

A CALL TO ACTION

**A Coalition on the Future of the
Federal Human Resource Management Profession**

September 2000

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A Call to Action

A Coalition on the Future of the Federal Human Resource Management Profession

September, 2000

Introduction

The idea that there needs to be transformation within the federal human resources (HR) community is not new. Since the early to mid-nineties, studies have been conducted to assess what changes were needed if HR was to meet the changing needs at work. New roles and competencies were identified to assist HR in evolving to more of a business partner.

Faced with the pressures and demands of the work environment, internal customers rightfully clamored for timely and effective responses from their support departments. They needed allies who were willing to focus on helping them achieve their strategic goals. They expected persuasive facts and practicable solutions to the dilemmas they faced in delivering goods and services to their customers.

The challenge for HR was to ensure that the organization was prepared with the human resources and management tools needed to fulfill its mission – now and into the future. Managers would be empowered to make what had traditionally been considered “HR” decisions. HR would focus less on ensuring compliance with rules and more on making value-added contributions. The ability to offer technical expertise using a consultative approach would become an indispensable talent within HR.

The question is, has HR fully embraced this new way of doing business? Has HR let go of antiquated approaches that no longer serve its customers’ needs and developed the competencies needed to adapt? There are some who would argue that changes within the HR community have been slow and unremarkable. Evidence suggests that the federal HR profession must take immediate steps to ensure its future viability or risk being viewed as a “non-player” within the organization. Worse yet, HR might find itself becoming vulnerable to replacement with alternative service arrangements.

The purpose of this report is to capture the important steps being taken within the federal government to guide HR’s future – and to issue a call to action so that tangible and substantive changes begin to happen within the community.

Background:

“To be more significant, HR must become more professional”

Dave Ulrich

The federal human resources (HR) community is at an important crossroads. Over the past several years, human resource leaders have become increasingly concerned about the need for HR to become more strategically aligned with the agency missions it supports. At the same time, a number of factors have hampered HR's ability to transform its staffs and structures to achieve success in these new roles and responsibilities.

HR professionals' roles are changing rapidly. In the past, the focus was on “personnel administration,” with much time spent in transactional work. Influenced by a variety of factors affecting the workplace, HR professionals must now move to the role of consultant. As such, they must focus on developing new HR systems that support mission objectives and becoming trusted members of the management team by providing strategic HR planning and advice.

In his book, *Human Resource Champions* (1997), Dave Ulrich challenged HR to shed its old myths, adopt new competencies, redefine roles focused on results and evolve into a true profession that makes a difference for the organization.¹ The federal HR community's response to this challenge and how to collectively address future opportunities form the basis for this report.

Much of the information that serves as background to this report is not new. As far back as 1993, the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) concluded that federal personnel offices needed to change the way they do business.² Yet many of the problems MSPB identified persist. From the perspective of HR's customers, for example, there has been varied success in extending delegations of authority to line managers.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has also been studying human resources and workforce changes for a number of years, with some of its more recent work focusing on the concept of Human Capital, an approach that sees people as assets whose value to organizations and themselves can be enhanced through investment. In recent remarks, U.S. Comptroller General David Walker expressed the desire to make the federal government more results-oriented and accountable to its constituents by looking at its decisions with a longer, broader and more integrated perspective. In order to do so, he reasons, people must become the top priority. As the federal government addresses the rise in retirement eligibility, the shape and size of its workforce, and other “people” factors, human resources will play a key role in designing and implementing effective human capital strategies.³

In 1995, GAO identified important principles and issues critical to managing the federal workforce of the 21st century that will pervade the workplace and influence the issues faced in the coming years.⁴ Additional work has focused on areas that Congress and the federal HR community can use to improve human resource programs and implement more effective processes. A GAO study released in January 2000 provides insight into the private sector and identifies key principles for strategically managing human capital that can be applied to the federal environment.⁵

The National Academy for Public Administration/Center for Human Resources Management (NAPA/CHRM) has also been at the center of the discussion about the future of the HR Profession for many years. The NAPA report, *New Times, New Competencies, New Professionals - A Guide for Implementing a Competency Model for HR Professionals: A Strategy For Becoming a High Performance Organization*, was published in October 1997 and provided approaches and strategies for applying and implementing the model.⁶

In 1999-2000, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) published a three-part study of the HR profession, *An Occupation in Transition: A Comprehensive Study of the Federal Human Resources Community*. Part 2 of this study supplied much of the demographic trend information in this report. The study establishes a statistical profile of the federal HR profession, identifies significant trends, reviews the competencies needed by HR professionals today and in the future, looks at the current competencies of HR staff, and provides recommendations for closing the gap.

Senior leaders in both the public and private sectors have seen the crisis in human resources looming on the horizon for some time. NAPA has asserted that the HR occupation as a whole is undergoing the same transformation, whether in the public or private sectors. Trends in the federal sector have generally mirrored the private sector, but about five years later. In addition, the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) study: “Human Resource Competencies for the Year 2000: The Wake-Up Call” (1998) indicated that most HR professionals need to build new competencies and skills immediately.⁷

While the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) requires federal agencies to set goals, measure performance and achieve results⁸, agencies have typically not addressed how they plan to manage their most important resource – their human resources or human capital. The role that the human resource professional can and should play in this important strategic area cannot be underestimated.

I. The “Crisis”

“Crisis: A stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point.”

The Random House Dictionary

Is the federal HR community faced with an impending crisis?

The term “crisis” typically brings forth negative connotations because it is often associated with catastrophic events, disaster or doom. But inherent in the term, if we consider the definition offered in *The Random House Dictionary*, is a sense of hope. A crisis can represent a turning point, a critical juncture at which the future is changed inextricably forever. The federal HR community’s biggest challenge today is how to shape the future – for the better.

What information suggests that a crisis is looming?

