

The government worker of 2035



Introduction

By 2035, radical technological changes and new generational expectations about public service work, coupled with mission shifts across the government may challenge the traditional notion of “public service” from lifelong agency employment to a more flexible federal career model. This new vision of the future government worker will require a rethinking of current workforce planning and talent management approaches. We will likely be witnesses to workforce solutions that can be more iterative, predictive, “outward” oriented, and focused on identifying skill needs in high-end technical areas.

This point of view examines the trends for 2035 and the implications for federal employees and the corresponding workforce planning requirements. Specifically, we will discuss specific trends that can shape and redefine the future of government work and the model of a “government worker of 2035,” as well as implications for how workforce planning and other talent management activities, such as recruitment and development, will likely be conducted within the future federal government environment.

Technology—Mega Trends

By 2035, technology will likely be radically different from today becoming more intelligent, personal and structured than ever. New technology advancements allowing a true extension of the physical reality into the digital world, crowdsourcing of public sector insights and approaches and scalable use of advanced analytics for a wide variety of functions and tasks, may become so deeply ingrained in government work that it can lead to a profound change from being an enabler of efficiency and human productivity—technology as a work tool or medium of communication—to a true extension of human activity and a driver of intelligent, data-driven solutions.

Augmented Reality

“Wearable” technology has already started to make forays into the consumer and business world allowing the digital world to feel more “palpable” and personal. Twenty years from now, wearable technology will create a true augmented reality, one in which “the use of human gestures will dictate what you read, hear or feel.”¹ The Millennials and Generation Y workers likely will be totally immersed in this digital augmented reality relying upon open source tools and information to perform their work.

Additionally, the use of avatars, visual representations of people and expressions of ideas in digital three dimensional environments, will be a common technique that will enhance regular communication among workers in a virtual space. Avatars will transform human interactions at work allowing for a form of collaboration that today “isn’t possible with telephone, video, or typical web conferencing,” one in which “document sharing in a richer, more interesting environment provides more contextual clues about who’s interested and who’s paying attention.”² The use of avatars can also create a different kind of interaction among team members, one that is based on leveraging a “digital” professional image, rather than a physical identity.

Semantic-Based Web 4.0

The Internet will reach a new maturity level becoming more dynamic, sensory and symbiotic. Web 4.0 connections will draw from both offline and online communities and other intelligent solutions and devices³ creating a rich medium of interactions and causal, logically organized links. Each piece of information and data from databases, social media, “Internet of things” and even real physical life will connect and flow instantly, “... intelligently linked to each other and filtered in such a way that it’s relevant for every person.”⁴ In this new digital environment, work will be more accurate and data-driven,

less duplicative and based on collective input and open source worker interactions.

The new generation of government workers likely will be the promoters and users of these innovative technologies in daily project activities and operations, leading to new approaches to strategic planning and execution of work assignments that will facilitate solving complex problems and addressing critical issues in the public service arena.

The Future Workforce May Have Technology Embedded in their DNA

By 2035, the government workforce likely will consist of technologically advanced generations with different expectations regarding employment. These new workers may be less attached to the notion of “career tenure” and will expect to work on short term, specialized projects where they can apply their innovative technology skills.

Work Values of Digital Natives

Currently, federal agencies manage four generations of workforces with their own individual expectations and styles: the Veterans, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Millennials or (Generation Y⁵). Twenty years from now, the majority of the federal workforce will be comprised of Millennials, due to the retirement of veterans, baby Boomers and many of the Generation X. The Millennials will represent the mature government workforce, followed by the yet to be defined generation born after 1995, sometimes coined as “Plurals,” “iGeneration” or “Generation Z.”⁶

The predominance of the Millennials and the Plurals generations in the federal workforce can drive new talent management expectations, as well as transformative approaches to job assignments, career paths and work environments.

There are many similarities between the Millennials and Plurals. Both generations will be highly educated, familiar with virtual communication, and comfortable with advanced technology. Millennials value group work, are highly mobile, like working everywhere at any time, and seek continuous feedback on their progress⁷. The Plurals generation will be likely the most diverse⁸ and technology savvy and will also be comfortable with change and virtual collaboration.

Also, these two generations have already experienced the 2008 economic recession through the lens of their parents on their own. Many Millennials have already been exposed



to job insecurity, frequent change in jobs and lower gain prospects. As a result, in contrast to previous generations, future workers may be less interested in job security and tenure-based careers and more interested in short-term, specialized and challenging projects.

Perhaps one of the most interesting characteristics for both the Millennials and, by extension, the Plurals is the desire and ambition to make significant contributions and work on meaningful, strategic assignments. In the 2013 Federal Employee ViewPoint Survey⁹, only 50 percent¹⁰ of the respondents in the Millennials category (age group 26-29) felt encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things. Similarly, only 62 percent¹¹ of the federal survey respondents in the same age category felt that their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment, even if the vast majority (at least 90 percent¹²) of them are willing to put in the extra effort to get their job done and are constantly looking for ways to perform their work better.

