

## **Strategic Human Resources Management:**

### Aligning with the Mission

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# STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: ALIGNING WITH THE MISSION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human resources alignment means integrating decisions about people with decisions about the results an organization is trying to obtain. By integrating human resources management (HRM) into the agency planning process, emphasizing human resources (HR) activities that support broad agency mission goals, and building a strong relationship between HR and management, agencies are able to ensure that the management of human resources contributes to mission accomplishment and that managers are held accountable for their HRM decisions. This is especially important in light of the Government Performance and Results Act's (GPRA) push to align all agency activities, including HRM, toward achieving defined agency strategic goals and measuring progress toward those goals.

In fiscal year 1999, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) embarked on a special study to determine how much progress Federal agencies have made toward aligning HRM with agency strategic goals in support of HRM accountability and agency mission accomplishment. Our key findings and conclusions are summarized as follows.

- Many more agencies than expected include HR representatives in the agency planning process and integrate human resources management goals, objectives, and strategies into agency strategic plans. However, most agencies are still struggling in this area. Therefore, agency executives and HR leaders need to work together to fully integrate HRM into the planning process so that it will become a fundamental, contributing factor to agency planning and success.
- Although some agency HR offices have begun focusing on organizational activities that assist agency decision-making, most are still emphasizing internal HR office efficiency efforts. While internal issues are important to the success of any HR program, HR offices also need to examine the “big picture” and find ways to impact the success of the agency as a whole.
- Most agencies are in some way measuring the efficiency and/or effectiveness of the HR function. These measures, however, are generally output-oriented, focus on internal HR processes and activities, and are used to make improvements to HR-specific policies and procedures. As HR refocuses its activities to broader organizational issues, HRM measures also need to be expanded to gauge the impact HRM has on agency goals and mission. Then, the measurement data can be used to inform agency-level decisions.

- The relationship between HR and management is becoming more collaborative. HR executives are beginning to earn a seat at the management table. HR offices are becoming more consultative and involved in day-to-day line management activities. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go if HR is to become a strategic partner at all levels. To do so, HR needs to build its own internal competencies to deal with organizational issues, educate itself on agency and program missions, and find ways to offer creative and innovative solutions to organizationwide issues.

Although many National Performance Review (now known as the National Partnership for Reinventing Government) initiatives, such as downsizing, reorganizing, streamlining, and delegating HR authorities, were meant to improve HR's ability to focus on organizational issues, they have not taken hold as quickly or thoroughly as hoped. Therefore, HR is still doing most of the process work, and its ability to focus on alignment has been limited. However, as HR's role in agency planning, activities, and decision-making advances -- and it is advancing -- so too will the alignment of human resources management with agency mission accomplishment.

# I. INTRODUCTION

*A company is known by the people it keeps.*  
- Unknown

## ***What is Alignment?***

Strategic human resources management...strategic alignment...alignment with mission accomplishment. These are just a few of the terms being used to describe the new, evolving role of Federal human resources management (HRM). What do these terms really mean? If you were to ask agency personnelists, managers, or employees, you would probably get a wide range of answers. So, it's important to establish from the beginning what we are really talking about.

Human resources management alignment means to integrate decisions about people with decisions about the results an organization is trying to obtain. Our research indicates that agencies that successfully align human resources management with agency mission accomplishment do so by integrating HRM into the agency planning process, emphasizing HR activities that support mission goals, and building strong HR/management relationships.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being a vital contributor to agency mission accomplishment, HRM alignment is the ultimate level of HRM accountability, as demonstrated in the *Hierarchy of Accountability*. While HRM accountability must begin with basic legal compliance, it ultimately encompasses all four levels of the pyramid, including demonstrating how HRM supports achievement of the agency strategic goals.

### ***Hierarchy of Accountability***



## ***Why Align?***

Why the sudden emphasis on aligning HRM activities with agency mission accomplishment? Basically, it comes down to demonstrating the value of human resources management to the

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<sup>1</sup>For consistency's sake, this report uses the term "agency" when referring to the broadest form of the Federal organization. For instance, the Department of Agriculture, along with all its components, is an "agency." When addressing specific components within an agency, the report will refer to them as "sub-components."

agency. In the past, one of HR's primary roles has been to ensure compliance with laws, rules, and regulations. Although this is still, and will always be, a necessary function, many recent developments have led to a strong emphasis on results.

The National Performance Review (NPR)<sup>2</sup> took on the task of reinventing government to make it work better, cost less, and get results. NPR mandated many initiatives that changed the focus of HR from just compliance toward results, including downsizing the HR function, delegating HR authorities to line managers, calling for HR to demonstrate its business value, and enhancing customer service. Through these initiatives, management of human resources would become more responsive to mission-related needs because it would take place at the line level, and the HR staff would be able to expend more of its energy on broader organizational issues.

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 has also played a large part in focusing agencies on results. The purpose of GPRA is to improve Federal program effectiveness, accountability, service delivery, decision-making, and internal management, thereby improving confidence in the Federal Government. This is achieved by demonstrating organizational results through strategic planning and performance measures. Although the primary focus of GPRA is on programmatic functions, agencies are also required to describe how administrative resources, such as HR, are being used to achieve strategic goals. Further, the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have evaluated many of these efforts, and are calling for agencies to improve their discussions of HRM alignment in strategic and annual plans. Therefore, the human resources function is increasingly being aligned to the agency strategic plan, which requires HR to show how it is supporting mission accomplishment.

Alignment has already occurred in other key administrative functions. When Congress developed a statutory framework to introduce performance-based management into the Federal Government, it initiated financial, information technology, and procurement reforms through such mandates as the Chief Financial Officer Act and Information Technology Management Reform Act. Human resources management is the administrative missing link to this comprehensive package.<sup>3</sup>

The private sector has recognized that it is not just financial and technological capital that provide companies with the competitive edge, but people, or human capital. Without attracting and retaining the right people, in the right jobs, with the right skills and training, an organization cannot succeed. Therefore, people have been recognized as companies' most important asset. As the Federal Government moves toward a performance-based management approach, we, too, need to realize the importance of our human resources. A huge percentage of agencies' budgets

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<sup>2</sup>Now known as the National Partnership for Reinventing Government.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. General Accounting Office. *Major Management Challenges and Program Risks: A Governmentwide Perspective*.



is spent on human resources -- salaries, benefits, training, work life programs, etc. Nowhere else do you make that substantial an investment and not measure the return.