The various studies and reports produced by organizations such as OPM, NAPA, MSPB and GAO have identified opportunities for the federal HR community to effect changes from within. While the message of change is clearly being heard, the HR community is struggling to implement the shift in emphasis needed to move in a new direction. For example:

- ✓ The three-part study by OPM captured how much progress was being made in aligning human resource management efforts with agency goals and mission accomplishment. Part 3 of the report, “The HR Workforce: Meeting the Challenge of Change,” found that while the HR environment is changing, much of the focus is still on “internal HR office efficiency efforts” rather than on broader organizational issues.⁹
- ✓ The federal HR community’s shortage of needed competencies: The OPM report cites survey results suggesting that 94% of federal HR executives feel there is a gap between the competency requirements that will be needed of HR staff and the actual competencies of current HR professionals. Yet 44% indicated that they have no formal plans in place to address the gap.¹⁰
- ✓ The failure of the federal government to address factors impacting the workforce: In testimony offered March 9, 2000 on “Human Capital: Managing Human Capital in the 21st Century,” David Walker, U.S. Comptroller General, reflected on the implications of downsizing in the federal government. He expressed concerns “that the widespread lack of attention to strategic human capital management may be creating a fundamental weakness in federal management, possibly even putting at risk the federal government's ability to efficiently, economically, and effectively deliver products and services to the taxpayers in the future.”¹¹

II. Why Now?

“Most people are comfortable with old problems rather than new solutions.”

Anonymous

Clearly, the fact that HR is facing change is not a novel idea. But what is behind the recent sense of urgency throughout the federal community?

HR has undergone dramatic changes over the last five years. These include downsizing of the HR workforce, structural reorganizations, delegations of HR authority to line managers and an influx of technology.

1. The demographics on the federal HR profession are alarming. While there has been significant downsizing across government, the HR profession has been particularly impacted. Part one of the OPM study contains some startling statistics¹² that suggest:

- ✓ The human resource workforce dropped by one-fifth (20 percent) between 1991 and 1998. The staff numbers shrank from 22,917 in 1991 to 18,305 in 1998 (excluding the Equal Employment Opportunity GS-260 occupation).
- ✓ Since agencies have largely been unable to hire over the past several years, vacancies are often filled by internal advancement. This has contributed greatly to the lack of bench strength as well as to the lack of HR professionals with the right mix of technical and business partnering/consulting competencies.
- ✓ The impact of potential retirements is staggering. Approximately **one-third of federal HR professionals on board in September 1998 would become eligible to retire by the end of 2003**. A significant number have already left, taking with them a wealth of experience and a depth of technical knowledge that will take time to rebuild. In the HR Senior Executive Service (SES), over half (61 percent) will reach the age and years of service needed to retire during this same period. While a record number of staff will become “eligible” for retirement, it is important to note that historically many do not retire immediately after becoming eligible.
- ✓ There has been a noticeable shift towards generalists rather than specialists within the HR profession, which makes sense for delivering a broader functional expertise to the customer, but can also result in a watering down of in-depth technical expertise.

2. The new roles that the HR professional is expected to play are quite different than those of a traditional personnelist. The business of HR is changing – and changing rapidly. Perhaps due in large part to the significant occupational downsizing, coupled with the advent of technology, human resources staff have had to find new and innovative ways to do the work and have reengineered and redesigned a number of systems and processes to be more innovative and responsive to customer needs. At the same time, agencies are redefining the role of the HR professional to be more of a consultant than a gatekeeper.

The OPM study “The HR Workforce: Meeting the Challenge of Change” states that there is ample evidence of the effects that the National Performance Review (NPR) has had in shaping human resources beyond simple reduction in staff numbers. The NPR vision of the future was to “redefine accountability in terms of results...within the context of decentralization, deregulation, simplicity, flexibility and substantially increased delegations of authority ...personnel offices

must shift from reactive processors of paperwork to responsive consultants and advisors.”¹³ While some of that vision has certainly taken hold to varying degrees across the government, it has been with varying degrees of success. Managers are taking on a greater role in human resources functions through increased delegations of authority and access to information via the Internet. Many agencies are finding different ways to improve their HR efficiency such as fee-for-service or franchise operations. There is increased reliance on technology to get HR work done. Popular examples include the use of private sector expert systems and on-line learning. All these factors add up to a transformation from what OPM terms the “Industrial Enterprise” to the “Knowledge-based Enterprise”.¹⁴

The erosion of technical expertise has been, and will continue to be, a major concern for the profession as it moves ahead. In 1993, in response to the National Performance Review’s (NPR) call for HR reform, OPM abolished the *Federal Personnel Manual*, initiated HR reform legislation and adopted regulatory changes. The NPR also led to significant staff reductions, which reduced the expertise of many Agencies’ HR staff. This trend is expected to continue due to retirements over the next several years. The advent of new roles also requires that HR professionals learn and exercise new and unfamiliar competencies, while maintaining a baseline of technical expertise. While these issues may present some real challenges, they may also provide HR an opportunity to hire and/or develop new talent and to bring about real transformation in the community.

3. The impacts of delegations of authority continue to be felt. As line managers continue to share accountability for human resources management within their organizations, the role of the human resource professional naturally moves from “gatekeeper” to that of “advisor or consultant.” As managers become more conversant and knowledgeable in human resources, HR’s focus must evolve to assessing the factors needed to develop a highly competent and productive workforce and recommending strategies to help the organization perform.

Further, the competencies identified in HR competency models, other than in the technical area, are not competencies that have traditionally been associated with personnel functions. OPM is in the process of identifying and describing those roles and functions through the revision of the classification standards and job profiles for human resources professionals. These standards have not been updated since June 1976, and it is difficult to accurately describe a profession that is in the midst of such upheaval. However, the role that these standards and profiles will play in the near and long term in helping to shape the profession will be profound.

