



HUMAN CAPITAL - Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning

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Strategic human capital management is a pervasive challenge facing the federal government. In January 2001, and again in January 2003, we identified strategic human capital management as a government-wide high risk area after finding that the lack of attention to strategic human capital planning had created a risk to the federal government's ability to serve the American people effectively.³ As our previous reports have made clear, the widespread lack of attention to strategic human capital management in the past has created a fundamental weakness in the federal government's ability to perform its missions economically, efficiently, and effectively.⁴ In the wake of extensive downsizing during the early 1990s, done largely without sufficient consideration of the strategic consequences, agencies are experiencing significant challenges to deploying the right skills, in the right places, at the right time. Agencies are also facing a growing number of employees who are eligible for retirement and are finding it difficult to fill certain mission-critical jobs, a situation that could significantly drain agencies' institutional knowledge. Other factors such as emerging security threats, rapidly evolving technology, and dramatic shifts in the age and composition of the overall population exacerbate the problem. Such factors increase the need for agencies to engage in strategic workforce planning to transform their workforces so that they will be effective in the 21st century.

There are a variety of models of how federal agencies can conduct workforce planning. For example, in 1999 OPM published a five-step model that suggests agencies define their strategic direction, assess their current and future workforces, and develop and implement action plans for closing identified gaps in future workforce needs.⁵ Since then, NAPA and the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) have reported on workforce models used by federal, state, and local governments and industry, and developed their own generic models.⁶

Comparing these models, NAPA and IPMA found that the following four steps are generally common to strategic workforce planning efforts:

- examining future organizational, environmental, and other issues that may affect the agency's ability to attain its strategic goals;
- determining skills and competencies needed in the future workforce to meet the organization's goals and identifying gaps in skills and competencies that an organization needs to address;

- selecting and implementing human capital strategies that are targeted toward addressing these gaps and issues; and
- evaluating the success of the human capital strategies.

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