

MEMO #4

WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT: Human Resource Management and Public Service Motivation

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Over the years, much has been written about the importance for reforming the current civil service system. In fact, President Barack Obama's FY 2015-2017 budgets referenced the outdated federal personnel system by noting that "an alternative, cost-effective system needs to be developed that will allow the Government to compete for and reward top talent, while rewarding performance, and increase responsibilities of and encourage adequate flexibility to family caregivers, among other factors."

Regardless of whether any legislative changes are on the horizon, agency management officials, including Chief Human Capital Officers can take specific steps to make sure that the federal workforce is aligned and poised to meet mission requirements. The passage of the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Act in 2002 and the subsequent enactment of the modernization of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA-MA) in 2010, provide the necessary framework to facilitate inter- and intra-agency collaboration in the design, development, and implementation of strategic goals and objectives.

Recommended Actions

There are a number of steps an agency's Chief Human Capital Officer can take to help manage an agency's workforce during times of transition. These include:

1. Strengthening the Link Between Strategic Planning and Human Capital Management

The modernization GPRA in 2010 established a well-defined strategic planning timeline for federal agency leaders to follow during the initial stages of a new Administration. Specifically, by law, the head of each agency is required to produce and publish a new strategic plan by the first Monday in February one year after the Presidential inauguration.

In addition to establishing this regular strategic planning cadence, GPRA-MA also solidified the importance of sound management oversight and execution by creating the Chief Operating Officer (COO) position in government. Among other important duties, an agency's COO is responsible for coordinating and collaborating with other C-Suite executives to develop, implement, track, and report progress against strategic planning goals, objectives and outcomes. While these priorities are being established, an agency's Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) must provide keen insights to the strategic planning process and ensure that the organization's workforce is aligned to execute its mission.

2. Analyzing Key Workforce Trends

In order to contribute to the strategic planning process, an agency must have the systems and processes in place to capture, let alone, analyze the impact of key trends. Before charging full steam ahead into the world of predictive analytics, it is important to first understand the availability, reliability, and validity of existing data that is being used to drive and inform agency decisions.

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) data provides one important vantage point to understanding key trends. However, the richness of FEVS data should not be viewed as the ultimate source for basing strategic human capital decisions. Depending on the availability of data and sophistication of the underlying information technology systems, agencies should begin identifying ways to overlay data for a more comprehensive view of the critical trends. For example, mapping employee engagement with customer service data and turnover trends could yield important information about the overall engagement, performance, or developmental needs of a specific functional area, program, or office.

3. Solidifying the Talent Pipeline

On December 15, 2015, President Barack Obama issued an Executive Order designed strengthen and improve the talent management, succession planning, recruitment, and development processes for our government's Senior Executive Service (SES). With over 60 percent of the SES workforce eligible for retirement in 2016, the timing of the President's Executive Order could not be more critical heading into a change in Administration. Although we have yet to experience the much-anticipated retirement wave, agencies that have been planning for the potential loss of talent and institutional knowledge are in a better position to replace key staff when turnover occurs.

Taken in isolation, a retirement wave could have a devastating impact on the government's ability to achieve its mission and manage its workforce. However, a five-year trend analysis of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's FedScope database yields important information for agencies to consider. Specifically, from FY 2009 – 2014 more employees quit (455,000) federal service compared to those who retired (366,000). An astounding 84 percent of those quitting federal service during this timeframe left before reaching their ten-year service anniversary. So, if you look at these trends as a whole, it would seem that the retirement wave may be compounded by a strong undercurrent of employees quitting federal service.

In short, the President's Executive Order on strengthening the SES workforce is an important first step to ensure that agencies have strategies in place to transition new leaders into executive level positions. However, without the proper succession planning, recruitment, hiring and talent management strategies in place at all levels of the organization, the talent pipeline may run dry long before the well can be replenished.