4. A Presidential Memorandum signed by President Clinton on June 9, 2000 reinforced the role that human resources management plays in accomplishing agency missions. In his memo, the President lays out specific instructions to heads of agencies to fully integrate human resources management into the strategic planning, budgeting and accountability processes across government and to clearly state specific human resources management goals. This memorandum further directed agency heads to “provide for the continued development of a highly competent corps of human resources management professionals to assist agency line managers in ensuring the most effective use of their workforce to accomplish the agency mission.” Furthermore, the President’s fiscal year 2001 budget has added human capital management to its list of Priority Management Objectives, indicating that it is essential to align federal human resources in support

of agency goals. These directives highlight the importance of having HR as an integral partner in achieving agency and federal missions and provide HR professionals a unique opportunity to gain a “seat at the table.”

This memorandum also redesignated the Interagency Advisory Group of Federal Directors, in place since 1984, as the Human Resources Management Council (HRMC) to further emphasize the role of human resource management in achieving agency missions.¹⁵

5. Outsourcing. The specter of outsourcing some or all of the human resources functions is very real as organizations critically examine the way business is done. The Merit Systems Protection Board has already outsourced its HR function and DOD is studying the issue. The Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act¹⁶ (FAIR Act) calls for each agency to conduct an annual review of its commercial activities performed by federal employees and determine which are inherently governmental and which could potentially be performed by an outside source. Other variations of outsourcing involve franchise operations, fee for service, and cross-servicing, among others. A number of organizations are experimenting with various permutations and combinations of these approaches to service delivery to determine efficiencies to be gained by carrying out their human resources functions in non-traditional ways.

6. Impact of technology. The data contained in the OPM study referenced earlier does not address the current or future impacts of technology on the HR profession and the workforce it supports. Timeliness and speed of service delivery and anytime, anywhere access to information are fast becoming the norm. This not only leads to reengineering work processes to meet such demands, but also the dissemination of new tools to aid managers in carrying out their human resource management responsibilities. Information can be shared on line in real time and that leads to expectations of comparable speed in other areas as well.

What are the potential risks of our failure to act?

Through the dedicated efforts of many, we have all the information, studies, tools, best practices and technology needed to turn the corner - but yet something has been missing. The need for more determined action is compelling, with the future viability of the HR community as a whole at risk. Absent bold and decisive action, the credibility of HR as a strategic partner and as a valuable contributor to agency goals and objectives will be jeopardized. More importantly, however, a failure here will ultimately result in significant barriers to the federal government’s development of the human capital needed to accomplish its mission. Clearly, HR’s failure will become the federal government’s failure.

III. The Next Steps: Pulling it All Together

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

Albert Einstein

On July 10, 2000, the Federal Section of the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) sponsored a summit meeting of individuals representing senior human resource leaders and practitioners, the Office of Personnel Management and professional organizations to discuss the future of the federal human resource profession. This coalition was comprised of a wide cross-section of organizations with a mutual interest in and concern for enhancing the professional status and contributions of the federal HR community (see Appendix A). The meeting was convened as a way of acknowledging the important turning point facing the federal sector, to gain insight as to issues and challenges at hand, and to develop consensus as to a common path forward.

As a result of the challenges faced by the federal HR community, several independent initiatives have been introduced to address HR's future role and the skills and competencies needed by HR professionals to be successful and to add value in the new workplace. The goal of the summit was to begin developing alliances and partnerships to ensure that these efforts are additive rather than duplicative. The group reached a degree of agreement and buy-in on what efforts will be needed to achieve a strategic, system-wide approach to ensuring that federal agencies will have the type of human resource management programs and staff needed for the future. Most importantly, the meeting brought together key players who could collectively direct their focus on the HR profession to ensure that it remains value-added and furthers the mission of the federal government and the departments and agencies that support it.

Summary of the summit dialogue:

The dialogue began with a presentation by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on the current state of the federal HR profession. Each of the organizations represented were then asked to share what steps were currently being taken to further these interests. **These important efforts are highlighted in Appendix B.** This groundwork led to the group's discussion of forecasts and assumptions for the HR occupation in the year 2005, focusing on the following five dimensions:

- ❑ Roles of the HR Professional within the Federal Sector
- ❑ Skills and Competencies Required of HR Staff
- ❑ Sources for Accomplishing HR Activities
- ❑ Structure of the HR Function within the Organization
- ❑ Other Internal/External Forces Impacting HR

IV. HR on the Horizon:

“We must become the change we want to see.”

Gandhi

Change will occur, but several factors will influence the speed at which agencies are able to adapt. These include agency size/scope, budget status, leadership within the organization, culture, and more. While it was recognized that not all organizations would achieve the same

rate of change or the same degree of alignment with the new HR competency model, the group generally agreed on the following assumptions for the future of HR in the federal government:

Roles of the HR Professional within the Federal Sector: Human resource staff will function as strategic partners *and* technical experts within their organizations. Technical knowledge of and expertise in applying the laws, rules and regulations that affect people at work will continue to be needed. The number of HR staff functioning in specific expert roles, however, will continue to be reduced as a percentage of the occupation. The focus will shift away from ensuring regulatory compliance – and will instead be centered on how HR can contribute to a more highly productive workforce.

The HR function will be driven more by customer needs and demands. These customers will become more involved in “HR” decisions as managers become further empowered by various delegations of authority. HR will assume a variety of roles, depending upon the environment and the needs of the organization. These roles will be adapted as needs change over time to meet customer expectations, to adjust to internal and/or external political influences, etc. Some of these roles will likely extend beyond the “traditional” HR functions into other mission-critical areas. For example, HR may take on more of a business manager role, identifying the best means and/or resources for getting things accomplished, managing change, selling their products or ideas, and negotiating with others to get the work done.

Most importantly, HR will increasingly be held accountable for bottom-line results and will be measured on contribution to mission accomplishment.

Skills and Competencies Required of HR Staff: New roles will require a more skilled and competent HR professional with higher level analytical and critical thinking skills. To ensure that HR is positioned to capably perform, increased emphasis will be placed on selecting and developing individuals who can clearly demonstrate that they have the competencies needed in this new environment. As such, greater value will be placed on credentials, such as college degrees and HR certifications. The HR community will be induced to engage in continuous learning, ever increasing the capabilities of its members.

