



OPM HR SOLUTIONS *by government, for government*

The Next Generation of IT Human Resource Systems for the Federal Government

An Iterative Approach



This white paper is the first in a series of papers illustrating how the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has begun implementing a Strategic Information Technology Plan. The Plan, issued in February 2014, is a driving force in transforming the government’s Human Resource Information Technology. Moreover, it provides a framework for rationalizing and modernizing the portfolio of systems and processes around a customer-centric process model.

Beyond HR processes, the Plan focuses on adopting a new model for application development and sustainment, called “agile.” This shift in direction ensures that the services and systems provided by the HR Line of Business (HR LOB) Business Reference Model (BRM) remain aligned with the evolving situation and customer base it serves. This initial paper highlights how OPM is using agile’s evolutionary practice through examples presented around four HR systems.

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An Iterative Approach

“What we know is, the best designs and best programs are iterative: You start out with, ‘What do you want to accomplish?’”

— **President Barack Obama in Interview with *Fast Company*, July/August 2015¹**

This quote from President Barack Obama is the cornerstone of the strategy for developing and delivering the next generation of IT solutions from OPM. The Plan focuses on process transformations associated with human capital management (HCM). It calls for developing systems in an iterative manner with greater emphasis on the customer experience, thereby creating greater efficiency not only in cost but also in the delivery of services to OPM’s clients. This paper outlines initiatives addressed in the Plan and discusses various dimensions of HCM IT.

An Opportunity to Simplify and Optimize Services

We started our journey by imagining a simplified life for both federal employees and the HR professionals who serve them — from job seeking to career development to retirement. We envisioned a circumstance whereby employees of the federal government could have one convenient access point to all of their information. Similarly, authorized agency professionals could see an employee’s progress through initial assessments, performance measurements, and training courses completed all in one integrated view.

To make this vision a reality, OPM approached the development of the next generation of processes and systems from the perspective of the life cycle of an employee from hire to retire — from the time a federal employee applies for a job to his or her retirement and beyond.

OPM’s HR Solutions’ team is bringing the Plan to life. Its product teams are exploring ways to simplify the processes and technology required to support HCM. The outcome will not only update and interconnect HR systems, but also reinvent the methodologies used to develop them. By examining four systems, this white paper highlights, how our new approach to process and systems is advancing the HCM function.

1. USA Staffing — a proven, robust talent-management system responsible for 83 percent of the postings on USAJOBS.
2. USA Hire — provides access to high-quality online assessment tools to evaluate critical competencies for workplace success.
3. USA Performance — automates cumbersome and time-consuming paper-based performance-management processes.
4. USALearning — the next generation of the former GoLearn system, a web- and competency-based educational curriculum for the entire federal workforce.

The Challenges

Before we discuss how a new approach to application development and requirements management has transformed our approach to modernizing federal HRIT, it is helpful to look at the general challenges confronting application development in the government.²

Overcoming the status quo to deliver innovation and agility.

Implementing agility and innovation in federal application development initiatives is far from easy. Any process concerning merit-based civil servants — from the time they join government to their separation — rests on a complex, nearly 150-year-old legal foundation. The compromises between efficiency and regulation color almost every aspect of federal activity. As Garren Givens, director of the White House's Presidential Innovation Fellows Program, put it, "As innovators, we always favor more flexibility in developing solutions. The problem with laws is they aren't always agile."³

Thus the accomplishments achieved at OPM around these systems are significant and signal a change in culture. Prior to this recent initiative, HR was like most federal systems — rarely incorporating or introducing significant innovation into the systems it delivered.

Staying in tune with dynamic change.

Service providers must maintain an unprecedented degree of customer intimacy, monitoring customer needs and gauging how well solutions work. In this context, OPM's Strategic Information Technology Plan represents a new way to ensure that capabilities stay aligned with evolving requirements.

In 2014, OPM designed this Plan around a commitment to use agile IT methods as a paradigm for software and system development. The traditional "waterfall" approach to application development unfortunately sometimes resulted in OPM beginning a project based on requirements that had evolved by the time the system was finally delivered, thus missing customer current requirements and customer expectations. The new approach acknowledges that both requirements and solutions can and will remain in flux. A major implication of this reality is that the customer must be kept involved throughout the project, ensuring the system is adjusted and tweaked to meet project objectives. These small changes prevent significant rework and associated costs, because the course corrections are evaluated early and often.