Not only do human resources provide the competitive edge, but several recent studies have confirmed that the quality and innovation of HR practices impact business results. These studies were able to draw a correlation between increased quality of HR practices and increased business success. Among other benefits, HR alignment with mission accomplishment increases HR's ability to anticipate its customers' needs, increases the agency's ability to implement strategic business goals, and provides decision-makers with critical resource allocation information.

Finally, HR alignment is a vital process to advance agency accountability. By defining, maintaining, and assessing HRM goals and measures, communicating them throughout the agency, and using the information to make management decisions, agencies are able to ensure that the management of human resources contributes to mission accomplishment and that managers are held accountable for their HRM decisions in support of mission accomplishment.

### *The Study*

Once we defined what alignment means and why it is important, we wanted to find out where agencies currently stand in terms of aligning their human resources management with agency mission accomplishment. Therefore, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) embarked on a special study designed to explore the following objectives:

- ▶ Assess how well human resources management is linked to agency mission accomplishment;
- ▶ Explore the role played by the HR staff in agency strategic planning;
- ▶ Determine how the HR service providers work with line managers to carry out agency strategic goals; and
- ▶ Identify best practices aligning HRM with the agency strategic plan and goals.

In order to obtain information pertaining to these objectives, we did the following:

- ▶ Reviewed 31 agency strategic and 28 annual performance plans;
- ▶ Conducted an extensive literature and Internet search;
- ▶ Gathered information from agency HR professionals, supervisors, and employees at 17 agencies of various size through the fiscal year 1998 and 1999 OPM Oversight reviews;

and

- ▶ Interviewed nine additional leading agency HR Directors.

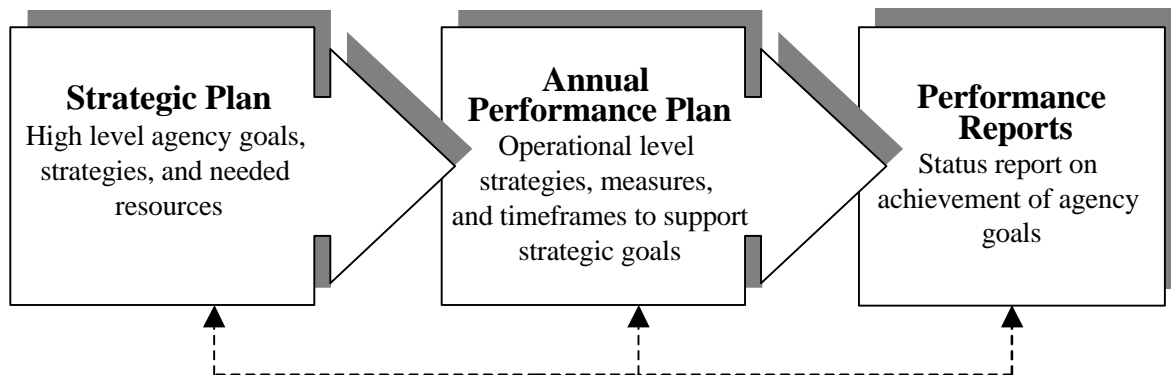
## II. STRATEGIC PLANNING

*You got to be careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there.*  
- Yogi Berra

### *Agencywide Planning*

To some agencies, strategic planning is a way of life. To others, it's an exercise. To almost all, it's a requirement. As part of GPRA, agencies, unless specifically exempted, follow a continuous, three step strategic planning process:

### GPRA Strategic Planning Process - Simplified

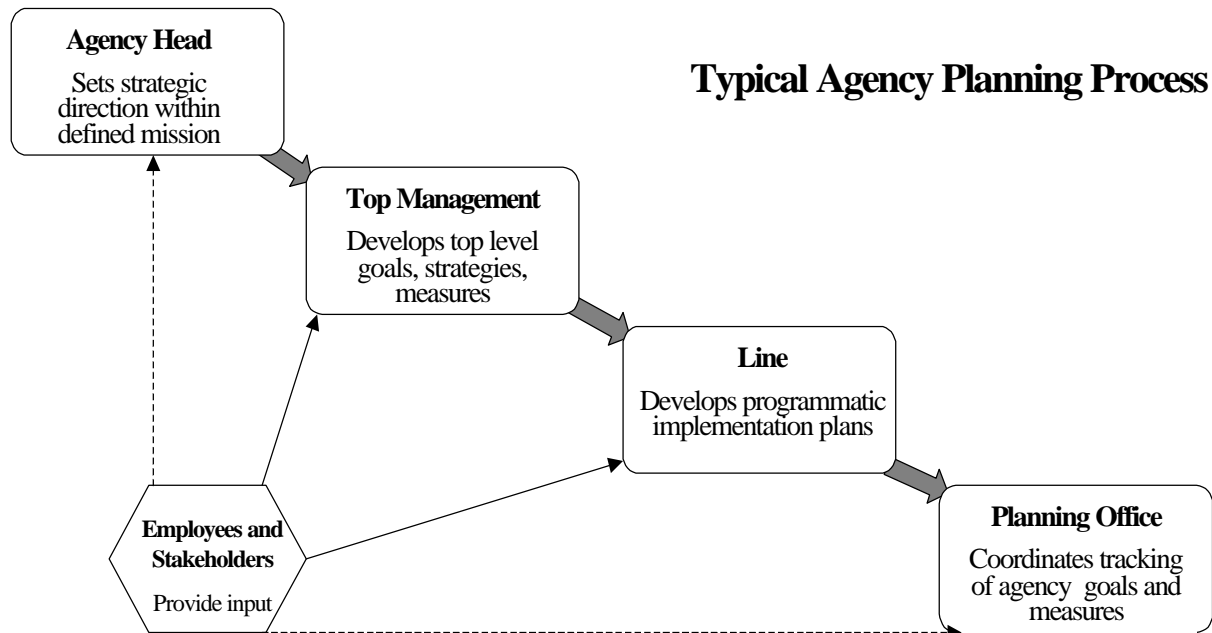


Strategic planning allows agencies to map out where they are, where they want to go, and how they plan to get there. Some agencies adopted the idea of strategic planning even before GPRA was enacted, whereas others are just beginning to understand its potential benefits. The results of the fiscal year 1999 Merit System Principles Questionnaire (MSPQ), an OPM Governmentwide survey of supervisors and employees, show that agencies are beginning to embrace not only the concept, but also the practice, of strategic planning.

**MSPQ Results**

- 62% agree that their agency has a process for developing strategic, long-range plans and updating them periodically.
- 65% agree that operational goals and objectives are set to help the agency meet strategic, long-range plans.
- 54% agree that progress toward goals is measured.
- 61% agree that information is collected for assessing performance.

