



Highlights of [GAO-03-914](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Leading public organizations here and abroad recognize that a more strategic approach to human capital management is essential for change initiatives that are intended to transform their cultures. To that end, organizations are looking for ways to identify and develop the leaders, managers, and workforce necessary to face the array of challenges that will confront government in the 21st century. GAO conducted this study to identify how agencies in four countries—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom—are adopting a more strategic approach to managing the succession of senior executives and other public sector employees with critical skills. These agencies' experiences may provide insights to executive branch agencies as they undertake their own succession planning and management initiatives.

GAO identified the examples described in this report through discussions with officials from central human capital agencies, national audit offices, and agencies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, and a screening survey sent to senior human capital officials at selected agencies.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-914.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Insights for U.S. Agencies from Other Countries' Succession Planning and Management Initiatives

What GAO Found

Leading organizations engage in broad, integrated succession planning and management efforts that focus on strengthening both current and future organizational capacity. As part of this approach, these organizations identify, develop, and select their human capital to ensure that successors are the right people, with the right skills, at the right time for leadership and other key positions. To this end, agencies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom are implementing succession planning and management initiatives that are designed to protect and enhance organizational capacity. Collectively, these agencies' initiatives demonstrated the practices shown below.

Selected Practices Used by Agencies in Other Countries to Manage Succession

- **Receive active support of top leadership.** Top leadership actively participates in, regularly uses, and ensures the needed financial and staff resources for key succession planning and management initiatives. For example, New Zealand's State Services Commissioner developed, with the assistance of a group of six agency chief executives who met regularly over a period of 2 years, a new governmentwide senior leadership and management development strategy.
- **Link to strategic planning.** To focus on both current and future needs and to provide leaders with a broader perspective, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's succession planning and management initiative figures prominently in the agency's multiyear human capital plan and provides top leaders with an agencywide perspective when making decisions.
- **Identify talent from multiple organizational levels, early in careers, or with critical skills.** For example, the United Kingdom's Fast Stream program specifically targets high-potential individuals early in their civil service careers as well as those recently graduated from college with the aim of providing them with experiences and training linked to strengthening specific competencies required for admission to the Senior Civil Service.
- **Emphasize developmental assignments in addition to formal training.** Initiatives emphasize developmental assignments in addition to formal training to strengthen high-potential employees' skills and broaden their experience. For example, Canada's Accelerated Executive Development Program temporarily assigns executives to work in unfamiliar roles or subject areas, and in different agencies.
- **Address specific human capital challenges, such as diversity, leadership capacity, and retention.** For example, the United Kingdom created a centralized program that targets minorities with the potential to join the Senior Civil Service. To help retain high-potential employees, Canada's Office of the Auditor General provides comprehensive developmental opportunities.
- **Facilitate broader transformation efforts.** To find individuals to champion recent changes in how it delivers services and interacts with stakeholders, the Family Court of Australia identifies and prepares future leaders who will have the skills and experiences to help the organization successfully adapt to agency transformation.