In support of this shift in focus, the federal *systems* will need to change as well. The move will be away from experience-based to competency-based HR systems for recruitment and selection, employee development, career management, performance management, etc.

Sources for Accomplishing HR Activities: Historical data about the occupation from OPM indicates that the decrease in HR staffing levels prompted by the NPR has slowed, that the HR workforce is somewhat younger than the federal government as a whole (and perhaps less likely to retire), and that turnover rates have remained fairly consistent at 12-15%. It was also noted that an increasing number of those new to the profession do not have a college degree, with many having risen through the clerical/support fields.¹⁷ Taken in context of the current environment, the data suggests potential staffing trends as follows:

New entrants to the workforce: Annual intake to the occupation will likely remain steady, with little variation from the current need for approximately 400 new employees per year. Selection of

new hires will consider whether the candidate has the business-customer orientation needed to succeed. Recruitment strategies will need to be adapted to account for increased competition for skilled staff. There will be a need to develop and implement innovative approaches designed to yield high-performance HR teams. College graduates will become an important target of these recruiting efforts.

Existing HR Staff: With the continuing need to downsize or remain stable, HR offices cannot expect an influx of new talent as experienced people continue to depart. Therefore, much of the change will have to result from equipping existing HR staff with new skills to adapt to the changing work environment. Leadership in the profession will likely continue to come from within – provided the necessary competencies are developed and fostered within the community. Through the increased use of knowledge-based information systems, managers will be further empowered with the authority to make “HR” decisions.

Note: Much may be learned from the recent experiences in the federal contracting arena. The contracting community was confronted by a “quiet crisis” within the function that was negatively affecting the federal government’s performance. The government-wide solution, prompted by a legislative mandate, sought to increase the level of proficiency among contracting personnel through formal education and training. As a result, the community has made significant strides in enhancing the professional standing and performance of staff in this function. Similarly, the HR community must continue to raise the bar by encouraging professional development among its members.

Alternative Staffing Strategies: The contingent workforce will be an important complement to the core HR staff. Outsourcing, consultants, cross-servicing among federal agencies, and automation will become ever-increasing factors in the way HR is done. Collaboration among federal agencies will become essential, providing the partners with an opportunity to leverage their efforts and maximize the use of limited resources.

Structure of the HR Function within the Organization: The moves towards decentralization, geographic dispersion, and the like will make the specific structure of the HR office less significant. It is anticipated that a variety of organizational structures will form across federal agencies, structures that are designed and driven more by customer needs, agency budget, etc. Some organizations may develop less conventional HR structures that transform the traditional HR office.

Agencies will be empowered by increased authorities and further “deregulation” from centralized agencies. This transfer of authority also has the potential to create less consistency, uniformity and transferability of functions across agencies. It is anticipated, however, that agencies will expand their capabilities and share resources through *centers of expertise* in order to maximize their potential for success.

There will also be movement away from traditional structures towards the more flexible teams pulled together for specific projects. These teams will extend beyond the bounds of HR. To ensure agency-wide solutions to organizational issues, HR’s efforts will be expected to be more

integrated with other administrative functions, requiring enhanced knowledge of procurement, technology, etc. Matrix and/or project management will grow in importance.

Other Internal/External Forces Impacting HR: There will continue to be pressures exerted on HR to change, but true transformation will not occur unless the need is perceived throughout the community as compelling and dramatic. President Clinton's Executive Memorandum has provided the impetus for real progress to begin. While it is difficult to predict the political impact of the pending change in administration, it is expected that the changes within the HR community will have sufficient momentum to sustain any transition. HR will have developed its own champions and change drivers to institutionalize the changes envisioned and to enhance the professional standing of the community as a whole.

The trend towards decentralizing federal government and expanding the role of state and local governments will likely continue. This decentralization will lead to movement away from government-wide corporate systems, which may challenge agencies' abilities to achieve economies of scale and to promote collaboration. In spite of this, the ability to form relationships with labor and other partners will become increasingly critical to HR's future successes. The challenge for HR will be to find innovative ways to get things accomplished.

Chief Information Officers (CIOs) will become important change drivers as technology redefines organizational boundaries and our sense of "community." Automation, with its potential to enhance employee self-service and deliver expert systems to managers, will create better informed customers with direct access to information and data. The trend will be towards anytime, anywhere service delivery, the virtual HR workplace, and technology-based training, all of which may further impact HR's staffing, structure and operations. As competition for resources heightens, however, HR will have to vie for its share of the investment in information technology by demonstrating the benefits to customers and potential return on investment.

V. Where do we go from here – and how do we get there?

“Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The capstone of the meeting was the critical discussion regarding the most important strategies that the federal sector must initiate now if it is to turn this vision for the HR profession into a reality. Those findings are summarized as follows:

Defining the Roles of the Federal HR Professional:

- ✓ The HR profession must focus on its own performance - and ensure that it delivers customer-

focused results that have broad impact in furthering the organization's mission. Furthermore it must be positioned to demonstrate through various success measures that it is a viable and contributing function that adds considerable value and produces a return on investment.

- ✓ The community needs to foster "HR champions" among the leadership of federal government. Using a higher-level management strategy, HR should engage entities such as the President's newly designated Human Resources Management Council (HRMC) in ensuring the future directions taken by the HR community are in keeping with the needs of government executives.

Developing the Necessary Skills and Competencies within HR:

- ✓ It is essential that a baseline of competencies be officially established to serve as the basis for selection, promotion and training decisions affecting HR staff. OPM should aggressively continue with its efforts to adopt competency profiles and eliminate the current experience-based requirements as a means to institutionalize the use of this invaluable tool.
- ✓ OPM should take a leadership role within the HR community to reinforce the value of competency-based approaches. To this end, OPM should place a high priority on aggressively pushing out pilots that provide alternatives to the X-118 experience-based requirements. There also needs to be considerable integration of the competency-based HR profiles being developed with the new classification standards for the GS-200 family currently under review.
- ✓ Once competency profiles have been established, there should be a thorough assessment of where the federal HR occupation stands and where the skill gap(s) are. A collective effort can then follow to build those competencies within the HR community utilizing the expertise of organizations such as USDA Graduate School, NAPA, ASTD, etc.
- ✓ Further explore the feasibility of certification/credentialing programs as a means of enhancing the HR professional's knowledge, skill development and professional edge as well as providing a foundation for consistent service delivery expectations.

