Deloitte.

Opening up the federal talent economy

18F, the group within General Services Administration (GSA) that designs user-centric digital services, only represents 0.03% of the total federal information technology (IT) workforce — but that may be enough for a team that can prototype a mobile feature in 29 minutes.[1] The tech group's success stems in part from its commitment to collaboration: publicly posting the code for each project on GitHub for others to use or by pairing their embedded Presidential Innovation Fellows with business, nonprofit, and academic partners.

Is 18F a niche outlier — or the beginning of a new talent model for government? Designed as a new approach to building "core capacity in government from a human capital perspective," according to Andrew McMahon, a senior advisor to the GSA Administrator, 18F works to "bring the most talented people in government, the private sector, and foundations together on one team."[2] Tapping into broader types of talent, however, requires different talent strategies. 18F trades traditional employment incentives like higher pay for a wifi-enabled open work environment and the opportunity to serve the public — strategies that make the group feel like a startup, and have drawn talent from top-tier engineering schools and Silicon Valley.

The federal government may have a broader talent base to help solve emerging challenges than current practices anticipate — or allow. The evolving American workforce includes a growing number of self-employed contractors and freelancers — projected to be 40% by 2020[3] — which is driving a more open talent economy in the private sector. What does an open talent economy imply for government agencies? What defines this 21st century labor market, and what does that mean for a federal agency's talent infrastructure and strategy?

Executive summary

Global shifts in technology, workforce demographics, and social business are fundamentally changing the way people do work — and the public sector is not immune. As government is asked to tackle today's big, interconnected problems, traditional federal employment practices are being challenged by an emerging labor model: the open talent economy—a collaborative, transparent, technology-enabled, rapid-cycle way of managing talent through networks and ecosystems.

What the open source model did for software development, the open talent economy is doing for work. As emerging challenges require skill sets of people not on the agency's payroll to do work not defined by existing position descriptions, *access* to talent becomes more important than *ownership* of talent. Former U.S. Chief Technology Officer Todd Park described this principle using Joy's Law: "No matter who you are, you have to remember that most of the smartest people in the world work for somebody else."[4] With only 2.3% of Millennials interested in replenishing a rapidly-retiring federal workforce,[5] government could benefit from creating a talent infrastructure capable of tapping into "the crowd" — the 1.3 billion people estimated to work virtually within the next few years.[6]

How could an open economy reshape federal talent?
An open talent economy reframes talent in terms of "access" rather than ownership. Practically, this might look like agencies specializing in critical workforce segments that serve a broader set of partners. Instead of every agency requiring their own set of IT developers, agencies could "lease" developers through term appointments. Where many agencies today rely on general developers to handle everything from financial management systems to advanced mission-specific tools, teams of system-specific experts could rotate from agency to agency by taking advantage of existing term appointments.

Open economy — "An economy that allows the unrestricted flow of people, capital, goods and services, across its borders; the opposite of a closed economy."
— *The Economist*

An open talent economy acknowledges that organizational boundaries are no longer the end but rather the departure point for influencing, enticing, and integrating a network of solution providers. Today's younger, connected, and mobile employees are managing careers on their own terms. While their parents may have sought job security, they prize engagement and meaning. As a result, agencies should reinvent their sense of what they have to offer talent, and possibly even what it means to "have" talent in the first place. To access and harness the capabilities of workers not on their payroll, agencies should carefully navigate a shift in talent strategy to prioritize talent "engagement" over talent "management."

We are just entering the early years of an open talent economy within the federal space; some parts of the landscape are clear, while others are still being defined. Like early mapmakers, we recognize that we are outlining a potential new reality. We hope to provide a preview of the next phase of talent strategy and management for federal agencies, and meaningful actions federal leaders can take to navigate this transition.

What's shaping the federal talent economy?

An open economy places federal agencies and talent in new relationships with each other — relationships that are more sensitive to global labor market trends. Government leaders looking to attract, develop, and retain the leading talent are finding that many of the rules that applied in the traditional workplace have been radically re-written. Post-digital trends, combined with the larger forces of globalization, education sector growth, and recent Federal events are reshaping what is relevant to human resource (HR) executives.

