

Federal HR Forum
Washington, DC
April 1, 2010
Meeting Discussion Summary

Representatives of the following organizations participated in the meeting:

Department of Justice	National Nuclear Security Administration
National Institutes of Standards and Technology	Government Accountability Office
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Department of Housing and Urban Development
General Services Administration	Department of Homeland Security
Department of Treasury	Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency
Commodity Futures Trading Commission	Department of Transportation
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	Social Security Administration
Overseas Private Investment Corporation	Partnership for Public Service
Office of Personnel Management	Air Force – Wright Patterson Air Force Base
National Institutes of Health	Federal Bureau of Investigation

HR Competencies/Skills

- There is a lot of concern in the federal HR community about the future of the profession.
- There was an acknowledgement of the failure to invest in the future of the federal HR profession.
 - Where will federal agencies find the needed talent?
 - How can we ensure that the right people are in the pipeline?
 - How do we train and develop them?
 - Is it time to professionalize the HR specialist series?
 - Is there a need for an HR certification?
- The challenge is to get the HR profession to where it needs to be.
- There was concern expressed that the HR profession has become overly reliant on technology, which has taken the place of developing HR skills. This has led to a lack of understanding of the basics of HR.
- There was discussion of why the HR community has not solved this issue and what can be done now.

- There is a need to do more succession management in the HR profession.
- The degree of transformation that needs to occur in the HR community is massive.
- There was agreement that the HR competencies have been defined.
- There were some participants who believe that HR has always had a role as a consultant.
- There was recognition that to be effective, the HR staff has to understand the mission and business of the agency.
- There is a need to capture knowledge and share it with the HR staff.
- There was acknowledgement that agencies are stealing HR talent from each other. There is a need for people to stay in agencies so that they can grow.
- There was an understanding that the future of the HR profession is in human capital strategies. However, those working in HR need a foundation in human resource management if they are to succeed. The basics need to be addressed first before looking at strategic issues. HR needs to be less transactional.
- There has been an effort to shift more HR work to line managers. However, managers have not been prepared for this. Where this occurs, for the HR staff to be effective, they need to know the business of the department.

HR Development Programs

- There was acknowledgement that some federal agencies like the Army and Navy used to run intern programs that no longer exist. These programs did an excellent job of preparing future HR leaders and are missed.
- All of the participating organizations are doing some development of their HR staff. Highlighted programs include:
 - One agency has established an HR university that offers 2 hour courses that are taught by subject matter experts. They have a speaker's bureau where agency experts talk about the work of their centers. They utilize videoconferencing to increase the number of participants by cutting down on travel costs.
 - Another agency reported that it has stopped trying to bring in someone at the full performance level to do HR work. They are bringing in individuals at the entry level and develop them internally. They identify subject matter experts who provide training. They pair the new hires with mentors. They have embedded HR specialists in the organizations that they service. This has worked well and they have become involved in HR strategy and have become business partners.
 - Another agency has started a program called 'Fall in Love' with the agency. Each quarter, they sponsor a 2 day program. They require rotations and shadowing of managers and program staff.
- It was recognized that there are successful government-wide development programs. There was agreement that there is need to create an HR potential program throughout the federal government. This would allow for the sharing of existing programs and resources. There was support for developing a proposal on this issue that could be submitted to the director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

- The framework of a development program exists across agencies that could be used as a foundation for training the HR staff.
 - This effort needs to be sustained by federal agencies with the support of OPM.
- Ongoing development is critical in order to keep the HR staff up to date.
- There is a need to align formal training with on-the-job training.
- There was recognition that this is in large part a resource issue.
- There was discussion of the generational issue, since the generations learn differently.
- There is an emerging HR leaders' forum that will bring together HR people from across agencies.
- There was agreement that this effort will be a marathon and not a sprint.

Leadership/Supervisory Training

- There was a discussion about how to implement the requirements of the new training regulations. **(Note – I am not familiar with the training regulations so did not understand the issue).**
- Colleges were identified as an underutilized source, since they have graduate students that are looking for projects.
 - One agency reported partnering with Johns Hopkins University on three occasions for different projects. There was no cost and the agency got motivated individuals to work on the projects.
 - Another agency brings people from universities into the agency so that they can see how learning is applied. They used the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) authority to facilitate the exchange.
- The difficulty in getting HR people who want to step into leadership positions was noted.
- Agencies are looking to identify and develop leaders.
 - One agency is targeting training to those individuals who indicate that they want to be leaders.
 - Another agency promotes leadership as part of its culture and has tremendous competition for its leadership development program.
 - Another agency has established a Leadership Institute that is part of its succession management program. They have development programs focused at all levels within the agency. Formal mentoring is included as part of the program.
- There was agreement that the pay compression problem has eliminated one benefit of being in a leadership role. As a result, there is a need to redefine why someone would want to be a leader.
- It was pointed out that when current leaders are negative and jaded, this can have an adverse impact on newer employees and contribute to their reluctance to step into leadership positions. Leaders need to model positive behavior.
- There was consensus that leadership is about inspiring people. If individuals want to make a difference leadership is the route. It is not about the money.
- HR needs to give people the confidence that they can succeed in leadership roles.

