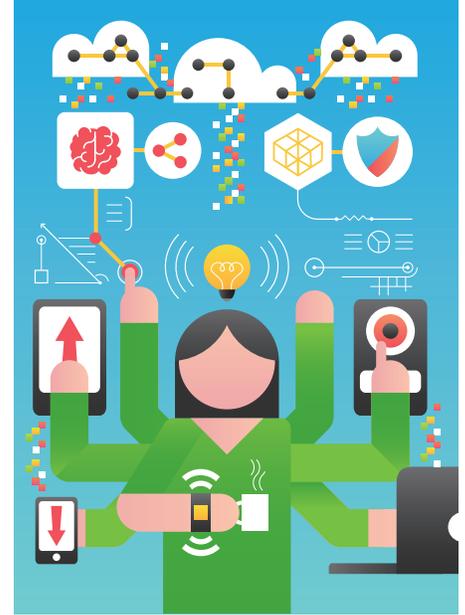




IT worker of the future

Tech Trends 2015: The fusion of business and IT A public sector perspective



Senior public sector technology workers are leaving agencies en masse, and younger employees with new skills are taking their places. This changing landscape is forcing technology leaders to rethink their approach to talent management today and for the future. Everything is on the table – from the types of skills new workers must have to new service delivery and staffing models.

Public sector perspective



The graphic above represents the trend's potential relevance, timing (short, medium, or longer runway), and overall readiness (low, moderate, or high) of the public sector to adopt this trend. These broad ratings are based on the professional opinions of some of the authors and may not reflect your organization's unique situation.

Public sector leaders who are moving forward with transformative technologies are also turning their attention to the workforce that will be expected to deliver value from these investments. Hiring the right talent with the right skill sets presents a mix of big opportunities and long-simmering challenges.

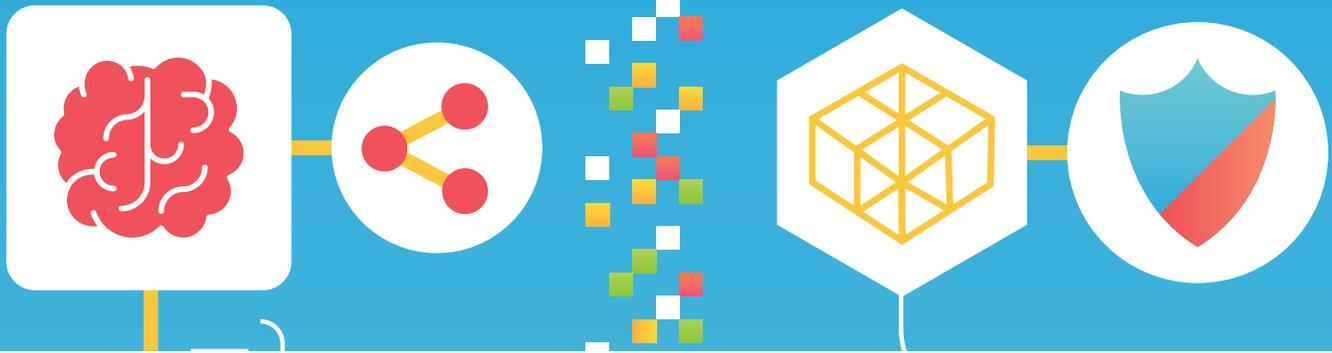
Some CIOs continue to worry about the large number of retirement-eligible employees who may leave public service and take their skills and institutional knowledge with them. The Government Accountability Office forecasts that more than a third of federal workers will be eligible for retirement by September 2017.¹ While agencies may be trying to hire new, younger talent to fill gaps left by retirees, many are not having success. A 2014 report said the percentage of federal employees under age 30 hit an eight-year low of 7 percent in 2013.² It may be that agency hiring practices, compensation, and staffing models are seen as out of step with what younger workers are looking for. Many of those workers may be interested in government work but are not ready to commit to lifelong public service.

Other CIOs are thinking about the issue differently, asking a new kind of question: What if success depends less on replacing all that retiring talent and more on rethinking what kind of talent is actually required and how to get that talent exactly when it's needed?

Given today's advancements in automation, for example, it may be that IT workers require fewer hard technical skills and more soft skills from disciplines like anthropology or sociology. The real work may involve bringing training, vendor management, and change management capabilities together to achieve an objective, not simply grinding out the work. Think vendor management officers, service delivery managers, and solution architects versus system administrators, operators, and developers.

Technology leaders at every level of government are already adapting their technology portfolios and service delivery models to meet new demands, from shared services to cloud-based services, taking advantage of new capabilities as they emerge. They'll have to spark the same level of innovation when it comes to talent management. If their IT organizations can spend less time on user support, for example, their workers can be used for more sophisticated technology collaborations.

CIOs need to continue to be creative to compete with private sector compensation packages and job flexibility. Some are offering externships and reverse mentoring. Others are creating more opportunities for virtual work. Still others are changing their hiring practices and associated policies to be more agile. For example, some states have enacted game-changing reforms in terms of who can apply for and secure various IT jobs. Tennessee has increased its focus on hiring for skills needed rather basing the position on experience or seniority.³



New technologies also provide a path for exploring innovative, flexible workforce models, even as the overall IT personnel model in the public sector may struggle to catch up. Just as cloud services introduced a model for renting processing capacity, so too are agencies looking at ways to access on-demand IT talent. For

example, the federal General Services Administration’s 18F coding squad is an example of an entirely new approach to government technology staffing. This is just one early example (hackathons are another) of new talent models that could be replicated across many public sector technology arenas.

Moving forward

- **Experiment in new territory.** Choose an area that is not currently mission critical – or where you cannot find good people – and experiment with new workforce practices.
- **Mix it up.** Examine how you have people deployed. Can the jobs become more diverse? Can you cross-train? Can you rotate people into different positions for short periods of time? Look for ways to mix up responsibilities that may open the door to new capabilities and levels of creativity.
- **Take a portfolio approach.** Start managing your IT workforce like your IT portfolio. Just as you would invest in new technologies, invest in your people by offering development and career advancement opportunities. Align the workforce to technology investments now as well into the future.
- **Engage in the policy discussion.** In the public sector, many hiring processes are dictated by outdated laws and policies – which aren’t going to change until policymakers are educated on widening gulf between what public sector IT leaders need from their workforce and what they’re allowed to do today.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Government Accountability Organization, *FEDERAL WORKFORCE: Recent Trends in Federal Civilian Employment and Compensation*, January 29, 2014, p. 7, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-14-215>, accessed April 7, 2015.
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