Why the federal government and OPM are embracing agile software development — shorter value creation cycles.

One of the major tenets of OPM's Strategic Information Technology Plan states, "Agile IT principles will more quickly and efficiently allow for the deployment of innovative solutions, whether they are enterprise or business-unique capabilities, lowering risks by delivering capabilities in smaller segments with incremental investment, and allowing better stakeholder engagement and feedback throughout the solutions development process."

Government IT leaders echo this idea. At the June 2015 Federal CIO Council IT Symposium in Washington, D.C., these leaders affirmed the importance of agility of federal IT in delivering future federal systems.⁴ In reference to a new Agile IT Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA),⁵ Deputy Federal CIO Lisa Schlosser urged agency IT leaders to "be the change agent in your organization that says, 'I am going to use an agile BPA, an agile contract for my next development project, where I'm delivering incrementally; I'm delivering value, new code, new functionality every couple of weeks instead of every couple of years, as we have traditionally done.'"⁶

OPM's HR Solutions Team: An Intergovernmental Approach to Agile

OPM's HR Solutions fully embraces this approach to application delivery and is committed to making the Plan's agility goals a reality. HR Solutions' mission is "to provide exceptional HR products and services to meet the dynamic needs of the federal government." Because of its intergovernmental position, HR Solutions can bring together stakeholders from throughout government to assist in the next evolution of its software offerings.

In fact, as of mid-2016, a barrier to agile development may be the government's contracting model itself. Dr. Steve Kelman, Weatherhead Professor of Public Management at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, raises the question of whether the language of Federal Acquisition Regulations could impede the discovery process of agile development by mandating initial requirements up front and holding contractors to rigidly specified downstream deliverables. While Kelman finds greater flexibility than expected for outside contractors, HR Solutions, as a government entity, simply averts the quandary.⁷



A Primer on Agile IT for Human Capital Management

From Waterfall to Scrum

Two images express well the different paradigms of software development. Think of a waterfall flowing in one direction, cascading over stones. Now envision a rugby scrum, in which all players are tightly together.

The waterfall method for software development moves in one direction with handoffs between organizationally separate teams: you set your requirements at the beginning, write and test the code, and then finally deliver the end product. From start to finish, customer or user involvement is limited to a finite set of interactions along the process.

Agile development is about taking projects historically undertaken as a single unit of work and decomposing them into many smaller components, ultimately leading to the same final deliverable. The smaller units of work allow for more customer interaction and course corrections based on the changing environment to which the system is expected to operate as well as incorporating lessons learned from experience with the new process and system. The scrum is one of the agile main principles — tight collaboration between the developers and the users. Although the goal is to advance the ball downfield, similar to rugby, the team comes together many times throughout the “game.” Each time the development team and the customer come together, the system can accommodate change — including at the 11th hour and even after the system has gone live.

Agile development acknowledges that change is constant and that, instead of avoiding change, we must adapt to it. The forward march of technology and changes in the user environment can make software features obsolete on release. Rebuilding and reworking is mandatory. To bring order to chaos, product managers and developers must remain flexible. Yet even private-sector software leaders like Microsoft have had challenges with shifting from waterfall to agile development.⁸

Robert Read, co-founder of GSA's 18F agile developer arm, responded: “That's like asking whether the government is ready for oxygen. It needs it, whether it knows it needs it or not. I think the Federal Government is ready, [and] program managers are ready to see immediate results and de-risk projects by having gradual progress.”

A Change in Focus: Deliver a System That Enables a Complete Process That Is Effective, Efficient, and Concurrently Delivers a Positive Experience for the User

HR Solutions' USA Staffing organization works under the banner “Great Government Starts Here.” Working with some 50 federal agencies it serves, USA Staffing established an advisory board to define a new vision of process and systems for its talent acquisition system.

The team started its path to delivering a new user experience by revisiting every step of the processes it intended to support, not only for efficiency and quality but also to improve the experience of those who use the system. Early identified requirements that drove the new design included:

1. Identifying the start and end of the process to which the project was committed to deliver — in other words, starting with the request to hire and ending with a completed onboarding process.
2. Delivering a solution that effectively and efficiently supports the process but does so in a manner that avoids user frustration, creating an intuitive interface and a highly responsive experience.
3. Clarifying how the process and system will coexist and interoperate with other processes and systems.
4. Establishing data standards to facilitate enhanced data analytics and reporting.
5. Focusing on competency management to improve the quality of initial hires.