- There is a need to prepare people by giving them challenging projects.
- There is a need to share power.
- It is important to identify those with leadership potential early in their careers.
- Concern was expressed that in some agencies HR may be a dumping ground for those who cannot make it on the mission side.
- There is a need to promote HR as a profession, which is performing a critical service.
- It was noted that larger agencies may be willing to share their resources and expertise in the area of leadership development.
- The federal training officers' conference may be a good source of information.

Staffing/Hiring

- There was a discussion of the hiring reform initiative and a meeting that was held on April 1st at OPM. Highlights of the meeting:
 - There will be a memo issued by the President on April 12th.
 - OPM gave reassurances that it is trying to think through the implications of this initiative and will provide assistance
 - OPM will establish several taskforces to assist with implementation.
 - OPM will issue guidance to agencies prior to the issuance of the memo by the President.
- Hiring reform is the biggest change in HR process.
- There were some who believe that the hiring reform initiative needs to be piloted in a few diverse agencies. There was recognition that OPM will not do this.
- There was agreement that hiring quality individuals was far more important than speed.
- While the new hiring process may be more applicant friendly, it may also create false expectations.
- There was recognition that agencies do not use the plethora of assessment tools that are available and there is a need to be more creative.
- There was a recommendation that the entire civil service system should be examined and not just hiring.

Increasing the Percentage of Employees with Targeted Disabilities

- Concern was expressed that there is an underreporting of employees with disabilities.
- It is important to incorporate affirmative employment in every step of the hiring process.
- There was recognition that it is difficult to win the hearts and minds of hiring managers when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. The main barrier is attitudinal.
- There is reluctance on the part of managers to hire individuals with disabilities, despite the fact that these individuals have the skill sets needed to perform the jobs.
- Leaders need to hold managers accountable for hiring individuals with disabilities.

- HR has to be advocates.
- Unfortunately, some of the bias also resides with HR professionals.
- Accommodating individuals with disabilities is well worth the effort.
- One agency has a program for college students with disabilities.
- Someone needs to take leadership of this initiative.
- Sometimes there just needs to be one success story that is well publicized.

Hiring Process

- Manager engagement in the hiring process is a must.
- There needs to be a strategic conversation with the manager to launch the hiring process. The conversation should cover everything that HR needs to know and is a valuable way for HR to educate the manager.
- There is a need to do a job analysis and identify the needed skills for the position.
- The majority of time spent in the hiring process is due to the managers.
- HR does not always speak to the hiring manager, but rather to a middle person.
 - Senior Administrative Contacts are often between HR and the hiring manager. There is a need to use them to assist, without having them take over the hiring process.

Classification/Pay Reform

- There was an article in USA Today that said federal employees were overpaid as compared to the private sector. The concern with articles like this is that the authors usually do not understand the federal system and make comparisons that may not be accurate.
- There was recognition that a lot is wrong with the federal pay system and that the classification system is rigid. There was not a consensus as to whether the General Schedule should be replaced. The failure of NSPS was noted.
- Pay banding was discussed as one possible solution.
- Some agencies have the flexibility to provide recruitment bonuses to get federal employees to move among agencies and also can hire above the minimum.
- There was agreement that expanding what is working at federal agencies would be a positive step.
- There was a recommendation that an examination be made of those agencies in and out of Title 5, with consideration being given to extending certain authorities to other agencies.
- Pay compression is a problem for those at the GS-15 level and those in the SES.
- There was discussion of the difficulties in implementing pay for performance, since measuring performance is a challenge.
 - There needs to be a big investment in training if agencies are going to implement pay for performance successfully.
 - Concern was expressed that there is little incentive for managers to manage the pay budget.
 - Overall, the federal government does not do well in being results oriented.

- One agency reported it is a fan of pay for performance. Their system works because of the time and effort that was put into training managers. Employee surveys indicate satisfaction and there have been very few complaints.
 - Another agency advised that pay for performance also works well for them. They guarantee that those who are rated as fully successful will get the same increase as other government employees plus a little extra.
- For those agencies with pay banding, one problem is that if they do not have sufficient money, they will not be able to give raises that keep up with the general schedule.
- The private sector is much more nimble when it comes to pay than is the federal government. There is no market sensitivity in the federal government. While the federal government tends to underpay at the entry level as compared to the private sector, people can move quickly in the federal system.