

Digitizing Federal HR Systems to Attract, Sustain Talent

The workforce has changed in the last couple of years, & federal agencies are modernizing HR processes & prioritizing IT to keep up

Government agencies are facing a war for talent. They're challenged with filling job vacancies, retaining staff and finding talent with skills in cybersecurity, IT management and other tech-related fields. The pandemic and private sector competition have amplified these challenges, but strategic human capital management has been an issue for a long time for many agencies.

These challenges are also made worse by manual HR processes and drawn-out hiring timelines. So, members of government and industry recently spoke at a [FedInsider panel](#) to discuss how applying digital workflow management tools can automate tedious HR tasks to help agencies become more competitive in the employment space.

Digitizing the HR Experience

Agencies are modernizing HR processes to make it more efficient for staff and prospective employees. Joseph Abbott, chief human capital officer of Food Safety and Inspection Services for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said his team uses a customer relationship management platform to keep up relations and track feedback during an employee's tenure. "It is important going forward that we capture and digitize the customer relationship for the whole lifecycle of their career," Abbott said.

And that information gets used as a building block. If those life events are captured as they occur, that information can help those administering benefits, making pay changes, promotions or other actions. "I have the complete picture of that career development, and I can see the path they have taken to put things in place," Abbott said, "I can visualize it no matter where they are in the country, and it does not get lost or stuck in a file cabinet."

Britani Carroll, federal services managing director and human capital practice lead for Accenture, said that while agencies are in varying stages of modernization, digitizing all levels of human capital is still in its infancy. "HR is not always the one that gets the budget first," Carroll said.

Yet digitization has accelerated as a result of the pandemic. Employees could not come into work to get paperwork or keep things moving, so leadership was forced to elevate the conversation of HR modernization. "The focus is no longer just at the HR level, but it is rising to the priority at the agency level because people need to attract and retain the talent to meet the mission," Carroll said. "The talent gap is driving the need for this."

Featuring:

■ Sarah Kerley

Chief Administrative Officer,
Illinois Department of
Central Management Svs.



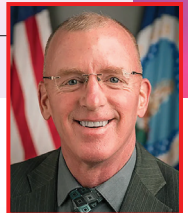
■ William Malyszka

Division Director of Human
Resources Management,
Deputy Chief Human Capital
Officer, National Science
Foundation



■ Joseph Abbott

Chief Human Capital Officer,
Food & Safety Inspection
Services, USDA



■ Britani Carroll

Federal Services Managing
Director, Human Capital
Practice Lead, Accenture



■ Rafael Diaz

Digital Transformation
Principal, Peraton



■ David Santiago

Public Sector Strategy,
Adobe Document Cloud &
Former Deputy Assistant
Administrator, FEMA



Putting HR Technology to Work

When William Malyszka, division director for human resource management and deputy chief human capital officer at the National Science Foundation (NSF), joined the team, he immediately focused on modernizing HR IT systems. "We started right out of the gate implementing an online performance management system. We had a paper system pushing

printouts of paper around the building, and that was not fit for that purpose during the pandemic, nor was it effective," Malyszka said.

This allowed NSF to create more consistency across all performance assessments. "There was a rich trove of qualitative and quantitative data that we have used to build some program improvements on," he said. NSF is also expanding its learning management system to a talent management system to improve strategic workforce planning, and addressing equities by providing a career path navigation system to employees.

Sarah Kerley, chief administrative officer for the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, said she's focused on updating processes from transactional HR to being a strategic partner. "You cannot be a strategic partner without technology," Kerley said.

Over the course of the past two years, her team has dramatically altered the hiring process for the state of Illinois. It is moving from 99% paper based to more than 90% electronic processes. In fact, as late as 2020, jobseekers could not apply for state of Illinois jobs online. As of July 1, 2022, every job is now filled through electronic processes on a mobile-friendly, portal-like user interface. And because of that, Kerley's office has seen a 311% increase in job applicants.

Common HR Modernization Barriers

Along with antiquated systems and paper-based processes, a lack of budget for

modernization is a major challenge for HR. David Santiago, public sector strategy for Adobe Document Cloud and former deputy assistant administrator of FEMA, said general accountability within strategic human capital management is at high risk, and technology is playing a major role. "In fact, recent office personnel management guidance for the federal workforce priorities has listed technology modernization as the number one priority for the community," Santiago said.

Prioritization is also a challenge. HR is a key support function, yet agencies suffer from a lack of prioritization and investment. Agencies can't modernize their HR processes without investing in technology and in the right skillsets.

These are largely people and processes challenges. Rafael Diaz, digital transformation principal at Peraton, said the pandemic was informative about how critical the workforce is to an organization. Federal government services have never been at a higher demand, and it is the workforce that delivers those services.

HR and human capital are now strategically aligned to the organization. "We are working very differently than how we were three years ago...the flexibility that is required of the workforce is so critical to understand and to be able to provide digital capabilities," Diaz said. "The HR organization is translating these priorities and these trends into new capabilities for the organization." Plus, the

more agencies show interest in modernizing HR, the more funding it will receive.

It Starts with Culture

Modernizing any federal IT system starts with people – employees, leadership buy-in and organizational culture. Feedback is a critical piece. "We have the capabilities today to assess the data with artificial intelligence and machine learning and data analytics. These are truly transformative and will inform our decisions and our next steps," Diaz said. "And talking to people and getting more people engaged is another the key to that effort."

Organizations can also take their first steps to improving talent retention by providing flexible frameworks for employees and then digitizing their processes to provide even greater flexibility. "With technology, it can also help improve the overall employee experience. People in the organization are the most important asset," Santiago said.

Ultimately, this is a cultural change that continuously grows and evolves. Streamlining people, data and processes is key. "I think what people need to start with is realizing the downstream effects that you are going to have because of digital modernization," said Carroll. "[It] will reduce the time they have to spend. And it will create a better employee experience. These are all processes, and those are owned by HR. You need to have individuals who are willing to change, and having that with automation brings equal access to opportunities and career mapping."



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