The strategic planning process varies from agency to agency. On one end of the spectrum are the agencies which have very collaborative processes involving senior management, line supervisors and employees, and stakeholders throughout the entire process. On the other end are the agencies which develop plans at the top management level with little input from the line or stakeholders or that plan functionally, having each program office submit its own goals and strategies with little to no collaboration among offices. The typical strategic planning process is a mixture of these:



***HRM Integration in Agency Strategic Plans***

The management of agency human resources is an integral part of how an agency is going to achieve its mission goals. Without people, there is no one to do the work. Therefore, integrating HRM into the agency strategic plan is the first step in aligning it with the mission.

Even though GAO and OMB are pushing for improvement of HRM alignment discussions in strategic and annual plans, GPRA's primary focus is still on agency programs, rather than corporate functions. Therefore, we assumed at the beginning of this study that not many agency strategic plans would have addressed HRM's role in mission accomplishment. We were pleasantly surprised. Out of the 31 strategic plans reviewed, 87 percent had addressed HRM in some way. Below is a breakdown of how integration between HRM and the agency plan is achieved, a count of how many strategic plans have integrated HRM in a particular way, and some examples of actual agency approaches.

How used:	# of plans:	Examples:
Mission Goals (Listed side-by-side with program goals)	8	<b>Social Security Administration's</b> Mission Goal: To be an employer that values and invests in each employee.  <b>Air Force's</b> Mission Goal: Ensure a high quality force of dedicated professionals and provide an enhanced quality of life and strong sense of community.
Support Goals (Listed in a separate section from the mission goals but described as critical to the mission)	8	<b>Transportation's</b> Corporate Management Strategy that supports mission goals: Foster a diverse and highly skilled workforce capable of meeting or exceeding our strategic goals with efficiency, innovation, and a constant focus on better serving our customers now and into the 21st Century.
Objectives and Strategies (Action items that support mission and/or support goals)	22	<b>Treasury's</b> objective in support of its mission goal to improve management operations: Improve capacity to recruit, develop, and retain high caliber employees. This is followed by a list of strategies aimed at achieving the objective.  <b>Energy's</b> HR strategy that supports the mission objective to ensure the vitality of DOE's national security enterprise: Ensure that sufficient personnel are available to meet long-term national security requirements.
Critical Success Factors (e.g., needed resources, improvements, etc)	12	<b>Health and Human Services</b> highlights Quality of Worklife as a cross-cutting management responsibility that can enhance the performance and accountability of its programs.
Values	9	<b>NASA</b> lists its workforce, or "People", as its greatest strength.

The table can be somewhat misleading, however. Although some agencies are clearly ahead of the pack, integration of HRM in agency plans is still evolving. When looking at the actual placement of strategic plan HRM discussions, they are generally segregated from the program-

matic goals, objectives, and strategies. Considering that an agency's mission cannot be achieved without its people, this is an important point. Could this be an indication that human resources management is not yet recognized as a critical contributor to agency mission accomplishment? In any case, it is clear that though there are some exceptions -- as evidenced by some of the examples above -- full HRM integration into agency strategic plans has not yet been realized.

The human resources issues addressed in agency plans provide insight into what aspects of human resources management are most important to agency management. In reviewing the plans, or even just by looking at the examples above, it is clear that diversity, recruitment, retention, employee development, and workforce quality are the major areas of interest. Although these could be looked at as process or output programs, when they are designed and implemented well, they lead to the ultimate result: the right people, with the right skills, in the right positions to carry out the agency mission.

### ***Agency HRM Strategic Measures***

Defining practical, meaningful measures that assess the effectiveness of agency human resources management and its support of mission accomplishment is a topic that agencies have been struggling with. It is easy to measure a process -- how long does it take to complete an action? It is easy to measure productivity -- how many actions were completed in any given time frame? But how do you measure the outcome of human resources management? How does an agency know if it has the right people, with the right skills, in the right positions to carry out the agency mission? Have any agencies found a way to do this? To help answer these questions, we looked to see if agencies are including HRM measures in their strategic plans, and what types of measures they have identified.

Not surprisingly, 71 percent of the plans did not identify any HRM measures. Moreover, the meaningfulness and practicality of the 29 percent of agency identified measures could be stronger. About one-third of the 29 percent contain measures that are not really measures. They are lists of activities or projects that, when completed, will help to reach the goal. In other words, they are strategies labeled as measures. The other two-thirds of that 29 percent have fairly good measures that are tied to specific mission or support goals and provide seemingly relevant information. However, even these fairly good measures tend to focus on HR processes (outputs) rather than intended outcomes. For example, some agencies measure the average number of employee training hours to measure workforce skill levels, rather than what skills are actually gained through the training or what skills the workforce actually possesses. See the following chart for some examples of the better HRM measures we saw in agency strategic plans.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Measures</b>
<b>Air Force</b>	Recruit and retain the force to execute Air Force core competencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Percentage of recruits categorized as high quality</li><li>• Air Force enlisted reenlistment rate</li></ul>

<b>Education</b>	The Department's employees are highly skilled and high-performing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 2000, 75% of Department managers will agree that staff knowledge and skills are adequate to carry out the mission</li> <li>• By 2000, 75% of employees will demonstrate the basic computer competencies identified in the Department's computer competency standards</li> </ul>
<b>Energy</b>	Ensure that all DOE employees are appropriately trained and technically competent commensurate with their environment, safety, and health responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet annual DOE technical Qualification Program goals</li> <li>• Meet or exceed competency requirements for employees that perform physically hazardous work</li> </ul>

### *HR Involvement in Agency Strategic Planning*

Now that we have seen what types of goals, objectives, strategies, measures, and other forms of HRM integration are present in agency strategic plans, we should look briefly at how these were developed. The legitimacy and ultimate value of these pieces of the plan will depend substantially on where they came from.

Historically, members of the HR community have remarked on the difficulty they have had “getting to the table” with top agency management. Rather than being involved in agency planning from the beginning, HR is commonly consulted after decisions have been made in order to help implement any major changes. Considering the invaluable perspective HR has on how decisions will impact agency resources, HR professionals have been frustrated that they are not involved sooner in the planning process.

Therefore, it was surprising when 79 percent of the agencies we talked to indicated that they do play a role in the overall agency strategic planning process. The roles vary from a peripheral consultant who reviews and comments on preliminary products to an integrated team member who actively helps to identify not only HRM agency strategic goals and objectives, but programmatic goals as well. Two or three of the responding agencies fall in the former category, a handful in the latter, and the rest somewhere in between. Later, we will discuss how some HR officials are able to elevate themselves to agency strategic partner, while most are still struggling to achieve this.