This simple set of five focus areas had a profound effect on the project.

The team also recognized that newer commercial offerings could accelerate the delivery of new capability in far less time, while also delivering a more positive customer experience. Erika Vega, formerly USA Staffing's lead account manager and now program manager of the Federal Staffing Center's Staff Acquisition business, described this goal in a human experience rather than purely technical terms: “Often our customers must be on the system, day in and day out, sometimes at stretches of eight hours or so. So we wanted a system that recognized the experience we wanted to improve, while concurrently delivering upon the objectives of the role. Looking at the systems requirements now with two perspectives represented change. Prior efforts focused on the mission, often without proper consideration being given to the employee tasked with its

delivery. Our customers told us what they expected from a new and improved USA Staffing.”

This time, however, we sought to understand both perspectives: the mission at hand and the experience we would be shaping. Such guidance to our customer and development teams was a major step forward in shifting our approach to one that is sensitive to a complete user experience, not limited to a set of focused requirements.

The Agile Kickoff

From the beginning, the team decided to approach the upgrade of USA Staffing under a new commitment to agile development and an improved customer experience. Consequently, it needed to establish a new interaction model with its customers. The customer would have far more frequent contact with the development team, as smaller units of work would be defined and delivered. With each delivery, the team created an opportunity to validate the direction and, if necessary, adjust the path forward based on changing conditions and a new understanding of what might be possible. With each iteration, the engagements and exchanges of feedback improved, but so did a new realization that together they could seize the innovative possibilities this process might permit.

Though agility calls for greater freedom over traditional methods, its feedback loops require a planned structure. USA Staffing formed a subset of the advisory board with its most engaged customer agencies and included regular representation from the smaller agencies. The resulting group comprises some 30 representatives who meet with USA Staffing monthly to see demos of the new features, discuss priorities, and weigh in on interface design concepts. This group also participates in numerous hands-on customer testing activities at multiple stages in the project.

The approach has been far different than most have previously experienced, but it is seen as an improvement and generally well accepted. The strategy called out in the Plan is becoming a reality.

Agile Development — Lessons Learned

Lessons Related to Stakeholder Involvement in HR System Development Using Agile Methodology⁹

- Start with the big picture and then move to the details. It's important to keep vision and scope statements handy, as stakeholder input and requests can snowball.
- Start with concepts and processes that everyone understands, and ensure the use of standardized terms.
- Identify stakeholders early and collaborate on a group charter to gain buy-in from the beginning. Incentivize stakeholder participation — what's in it for them? Let them pilot the system at no cost if they remain engaged in the requirements process, which helps them visualize a system they would actually use and identify system features aligned to that vision.
- Get the right audience — only invite stakeholders who can speak to the information or requirements you require. Return to the same stakeholders to validate actions. Demonstrate where stakeholder input was used.
- Consider the delivery — what modes of communication work best for each type of stakeholder? What engagement features — for example, video, chat, polls, two-way sharing—work for stakeholders?
- Have a mechanism for active engagement in every encounter with stakeholders.
- Use member spotlights to encourage engagement and highlight successful customers.
- Identify and prioritize major decision points early. Consider the input needed to address major decisions. Complete, accurate documentation and organization ensures that everyone knows decisions that have been made and the rationale for those decisions.



- Identify prototyping techniques — system mock-ups, potential paths through the system, example scenarios—that work for all stakeholders.
- Invest in training and change management at multiple levels in the organization, not just for the developers and analysts who will staff the scrum teams. Project and program managers and their leadership at the executive level need to understand the business case for agile and how their role evolves in an agile environment.
- Use business process and business data modeling in requirements workshops that include customer subject matter experts, your analysts, and lead developers. By the end of the process, they will have a common understanding of the relevant data and business processes.

USA Hire: Automating Assessments Enables Agencies to Hire the Best

Consider this typical scenario: In a small Iowa town, at 2:14 a.m., “Robert” finishes his online application for an HR assistant (office automation) position with the U.S. Department of the Army. He is seated at the family “control center”: a small desk in the kitchen that doubles as the place where he and his wife manage the family bills, coordinate schedules for their three children, and, for the last two years, his wife has taken online classes for a master’s degree. He makes one final check of his application before submitting it at 2:15 a.m. Unbeknownst to him, some 127 seconds later, information on “Robert” is passed from USA Staffing to USA Hire, which generates an email inviting Robert to complete the assessments required for the position.

