



An Application of Assessment Center Methods in the U.S. Government

Working for America

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT



Did You Know?

The United States Federal Government is the largest employer in the United States of America*

*Bureau of Labor Statistics – Career Guide to Industries, 2008-09 Edition



Did You Know?

The U.S. Federal Government employs approximately 1.8 million civilian employees*

- This figure does not include the Postal Service (615,000) or the Armed Services (2.6M)*
- This figure does not include much of the Federal Intelligence Community (CIA, NSA, DIA, NGA)*
- 9 out of 10 Federal employees work OUTSIDE of the Washington, DC area*

*Bureau of Labor Statistics – Career Guide to Industries, 2008-09 Edition



Did You Know?

The U.S. Federal Government includes 15 Executive Cabinet Departments and approximately 90 Independent agencies



Did You Know?

Executive Cabinet Department	# employees (thousands)
Defense	623
Veterans Affairs	239
Homeland Security	149
Treasury	109
Justice	105
Agriculture	92
Interior	66
Health and Human Services	60
Transportation	53
Commerce	39
Labor	16
Energy	15
State	14
Housing and Urban Development	10
Education	4





Did You Know?

There are approximately 181,000 employees in various Independent Agencies such as

- Office of Personnel Management
- Social Security Administration
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency
- General Services Administration
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
- Peace Corps
- Federal Communications Commission
- Federal Trade Commission



Did You Know?

The U.S. Federal Government includes over 750 occupations

- 420 General Schedule (White Collar)
- 250 Federal Wage System (Blue Collar)
- 91 Vessel Jobs (officers and members of crews of vessels) not covered by the Federal Wage System

OPM's Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families



Did You Know?

- The single biggest concern for the Federal Government in terms of the workforce is the impending retirement of Baby Boomers
- 60% of the Senior Executive Service (SES) will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years



Federal Leadership Succession Planning: The Issue

- The Federal Government is facing a Human Capital challenge - many Federal supervisors and managers are currently, or soon will be, retirement eligible
- The pending shortage of qualified leaders is a Governmentwide challenge
- The Federal Government must ensure a continued supply of highly qualified supervisors, managers, and executives to backfill critical positions



Federal Leadership Succession Planning: The Challenges

- The U.S. Government is a huge employer comprised of a highly diverse group of Departments and Agencies – each with unique needs
- The Federal Merit System requires competitive selection for non-political appointments
- SES level employees must clearly demonstrate their executive readiness prior to appointment



Federal Leadership Succession Planning: One Solution

- OPM's Center for Talent Services (CTS) offers Human Capital Management (HCM) Services to other parts of the Federal Government
- A Leadership Assessment Center is one of the services CTS offers
- The Leadership Assessment Center is often used as part of broader succession planning solutions





Design of a Selection System to Identify High Potential Leaders

- Multiple hurdle approach
- Candidate application materials' prescreen
- Leadership assessment center
- Structured interview
- Agency specific considerations or requirements
- Final decision





Recurring Challenges

- Deciding on the size and scope of the project
- Establishing eligibility requirements
- Determining timelines and required resources
- Arranging/providing necessary training (for example, interview panels and assessment scoring)
- Coordinating the phases of the selection process





Recurring Challenges

- Developing an employee communication plan
- Establishing and maintaining key stakeholder involvement
- Maintaining focus on procedural fairness
- Minimizing “clinical” judgment in deciding who is selected





Key Lessons: Manage the Process

- View leadership development as one process, not various detached programs
- Integrate the support systems
 - Selection into the program
 - Opportunities for development
 - Management of performance
 - Compensation/promotion of candidates
- Seek continual involvement and support from key stakeholders





Key Lessons: Explain the Rules

- Decisions should be made early and revisited frequently
- Discuss the final selection process early and often
- Keep the key stakeholders in the communication loop to minimize misunderstandings



Key Lessons: Be Prepared

- Previous knowledge of the candidates can be incorporated objectively
- Most senior executives would prefer to discuss solutions (if they are involved they already know about the problem)





Ongoing Challenges and Opportunities

- Conducting program evaluation
- Determining return on investment (ROI)
- Maintaining shelf life
- Providing feedback
- Controlling volume
- Controlling costs
- Introducing automation



Some Good News

- Our customer agencies have very different missions but they share some common objectives
 - Identify high potential leaders
 - Achieve key stakeholder buy-in
 - Implement an efficient process
 - Optimize procedural fairness
 - Make the best possible candidate selections
 - Combine multiple sources of information
- Despite the challenges, we are making a difference



Contact Information

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