**Patent and Trademark Office (PTO):  
HR's Involvement in Strategic Planning**

The PTO's planning process tracks closely with the diagram presented on page 6: the Commissioner identifies the main strategic themes; top management adds to the perspective through offsite retreats; the three business lines develop and rank their specific initiatives; and finally, representatives from all the three business lines come together to rank all of the initiatives and talk about how the budget impacts those initiatives. HR, as well as the other administrative functions, is integrally involved in and present during all aspects of planning -- the top management discussions, business line planning, and overall ranking and budgetary discussions. The administrative functions serve several purposes: to inform managers what resources are available to them; to determine what resources managers will need; and to discuss the impact program initiatives will have on the agency.

When it comes to defining actual HRM goals, strategies, and measures, the roles also vary. In general, agencywide HRM-related goals, strategies, and measures are identified by the agency leader or other senior managers with HR collaboration. They decide what is most important to the agency based on the challenges the agency will face in years to come. Some use a more elaborate collaboration approach that involves agency management, HR officials, and other stakeholders, as is demonstrated in the presented examples from the Department of Commerce's Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Then there are the agencies that use the functional strategic planning approach where the HR office is tasked with coming up with the goals, strategies, and measures itself. In these cases, HR generally uses some type of feedback from customers to identify what is important to the agency and should be included in the plan.



### **Department of Veterans Affairs Collaborative Approach**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Human Resources Management was integrally involved in the Department's strategic planning process. Although the program offices were the drivers for the strategic goals, the administrative functions were integrally involved in establishing how resources can be attained, retained, and utilized to support the programs that deliver services to their customer, the veterans. The HR staff worked with program planners and line managers in an iterative and interactive series of meetings that provided HR with information on the Department's current and future business and corresponding human resource needs. The HR staff was able to translate this information into specific objectives with supporting strategies and performance goals that were incorporated into the VA strategic plan.

To further refine its priorities, HR held a conference attended by approximately 300 people representing its key stakeholder groups departmentwide including: HR professionals, political appointees, headquarters executives, field line managers, staff offices, unions, and veterans. A "real time" strategic planning process that included facilitation, formal presentations, and inter-active discussions led to the identification and prioritization of four critical human resources "strategic opportunities" that must be dealt with if VA is to successfully accomplish its mission. Top management at the conference committed to supporting the pursuit of these strategic opportunities, and, subsequently, teams including field and headquarters, line and staff representatives were formed around these opportunities.

### ***Agency Annual Performance Plans***

In addition to reviewing strategic plans, we also reviewed 28 agency annual performance plans to see how HRM is addressed. As mentioned earlier, performance plans are the yearly operational plans defining what the agency will accomplish in that fiscal year that will contribute to the longer-term strategic goals, and how they will measure accomplishment of these performance goals. Seventy-five percent of the reviewed plans contain both HRM performance goals and measures. This is not surprising because these operational plans tend to be more process and budget focused than strategic plans and therefore contain more detail about the resources needed to accomplish the performance goals. Therefore, administrative functions, in general, are represented more fully than in the strategic plan.

The development of the performance plan is invariably more functional than overall strategic planning. At most agencies, each program and administrative function is responsible for defining its own goals and measures which it then forwards to the planning office for coordination into the annual performance plan. As with the strategic plans, the HRM goals, strategies, and measures identified by HR offices tend to focus more on processes or activities than on overall outcomes. These process measures can be helpful, but because operational goals, strategies, and measures

help determine achievement of mission goals, they should focus more on whether or not the intended outcome of the activity was achieved.

### ***HR Strategic Plans***

Approximately half of the agencies we talked to have developed separate Human Resources strategic plans. These plans generally serve one of two purposes. Either they provide direction for those agencies that have not integrated HRM into the agency strategic plan, or they are used as implementation plans which support agencywide HRM goals, strategies, and measures.

These plans are particularly important to those agencies that do not integrate HRM into the agencywide plan because it helps them map out where they want the HR program to go. They seem less important to many of the agencies that have thoroughly integrated HRM into the agency plan. For example, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has not developed a specific HR strategic plan because HR's goals and measures are part of the agencywide approach. Then, there are some agencies that integrate HR extensively into the agency plan, but still prefer to have a separate HR operational plan supporting the agencywide plan, as is often done by other corporate functions such as information technology and financial management.

Most of these plans focus on internal HR office program activities, rather than on agencywide accountability for the effective use of human resources in accomplishing the mission. Therefore, ownership of the plan belongs to the HR office, not the agency. The Health Care Financing Administration (a sub-component of the Department of Health and Human Services) is an interesting exception to this, as seen in the inset.

### **The Health Care Financing Administration's Human Resources Management Strategic Plan**

The Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has developed a very noteworthy approach to aligning human resources management with mission accomplishment. HCFA's Human Resources Management Group (HRMG), Learning Resources Group (LRG), and Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (OEOCR) collaborated to develop a draft Human Resources Strategic Plan that goes beyond each of these individual organization's human resources responsibilities and instead addresses the entire sub-component's human resources management responsibilities. It assigns accountability for specific HRM goals to HRMG, LRG, OEOCR, senior leadership, line managers, employees, the union, and/or other non-HR stakeholders. The HRMG, LRG, and OEOCR worked very closely with the HCFA strategic planning and evaluation office to tie the plan to HCFA's strategic plan.

Specifically, the plan includes challenges that HCFA will face in the future, HRM goals that will support HCFA in meeting those challenges, potential performance indicators and strategies for each goal, the roles and responsibilities of HRMG, LRG, OEOCR, managers, employees, and other stakeholders, and finally how to implement and assess its results.

As with agency strategic plans, the measures identified in HR strategic plans are typically process-

oriented and tend to address what steps have been taken to achieve a goal, rather than whether the intended outcome of the goal has been achieved. A little over half of the agencies use management input in developing these plans, generally in the form of previous customer satisfaction surveys.

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### III. STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

*Well done is better than well said.*

- Benjamin Franklin

Strategic planning allows agencies to put down on paper where they are, where they want to go, and how they plan to get there. But the best planning in the world does nothing for an agency if it does not act on those plans. Strategic implementation of human resources management means performing activities that support agency mission accomplishment and measuring how well those activities contribute to achieving agency strategic goals.

#### ***Strategic HRM Activities***

When we talk about HRM activities, we tend to focus on what the HR office, itself, is doing even though we recognize that supervisors would bear the responsibility of HR decisions in an ideal world. After all, NPR advocated deregulation and delegation and the downsizing and outsourcing of HR office activities so that human resources management could take place at the line level, making it more responsive to mission-related needs. Additionally, the HR staff would be able to devote more time to broader organizational issues, thereby improving its contribution to mission accomplishment.