Combined, these trends demand a more open flow of talent. Mobile computing and social networks not only allow flexibility for current workers, but also give government agencies greater access to new talent sources. Tapping into these specialty skills is critical as globalization increases complexity, shifting government's role from completing tasks to solving problems. And where previous budgets allowed the flexibility to fund new mission elements, agencies will now have to support current talent with strategic partnerships and other innovative operating models.

Becoming post-digital: Emerging technologies, social media, and mobile networks

New technologies are calling into question traditional understandings of where and how work gets done. Mobile networks enable new models for work, such as telecommuting, the mobile office, and the use of talent clouds — pools of independent workers accessed through the Web and hired by the project, task, or hour. Social media tools overlay this infrastructure to drive greater collaboration, allowing users to share ideas and information with a new intensity, level, and speed. Meanwhile, emerging technologies — from drones to sensors — have greater capability to integrate people with smart machines, eliminating tasks from current jobs and creating demand for new skill sets.

Going "big": Globalization and analytics

Communications and greater availability of data have opened the world. For government, globalization has led to a new economy where players from across the spectrum of government, business, and social enterprise collaborate to solve tough problems. Data analytics provide fuel for this engine, using the open government data to generate insights on public issues from education to poverty. The same tools enable greater segmentation of the federal workforce, using millions of records on employees and their tasks to identify tailored interventions that push agencies beyond stock talent management approaches.

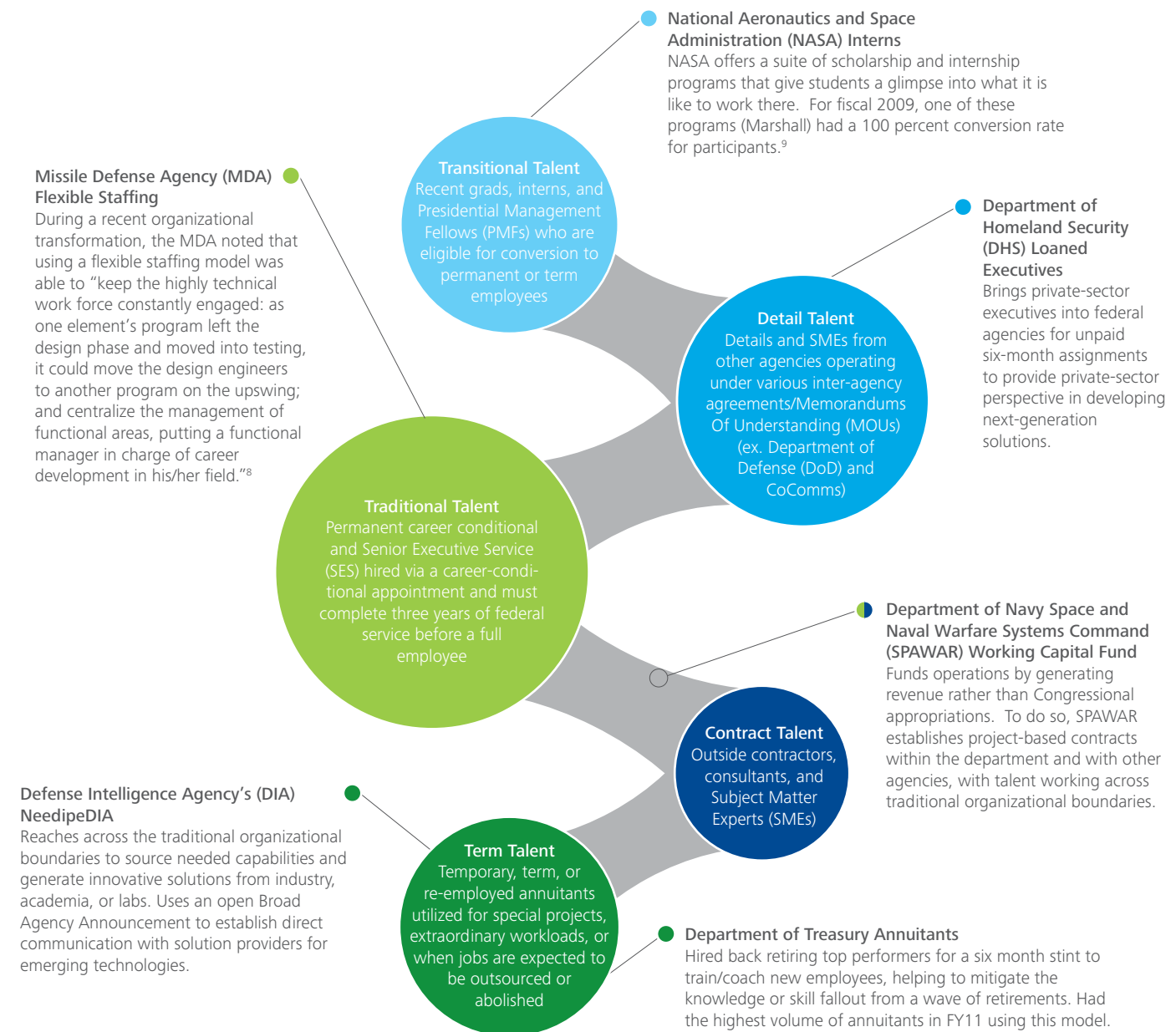## Adapting to reality: The current federal environment