With such a submission from anywhere in the country, by mid-Fiscal Year 2015, USA Hire reaches a major milestone: 250,000 applicants for processing since program inception. The system has invited a quarter of a million applicants to USA Hire to complete required online assessments for federal positions.

Robert and thousands of federal job seekers like him exemplify USA Hire’s vision of “Transforming Government, One Hire at a Time.” Well-designed online assessments not only improve the quality of hires, but also bring them into government for less expense. According to a survey by the Center for American Progress, the cost of turnover remains high at 21 percent of an employee’s annual salary (excluding physicians and executives).¹⁰ In a time of hiring freezes and budget constraints, federal agencies simply cannot afford to hire the wrong people for critical positions.

Web-Based Testing Can Be a Valuable Tool

For agencies to get the best people at the lowest cost per hire, each hire must be efficiently assessed to ensure the fit is correct. Web-based assessments — tools increasingly used by the private sector — made sense for this project. Tests bring a consistency and objectivity to the hiring process that improves the odds of hiring the right person.¹¹ Research that considers the theoretical and practical implications of personnel performance over 85 years significantly correlates certain measurable candidate attributes, such as general mental ability and integrity, with successful future job performance. USA Hire’s psychologists used these indicators in formulating the test instruments.¹² By 2013, about one in three federal job seekers reported receiving this kind of testing, up from only 18 percent in 2005.

The return of testing to civil service has garnered interest from the media, who note the changes in terms of updated sensitivities. In April 2015, the *Washington Post* reported that USA Hire exams “still assess general aptitude, as the old-time civil service tests did. But to avoid possible discrimination, a concern with the old tests, the new exams also measure other attributes, such as teamwork, problem solving, and judgment, and are tailored to assess specific job skills.” The *Post* article quotes OPM in reporting that the new tests were developed by personnel psychologists who seek to ensure that all applicants are on a level field.¹³

OPM began building online job examinations following President Barack Obama’s Presidential Memorandum of May 11, 2010: Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process.¹⁴ The idea of the executive order is “to get better people into government faster with a minimum of bureaucratic procedures.” Finding an improvement over employee self-evaluations and essays was in order. OPM piloted the new tests in 2012. Today, USA Hire is a robust and growing system that is integrated with USA Staffing.

Online assessments have been developed for 75 job series for use across government. OPM’s HR Solutions and its agency customers continue to evaluate and refine the test instruments. OPM’s Dr. Patrick Sharpe, who helped guide the rollout, says that agility helped the team understand the complex tradeoffs involved in online, unproctored testing. While streamlined efficiency is a design goal, it cannot in any way compromise the fairness of the hiring process for applicants. Sharpe is emphatic that agencies must understand what tests can measure and the importance of job analysis as a foundation for applicant assessment.

For example, in addition to technical skills, what soft skills or other competencies are appropriate for the position? Says Sharpe, “With USA Hire, one of the good things is we’re helping agencies measure some of those general competencies that cut across jobs, like interpersonal skills, reasoning, and self-management. That’s where agencies

have told us they need the most help. They're good at measuring technical skills. In the past, for softer skills they have depended on self-evaluations, which are likely not as accurate as an objective test instrument. For instance, if you want to measure writing ability, the online assessment actually gives you a sample."

Sharpe feels that this improved assessment of talent can be of great value to federal agencies: "USA Hire is providing agencies with assessment tools that allow them to identify top talent so they can better fulfill their mission."

Accomplishments

Early Returns, Big Accomplishments

Collaboration: Key to Accomplishing Timely Results

Unlike USA Staffing, OPM's HR Solutions developed USA Performance without a pre-existing system or established set of customers. We brought together stakeholders across government for a series of exercises to gather the requirements. The first meetings were simply to map process — first defining the current process outside an automated environment. Some of the most valuable discoveries grew out of these discussions:

- We identified legacy and new processes necessary in an automated system.
- We identified standardization opportunities for a governmentwide system.