Unfortunately, deregulation and delegation, as reported in OPM's 1997 special study, *Deregulation and Delegation of Human Resources Management Authority in the Federal Government*, have not taken hold as quickly or thoroughly as was hoped. HR is still doing most of the HR-related work and is the nerve center for HRM activities. That is why the focus of this section is on the HR office and what it does to support mission accomplishment.

So what are HR's contributions toward mission accomplishment? Although most line managers we interviewed cannot describe precisely which HR activities support specific agency strategic goals, they recognize that they could not accomplish their mission without HR's help. Ironically, the areas most often mentioned by managers as HR's most valued contributions are also the areas they feel need the most improvement: recruitment and staffing, employee development, and employee relations. They would like to see HR become more involved and innovative in these areas, but they also admit that it would be extremely difficult for them to get their jobs done without the help HR already provides. An interesting example of innovative staffing is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Automated Disaster Deployment System described on the following page.

### **The Federal Emergency Management Agency: Staffing our Disasters**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) HR staff is an integral part of achieving the agency mission. FEMA employs approximately 2,200 permanent employees, but can surge to 7,000 or higher with any given disaster. With these highly fluctuating and extremely vital staffing needs, FEMA's mission is more directly dependent on its staffing function than most other Federal agencies. In response to this need, HR has implemented the Automated Disaster Deployment System. This automated system allows HR to track employee credentialing (including knowledge and experience levels and performance ratings), availability, past and present assignment locations, dates of employment, and other vital employee data. With this system, HR can immediately identify available deployment candidates for selection as soon as disasters are declared. Additionally, the system allows HR to better identify employee training and promotion needs, match employee expertise with specific disaster site victim needs, and create a selection routine that rotates available employees, thereby avoiding employee burnout.

Clearly, staffing, development, and employee relations are important HR activities that make a difference to agency goal accomplishment. However, there are other areas in which HR offices contribute to and align with mission accomplishment, such as the few described below.

**Agency Reorganizations:** Because of all of the downsizing, streamlining, and budget cuts that have been occurring in recent years, many agencies and sub-components have had to redefine their missions and restructure the program areas that support those missions. Human resources staffs play key roles in some of these redesign efforts. Managers at the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration were particularly complimentary of all of the work the HR staffs did to redeploy and retrain the workforce, provide guidance on organizational development issues, and redesign performance standards.

**Workforce Planning:** In this time of budget cuts, downsizing, and an aging Federal workforce, workforce planning becomes extremely important to increasing agencies' overall ability to achieve their missions. Although few agencies have strong workforce planning systems in place, some are beginning to take steps in this direction. The Department of the Army has an automated civilian forecasting system that uses 15-year workforce data trends to project future employment patterns, up to 7 years. This is part of a developing workforce planning initiative. SSA has developed a methodology to predict the number of actual

retirements and is developing a workforce transition plan that will identify current and future required skill sets, determine how the workforce can obtain these skills, and set action plan milestones. Additionally, OPM is in the process of developing a workforce planning model that will assist agencies in this area.

### **Linking Performance Management to**

**Mission Accomplishment:** When managers and employees are interviewed, they almost always cite the performance management system as a way they are held accountable for meeting agency goals. So, does this mean performance management systems are aligned with agency strategic goals? In most agencies, the answer is “not yet” -- at least not fully. Recently published research has identified over a dozen agencies and agency sub-components that have started to formulate systematic approaches to aligning performance management to strategic goals. Most are starting by linking top management performance plans and contracts to agency goals and rating and rewarding executives based on achievement of those goals. Many of these agencies are planning to cascade the alignment down to the employee level.

OPM’s 1999 publication, *A Handbook for Measuring Employee Performance: Aligning Employee Performance with Organizational Goals*, is a very useful tool to help agencies link employee performance to the goals of the organization and measure employee accomplishments.

A couple of agencies actually mandate the linkage of employee level plans to agency goals, while others are using team-based performance management approaches that include performance targets, informal team assessments, and awards that are linked to mission goals. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), as shown in the inset, actually has an automated system that assists in the linkage. Nevertheless, as the General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded in its study, *Performance Management: Aligning Employee Performance with Agency Goals at Six Results Act Pilots*, aligning performance management systems with organizational missions and goals is still a “work in progress.”

**HR Self-Assessment:** A handful of agency and sub-component HR offices are actually

### **NASA: Tracking Strategic Progress**

Engineers at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center have designed and implemented an excellent strategic management tool: the Goal Performance Evaluation System. This computer system implemented a major performance management change by linking individual employee performance goals all the way up through the Center and Agency goals.

The system tracks the status of performance plans, and allows organizations to track results achieved against their mission. Managers can access the system to see what their units and individual employees are contributing toward the agency strategic goals. The system functions as a strategic management tool, an employee performance management system, and a Center-wide communication tool. Kennedy and Johnson Space Centers have piloted the computer system with very positive results.

assessing how well their programs align with agency mission accomplishment as part of recently established HR self-assessment programs. These assessment programs focus on the compliance of HR activities with law as well as how effectively HR programs are achieving their objectives in support of mission accomplishment. Because these assessment programs are fairly new or are in the process of being revamped, it is too soon to tell the success they will have in measuring HR's impact on organizational mission accomplishment.

### ***HRM Measurement***

In the end, HR can only determine its value to the organization by measuring it. Earlier in this report, we saw that most agencies had at least defined HR output measures in agency strategic plans, annual performance plans, and/or HR strategic plans. This is an encouraging trend, but we need to look further at whether these measures are actually being tracked and used for decision-making. The best measures in the world are meaningless if not used.

*If you're not keeping score,  
you're only practicing.*  
-Vince Lombardi

HRM measures in the strategic and annual performance plans are usually tracked by the HR office and forwarded to the planning office for distribution and sharing of the information. A few agencies, such as NASA, SSA, and Education, report actually using the information for decision-making and tracking whether goals are being met. NASA even posts the information on its web page. However, we found that most agencies look at available data without really evaluating how the information can be used to enhance goal attainment.

HR staffs find that measures from HR strategic plans tend to be more useful than those in the agency strategic or annual plans, at least at the functional level. As discussed earlier, HR strategic plan measures tend to focus on internal HR programs, policies, and processes, and can therefore point to deficiencies in these areas. HR officials can then use this information to make improvements to the problem areas. From an organizational perspective, however, the measures are generally not very helpful in determining achievement of HR goals because they are process rather than outcome oriented.