Faced with decreasing budgets, spiking levels of retirement-eligible leadership, and an evolving and complex global mission, the federal government should consider how to prepare its current workforce to meet future mission needs. Adding to this pressure, by 2016, one-third of the federal workforce will be retirement eligible, including three out of five supervisors.[7] In response, agencies will have to engage and quickly develop the Millennial workforce — a workforce which is leaving government at a higher rate than its predecessors.

Expanding types of federal talent

To better access talent in an open economy, some agencies are already beginning to rethink how they manage traditional talent structures. Federal leaders should continue to think more broadly about total workforce management, employ a wider range of talent types, and be more creative about when and how to utilize each type to meet their individual missions.

Figure 1: Types of federal talent with relevant examples

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Interns
NASA offers a suite of scholarship and internship programs that give students a glimpse into what it is like to work there. For fiscal 2009, one of these programs (Marshall) had a 100 percent conversion rate for participants.[9]

Missile Defense Agency (MDA) Flexible Staffing
During a recent organizational transformation, the MDA noted that using a flexible staffing model was able to "keep the highly technical work force constantly engaged: as one element's program left the design phase and moved into testing, it could move the design engineers to another program on the upswing; and centralize the management of functional areas, putting a functional manager in charge of career development in his/her field."[8]

Transitional Talent
Recent grads, interns, and Presidential Management Fellows (PMFs) who are eligible for conversion to permanent or term employees

Detail Talent
Details and SMEs from other agencies operating under various inter-agency agreements/Memorandums Of Understanding (MOUs) (ex. Department of Defense (DoD) and CoComms)

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Loaned Executives
Brings private-sector executives into federal agencies for unpaid six-month assignments to provide private-sector perspective in developing next-generation solutions.

Traditional Talent
Permanent career conditional and Senior Executive Service (SES) hired via a career-conditional appointment and must complete three years of federal service before a full employee

Department of Navy Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) Working Capital Fund
Funds operations by generating revenue rather than Congressional appropriations. To do so, SPAWAR establishes project-based contracts within the department and with other agencies, with talent working across traditional organizational boundaries.

Contract Talent
Outside contractors, consultants, and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) NeedipeDIA
Reaches across the traditional organizational boundaries to source needed capabilities and generate innovative solutions from industry, academia, or labs. Uses an open Broad Agency Announcement to establish direct communication with solution providers for emerging technologies.

Term Talent
Temporary, term, or re-employed annuitants utilized for special projects, extraordinary workloads, or when jobs are expected to be outsourced or abolished

Department of Treasury Annuitants
Hired back retiring top performers for a six month stint to train/coach new employees, helping to mitigate the knowledge or skill fallout from a wave of retirements. Had the highest volume of annuitants in FY11 using this model.

# From talent cycle to talent signals

As the open talent economy places federal agencies and talent in new relationships with each other, agencies need to rethink current talent strategies and infrastructure. How does an agency measure performance for an employee who is consistently deployed on projects within other agencies? Or how does the government incent highly specialized term employees for whom long-term benefits have little meaning?

The traditional "talent cycle" may be too limited to address these challenges, as it is designed around an employee tenure within a single agency. Talent managers and federal leaders have traditionally thought of talent and employee processes as a supply chain with an on-ramp for new employees and an off-ramp for retirees. An increasingly mobile workforce stresses this model with its higher turnover; "investments" in recruiting and training may not show expected returns when critical employees are no longer "assets" or balance sheet talent.

