Executive summary

Government is facing a serious workforce dilemma. The capacity to fulfill agency mission and effectively serve constituents is in danger of falling far short of expectations because of an impending shortage in skilled workers. A talent shortage, provoked by high numbers of portended retirements and a record low number of entrants into the government workforce, signifies that a traditional approach to recruiting and selection may not work. A new approach is needed—an approach fueled by a revolutionary new process called “talent science.” Talent science is a process being pioneered by high-performing organizations, where they experience higher levels of success in matching candidates to critical-skill roles or roles that typically incur abnormal rates of turnover. Through a talent science approach, these organizations are becoming more adept at predicting candidate success, and as a result, they are hiring candidates who more closely align with organizational role requirements. Greater candidate fit means elevated worker engagement, lower rates of turnover and ultimately, a higher performing organization.

The workforce dilemma

Almost everyone is familiar with the predicted shortage in skilled workers that is expected to occur over the next three to five years. News about the impending exodus of retiring baby-boomers from the workforce is published everywhere, from academic journals to trade magazines and newspapers. However, the pending workforce shortages are not unique to the private sector. Governments of all sizes will experience a severe shortage in talent, too. Many government workers, eligible to retire today, have postponed retirement at least temporarily. For example, the Center for State & Local Government Excellence polled 460 public entities and found that nearly 81% of the retirement eligible workers in those organizations have postponed their departure because of the slumping economy.1

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According to a 2013 article from the Washington Post on Waves of Retirements Hitting the Federal Workforce, the trend to delay retirement will not continue indefinitely. The economy is recovering, and employees are regaining confidence in their prospects of retiring. Employees in most government jurisdictions can retire as early as age 62, or even younger if they have more than 20 years of service. Anyone who walks the halls of government has observed that “today’s federal civil servants are much grayer than they were a decade ago.” The experience rate in employee retirements is increasing. More federal workers are filing for retirement now than in previous years—the rate is up as much as 43%, according to the Office of Personnel Management. William Dougan, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, recently stated, “We’re seeing this massive brain drain as thousands of workers leave the federal workforce, and it’s leading to a huge loss of knowledge and expertise. A lot of these jobs are not being filled once they’re vacated.” According to recent reports published by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), more than one third of the federal workforce is expected to retire by 2016.

Retirement isn’t the only factor contributing to a talent shortage in government. Research conducted by the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton reports that almost 25% of all new hires in the federal government leave their jobs within the first two years. The reasons for short tenure and unexpected transitions are mostly conjecture at this point because there hasn’t been enough research conducted and the exit interview process at many agencies, which serves as the primary data source for such research, is random and irregular. However, evidence based on Gen-Y work patterns suggest that younger workers are more transitory by nature, especially compared to older workers, who tended to settle into careers with one employer for the long haul. This kind of voluntary turnover may also be attributable to other factors, like the perception that there are fewer opportunities for career development and advancement in government, poor relationships with supervisors, dissatisfaction with compensation, or the nature of the work itself. Regardless of the reason, high turnover represents recruiting and training dollars down the drain. The cost of replacing someone who leaves early is significant and lends to degradation in an agency’s capacity to effectively administer its programs and services.

Talent shortages in government are also exacerbated by the fact that critical-skill positions are the most difficult to fill. Another workforce survey, conducted in 2013 by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence, cited the following positions as difficult to fill at the state and local level: firefighters, EMS paramedics, police officers, correctional officers, dispatchers, social workers, nurses, and many back-office professional positions, most notably, information technology workers. According to the GAO, a third of the controllers who direct our nation’s air traffic could leave their posts today. That’s why the Federal Aviation Administration has taken emergency steps to source and hire 750 new controllers a year for the unforeseeable future. Employees with these kinds of unique skills and specific expertise are not easily replaced. The impact of loss in these jobs is more than just financial—it affects public trust, safety, and goodwill.

A new approach is needed

The workforce challenge facing human resource professionals in government seems, at first glance, insurmountable. The traditional approach to filling position vacancies in government is very structured, and often times, at the mercy of Civil Service rules and regulations. Assuming a position is approved and budgeted, and a job reclassification is not warranted, position vacancies are posted for a time-certain period, normally 7 business days. Applicants are considered in order of preference, with preference typically given to those individuals whose names appear on a layoff or transfer list first or who are veterans, followed by those individuals who have been certified as meeting the minimum qualifications. The fitness of the applicant might be determined by any number of assessments, which test knowledge, skills, and abilities. Assessments can be in a variety of formats, including written, oral, performance, psychological, and physical exams. Applicants are ranked based on test results by means of a weighted and raw score analysis and placed on a list of “eligibles.” The top 3 to 5 candidates are interviewed, with one eventually selected to fill the open position.

While the structured process under Civil Service provides an approach to candidate selection that is objective, content-valid, and job related, there are some disadvantages. First, the process is slow. The time and effort that is expended to fill vacant positions, especially the critical-skill positions mentioned earlier, can be excessive. There are a series of correlated events that need to be carefully orchestrated, easily frustrated by manual systems and paper-based processes. Second, most of the exams that are administered only assess a person’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. They do not target behaviors essential for success and high performance in these specialized roles. While a person may have the necessary skills to complete the essential duties of a job, that person may not have the behavioral characteristics to perform it well. Selection misfits contribute to high and unexpected turnover.

