HUMAN CAPITAL

Sustained Attention to Strategic Human Capital Management Needed

What GAO Found

Congress, executive branch agencies, and OPM have taken action to reform federal human capital management, but federal agencies are facing new challenges. The recent need to quickly hire staff to carry out and oversee the Troubled Asset Relief Program and expanded agency responsibilities under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 point to the need for sustained attention to help ensure that agencies have the right people with the right skills to meet new challenges.

Leadership: Top leadership in agencies across the federal government must provide committed and inspired attention needed to address human capital and related organizational transformation issues. OPM has made strides in transforming itself as a strategic partner to help lead human capital reform efforts. For example, at the agency level, OPM works with the Chief Human Capital Officers council to develop and disseminate human capital guidance and relies upon the council members to communicate OPM policy and other human capital information throughout their agencies.

Strategic human capital planning: Integrating succession planning and management efforts that focus on strengthening both current and future organizational capacity to obtain or develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities agencies need to meet their missions continues to be important. For example, GAO has reported on a challenge in the acquisition workforce where the workload and complexity of responsibilities have been increasing without adequate attention to the workforce’s size, skills and knowledge, and succession planning.

Acquiring, developing, and retaining talent: Faced with a workforce that is becoming more retirement eligible and the need for a different mix of knowledge, skills, and competencies, it is important that agencies strengthen their efforts and use available flexibilities. Agencies have developed strategies to recruit needed talent, including turning to older experienced workers to fill knowledge and skills gaps. For example, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has used a combination of techniques to recruit workers with critical skills, including targeted recruitment activities, educational outreach programs, improved compensation and benefits packages, and streamlined hiring authorities.

Results-oriented organizational culture: In addition to promoting high performance and accountability to foster results-oriented cultures, it is important for agencies to develop and maintain inclusive and diverse workforces that reflect all segments of society. Agencies can benefit from strategies that offer a diverse pool of talent for selecting the agencies’ future leaders and recruiting new employees so that agencies can get a wider variety of perspectives and approaches.

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