We collected hundreds of requirements over nine months of initial stakeholder engagement. Other accomplishments include:

- In Fiscal Year 2015, USA Performance had eight releases, translating to enhancements and upgrades to the system about every 12 weeks, providing a nearly immediate response to customer change requests.
- USA Performance has achieved a 100 percent customer retention rate.
- USA Performance has been acknowledged outside of OPM for its innovation and efforts to revolutionize performance management, winning the Nextgov Bold Award and the HCMG Award.
- In Fiscal Year 2015, we helped reduce printing by 5,000 pages of performance plans.

- In Fiscal Year 2015, the system handled more than 5,000 electronic signatures.

Similarly, the USA Staffing collaboration resulted in the following accomplishments:

- On April 1, 2015, we achieved an on-schedule launch of the first announcement in the USA Staffing upgrade system.
- Since its launch, the USA Staffing upgrade has handled 141 vacancies, 18,921 applicants, 278 certificates, and 78 selections.
- Thanks to process and technology improvements, USA Staffing releases new functionality to production every 30 days, with only brief system downtimes.
- Using an iterative approach, USA Staffing is building a robust data warehouse with a dedicated scrum team. The data warehouse will enable USA Staffing to deliver interactive dashboards so that agencies can monitor hiring process performance metrics in real time.

USA Performance: Managing Complexity Can Reduce Cost and Improve Customer Satisfaction and Acceptance

USA Performance promises "Manage Performance, Ensure Success." Still caught in a cumbersome paper process, some two-thirds of federal agencies do not use an IT system to conduct performance management. OPM's HR Solutions, working with agency stakeholders, has pioneered the first and only federal performance management system, offered under a new software as a service (SaaS) model. This model allows the agencies to easily assess the value of the system against its current methods and see the time and cost benefits. This combination of a superior intuitive automated system and clear cost model is easier to provision and budget for, and also much easier to use. Today, USA Performance is steadily reducing costly offline performance management procedures and saving agencies money.

As of July 8, 2015 — the first anniversary of its release — the system was already recognized as one of the more successful solutions OPM has delivered, gaining acceptance across the federal government at rates not previously enjoyed.



Focus on Process over Technology Is More Likely to Deliver Success

According to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), currently less than a third of federal employees feel that performance is meaningfully recognized and that promotions are based on merit.¹⁵ Part of that problem stems from a lack of standardization and sharing of best practices, which is endemic to manual methods that vary from agency to agency. Because government lags so far behind in automating performance management, USA Performance is perhaps the most revolutionary application of the Plan. It brings standardization to a process that previously lacked credibility based on the limited exercise of controls — particularly concerning because it directly affected people’s careers and lives. Automation enables superior process execution as well as inspires trust in the performance evaluation process over previous practices.

At an organizational level, it also provides benefits based on concepts considered pioneering, not just in terms of functionality but also in the breadth of its application across government. The system:

- Streamlines and standardizes a complex set of paper-based processes that are expensive and time-consuming.
- Aligns individual and organizational performance.
- Enhances accountability, and therefore increases trust and confidence that the process will be fair and beneficial to its participants.
- Improves the efficiency of the performance management process, while concurrently reducing the cycle time for all participants.
- Reduces cost over previous practices — initial estimates are that a typical small government agency will save more than \$400,000 annually.

Program Manager Dr. Rebecca Ayers emphasizes that the true value of the customer-centric innovation is how it can help performance managers throughout government: “We are putting more time in the hands of the HR specialists and their managers to focus on the real concerns of performance management: frequent communication and feedback; providing meaningful ratings that hold employees accountable; and developing good performance plans, elements, and standard measures.”

USA Performance has received recognition for its innovations, including a Nextgov Bold Award from Atlantic Media, citing Ayers for her efforts in creating the first-ever governmentwide performance management system. Ayers, however, is quick to give credit to its predecessor: “We are following the footsteps of the success that USA Staffing and some of our other systems have had.”¹⁶

Should I Use Open Source Software?

Should I use open source software (OSS)?

- There are many advantages, such as lower costs, no licensing fees, flexibility, open standards and interoperability, no proprietary formats, and rapid spiral development and distribution.
- Compare open source against proprietary software to determine the best value and total cost of ownership.
- Ensure that your organization’s infrastructure supports open source.

Where do I start?

Check your organization’s acquisition policies and guidelines for OSS.

