CASAL: Army Civilian's Perceptions of Leadership and Leader Development Practices

Special Report 2011-2

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BLUF: Army civilians are satisfied with their careers and committed to their jobs. Reported strengths include: work autonomy, leader effectiveness, and work experience preparing civilians for future leadership roles. Reported weaknesses include: high stress from workload, lack of information flow, and lack of leader development within organizations.

From November-December 2010, 18,000 Army civilian leaders were contacted and 5,882 participated in the CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) for a response rate of 33%. CASAL assesses and tracks trends in attitudes toward leader development, the quality of leadership, and the contribution of leadership to mission accomplishment. This is the second year in which Army civilian leaders participated in CASAL. The purpose of this note is to highlight the key findings from the civilian CASAL survey and provide feedback directly to the survey participants.

Quality: **Civilian leaders indicate that 61% of the leaders in their unit or organization are effective leaders.** Civilian leaders are also seen as effective or very effective in getting results (76%), leading others (70%), setting the standard for integrity and character, and demonstrating resilience when facing adversity (72%). Overall, perceptions of civilian leader quality are moderately high. Improvements could be made in developing subordinates, transparency in decision making, and building effective teams.

Workload and Stress: **About 30% of Army civilian leaders indicate that stress from a high workload is a serious problem (55% say that it is a moderate problem).** Nearly one in five civilian leaders (18%) disagree that seeking help for stress-related problems is accepted and encouraged. Stress data are nearly identical to those observed in the 2009 CASAL, which suggests this issue won't improve without action.

Career satisfaction and Commitment: **A large percentage of Army civilian leaders are satisfied or very satisfied with their career working for the Army up to this point (89% of managers and 86% of first line supervisors).** It should be noted that no more than 6% of either group indicated that they were dissatisfied with their career so far. Commitment of Army civilian leaders is also high, as most civilian leaders **(95%) feel committed to their team or immediate work group because of a sense of personal loyalty**; and 79% of civilian leaders agree that they feel vested in problems affecting their team or immediate work group even if they do not directly affect them. This type of affective commitment is important to maintain because it is linked to job performance, absence, and turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Leader Development: Less than half of Army civilian leaders (45%) report that their unit or organization places a high or very high priority on leader development. **Twenty-three percent of civilian leaders indicate leader development is treated as a low or very low priority.** A decline in the emphasis or priority for leader development at the unit/organization level is also observed in ratings by uniformed leaders in 2010, suggesting this downturn exists across the Army and is not isolated to specific cohorts or organizations.

Work Experience and Self Development: Four out of five Army civilian leaders (80%) believe that their operational experience (work experience) has been effective or very effective in preparing them to assume new levels of leadership or responsibility. In addition, more than three-fourths of Army civilian leaders (78%) are satisfied or very satisfied with the variety of experiences provided by the Army. Seventy-nine percent of Army civilian leaders believe that self development has been effective or very effective in preparing them to assume new levels of leadership or responsibility. Self development is also viewed as a strong method of development by civilian leaders, as 55% indicate it has had a large or great positive impact on their development.

Civilian Education Systems: Recent graduates of Civilian Education System (CES) courses generally rate their educational experiences positively. Graduates of CES courses generally rate the quality of the instruction favorably. Instructors are perceived as being of high quality, providing timely feedback, and providing autonomy by allowing choices and options for course work and activities. Most civilians perceive course attendance to be effective in preparing them for new levels of leadership or responsibility, and believe the experience is beneficial to them in ways beyond just meeting educational requirements. Those who have attended courses have mostly found them beneficial, while those who have missed opportunities to attend do not see this as a detriment to their career. While perceptions of institutional education are better for civilians than for uniformed personnel, there is still room for improvement.

MSAF: Of the near 6,000 civilian leaders who participated in CASAL, 14% (n = 809) indicated that they had participated in Multisource Assessment and Feedback Army-360. Nearly all (98%) reported sharing their feedback with at least one other person as compared to the 60% of uniformed personnel. Eighty-six percent of participants noted at least a small effect of participation (79% moderate or greater impact) and 42% felt the effect lasted longer than a year.

Summary: The research team would like to thank our hard working DA civilians for their excellent response and timely feedback to this important survey. Our goal is to report your valued feedback. Senior leaders- including the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army are aware of your feedback and are working to improve the shortcomings identified by this survey. It is important for you to know that your feedback is taken seriously, that it has been reported, and that it is being used to improve our organizations.

References

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