Instead, agencies should view talent strategies as a "talent signal," emanating an employee value proposition to not only those currently employed by the agency, but also to independent actors deciding whether to participate in the agency's current environment. This ecosystem view requires a fresh perspective on how to build and manage talent networks. The starting point is to reimagine both what work needs to be done and who can do it; in essence, the process begins with an expansive view of work design and workforce planning.

The following four sections examine how an expansive view of talent affects talent strategies for recruiting and staffing, learning and development, employee performance, and employee benefits.

Figure 2: Shifting talent paradigms: From the traditional talent lifecycle to emerging talent signals
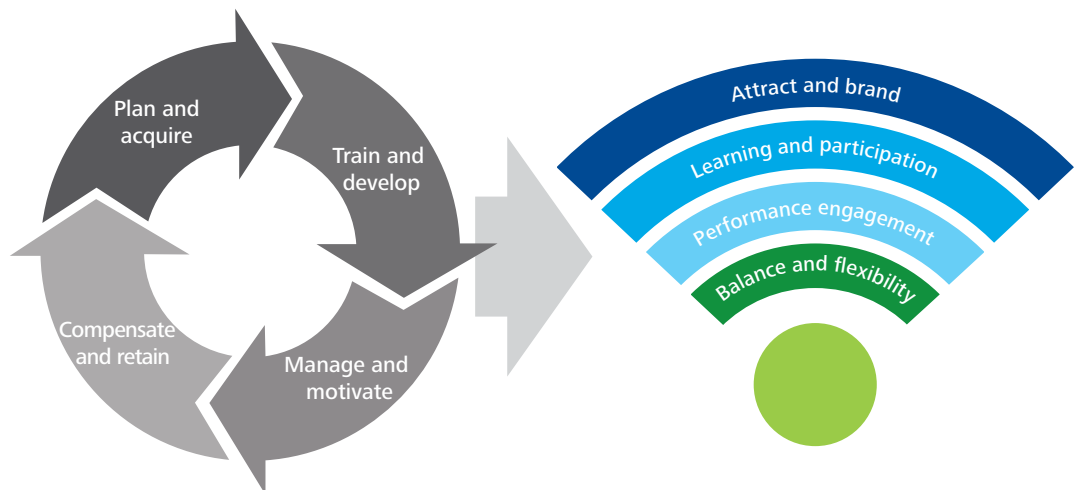
Recruiting and staffing

From "plan and acquire" to "design, brand, attract, and access"

To attract top talent entering the workforce today, government agencies should consider changing their approach to recruitment to be a marketing activity rather than simply a hiring activity. As Millennials prize jobs centered on engagement and meaning, agencies should actively market the potential for challenging work and social impact. Radically shifting the branding and recruiting tactics of an agency will take time, but agencies can start moving in this direction today. Consider three tactics that agencies can start now:

1. **Brand government jobs around public service.** In a global study conducted by Deloitte on Millennials, the largest number of respondents (36%) agreed that the major purpose of business is to improve society.[10] However, despite Millennials' interest in improving society, federal agencies have not been able to capitalize on the pool of young talent that is eager to serve. In the 2013 American Student Survey of Ideal Employers, the highest ranking federal agency was the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ranked at 13, followed by the Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency, at 22 and 24 respectively. A common thread among all these organizations is that they have been able to market themselves as innovative places to work, with opportunities for employees to work with cutting edge technologies or serve the country by solving complex, top-of-mind national challenges.[11]

2. **Don't limit recruitment to specific, balance-sheet jobs.** A strong recruiting strategy should go beyond building a pool of candidates for a given position. Agencies should establish a brand that helps them start and sustain relationships, which place candidates — and their capabilities — within the agency's network. Even if an agency does not need the specific skills or level of experience of a candidate today, shaping a positive perception may increase the likelihood that the candidate applies for a job in the future or works for the agency as a contractor or temp. Effective ongoing relationships balance "push" and "pull" sourcing activities: push activities target a specific audience and can include employee referral events and networking events, while pull activities create opportunities for applicants to discover jobs on their own through postings or social media.