- Chose an appropriate OSS license that covers intellectual property (IP) and distribution.
- Perform a thorough security evaluation that includes application scanning and continuous monitoring.
- Put in place a configuration management plan and support documentation.

How do I share?

- Identify someone to be responsible for configuration management and maintaining OSS after it’s developed.
- Developers use the popular GitHub to share their open source code. It is the de facto repository for open source software and associated documentation.

USALearning® (USAL) — A New Model for System Life-Cycle Management

USALearning® (formerly GoLearn), is the official learning development site for the U.S. federal government. Its vision is “Advancing America’s Workforce,” emphasizing its broader purpose to enhance individual skills that add value to federal agencies. In migrating from the GoLearn system, and in line with the Plan, USAL uses the agile software development framework to actualize and then continuously improve its web- and cloud-based solutions in support of agency requirements. USAL uses a rapid prototyping and spiral development software development cycle to create functional prototypes in weeks as opposed to months.

USALearning has used agile’s iterative, collaborative development process to continually improve its product offerings and enhance the user experience. The program office, which provides a variety of web-based training opportunities to government employees, has developed numerous applications. Over the last six years, the staff has integrated these applications into optimal end-state technology solutions using a Custom Distribution Learning Management System code base, with a separate development path that is unique to USAL. To date, the system has been secure and uncompromised. USAL’s own security staff ensures compliance with FISMA 800-53 and its current revision. Since the system must serve some 2 million federal employees, agile’s collaborative process ensures that the software will work for many different kinds of users and on a diverse set of platforms.

In 2015, Elearning Media Group named USALearning a top 100 learning organization for the fifth year in a row. A major criterion for inclusion on the list is that programs and systems demonstrate continuous improvement in their product and service offerings. USALearning’s place on the ranking has risen each year by consistently driving continuous improvement in the services delivered by HR Solutions. An agile development approach has allowed the team to work with its customers to continually adapt the services delivered to meet their evolving requirements. The legacy process of delivering one major release and then spending years dedicated only to “break/fix” is clearly no longer a strategy for success. You must plan and design for change, because it is the only variable that is reliably predictable.

Honoring the Human Side of Agile Software Development

Bridget Dongarra manages USA Staffing’s product development team and has served as business analyst and product owner on multiple scrum teams. She presented a session on best practices in government product ownership at the 2015 Agile Alliance Conference in Washington, DC.

Throughout the USA Staffing upgrade, Bridget Dongarra, HR Solutions’ USA Staffing product development manager and agility expert, has remained mindful about the human emphasis of the original Manifesto for Agile Software Development. A core principle is “Through this work we increasingly value individuals and interactions over processes and tools.”

Dongarra amplifies this point: “The genesis of the Agile Manifesto simply came out of people being fed up with how bureaucratic, regimented and process-oriented barriers hamper producing working software that people need. So they said, ‘Well, what if we didn’t have to do any of this? How would we really like to work?’ And the focus is on small interdisciplinary teams working together, and the most important thing is to make useful software that people actually want to use and accomplish the mission it is being used to support. So you try to cut through all of the noise and distractions and focus on the mission and the software’s usability to implement the process.

The question to focus on is ‘What is the most valuable thing that we can deliver?’ This is often far more important than ‘Which technology should we use?’ Experience in most things we do in our lives has taught us that the more we use a product to solve a task, the more we learn about considerations we may have not understood at the time we purchased the original product.

Agile methodology allows us to incorporate our lessons learned, as we learn them, rather than create frustration as was more typical with the waterfall techniques. This is because we start with a set of requirements in the waterfall methodology, test against those, and then accept the system. This does not permit learning throughout the development process like we were able to achieve in the development of the USA Staffing Upgrade system.

Now the question is: How does your software help professionals do what they do most effectively, and how does it make space for them to use their expertise to make better decisions?” asks Dongarra. “How does a system deliver information



that helps them design better assessments and make better choices? The goal is not to automate a process entirely. It still requires talented, trained, experienced HR and assessment professionals to do this well, so the technology that we design has to help them do the very best they can.”

Dongarra draws an analogy with applications like YNAB (You Need a Budget) and Intuit’s Mint, which allow consumers to see their entire financial picture at a glance: “We don’t want to bog down human capital specialists, chasing down details, doing repetitive tasks, clicking around to multiple locations to do one thing. We want to put everything in front of them so they can make quick decisions, just like applications that allow us to see our whole personal finance posture. We have to do the same thing with the hiring process.”