Few agencies have implemented elaborate systems to track HRM goals and measures. Nonetheless, there are quite a few interesting approaches some agencies are using to measure their HRM performance.

**Benchmarking** is a systematic process of measuring an organization's products, services, and practices against those of a like organization that is a recognized leader in the studied area. Many Federal HR offices are using this practice to identify ways to improve service and align with business results. The most common benchmarking effort Federal HR offices have participated in is the National Academy of Public Administration-Hackett Group HR Benchmarking Study. There are at least 19 Government agencies involved in the



benchmarking of 22 HR processes within four areas: administration, risk management, employee development, and decision support. The study also helps to gauge HR alignment through decision support categories such as resource planning, organizational planning, and strategic HR planning. Most participating agencies see the value in the information but have not devised strategies for how to use it.

**The Balanced Scorecard** is a framework many agencies are using to translate strategy into operational terms by measuring a full range of perspectives: financial, customer, internal, and learning and growth. Vice President Gore advocated the use of this type of balanced set of results to evaluate agency performance at the Global Forum on Reinventing Government, January 1999. The scorecard is generally used at the business unit level, as with the Veterans Benefits Administration (see insert). To date, most agencies are in the beginning stages of implementing balanced measurement approaches.

**Activity Based Costing (ABC)** is a method of cost management that determines the true cost, including overhead, for a service or product. Finding the true cost allows agencies to discover cost improvement opportunities, prepare and actualize strategic and operational plans, and improve strategic decision-making. This cost management methodology involves identifying activities, determining activity costs, determining cost drivers, collecting activity data, and calculating the service cost.

ABC is being explored by a number of agencies. The Patent and Trademark Office is using ABC agencywide, and the General Services Administration is using it to determine HR costs, as described on the following page.

### **Veterans Benefits Administration's New York Regional Office: The Balanced Scorecard in Action**

The Veterans Benefits Administration's New York Regional Office implemented a balanced scorecard that uses outcome measures linked to organizational goals at the team, core group, and division-wide levels. The purpose is to determine how successful its operations are and where improvements are needed. This "balanced scorecard" measures five performance areas: customer satisfaction, speed, accuracy, cost-per-claim, and employee development. For each element in the balanced scorecard, teams are awarded points based on how well they are performing, and the scorecard is aligned with individual employee assessments and incentive pay. Veterans' expectations are used to define customer performance targets, and employee measures are derived from climate surveys, team development data, and technical skills inventories.

HR has played an important role in designing the balanced scorecard, including developing measures, peer assessments, and other tools, as well as helping managers understand the approach and how to manage under it.

### Measuring True Cost and How to Use It

Both the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Department of Commerce's Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) have successfully used Activity Based Costing (ABC) to determine the true cost of human resources management services.

The General Services Administration began tracking HR costs due to customer complaints that services were too expensive. The problem was that no one, including HR, knew the actual cost of HR services. By using Activity Based Costing, GSA was able to compute the HR activity costs and make comparisons to other Government and private sector organizations using the Hackett Benchmarking Study data. HR demonstrated to managers that its costs were actually relatively low, and it had the data to prove it.

The Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) has engaged in agencywide Activity Based Costing. All senior managers were trained in the process, and each functional area, including HR, formed teams to identify activities, activity-based drivers, and primary products. PTO has used the information to close out fiscal year 1998 financial activities and to plan the fiscal year 2000 budget. ABC has helped determine the full cost of agency activities, the proper distribution of costs, and has even influenced service rates. An additional benefit to the system is that it has encouraged strategic thinking. Managers see how much a function, such as HR, costs and starts asking what value that function really adds to the program. This challenges HR to show its value and return on investment.

**The Malcolm Baldrige and the President's Quality Award Criteria** are each based on a set of core values and concepts that integrate key business requirements into a results-oriented framework. Using the criteria as a framework for management practices and measurement can help agencies to improve performance, facilitate communication and best practice sharing, and serve as a tool for managing performance, planning, training, and assessment. HR measures are 15 percent of the total Baldrige framework score.<sup>4</sup> Several agencies, most notably the Department of Navy's Inspector General's Office, have successfully used the criteria to assess agency mission programs.

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<sup>4</sup>National Academy for Public Administration, *Measuring Results: Successful Human Resources Management*.

## IV. STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

*All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.*

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

The lynchpin that holds all of this planning and implementation together is the relationship between HR executives and staffs and agency management. In the past, there was often much contention between the two groups because of HR's role as "gatekeeper," enforcing the laws, rules, and regulations. Now, with the role of the human resources staff shifting toward achieving organizational results, HR and management need to work together to further HRM's ability to have an impact on agency decisions and achievement of goals. So, let's take a look at how well these relationships have been fostered thus far.

### *Corporate HR and Top Agency Management*

The relationship between corporate HR and top agency management varies greatly by agency. A few agencies, like SSA, NASA, Air Force, and GSA, have been able to develop strong working relationships with management in which HR is a full member of the agency decision-making body. Most other agency HR executives have not been so fortunate. They are generally brought into the agency decision-making process during the implementation phase rather than being consulted in the beginning on how decisions may impact agency human resources or vice versa.

For some agencies, it has been a hard road "getting to the table." For others, it has been more of a natural transition. In exploring how to elevate HR's role to management partner, agencies where this has been achieved attribute their success to a combination of the following factors:

**Reporting relationships** - In agencies where there is a direct reporting relationship between the head of HR and the head of the agency, HR generally has a more visible role in agency decision-making.

**Management advocates** - In agencies where there is a strong HR advocate in senior management, HR enjoys more involvement in the agency decision-making.

**Credibility** - HR representatives who are formerly program managers tend to earn more credibility from the other managers. This type of individual knows, first hand, what the program concerns are and how HR decisions will impact the program, and can speak the same programmatic language.

**Culture** - In some agencies, the recognition that its people are its most important asset has

traditionally been part of the culture. Therefore, it is natural for the HR leader to have a voice in agency decisions.

**Value** - In all cases, HR has to bring value to the discussion in order to be considered a member of the management team. If you have little or nothing to offer, you will not keep your seat at the table.

Because HR executives have little control over agency reporting relationships, management advocacy, executive appointments, and agency culture, they need to focus their efforts on providing value to agency business discussions. But what kind of value can HR bring to the agency decision-making table? Other corporate functions have no problem demonstrating their value. The Chief Financial Officer has the money. The Chief Information Officer has the technology. Without money and technology, an organization is severely hindered. But HR has the people, and without the people, the organization has no one to do the work. So why has HR not been able to capitalize on this strength? We were able to identify two reasons.