3. **Establish a "push-pull" social presence.** Social networking sites are now the second-most effective way for those seeking employment to find new work, falling only behind traditional networking. Social media provides cheap access to a seemingly limitless talent pool; LinkedIn has 85 million members, Twitter has 175 million registered users, and Facebook has over 500 million active users, over half of whom check their Facebook accounts each day.[12]

"66% of Millennials say innovation is a key ingredient in making an organization an employer of choice…"

Deloitte Millennial Innovation Survey

Learning and development
From "training and deployment" to "participation and learning"

With higher turnover rates and more ways to tap into specialized skill sets, the open talent economy forces agencies to rethink the value of investing in training and development. Instead of prioritizing classroom instruction as a means to build specialized skills and talent, learning will be a way to develop skills — like collaboration — that allow agencies to access specialized skills and talent. And instead of simply being a means to develop current workers, learning and development becomes the value proposition for future hires, freelancers, and partnerships. Lifelong skill development will increasingly be the responsibility of the individual — and talent will likely choose an organization that offers the greatest personal development and tailored learning opportunities. Agencies can employ the following four strategies to begin attracting new talent through an innovative learning and development platform:

1. **Make learning participative.** The learning function may increasingly create the forum instead of the content. Particularly in an open environment that expects higher levels of job and career change, creating opportunities for knowledge and idea sharing supports connections between employees and enables them to exchange leading practices. Where many learning organizations focus on instructor-led training, communities of practice or virtual environments allow employees to discuss real challenges or on-the-job experience in real time rather than having to retroactively access and apply prior learning.

2. **Define curricula around experiences.** Traditionally, formal training has been the focus of 90% of talent development strategies even though these programs account for only 10% of actual employee learning and skill development.[13] A shift to on-the-job learning — or "stretch assignments" — provides the opportunity for individuals to pair with recognized experts in a field, take on additional responsibilities such as filling in for managers, or lead in changing circumstances. High-growth experiences may teach more than one competency, where modular courses often zoom in on one idea. The open talent system means that employees can shift between agencies, private companies, and independent (freelance and open source) employment to get experiences, rather than relying on the agency to provide a full range. Training becomes more about what support is provided to individuals during growth experiences, which makes it easier to offer the same standard of training uniformly, across occupational specialties or career paths.

Talent development strategies focused on formal training **90%**

Formal training contributing to actual employer development **10%**

3. **Design immersive and experiential courses.** Instead of simply receiving instruction in a traditional classroom or web-based setting, find methods that allow learners the opportunity to become immersed in the content and engage with the concepts being taught. Immersive and experiential learning solutions often use new technologies to allow employees to simulate and practice workforce skills in a safe but realistic environment. Examples of immersive learning include 3D simulation, which allows learners to engage with a virtual interface to experience unique situations difficult to replicate in the workplace, or gamification, which takes the essence of games — fun, play, transparency, design, and challenge — and applies them to business objectives in a learning setting. Gamification in particular is gaining popularity, as the competition and reward inherent in attainment and scoring provides a natural incentive for self-development — regardless of whether the employee is on the balance sheet. And the technological capabilities of gamified learning platforms provide the opportunity to collect and manage capability data on participating talent to promote more dynamic interventions.

4. **Analyze data to provide tailored feedback and robust development.** Given the wide array of learning opportunities available within any organization, the learning organization should support learners in "making sense of the information noise." Data collection can be integrated into learning by measuring and recording information about individuals engaging in training, including trends in behavior, satisfaction level, and learning gain. This information can assist individuals in understanding their personal mastery of concepts and skill gaps, and can also inform an organization where learning capabilities may need to be improved or where skill gaps in the workforce exist. Without regular evaluation, training programs can become obsolete, duplicative, or irrelevant, leaving the workforce unequipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to drive the organization's mission.[14]

"Gamification is an innovative and interactive way to deliver learning, and is increasingly utilized by top organizations. The idea is to take the essence of games — fun, play, transparency, design, and challenge — and apply them to business objectives in a learning setting."

Employee performance

From "performance management" to "performance engagement"

As workforces become more collaborative in nature, embracing innovative learning strategies and implementing new ways to "do" work, there is a need to re-think performance management at its core. Traditional federal performance management approaches were born out of the same mindset that delivered the general schedule — "equal pay for equal work" — and emphasize individual contributions by occupational specialists. But as government is asked to tackle today's big, interconnected problems, is this still an effective model? Will today's problems be solved by adding up the individual contributions of the people inside a single agency?