Exploring Various Sources for Accomplishing HR Activities:

The discussion centered on the unique challenges faced in staffing the HR profession at the entry-level, journey-level and leadership level.

- ✓ Entry-level: The challenge is to discover and hire new talent whose expertise can be developed through valuable learning experiences. It is therefore recommended that steps be taken by agencies to: (1) develop and publish marketing/recruitment brochures to frame the occupation in a positive way; (2) use these brochures and other innovative recruitment strategies to encourage participants in college-based HR programs to consider the federal government as a viable place to launch their careers; and (3) utilize new and established programs (such as the OPM-sponsored Presidential Management Intern Program and OPM's new Federal Career Intern Program) to prepare potential talent for introduction into the HR

community.

- ✓ Journey-level: For HR positions requiring functioning at the full performance level, the challenge is to identify ways to develop new skills and competencies needed in the changing workforce in a manner that is both cost effective and timely while retaining needed technical expertise. The group heartily endorsed the proposal of the Interagency Advisory Group (now the HRMC) to establish a virtual HR training institute with essential learning opportunities delivered via the web to the desktop. The concept of an electronic portal for HR information and services could be further expanded to other HR functions.
- ✓ Leadership: The challenge here will be to address the potential exodus of SES and other HR staff over the next three years as members of the HR occupation reach retirement age. The resulting loss of talent and expertise has the potential to have profound impact. The federal sector must begin now to develop future leaders within the organization by: (1) adopting new means/methodologies for pushing essential job knowledge out to the desktop, (2) empowering line managers with HR authorities, thereby lessening the dependence on HR, and (3) creating opportunities to expand the pool of candidates from within HR as well as from the business lines and other non-traditional sources.

Aligning the HR Function with the Business Needs of the Organization:

- ✓ To strengthen HR's position as a business partner, members of the community should take a leadership role in building effective alliances with other councils such as the CIO, CFO and others to broaden buy-in across areas. The HRMC would be a logical vehicle to begin building these alliances system-wide. These same alliances can be mirrored within individual agencies, with HR taking the lead in approaching these groups about opportunities for collaboration and partnering.
- ✓ In recognition of the movement towards more flexible, cross-functioning, team-based and even virtual team structures within organizations, the HR community should work towards developing project management-matrix management models with supportive infrastructure for effective teaming.
- ✓ The HR community must become adept at making a business case and at securing leadership buy-in and funding for its initiatives by delivering quality products using cost-effective strategies.

Addressing the Internal/External Forces Impacting HR:

The discussions focused on three primary external influences affecting HR's future: (1) customer demands and expectations, (2) the political climate, and (3) the speed of change. While HR cannot control these outside forces, it can direct its efforts towards strengthening the contributions of the community as a whole and thereby enhancing its professional standing within government.

- ✓ The group acknowledged that there must be concrete steps taken to: (1) "institutionalize" the

move towards competencies and other changes within HR so they become integral to the system itself, and (2) to build on the momentum begun at this summit to make things happen. The participants felt they, in collaboration with the HRMC and other constituencies, could be a powerful “voice of change” within the federal HR community. As a result, it was recommended that the group continue to meet so they might work towards synergistic approaches to the challenges, opportunities and dilemmas faced by the HR community now and into the future.

- ✓ The group felt that it was essential to continue to build consensus on a basic context for the HR occupation and for all future direction to flow from the identified roles. It is this common message that will help build strength and a sense of direction within the HR community, and provide a firm foundation for all future efforts of this and associated groups.

VI. Conclusion: A Call to Action

“Do or do not. There is no ‘try.’”

Yoda, character in the movie
Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.

Overall, the meeting participants uniformly agreed that continuing dialogue is important - but that *action* is absolutely critical to the future of the federal HR profession. It is therefore incumbent upon the HR community to maintain a unity of purpose and focus - and to be steadfast in its effort to translate these ideas into specific action steps. To further that end, the participants agreed to reconvene to further strategize on how these objectives might be accomplished. It was further agreed that there would need to be marketing strategies developed to generate excitement and buy-in, and that steps would need to be taken to actively engage stakeholders and champions in this important quest.

As this report has fully described, the federal HR community is increasingly faced with significant cultural change, the graying of the workforce, external pressures and competition for the best and the brightest. As a result, efforts must be undertaken to address HR’s role and the skills and competencies needed by HR professionals if they are to successfully add value in the new workplace. Absent such an approach, the profession will not be positioned to play the key roles necessary for federal agencies to achieve mission-related goals. If these efforts are to result in tangible and lasting change, however, it is absolutely essential that the key players work *together* to shape the occupation’s future. The coalition has taken a major step forward by challenging the HR community to build on past efforts – and to seize the opportunity to instigate real change from within. This is their call to action for the human resources profession. Do or do not – there is no “try!”

Appendix A: Summit Meeting Attendees

(Note: Some attendees have more than one affiliation)

Facilitated by:

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Sarah Shiffert, Senior Director of Association Services
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Frank Cipolla, Director, Center for Human Resources Management
National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA)

Larry Goodwin, Senior Consultant
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David Dye, IPMA Executive Council representative,
Assessment Council, and Past-President
Senior Associate, Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc.