First, HR has not historically had the statistics or data that can excite management and show how HRM influences agency success. Second, HR has focused on internal operations rather than activities that impact the entire agency. These facts are recognized by the Strategic Human Resources Roundtable, an OPM-sponsored working group of Governmentwide HR Directors that meets periodically to discuss HR's role in GPRA. This group acknowledges that to address these shortcomings, HR needs to ask itself what are the HRM concerns that will gain management's attention, and does HR have the data that can help address those concerns? SSA has done this, as is demonstrated in the above inset.

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### **The Social Security Administration: How HR Stays at the Table**

SSA's HR Office has a good record of contributing substance, creativity, and innovative solutions to dealing with agency issues. For example, when SSA heeded NPR's call to downsize administrative staffs, the HR office devoted substantial time and resourcefulness to redeploying these displaced employees to direct service jobs. For the headquarters employees who did not want to leave the area, HR helped to create a direct service office at headquarters and bring work there. Not only does this demonstrate HR's ingenuity in turbulent times, but it is a fitting example of how SSA values its employees.

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### ***The HR Office and Line Management***

Now that we have explored the relationship between HR executives and top agency managers, we need to look at how the HR office interacts with its line managers and if there has been any movement toward a more cooperative, consultative relationship. HR's role is changing, but is HR changing with it? As discussed earlier, NPR advocated HR delegating, downsizing, and outsourcing so that it could start concentrating on broader organizational issues rather than transactional processes. As we have seen, this is beginning to occur at the corporate level, but what about the line level?

The problem is that delegation to managers has not taken hold very quickly, but HR offices have already been downsized. Therefore, HR is still expected to do the transactional work it did before, while also focusing on broader organizational issues, and doing all of this with an average of 20 percent less staff.<sup>5</sup> It is not hard to understand why agency HR offices are struggling to redefine their role to strategic partner. Just how far have they gotten?

**HR as Consultant:** Most agency managers we interviewed acknowledge that their HR office has become more consultative. Rather than telling a manager he/she can or cannot do something, HR professionals are more helpful in finding solutions to HR issues.

**HR as Contributor to Mission Accomplishment:** These same managers also recognize the importance of the HR office to mission accomplishment. There is so much that HR does for managers in terms of recruitment and staffing, employee development, and employee relations that managers would have difficulty doing it on their own. However, HR does have its limitations, particularly the size of the staff in relation to the amount of work it has to do, its knowledge of the mission, and skill gaps resulting from downsizing.

**HR as Strategic Partner:** Few, if any, agency managers feel that their HR office is a true strategic partner. Few HR offices are included in business planning from the beginning, generally being brought in to implement a decision that has already been made. For HR to become more involved in line-level decision-making, managers would like the office to:

- have greater knowledge of the organizational mission, and
- get more involved and innovative in broad, organizational HR issues that impact most on the organization, such as recruitment and workforce and succession planning.

HR has made some headway, as demonstrated in the following NASA example, but clearly has some distance to go in being involved in line management decision-making. Now let's look at the other side of the coin -- how managers are involved in making decisions about HR programs. Most line HR offices involve managers at least at an informal level, generally through satisfaction surveys or informal discussions. A few have HR/management councils that get together

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<sup>5</sup>Government Performance Project. "The Human Factor." Government Executive, February 1999.

periodically to discuss human resources issues. This is as close as agencies get to real integration of managers into the HR program decision-making process. Generally, managers do not feel that they have a large impact on the direction of HR programs and therefore feel little ownership for them.

### **NASA's Centers Working Together**

NASA has 10 field centers, and each of these centers maintains a strong sense of its own identity and purpose and a strong enthusiasm for its mission. At the same time, each center can identify the linkage to the agency mission. This sense of empowerment appears to help motivate the center HR staffs to actively support that identity and purpose. Personnel officers generally participate in deliberations on center affairs. HR staffs are proactive in their work by making site visits, attending line staff meetings, asking managers for input on HR issues, and briefing managers about changes in HR programs. Managers are impressed with HR's availability, knowledge, and resourcefulness. This symbiosis is portrayed well in results from various employee surveys, data trends from the Central Personnel Data File, and third party evaluations of the HR program.

### ***Accountability***

With the developing relationship between HR and management, both at the top and line levels, along with NPR and GPRA mandates, accountability should become a shared responsibility. Managers are making more and more HRM decisions while the HR staff is becoming more involved in broader organizational issues. This means that both the HR staff and managers are ultimately accountable for effective, legally compliant HRM.

Is this shared accountability occurring in Federal agencies? Approximately half of the responding agencies agree that HRM accountability is shared between the HR staff and managers. Managers are accountable for the business results achieved through good human resources management, the HR staff is accountable for HR compliance, and both are accountable for the overall effectiveness of the agency HRM program. However, the other half still feels that the ultimate accountability falls on the HR staff. They are the ones responsible if actions are found non-compliant, and little attention is given to whether managers' HRM decisions are an effective use of resources. OPM's *HRM Accountability System Development Guide* goes into quite a bit of detail on shared accountability and can assist agencies in understanding the concept, determining who is accountable for what, and devising strategies for how to hold them accountable.

## VI. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

*Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.*

-Will Rogers

Strategic alignment of human resources management has come farther than we expected to find when we embarked on this study. There is definitely a trend toward integrating HR into the business planning process, measuring aspects of human resources management and its contribution to the organizational bottom line, and establishing a collaborative working environment between HR and management. Nevertheless, there are several indications that human resources management is not yet recognized as a critical contributor to agency mission accomplishment. HRM alignment is still evolving, and there are several steps agencies can take to help it along.

### **Fully integrate human resources management into the business planning process.**

Although many more agencies than expected include HR representatives in the agency planning process and integrate human resources goals, objectives, and strategies into agency strategic plans, most are still struggling in this area. Agency executives need to recognize the value that HR can impart to discussions about agency activities, priorities, and goals. In turn, HR leaders need to understand agency mission needs and be able to contribute substantive, creative solutions to meet these needs. Once these realizations occur, HR will no longer be segregated out as a support function but will become an integral, contributing factor to agency planning and success.