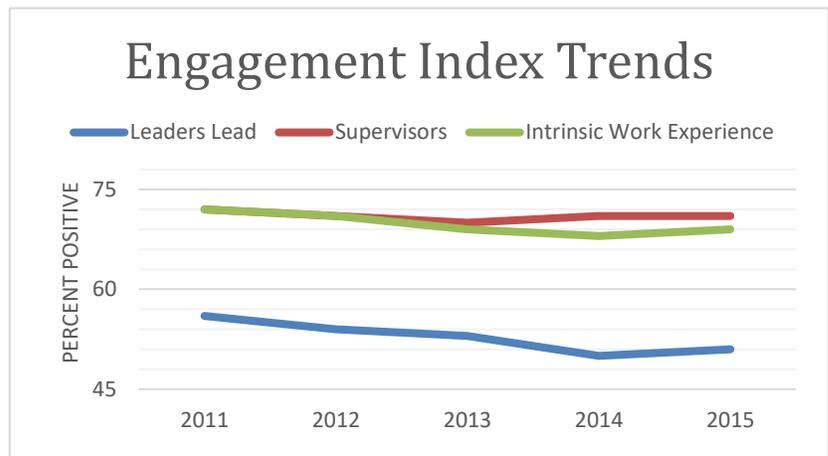
4. Focusing on Employee Engagement

In 2015, just over 421,000 employees responded to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. Multiplying this population by the number of items on the survey (84), gives the Federal Government an impressive 35 million unique responses that can be categorized and organized by agency, organization, and specific demographics means (e.g., gender, ethnicity, tenure, grade level, etc.).

While the survey yields an impressive amount of detail and information, analyzing the survey trend data can be simplified based on the way items are grouped. For instance, OPM organizes similar items into three important indices: (1) Engagement Index; (2) Global Satisfaction Index; and (3) New Inclusion

Quotient (New IQ) Index. The index measures provide an incoming Administration a fast and reliable way of understanding critical trends.

As illustrated in the 5-year trend analysis chart of the FEVS Engagement Index, differing employee perceptions are evident for (1) leadership; (2) supervisors; and (3) work experiences.



While it is important to reinforce the earlier point about layering human capital data for strategic planning purposes, an incoming Administration will undoubtedly ask for an historical analysis of employee engagement trends during their transition briefings. Providing this data with an appropriate level of analysis coupled with key actions needed to improve employee engagement can solidify the value of the Chief Human Capital Officers throughout and beyond the transition process.

5. Underscoring the Importance of Operations

While it is important to focus on the strategic aspects of managing the federal workforce, without good processes in place at the operational level, an agency Chief Human Capital Officer may have difficulty contributing credibly to the strategic planning process.

Over the years, Administrations have attempted to streamline, expedite and improve the federal hiring process. While some improvements have been made, there still appears to be a recognized rift between the human resource office and managers over important indicators including speed and quality of the hiring process. Successful agencies are able to keep an open dialogue and promote collaboration between HR and managers on important aspects of the hiring process, including identifying key competencies by position, designing assessments, writing job announcements, and selecting candidates.

Conclusion

Since the passage of the Chief Human Capital Officers Act in 2002, Federal Departments and agencies have taken steps to improve their strategic human capital practices and human resource operational activities. However, the strengthening and modernization of the Government Performance and Results Act in 2010 reinforced the importance of cross agency collaboration by ensuring that all C-suite functions are involved in the design, development, and implementation of the strategic planning process. As the new Administration embarks on this process, Chief Human Capital Officers will play an important role in establishing goals, strategies and objectives and ultimately be responsible for enabling the federal workforce is poised to meet its mission requirements.

References

Executive Order, Strengthening the Senior Executive Service, December 15, 2015.

Fiscal Year 2015 Budget of the United States Government, Analytical Perspectives, Chapter 8: Improving the Federal Workforce, 71-84.

Fiscal Year 2016 Budget of the United States Government, Analytical Perspectives, Chapter 8: Strengthening the Federal Workforce, 75-89.

Fiscal Year 2017 Budget of the United States Government, Analytical Perspectives, Chapter 8: Strengthening the Federal Workforce, 79-94.