Karen Gard, Senior Research Analyst
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Roberta Peters, Co-Chair, Subcommittee on the Human Resource Profession
Human Resources Management Council
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Evelyn M. White, Human Resources Management Council member
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources
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Sharon Barbee-Fletcher, representing the Small and Independent Agency
Personnel Directors Group (SIAPDG)
Director of Human Resources
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Victor S. Rezendes, Assistant Comptroller General for Health, Education
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Nancy Kingsbury, Assistant Comptroller General for General Government
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Ellen Roderick, Secretary
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Tony Gutierrez, Director of Regional Programs
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Jennie Johnson, Area Manager
American Society for Training and Development

Ursula Lohmann, Dean
Army Staff Management College
Fort Belvoir, VA

Richard W. Bell, President
Classification and Compensation Society

Appendix B: Summary of Activities of the Summit Partners

Office of Personnel Management

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is committed to helping agencies build the capability of their human resources (HR) staffs so they can provide a higher level of strategic assistance to line managers. To carry out this leadership responsibility for human resources management and the HR profession, OPM operates through close partnerships with federal agencies, the Human Resources Management Council (HRMC), and other stakeholders.

Since 1999, OPM has taken a number of significant actions to help HR managers and professionals to face the challenges of the changing federal work place. The first step was to recognize the significant turbulence in the HR profession and try to quantify it. This was accomplished in 1999-2000 through the publication of a three-part study, *An Occupation in Transition: A Comprehensive Study of the Federal Human Resources Community*. This study was a fundamental part of OPM's commitment to partnering with Federal agencies to attract, develop, and retain the HR professionals needed for the changing federal environment. The study served three major purposes:

1. Highlighted the demographic makeup of the HR workforce over a 30-year period;
2. Provided information about competencies with a particular emphasis on changing HR roles; and
3. Documented the effects that the changing environment is having on the ability of the HR workforce to assist agencies in meeting their strategic goals.

To better reflect the changed nature of HR work, OPM revised the classification standards for the HR occupation – the GS-200 series (except for GS-260) and published them for comment last spring. The new standards are scheduled for final issuance in the fall of 2000. In addition, OPM is also revising qualification standards for the GS-200 series to adopt a competency approach.

American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

The war for talent is a bottom line issue in today's knowledge economy. Workplace learning is becoming the smartest strategic solution to the largest human resource challenge ever facing employers. For both private sector and government, attracting, optimizing and retaining talent will require a continuous investment in people. Despite this trend of increasing training expenditures, senior executives recognize that training and career development programs on their own will not be sufficient to give their company an edge in attracting and training the best people. They are simply the price of admission to be a player in the global economy.

Among the firms in the *2000 ASTD State of the Industry Report*, basic skills, executive development, quality, competition, and business practices were among the types of training on which typical firms spent the least amount of money. However, there has been a recent shift in spending for soft skills training. Organizations are making tremendous investments in learning technologies. Training is the glue that holds an organization together. It is part of the broader

strategy for success that also includes other elements such as compensation and benefits, leadership, work/life balance, and employee growth and career development. Because training is a critical element in an interconnected system of workplace policies and practices created to improve performance, it cannot occur in a vacuum. ASTD has three recommendations for government:

- Cabinet secretaries should be encouraged to bring human capital to the forefront of agency priorities.
- Good decision-making requires good data. Federal leaders need data to understand how their workforce development efforts compare across agencies and industry. All agencies should collect and widely disseminate data on their training investments, practices, and outcomes, as well as use existing benchmarking tools.
- Organizations must train to retain. Government needs to recognize the value and importance of investing in its employees and set standards to help agencies identify appropriate training expenditures, employee eligibility, hours of training, and innovative delivery methods.

Finally, the key to preparing a strong workforce is best expressed by the director of training and communications for Wall-Mart: "Training is a vital strategy that can't wait to strengthen our people and build our retention. It must happen right here, right now."

Classification and Compensation Society

The Classification and Compensation Society continues to prepare for the future through its Professional Development Center (PDC) and the courses offered in the classification, compensation, and staffing fields. Twenty-seven courses are offered as well as on-site instruction and courses tailored to agencies' needs.

Courses are updated as changes in law, rules or regulations occur. Courses are developed and added to the curriculum as the need is perceived in the human resources community and are eliminated should they become outdated and no longer have the interest of the HR community. The Society is continuously looking to expand its course offerings as well as to partner with other nonprofit organizations and federal, state or local government agencies to promote professional development for HR professionals and technical employees. The Society continues to take an active role in preparing the HR occupation for the future.

U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

The Forest Service is improving timeliness, enhancing customer service, and lowering costs both by automating transactional processes, improving information availability, and by updating its HR structure to best leverage technology. The basic approach is to minimize the time specialists and customers spend processing transactions, use the Internet and other means to deliver information, and to build HR consulting skills.

To automate transaction processes, the agency is implementing an automated classification program, and also expects to test an automated USDA HR operating system. It plans to implement an automated staffing system, improve self-service capability, and develop an

automated retirement benefit calculator. Automated time-and-attendance, temporary employment, and individual development systems are already operational. The Forest Service also participated in the USDA Demo Program, an innovative external hiring system.

In regards to staff development, the agency is focusing on competency development, workforce planning, and strategic recruitment. HR specialists are receiving additional training.

The Forest Service has proposed a Service-wide HR structure that changes the 110 full-service HR office structure to a structure with an operations center, service centers, and HR advisors in the field. In short, the agency will centralize what makes sense to centralize, and maintain in the field what should stay in the field. The agency will test this new structure in a couple of its Regions prior to Service-wide implementation. The Forest Service has already automated the classification process and is currently focusing on initiatives in the area of staff development and training in the emerging human resources competencies and has begun a project involving the use of competencies in the staffing and selections process.

Graduate School, USDA

The Graduate School, USDA, Human Resources Management (HRM) curriculum includes over 65 classroom and self-study courses, updated regularly to ensure that course content covers the latest laws, rules, executive orders and court decisions. The HRM Generalist Roles and Competencies Model found in the FY 2001 Nationwide catalogue show the competencies covered by Graduate School courses. This model is a compilation of models developed by IPMA, NAPA and OPM. It also includes concepts from *Human Resource Champions* by Dave Ulrich. Although the Graduate School recognizes the changing roles, training for personnel management specialists is not plentiful and what is offered is specific to current job requirements rather than "change" training.