Agility can thus empower the people who hire, assess, and appraise performance to do quality work. Perhaps more important, it gives applicants — the future federal workforce — the interface and functionality to put their best foot forward quickly and accurately. The ultimate result is a more positive, engaged, and competent employee throughout his or her public service life cycle.

The Need for a Strategic Approach to HRIT

Some leaders see human capital management confronting major challenges in competing for talent with the private sector. For example, Booz Allen Hamilton Vice President and Fellow Ron Sanders predicts a major crisis in the federal workforce.¹⁷ According to Sanders, as private-sector job opportunities improve and federal workplace engagement declines, agencies must be able to offer “the most challenge, personal growth, developmental opportunities, autonomy, and perhaps most importantly the most visionary, inspiring leaders.”

When strategically implemented, HRIT systems that engage the employee and those who serve them can turn around an agency’s capabilities and autonomy, and also improve employee satisfaction and retention. The private sector already affirms this connection. In January 2015, John Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, identified that replacing and upgrading systems is necessary for better talent management and improved employee engagement.¹⁸ A recent McKinsey and Company study claims that improved online talent platforms can increase opportunities in labor markets on a global scale.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, the June 2015 article “Technology Creeping into HR” cites a Towers Watson study that finds worldwide corporate investment in HR continues to grow exponentially.²⁰

Future white papers will further examine the transformation underway within OPM’s HR Solutions, the results, and the lessons learned. Engagement with the workforce must change as technology and processes evolve. Our solutions should align with the dynamic situation in pursuing, developing, and retaining talent that is now competed globally.

For more information or to arrange a demonstration of the systems discussed in this white paper, contact OPM’s HR Solutions Senior Business Advisor Tim Letzkus at Tim.Letzkus@opm.gov.

HR Solutions — Your Strategic Partner

OPM’s HR Solutions can help your organization meet its mission goals through the expertise, experience, compliance, agility, resources, and technology that take you from start to solution — faster and better — across the entire human capital life cycle.

Strategize: Build a High-Performance Organization. Following merit system principles, we help you build and manage a high-performing workforce and culture of excellence that cultivates employee engagement and drives mission success.

Acquire: Assemble a Powerful Workforce. Our services and tools help you recruit, assess, select, and onboard highly qualified, engaged, and productive employees with the right skills and competencies in compliance with merit system principles.

Engage: Grow Potential and Measure Success. Our full spectrum of solutions helps agencies optimize individual and organizational performance for the long term, build agency expertise, grow leadership potential, and measure success.

Transform: Use Separation Solutions to Sustain Mission Effectiveness. Our services help you track why employees separate and provide strategies for retaining top performers critical to accomplishing your mission.

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- ² View the entire plan at www.opm.gov/about-us/budget-performance/strategic-plans/strategic-it-plan.pdf.
- ³ Tory Newmyer, "Can a tech strike force fix Washington?" *Fortune*, September 4, 2014, <http://fortune.com/2014/09/04/tech-strike-force-washington>.
- ⁴ Beth Cobert, current acting director of OPM and then the Office of Management and Budget's deputy director for management, was chairperson of the council.
- ⁵ The General Services Administration's 18F agile development arm released the BPA in July 2015.
- ⁶ Mark Rockwell, "18F readies agile BPA," *Federal Computer Week*, June 17, 2015, <http://fcw.com/articles/2015/06/17/18f-rolls-out-bpa.aspx>.
- ⁷ Steve Kelman, "Contracting for agile," *Federal Computer Week*, April 15, 2016, <https://fcw.com/blogs/lectern/2016/04/kelman-agile-contracting.aspx>. From 1993 to 1997, Kelman served as administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy in the Office of Management and Budget.
- ⁸ *Ars Technica's* "How Microsoft dragged its development practices into the 21st century" at www.arstechnica.com/information-technology/2014/08/how-microsoft-dragged-its-development-practices-into-the-21st-century). Not surprisingly, government developers struggle even more with this transition, prompting *Federal Computer Week* to write in February 2015: "Is government ready for agile?" (See www.fcw.com/articles/2015/02/13/agile-handbook.aspx.)
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