In an open talent economy, there is an opportunity for federal agencies to more efficiently solve problems by drawing on capabilities available in their broader sphere of influence — which means that their performance systems have to be able to measure that work, considering factors like engagement, development, quality, interest, access, and output. When employees might work for you, near you, for someone else, or on their own, the current thinking and approaches to measure and gauge employee performance will need to be adapted. In an environment where success depends on the ability to partner with other agencies, private companies, nonprofits, and individual specialists, collaboration will likely be prized over expertise, agility over specialty. How can performance management be structured to accommodate these changes? Take a look at three new ways to begin conceptualizing performance management in the federal space:

1. **Translate agency strategy into "performance imperatives."** An agency-wide strategy implies changes to processes (operations), people, and performance. For many federal agencies, the performance management cycle is based on a process that has been in place for many years or has been adapted from another agency. For performance systems to be relevant — a cornerstone of

engagement — they should be up to date and unique. Effective programs are not likely to be "cookie cutter" solutions, but should instead be tailored around unique elements of an agency's strategy, mission, and culture. Designing a performance management system should consider the nature of the work: Does the work rely on accuracy? Is the work dependent on the success of an individual or a team? If a team, what rewards does the organization offer to enforce the value of teamwork? Aligning performance measures to how work gets done drives candid discussions among senior leadership based on clear principles — and more effectively engages employees in the mission.

Figure 3: Performance Management Paradigm

Recognize the many — Recognize the few

Accuracy — Innovation

Strategic — Tactical

Monetary incentives — Nonmonetary incentives

Uniformity — Flexibility

Quantitative — Qualitative

The individual — The team
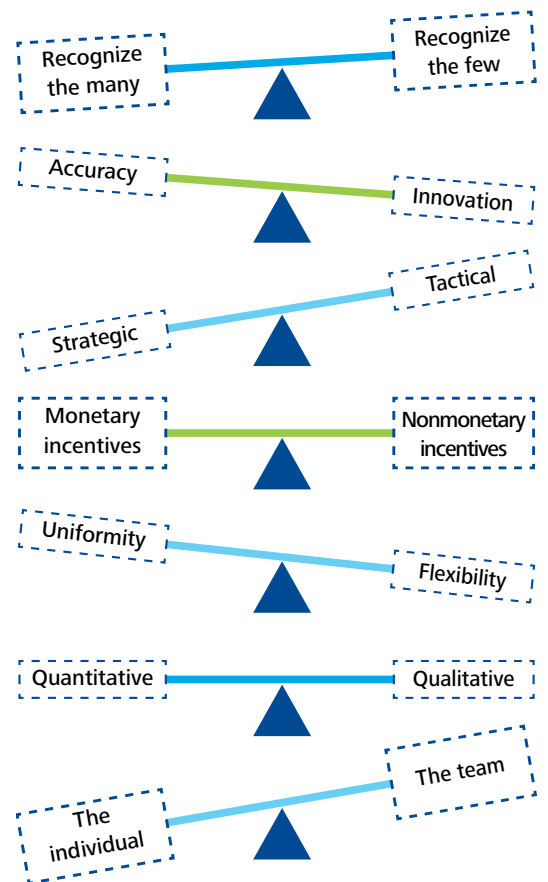
2. **Reconsider numbers and rankings.** Fewer and fewer people expect to stay at the same job for their entire career — a situation that is only reinforced by an open talent economy. And ranking systems — whether in workforce planning, succession programs, or performance management — are only effective if you can position top talent to build future strength. If you are uncertain about where your mission will be and what kind of turnover you'll experience, ranking employees today has little implication — or value — for tomorrow.[15] While some work fits nicely with standard comparison and numeric rankings, agencies should carefully assess whether these tools really drive better performance. If not clearly aligned to the organization's type of work, ranking systems can pose very real risks to employee engagement and productivity for those employees not in the "elite" cadre. And when an increasing percentage of an agency's ability to achieve their mission may come from outside their balance sheet workforce, the rankings may not only miss where value is actually coming from, but may create unhealthy competition where employees try to show personal value rather than working to find and scale ideas from within the agency's network.