New Workforce Attributes

The continual technological advancement and shift in workforce demographics will likely create a new supply of talent and can influence future workforce planning decisions. Tomorrow’s younger, connected, and highly mobile workers will likely manage their careers on their own time and often outside of the traditional categories that have defined the federal workforce for decades. It can be expected the workforce will continue blending the lines between their personal lives, evidenced by the evolving wave of digital communications that will replace blogs, wallposts, and text messages with avatars and brain-activated Internet devices.

The workforce of 2035 will likely be interested in performing meaningful work with tangible evidence of social responsibility. Leaders should consider be prepared to respond to a new federal workforce that values engagement and wants to have a social impact through their work.

Based on the existing trends, we created the following profile of the future government worker:



Tech savvy individual permanently connected to advanced, open source technology and seeking validation and input from collective, digital “wisdom”



Highly educated and striving for continuous development



Highly collaborative, flexible and familiar with working in ad-hoc, anonymous project team environments



High degree of autonomy



Mobile, available to work from everywhere, at any time



Looking for opportunities to make a social impact



Data-centric, analytics-driven, at home with big data, disparate data and visualization techniques



Not specifically attached to one career

Implications of Evolving Technology and Workforce Demographics

Radical shifts in technology and, demographics trends can have profound implications on how government work will be performed, transforming many workforce strategies and ultimately impacting how federal talent will support the delivery of public service.

Project Work in a Crowdsourcing Environment

In response to the younger generations’ work expectations, there will likely be a major shift from a tenure-based career system and agency-specific work to a project-based, cross-agency work model. Agencies will join forces to define and fund joint, strategic projects that enhance the delivery of public service. The predominant project-based approach to government work can provide employees with valuable opportunities to work on interesting and important assignments. As a result, workers will be more motivated and committed to work on federal assignments.

Open source software development and cloud computing concepts will go beyond the technology sphere, permeating the federal talent markets. The new “talent as an open service” concept has already timidly entered the commercial sector.¹³ This concept, however, can become the predominant government workforce model of the future over the next 15-20 years. At that time, we will be witnesses to a true “open talent economy—a collaborative, transparent, technology-enabled, rapid-cycle way of doing business through networks and ecosystems.”¹⁴ This model will create a different type of relationship between the government and talent markets, one defined by an external collaboration that drives continuous innovation through dynamic crowdsourcing around project ideas. The new government resource model will be radically different than the current vertically structured, tenure-based federal employment system.

Historically, the federal talent sourcing model focused on filling specific capability requirements by employing people

on a full-time or part-time basis or by hiring contractors¹⁵. In many instances, this federal sourcing system requires lengthy recruiting and onboarding processes, or contract award vehicles that were largely designed as “push” mechanisms. The new open source model can become an effective “pull” mechanism allowing employees from various agencies to easily join and collaborate to create new services or complete projects by sharing their skills, experiences, ideas and insights. The new, self-selection model will also expand government’s access to skilled individuals across the agencies to fill in new or evolving capability requirements in real time. Moreover, these project networks may be easier to reorganize to serve other government circumstances once a specific project’s requirements are fulfilled.

Pressure from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and other external oversight bodies, as well as a normal public expectation for social impact and results, will continue to drive efficiencies and the elimination of duplicate functions across the federal government. One concept that enables the more efficient use of government resources is crowdsourcing. Similar to shared services, crowdsourcing allows recruiters to search for candidates in a central talent pool accessible by many agencies¹⁶. Through the use of pooled resources, agencies can increase flexibility and drive project performance by filling positions based on defined competency needs. Additional benefits may include increased knowledge exchange, adaptability, and collaboration.¹⁷ For the employee, it means having the opportunity to work across agencies with different missions and challenges.

Workforce Planning Implications

As the government begins to move toward a project-based approach, effective resource allocation should become imperative. Workforce planning as a talent management capability will likely evolve, becoming more iterative and predictive than ever in an effort to identify the skill sets needed for project assignments and effective project capacity planning decisions.

A critical step in adapting to a new, on demand talent business model will require an influx of project managers to oversee multiple projects. Project management may no longer be a formal, rigid process that is planned within an agency or department on a certain frequency, but an agile, daily practice derived from the need to perform cross-agency project work.

Workforce Planning Predictive Analysis

The focus of workforce planning will likely be less on understanding the skills gaps within the existing tenure-based workforce and more on defining the supply of talent by simulating the skill needs for a project-based sourcing model. This model will use forward looking scenarios tied closely to evolving agency mission needs and rapid technology advancements.

In a tech savvy environment, workforce analysis will be predicated upon managers' ability to continuously sense the new skill sets and capabilities needed for a given project, update in real time skills repositories and make sure that these new capabilities can be integrated efficiently in the existing workforce environment.

Government will need to develop data-driven predictive workforce models that can forecast the rapidly evolving talent demands for strategic projects. Additionally, project managers will have access to predictive modeling to identify mission critical capabilities and translate them in specific project requirements in an agile manner. This transformative approach to workforce planning supporting project resource requirements rather than agency wide workforce needs can shift many workforce planning responsibilities to project managers to facilitate alignment of talent capabilities.