The Graduate School has established a special advisory board to provide guidance on the HRM curriculum, the type of offerings, appropriate faculty, and emerging needs and trends of the profession.

There are currently four Web-based courses in the HRM curriculum and the Graduate School will soon begin work to develop over 50 additional Web-based courses - many of which will cover HRM topics. They are currently working with the Internal Revenue Service to develop a web-based course for supervisors/managers in personnel management support. The Graduate School also plans to develop two new classroom courses on competency-based examining and selection and performance management.

Department of Defense (DOD)

The Department of Defense is looking at its structure relative to available training. Right now, training is provided through the traditional schools in Army and Air Force, while Navy uses the USDA Graduate School for many of its training requirements. Additionally, the Civilian Personnel Management Service provides on-site training in personnel functional areas. The structure of civilian personnel operations, however, has changed dramatically over the last few

years from 450 stand alone personnel offices to 25 regional sites. This regional environment has presented challenges in determining the best method of training and whether the traditional methods still work. There is no one central intern program; rather, the individual military departments have the authority to operate their own - the Army and Air Force have active programs.

U.S. Army Management and Staff College

A study entitled “*Leadership Challenges for the Millennium and Beyond*” examines what changes will translate into challenges and where those challenges are heading. What does this mean for leaders? The chief players in leadership change and challenges are the people’s view of what’s important, the technology to make what’s important happen and the speed at which things happen. Where does this lead? What’s different? Leadership concepts for the millennium include complexity, expectations, and richness of information, breadth of perspective and speed of change. All the focus is on performance, not perspiration, with the essence of leadership being authenticity. Include everyone in your thinking – a leader isn’t a title, but a descriptor of behavior. Everyone is a leader. Whose job is leadership? It belongs to all that have the courage to take it – along with the required ambition, the ambiguous environment, and its non-traditional skills.

Department of Energy (DOE)

The Corporate Human Resources Information System (CHRIS) initiative is streamlining human resources and other administrative functions into an integrated corporate system. With PeopleSoft as its foundation, CHRIS has launched “Employee Express” where DOE employees can view on-line their earnings and leave statement, personal, payroll and training information. They can also update their education, address/contact, payroll and location information on-line. With streamlining and reengineering the hiring process a top corporate priority for the DOE HR community, steps are being taken to implement a new automated “Quick Hire” recruitment/staffing system.

A DOE Human Resources Change Team was recently formed as a key component in the design of an approach to transition DOE HR professionals toward the future. In taking stock of the current workforce, DOE is identifying current and future work that adds value and is aligned to DOE’s goals and mission, defining the roles that the DOE HR professional must carry out to meet new demands and reviewing and identifying competencies required to be successful in these new roles. DOE is also looking to create learning opportunities for development and growth – not only for current staff but also to attract new individuals into the profession.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

It is critical that those in leadership champion professional development among HR professionals and serve as advocates for examining and re-defining the HR management role. The Office of Human Resources (OHR) has taken an aggressive leadership role in establishing HR as a critical partner in developing strategic alliances with its customers and stakeholders while recognizing the constant challenge of reinventing service delivery. Significant accomplishments involve

strategic workforce planning, balanced scorecard, annual training for HR/EEO Specialists, Distributed Learning Network and competency based training and certification initiatives. Beginning with the FY2000 budget, work force planning information is part of the budget justifications submitted by the Operating Division. The HHS Accountability Program uses a balanced scorecard framework for self-assessment. Several HHS components are using a library of web-delivered, self-directed common needs training. These are but a few examples that demonstrate the effectiveness of strategic alliances and their impact both within HHS and the HR community as a whole.

General Accounting Office (GAO)

Since 1995, GAO has been anticipating the design and composition of the federal civil service of the future, and the human resource profession that will support it. GAO has identified important principles and issues critical to managing the federal workforce of the 21st century. HR practitioners need to be aware of these principles because they will influence the myriad issues they will face in the coming years.

While GAO's past work has pointed out areas for program improvement and identified changes taking place in agency personnel offices, some of its most recent reports are focused on the concept of Human Capital, that sees people as assets whose value to organizations and themselves, can be enhanced through investment. As the value of an agency's people increases, so does the performance capacity of the organization, and too its value to its clients and stakeholders. Aligning an organization's human capital policies with its shared vision, its mission, vision, core values, goals, and strategies should ultimately result in more effective organizations. In the years ahead, as agencies develop, refine, and change their visions in response to changing circumstances, the HR profession must be ready to respond. HR professionals will need to position themselves to contribute a human capital perspective to their agency's broader strategic planning process; provide integrated mission support and participate as partners with line managers through facilitation, coordination, and counseling; lead or assist in their agency's workforce planning efforts; and develop human capital policies, programs, and practices that will help their agencies achieve its shared vision.

Human Resources Management Council (HRMC) (formerly the Interagency Advisory Group of Federal Personnel Directors)

The Interagency Advisory Group of Personnel Directors has been re-designated as the Human Resources Management Council (HRMC). In May 2000, the HRMC subcommittee on the HR Profession identified four goals (with accompanying detailed action plans) for improving the effectiveness and capabilities of HR staff. These goals are:

- Conduct a comprehensive, government-wide analysis of the HR occupation using a workforce planning model;
- Assess the feasibility and desirability of developing a model credentialing/training program for federal HR professionals based on core competencies needed to be successful;
- Establish an HR virtual training institute;

- Establish a government-wide standard for HR interns.

As co-chair, OPM is helping the Subcommittee carry out these goals and individuals, teams and other organizations are dealing with each goal, with definitive action expected by January 2001.

International Personnel Management Association (IPMA)

The federal human resources (HR) management world changed dramatically in the last several years, from what had been a long period of stability during the previous two decades and all indications are that this pace of change will continue to confront all federal HR practitioners.