### **Focus on organizational activities that assist in agency decision-making.**

Because of NPR mandates to downsize, streamline, and improve customer service, HR's recent improvement efforts have focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of traditional HR programs and processes. These are important endeavors. However, in response to GPRA's call to measure performance and demonstrate value, it is time to start concentrating efforts outside of the traditional realm of HR and on to broader organizational issues. When HR demonstrates that it can have an impact on agency direction, then it will gain credibility with agency executives and earn a seat at the table. To generate that type of impact, HR needs to develop strategies based on actual business needs, which will require involving management in the planning process. In addition, it must address Governmentwide concerns about the workforce capabilities of the future, such as workforce planning, succession planning, training needs assessments, skill gap analyses, etc.

### **Measure HRM outcomes.**

HR's role is evolving. Therefore, HRM measures need to evolve as well. As HR becomes more involved in broader organizational activities, HRM measures should evaluate the impact these activities have on the organization as a whole. At this point, measures typically focus on outputs and processes and are generally internalized to the HR function or office. The data are used mostly to make improvements to HR-specific policies and procedures. While this kind of measurement is important, measures should also focus on organizational outcomes. Information from these measures should then be used to inform agencywide decisions and find solutions to agencywide concerns.

### **Advance the collaborative working environment between HR and management.**

To facilitate all of the changes recommended above, HR has to have a strong, collaborative working relationship with top agency and line management. Since there is no tradition in most agencies of HR as strategic partner, much depends on personal relationships established by HR officials with top managers and key line managers. Meanwhile, HR and agency management need each other more than ever. Authorities are being delegated to line managers, HR staffs are being downsized, and top agency management is being asked to show how its resources are being used to support mission accomplishment. HR must be able to make the case that everyone in the agency, from the agency leader down to the HR function, must share accountability for ensuring that the use of human resources not only complies with Federal laws, rules, and regulations, but adds to the success of the agency.

This shared accountability is beginning to occur. HR management is beginning to earn a seat at the table. HR line offices are becoming more consultative and involved in day to day management activities. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in becoming strategic partners. First, HR needs to build its own internal competencies to deal with organizational issues, change, and strategizing. Further, it needs to educate itself on agency and program missions in order to understand what is important to those organizations and be able to offer creative and innovative alternatives and solutions to organizationwide issues. Finally, it must continually assert the absolute criticality of effective HRM to organizational success.

### **Conclusion**

This all looks so easy on paper. Do this, do that, and you will be aligned with the mission and able to demonstrate your contribution toward it. Obviously, it is not that easy. Private sector, public sector, and some Federal entities have been struggling with this issue even before GPRA was enacted -- and that works to our advantage. There is a wealth of information out there that can help -- hundreds of articles, books, and studies have been written, numerous tools have been created, and many organizations have already tested a number of approaches. We can learn from all of these successes and failures.



But the only way to begin is to begin. To help start you on this path, we have included a rather extensive, though certainly not all-inclusive, bibliography in the appendix of this report. In support of its program to foster development of agency accountability systems, OPM will also offer assistance to individual agencies in developing strategies for strategic alignment and has created a Governmentwide clearinghouse that will provide information on additional real life, successful approaches that agencies are employing (currently available on the OPM web page). It is in all of our interests to ensure that Government establishes and maintains a highly skilled workforce that can handle the demands of the 21st century. To achieve this goal, we must all work together.

*It's kind of fun to do the impossible.*

-Walt Disney

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## **APPENDIX A: NON-FEDERAL FINDINGS**

*Appearances are deceptive.*

-Aesop

For some reason, people tend to think that the Federal Government has fallen far behind the private sector, and even other public sector entities, when it comes to aligning human resources management with agency mission accomplishment. Although we did not talk directly with private or non-Federal public sector representatives, we conducted a fairly in-depth literature search that tells a somewhat different story.

### ***Private Sector***

There are many conflicting views on where the private sector is in regard to HRM alignment. For instance, the Conference Board recently conducted a poll of 155 private sector HR executives, and 63 percent responded that HR is “never, rarely, or only sometimes” a major player in the companies’ strategic process. A Pricewaterhouse-Coopers poll indicates that although 75 percent of the responding 70 companies reported that HR’s effectiveness is measured by its contribution to business results, only 27 percent include HR from the beginning of the business planning cycle. Further, 43 percent rated HR’s planning and policy effectiveness as only average while a mere 6 percent rated it as excellent.<sup>6</sup>

Other private sector surveys and studies over the past few years, however, have found that HR has been integrated into the strategic planning process, HR executives and top company management are strategic planning partners, HR is recognized for the importance of its role in implementing organizational change, and HR is viewed as critical to the success of the business.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, there are many private sector organizations that exemplify “best-in-class” alignment strategies. They have implemented such alignment approaches as the Balanced Scorecard, Return on Investment, Activity Based Costing, Malcolm Baldrige Award-type criteria, and more. They recognize the importance of their employees to business results, and HR is considered a valued strategic partner. However, even with a number of “best practices” out there, the research agrees that HR alignment, even in the private sector, is still a work in progress.

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<sup>6</sup>“HR News Capsules.” *HR Focus*, January 1999.

<sup>7</sup>National Academy of Public Administration. *A Guide for Effective Strategic Management of Human Resources*.

### ***Non-Federal Public Sector***

According to recent research, the non-Federal public sector is in much the same boat as the Federal sector. As the Government Performance Project pointed out in its recent study, State governments run into many of the same HR problems as the Federal Government -- rigid rules, lack of strategic management decisions, absence of statewide HR data, lack of workforce planning or the ability to plan for the future, etc. State governments have begun making HR reforms, such as reducing job classifications and streamlining hiring procedures. However, as with the Federal Government, States are focusing more on the efficiency and effectiveness of programs than how they support the bottom line.<sup>8</sup>

That is not to say that local, State, and even foreign governments have not been able to align themselves with mission accomplishment. A few cases can be most instructive for Federal agencies as they ponder this issue. The City of Hampton, Virginia HR staff has played a large role in increasing the performance of government services through improvements to work environment, organizational structure, work design, employee behaviors and organizational systems. The state of Washington is developing and enhancing HR information systems in support of mission accomplishment, is using personnel data to identify improvement initiatives, and includes the Director of Personnel in the Governor's Cabinet. The Canadian Treasury Board and HR Council of the Federal Government of Canada are developing approaches to measuring HR efficiency, effectiveness, and mission contribution. There are many other examples of how the public sector is moving toward aligning HR with mission accomplishment. Nonetheless, the research indicates that the non-Federal public sector, too, is only in the beginning stages of this transformation.

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<sup>8</sup>Government Performance Project. "Grading the States." *Governing*, February 1999.

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National Academy of Public Administration, [www.napawash.org](http://www.napawash.org)  
Saratoga Institute, [www.sarains.com](http://www.sarains.com)  
The Society of Human Resources Management, [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)