Also, workforce planning analysis may no longer focus on data from internal, agency-specific databases and employee surveys administered regularly, but will leverage more open workforce data readily available. Moreover, advanced technology will intelligently aggregate streams of big data from government-wide online project skills repositories and "open Internet" sources, increasing the accuracy of insights and enabling "what if" scenario analyses. The output of this complex, automated workforce data analysis activity will be easily visualized via virtual government-wide dashboards depicting more information about specialized skills sets and project-based roles available in the open market. These dashboards will be readily accessible to senior leadership to give them a real-time look at their federal workforce's skills sets and availability.

This type of data-driven intelligent workforce analysis can better inform other talent management decisions, including sourcing, learning and development, and performance management.

Skills Emerge, Expand and Evolve—The New Learning Paradigm

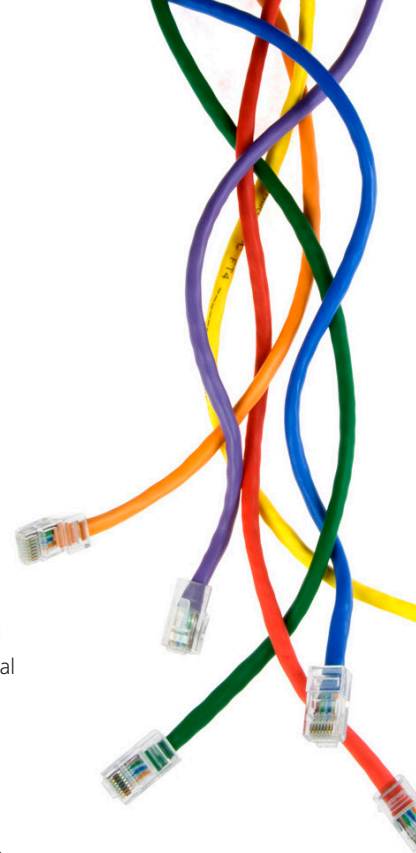
As government work becomes more project-oriented, agencies will shift from "command-and-control training and deployment approaches to new models built around projects and networks."¹⁸ Agencies will focus on building a strong learning culture and encouraging individuals and project teams to pursue learning both internal and external to the organization.

This transition to more project-based work in conjunction with the advancement of technologies will drive several changes in how skills are defined and developed. There will be a need for the rapid definition of skills requirements by federal agencies and the rapid acquisition of these skills by federal workers. The cycle will be a continuous thread of skills that: emerge, expand and evolve. Workers and agencies will need to be fluid and agile in meeting these requirements.

Continuous learning and improvement will be critical to practitioners to remain competitive in the highly specialized project environment. Increasingly, colleges and universities that offer Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are also providing certification of completion of online courses. For many individuals, this means an opportunity to update skills, network with other professionals, and communicate their capabilities and credentials to potential employers. For federal employers, it means more individuals will come to the workforce highly educated and trained with the latest skills. These evolving technologies will provide a platform that will give employees access to learn and rapidly acquire new skills and maintain current with accelerated change in technology.

Project Based Performance Evaluations

In the past, performance evaluations for full-time employees were private to each employee. That model may be begin to shift to adjust to the new talent paradigm. The government will need to create a new process for defining and measuring success to provide transparency to agencies looking to identify resources to support their respective projects. In the future, performance management may more closely resemble Amazon.com or Yelp.com, in which individuals' performance ratings on projects will be shared across agencies, unlike the current closed performance evaluation



systems. This new approach of open performance evaluations will provide agencies the ability to make more data-driven decisions on staffing, to confirm they match talent capabilities to project specific requirements.

Preparing for the Future

To gradually and smoothly transition to the new vision of the federal worker, agencies need to consider a few mitigating strategies:

- Inventory the regulatory changes needed to accommodate a largely “non-career” employee model that will impact current federal classification of positions, occupational series, competency models, performance management and salary practices.
- Conduct annual workforce planning exercises using a more forward looking approach comprised of employee predictive scenarios, labor markets and technology trends, as a way of mitigating a radical, disruptive shift to a new workforce model.
- Rethink current staff performance management practices to enhance focus on individual accountability for results and career mobility.
- Collect and review success stories of interagency collaboration and public innovation projects.
- Increase virtual collaboration and use of digital technologies at work.
- Conduct periodic workforce studies and employee surveys to understand and map the expectations and preferences of younger workforce.

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Conclusion

Radical changes in technology and demographics will transform the federal market. As a result, federal leadership will need to rethink how they define government workers and plan appropriately for mapping their workforce needs. Use of an open source talent market can allow for increased innovation and accessibility to the right skills for the mission at the right time. It will require a shift in how the federal government uses technology and sources its community of workers. Additionally, shifts in workforce demographics and the emergence of new generations of tech-savvy workers can lead to both opportunities and challenges that should be managed and harnessed. As technology becomes more of an extension of human activity and drives the work, rather than merely being an enabler of task execution, government workers and federal leaders alike should consider embrace the trends in technology. Each of the trends will create a shift in how workforce planning and talent management occurs in the federal government. Human Capitalists should consider work to fully understand mission requirements and their corresponding workforce demands to leverage the agile workforce of 2035.

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