

Talent Management: The Next Phase of Succession Planning

By Patrick Ibarra

Human resources in all sectors, in particular the public sector, are experiencing transformational change. Today's workplace is awash in a number of trends that include labels for the assorted workforce demographics, serious talk about pension reform, and how to reenergize organizational members—many of who have been personally impacted by a series of budget reductions. All the while there is increased public scrutiny about the evolving role of government, a slight thawing of the hiring freeze many agencies adopted as a way to cut costs, and the ever changing legal landscape, all of which combine as headwinds are confronting human resource professionals. These trends can be extremely disruptive by generating sufficient uncertainty to stall even the most seasoned HR veteran from moving forward.

While some in HR consider the confluence of these forces as an unnecessary disturbance to an otherwise effective system, others welcome the opportunity to transition towards the building of a workforce for the 21st century. Constructing such a workforce by public sector leaders who can translate the aforementioned headwinds into a tailwind will require the adoption of a contemporary approach to creating increased capacity while not necessarily adding workforce members. That approach is an integrated talent management program.

While the subject of succession planning has been the trend the last several years, this has transitioned to the practice of talent management, wherein organizational leaders are seeking a broader and more systemic approach to building workforce capacity. Achieving optimal performance is influenced more by preparing workforce members to handle present and future challenges and less by the past practice of simply adding more employees. While many government budgets are healthier than in the recent past, elected officials may be reluctant, based on the last few tumultuous years in relation, to institute reductions-in-force, furloughs and other related cost-cutting moves to support the addition of new positions. The adoption and implementation of a talent management program provides the opportunity for organizational leaders to improve organizational performance despite not adding to their workforce.



Human resource development evolved towards succession planning which, in turn, has transitioned into talent management. As depicted in the diagram, an integrated and systematic talent management program is comprised of eight segments, and each must be designed well, executed proficiently, woven seamlessly with the other segments and regularly monitored for potential variance. These eight segments comprise the equivalent of a “number of moving parts” and consequently, require synchronization. Effective and successful talent management programs often require the expertise and experience of external resources that are skilled as architects (design) and contractors (execution).

Successful approaches to each of the segments may include:

- **Recruiting:** The mechanics of recruiting include a contemporary sourcing strategy that features all social media platforms, an automated applicant tracking system, and use of social marketing techniques.
- **Selection:** Utilize a healthy mix of selection tools such as interview panels consisting of workforce members who will serve alongside the candidate hired, behavioral interviewing techniques, and appropriate use of pre-employment screening devices.
- **Training:** Requirement that every employee have an annual individual training and development plan (ITDP) he or she co-created with their respective manager. The components should include a combination of technical and non-technical activities. The focus of the ITDP must be based on both the mission and performance goals of the employer and the development and growth of job/position related competencies (i.e. communication, change acumen, managing employee performance).
- **Career Planning:** Human resources staff actively partners with occupations and professions within their agency to develop a series of sequential career planning steps, which may include a self-assessment. Job levels such as “maintenance worker II” or “accountant III” do not always constitute a career path as much as they indicate a compensation level.
- **Succession Planning:** Based on an assessment of the agency's workforce demographics, implement a succession planning program consisting of leadership and management learning activities intended to equip workforce members as potential candidates for position/job openings in the foreseeable future.
- **Performance Management:** A credible approach to managing employee performance is essential to an effective talent management program. Besides the importance of the actual instrument used, how well supervisors and managers are at navigating the performance discussion with their employees is equally as important.

- **Retention:** Targeted actions to retain workforce members who organizational leaders believe are high performers. Non-economic actions may include stretch assignments and work-life flexibility.
- **Qualified Work Supply/Demand Match:** Accessing federal- or state agency-produced research about the availability of qualified candidates, especially in the more technical fields. Research data obtained should be examined through the lens of what types of skills a particular agency is seeking, now and in the future. This is especially relevant to agencies in non-metropolitan areas where talent pools in certain occupations may be limited.

The following table outlines the various areas of focus necessary for the creation and adoption of an integrated talent management program and a recommended strategy for each of these areas:

The emergence of a well-designed and effectively executed talent management programs, are well underway. Increasingly organizational leaders are pivoting from past efforts to build their work-

force and instead embracing the comprehensive and systematic approach that talent management programs offer.

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Area of Focus for Integrated Talent Management Program	Recommended Strategy
Provide an overall vision of a completely integrated system including other human resources functions.	A unified approach outlining a cohesive series of talent management processes that are congruent with the organization's workplace culture.
Consider the context of the agency's mission and vision, as well as relevant organizational demographics and workforce characteristics.	An agency's mission and vision serve as the foundation of the integrated talent management approach, with a laser like focus on the composition—current and future—of the agency's workforce.
Prepare objectives for the talent management program.	Specific improvements will be provided to immediately strengthen each segment, such as establishing a robust leadership development program, implementing steps to accelerate the recruiting process, or creating a mentoring program for high-climbers.
Demonstrate the priority and phasing of each talent management segment to best advance the organization while leveraging time and resources for broadest impact.	Based on current practices, best practices and the design team's expertise, a sequenced set of actions to generate immediate dividends and long-term benefits are recommended. The cumulative result is a talent management program designed to become embedded in the culture.
Suggestions on what talent management functionality should be automated and how best to integrate that functionality with either existing IT systems or a new software system or others.	Certain sections of the talent management program will be strong contenders for an automated solution, such as performance management. Recommendations may include better utilization of existing technology capabilities or purchase of a separate system.
Ideas on what portions of the recommendations may be performed by in-house staff or may be better performed by a consultant.	Based on capabilities and capacity of existing staff related to operationalizing suggested talent management program, particular segments may be better performed by in-house staff while others better performed by an external resource.
Create success metrics that can be used during the implementation phase to measure progress.	A series of workforce analytics to monitor progress will be provided as a meaningful "dashboard."
Suggestions on an internal communications strategy	A range of in-person (i.e. group meetings) and electronic communication (i.e. email, intranet, and social media) tools and techniques will be recommended, including suggested timing and potential content.