Talent science, when combined with big data technologies, affords a new and revolutionary approach to address the deficiencies in the traditional recruitment and selection process. In a recent blog post of The Human Capital Institute, Jim Roddy suggested that, “The old model of hiring based solely on a list of skill and qualifications is not only dying, but dead.” He encouraged his readers to focus on behaviors, writing, “If you hire beyond skills and hold out for certain character traits, you have actually future-proofed your organization.”

The best way to hire beyond skills and acquire desirable character traits in your workforce is to apply talent science principles to your selection processes.

What is talent science?

Talent science is a predictive and analytics-based approach to managing human resource processes, like candidate selection, employee development, and succession planning. This approach objectively and statistically links performance metrics to the behavioral characteristics of employees within an organization to define a model of “best fit” for targeted positions. Research shows that candidate fit to an organization and job is highly correlated with higher levels of performance and employee retention in organizations across various industries.

Infor PeopleAnswers Talent Science—the talent science solution leader

Infor PeopleAnswers Talent Science™ has blazed the trail in the discipline of talent science and predictive analytics by adding big data technology to create a unique and proven solution. Infor’s Talent Science solution was recently awarded multiple patents for its cutting-edge approach to talent science. It is a unique solution that allows organizations to leverage talent science across large volumes of employees and candidate data to maximize effectiveness.

First, custom Performance Profiles are built using large samples of incumbents for any job within an organization where change is desired. This change could be higher quality hires, a reduction in turnover, increase in employee performance, or a better fit to the organization. A custom Performance Profile reflects the behavioral makeup of the best-suited candidate for the organization by determining the optimal range for each dimension being measured, weighing each of the 39 behavioral characteristics based on how predictive it is of job success. In this regard, no two custom Performance Profiles are identical. In fact, even the profiles for similar roles in two different organizations will possess unique key behaviors depending on cultural, environmental, and strategic variances between the organizations.

Next, job candidates are evaluated and ranked based on their responses to a comprehensive online assessment measuring the 39 behavioral characteristics. The assessment process is quick—requiring an average of less than 30 minutes to complete. The solution compares each candidate’s Behavioral DNA® to the custom Performance Profile corresponding to the position for which they are applying. A report is then generated, visually describing how and where the candidate aligns and differs from the requirements of the profile. This information can be leveraged across the entire employee life cycle from interviewing and selection to development and career path planning.
The Talent Science process includes a variety of tools to assist in all aspects of the talent management process. The following are a few of the tools offered in the Talent Science solution:

- **Pre-Employment Assessment.** Talent Science clients benefit from the most thoroughly researched and comprehensive assessment and validation processes in the industry.

- **Performance Profiles.** A benchmark, the custom Performance Profile, will be created for each targeted position by analyzing the statistical relationships between the job performance of the organization’s employees and the 39 behavioral, cognitive, and organizational cultural factors assessed by the system (Patent #8,204,778). This process is unique in that a custom Performance Profile isolates the behaviors required to achieve optimal performance outcomes, based solely on the organization’s data. The resulting Performance Profile accurately captures elements pertaining to the organization’s distinctive culture and environment, plus the behavioral and cognitive traits serving as determinants for the role’s key performance indicators.

- **Overall Rating (Recommendations).** Each job candidate is compared against the custom Performance Profile and detailed recommendations are provided around a candidate’s overall fit to the job.

- **Candidate Interview Questions.** Situational Interview Questions are automatically displayed for hiring managers to best explore the candidate’s characteristics as it relates to the job at hand.

- **Coaching and Development Module.** The Coaching and Development Module is a performance management tool highlighting areas to leverage an employee’s existing strengths and opportunities for improvement.

- **Career Path and Succession Planning.** Career Path and Succession Planning is a planning tool using predictive science to measure an employee’s Behavioral DNA against alternative open positions.

- **Employment Analytics.** Employment Analytics is a business intelligence (BI) reporting engine with over thirty pre-built standard reports for ROI, hiring, and development allowing users to drill down and create ad-hoc reports to meet unique organizational needs.

**Conclusion**

The workforce dilemma facing government will not solve itself through procrastination and inaction. High numbers of employees in critical positions and specialized jobs will be retiring soon—and the exodus has already started. When employees leave, the loss in knowledge capital is substantial and government’s ability to serve its constituents and fulfill organizational mandates and mission is significantly constricted. A new approach to hiring qualified replacements with the Behavioral DNA to perform well is needed. Talent science offers just such an approach. As experienced by the organizations that have chosen to use it, talent science more accurately predicts high performance based on a closer fit between organizational roles and prospective job candidates. It measures what matters—behavioral traits—not just knowledge, skills, and abilities. Hiring the wrong kind of people—people who do not have the Behavioral DNA to perform well in their jobs—only exacerbates the workforce dilemma and hinders government’s efforts to address the impending talent shortage. Infor PeopleAnswers Talent Science delivers an industry leading talent science solution to government that is valid, reliable, and economical.
About Infor

Infor is fundamentally changing the way information is published and consumed in the enterprise, helping 70,000 customers in more than 200 countries and territories improve operations, drive growth, and quickly adapt to changes in business demands. To learn more about Infor, please visit www.infor.com.

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