In response to both internal and external pressures, agencies are increasingly sensitive to the customers they serve and are developing sound business practices to serve those customers better. Agencies will be acquiring increasingly sophisticated technological capability that will enhance decision-making. Agencies are developing and adopting better business practices, putting added pressures on all program areas to make a sound "business case" for ongoing programs as well as new program initiatives. This will drive the need for development of valid performance measures to assess program outcomes, rather than just tracking process outputs: This approach will have the benefit in some cases of allowing agencies to base their employment levels on budget capacity; instead of on artificial authorizations. On the other hand, this business approach will increase the threat of outsourcing those poorly performing or resource-intensive processes and services that are not inherently governmental and could be performed more economically by commercial sources. (This threat extends to the HR function itself.)

Agency managers are responding to this changed climate and the increasing competition for talent by becoming more sensitive to maintaining a productive workforce. There is increased sensitivity to employees' family considerations. Increasing numbers of employees are telecommuting, working out of virtual offices rather than traditional office spaces. Increased diversity in agency work forces and more resolution of conflicts through non-traditional means have become the norm, not because of policy initiatives, but because they make good business sense.

The technological advances mentioned above, combined with the decrease in HR staffs, will speed up the delegation of personnel authorities that once were performed exclusively in HR offices. These advances will allow managers more ready access to employee data from their desktop, and create an expectation that most HR work will be performed in a streamlined and, wherever possible, electronic fashion. Prospective job applicants will increasingly be able to access job information from just about anywhere, through electronic networks and kiosks. HR specialists will also be able to connect to necessary resources from any location. More and more HR work will be accomplished effectively from long distances, though the use of networks and laptops. As a result, HR Specialists will have to possess up-to-date technical skills.

What all this means, is that there will be different priorities for federal HR specialists, which will require different strategies. Some HR specialists view the above assessment as dire and an indicator that HR work will become extinct. Others view it as an opportunity to reorient how HR

professionals can participate and influence the significant way in which federal agencies are becoming more efficient and more responsive to their customer and to the American public.

IPMA has collaborated with the National Academy for Public Administration on the competency model and has worked with the Graduate School, USDA on the competency training that IPMA offers. IPMA is looking more at tailoring the training to agency needs - particularly at the state/local level. The HR Certification Program has begun testing for certification as well as granting certification through March 2001. So far, the applications are predominantly from the state and local sectors.

Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB)

In 1993, the Merit Systems Protection Board published a report: “*Federal Personnel Offices, Time for a Change?*” that concluded that change was needed in the way federal personnel offices do business. Since then, the federal approach to human resources management and administration has undergone many modifications, but many things have also stayed the same. Some of the problems that were identified in that report have been addressed, but others persist or are perceived by customers as unresolved

Recent MSPB findings are significant to the discussion of the future of the federal HR profession because the roles played and the future competencies needed by HR professionals depend to a large degree on the division of labor between HR professionals and agency managers. Clarifying and gaining consensus on the overlapping HR responsibilities and the desired relationship between managers and HR professionals is an important element in the approach for developing future HR professionals and leaders.

These findings also highlight that effectively managing an agency's human resources depends not only on the talent available in the personnel or HR community, but also on how well prepared managers and supervisors are with regard to HRM work, and how willing they are to engage in it. Discussions of constructive ways to redefine the HRM role and promote the professional development of HR specialists should include the relationships of the personnel community with managers and supervisors and the current talent gap in the federal HR community.

MSBP has outsourced its human resources function to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Additional observations include making sure that decisions are based on data and in determining the level of interest the current HR staff has in changing its roles. While the occupation is younger than the government as a whole, the needed change is not apparent.

National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA) Center for Human Resources Management

The NAPA Center for Human Resources Management (CHRM) has been very involved in the area of competencies for many years. Through the Center, the HR Competency Model was developed and published in 1996 as well as *New Times, New Competencies, New Professionals – A Guide for Implementing a Competency Model for HR Professionals: A Strategy for*

Becoming a High Performance Organization, published in 1997. In that same year, an electronic competency network was established and as well as a clearinghouse of information about competency development and application to HR occupation. Numerous workshops and seminars on the competency model have been held for members of the Human Resources Management (HRM) Consortium in 1997 - 1998. The Center collaborated with IPMA and USDA/Graduate School on the development and presentation of training on new HR roles and competencies. Current projects include examination of HR roles, functions, staffing, implementation and validity of competency models. This project includes private sector benchmarking and comparisons with status in federal agencies and is being coordinated with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The projected completion date is October 2000.

NAPA/CHRM asserts that the HR occupation as a whole is undergoing the same transition, whether in the public or private sectors. The main difference lies in how the federal sector approaches the issue and what federal managers expect from HR. Trends that are occurring within the federal sector are generally the same trends as in the private sector, with the private sector about five years ahead of the federal community and much can be learned from their experiences.

Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation

The Corporation is targeting April 2001 for its institute to open. The institute will have two or three tracks on the needs of the HR community.

Small and Independent Agency Personnel Directors' Group (SIAPDG)

This group is comprised of a number of small, diverse agencies. As a group, they are challenged with getting a nucleus together on various issues. There is movement towards cross servicing, with creative options being developed.

Training Officers' Conference (TOC)

The Training Officers' Conference (TOC) brings together federal trainers and professionals from industry, academia and state and local governments to exchange ideas and discuss issues, trends and new frontiers in the training and human resource development community. TOC creates an environment for the exchange and development of ideas through a number of activities, including the TOC Professional Development Luncheon Program and the TOC Annual Institute. The Luncheon Program involves a series of monthly lectures and seminars featuring specialists in HR Development and experts in education, technology, economics, business and political science. The Institute is an intensive three-day conference providing skill building workshops and plenary sessions.

The TOC is currently working towards building stronger ties and partnerships with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) groups.

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¹⁴ U.S. OPM. "The HR Workforce: Meeting the Challenge of Change."

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¹⁶ "Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998," P.L. 105-270 (The FAIR Act)

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