3. **Focus on results.** At its most basic, performance management is designed to align individual interests with agency-level outcomes. However, performance issues are seldom the result of a single individual's success or failure. As Harvard Business School's Boris Groysberg has shown, hiring a rival firm's star performer rarely works, because the support structure that helped her shine at that company does not follow her to yours.[16] In an environment where not all contributors are direct employees of the agency, however, it is not possible to incentivize individuals the same way. Possibly the easiest way to drive alignment is to prioritize common results rather than over-engineering what is believed to deliver those results. In a traditional performance system, shifting focus or trying innovative methods can actually create shortfalls as an employee may no longer be able to meet the assigned objectives, while a "results-focus" can allow employees to try multiple approaches. And by measuring outcomes rather than inputs, employees can partner with supervisors to focus on development as a means to results.

Employee benefits
From "compensation and benefits" to "balance and flexibility"

Today's workers are looking for unprecedented flexibility in how work gets done — due in part to greater demand for work-life balance — that will challenge how organizations manage, motivate, and retain employees. Consider three ways that agencies can provide more flexibility now:

1. **Offer real flexibility to GS employees.** As agencies employ a greater percentage of workers — freelance or contract — with greater flexibility in where and how work gets done, agencies can create a more seamless culture by offering similar benefits to current employees as well. From one in five employees caring for aging family members[17] to Gen Y employees pursuing post-secondary education,[18] many employees no longer fit into the standard "nine to five" model of work and are seeking career customization.[19] Federal agencies and employees continue to grow and utilize telework capabilities, and with good reason: organizations can substantially cut operational costs while increasing productivity. For every 60 minutes an employee saves on commuting, they work an extra 40 minutes.[20]

For every

–60 minutes
saved commuting

employees work

+40 minutes
extra.

2. **Redefine benefits at your agency.** As Congress weighs the ability to sustain current pension and benefits plans, agencies should think critically about which investments are most effective for a workforce that expects less tenure within a single organization. What benefits reward employees in ways that are meaningful to them? Half of young professionals would prefer a lower-paying job with IT device flexibility and mobility than a more restrictive job with a higher salary.[21] Fitness plans or mobile offers may be more lucrative than traditional perks. Agencies should combine benefits options to build programs with a holistic focus on an employee's total rewards, not simply the typical "benefits package." And to meet the needs of a diverse workforce, agencies may consider creating a spectrum of programs from which employees can choose — or even let employees craft custom programs by selecting the set of rewards most meaningful to them.

3. **Find ways to acknowledge and reward talent that's not on the agency balance sheet.** To attract and retain top performers from across talent segments, agencies also have to consider the benefits which freelance, contract, detailed, or interim talent receive by choosing to work with their agency rather than another organization. These benefits go beyond monetary compensation, which can be more difficult to appropriate; agencies can attract high-caliber workers by considering the experience, education, exposure, recognition, and flexibility they offer for all talent categories. Freelancers might be motivated by recognition of superlative contributions, contractors might be attracted to more flexibility around where work gets done, detailed talent may want the opportunity to learn a new skill, or transitional talent might simply appreciate using the gym on site. Each of these benefits takes advantage of existing investments by the agency — and provides a competitive edge for agencies to attract top talent from all categories in an open economy.

Managing talent beyond traditional boundaries

In a federal environment that offers an array of talent markets extending well beyond the traditional General Schedule, the open talent economy presents a new starting point for federal talent strategies and management. To unlock the full potential, federal leaders should think strategically about how, when, where, and in what combination each type of talent should be applied. Does an agency need its own IT developers? Or should all technological development be term or contract based? Such decisions will require new perspective on workforce planning, but small investments up front could yield significant efficiency in this landscape.

And while the up-front policy and programmatic changes may come on an agency-by-agency basis, the natural result of a more open federal talent economy will likely be greater interdependence and collaboration between agencies. As more agencies adopt partnerships and other innovative operating models, federal leaders should consider integrating and standardizing these strategies across the federal government. To continue the earlier analogy to software, talent systems anticipate interoperability and communication — and may even require new platforms: acquisition vehicles that better facilitate prizes, crowdsourcing, or freelancing; categories of service outside of the General Schedule; or formalizing nontraditional public/Millennial engagement beyond the "saving the world on the weekend" attitude of hackathons.

Ultimately, a government that embraces the concept of an open federal talent economy will likely be poised to embrace its opportunities and immerse itself more effectively in the entire global talent market — the part it manages directly, the parts it hopes to influence, and the places where it wants to gain new access. Doing so can give the government better service capabilities, more incisive regulation, and a greater platform from which to affect better outcomes in the broader market — overall, improving mission effectiveness as government navigates the emerging challenges of the coming decade.

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