

EXPERT EDITION

How to leverage data,
automation for HR
transformation

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- Interior
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Addressing the federal skills gap — on repeat

Competing with other agencies and the private sector has long been a federal hiring and retention challenge.

Today, human capital management teams across government are leaning into data to help them better tackle that challenge. It's critical to the federal government's success in meeting its numerous missions and preparing for workforce needs of the future, points out Matthew Cornelius, managing director for federal industry at Workday.

"We have to give managers visibility across their current teams and the current structure of the people that they manage — and think about what that means against their budgets and how that ties to workforce needs," he said. HCM systems let agencies gather and synthesize that employee data across the enterprise, Cornelius says.

This approach also helps address the scope in many federal agencies, which rival some of the commercial world's largest companies in size. A perfect example? The Interior Department.

"Human capital data is really central to making many of our decisions because we have 70,000 employees across 2,400 operating locations. And understanding that workforce composition, the types of jobs they do, where they're located geographically; what we're seeing in terms of bringing people in, keeping them happy, watching people leave — I mean, it informs so much of what we do in order to meet the mission of the public," explains Robyn Rees, division director for strategic human capital initiatives in Interior's Office of the Secretary.

In this ebook, in addition to Interior's Rees and Workday's Cornelius, you will hear insights from leaders at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority too. We hope these articles help inform your own efforts to transform HCM.

Vanessa Roberts
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At Interior, human capital data drives people and mission

BY MICHELE SANDIFORD



With a workforce that spans over 11 bureaus including the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs, wildlife conservation and all 350 positions that exist in the federal workforce, the Interior Department (DOI) is increasingly reliant on the data that it collects about its employees.

“About a year ago, all the human capital leaders across the bureaus came together and decided that one of our common priorities was going to be human capital data analytics,” said Robyn Rees, division director for strategic human capital initiatives in Interior’s Office of the Secretary.

The focus on human capital data analysis is born out of an effort to strategically align and support priorities of the department, Rees said. Interior’s diverse mission to protect and manage federal lands and natural resources can’t get done without its people. And now, the [President’s Management Agenda](#) calls for agencies to track their data to more quickly access and act on workforce needs.

“I would say broadly that human capital data is really central to making many of our decisions because we have 70,000 employees across 2,400 operating locations. And understanding that workforce composition, the types of jobs they do, where they’re located geographically; what we’re seeing in terms of bringing people in, keeping them happy, watching people leave — I mean, it informs so much of what we do in order to meet the mission of the public,” Rees said during [Federal Monthly Insights – Leveraging data and automation to drive HR transformation](#).

“We really have been working aggressively to get access to the data we have. Whatever quality it is, show it, let’s make it better, right? And then provide whatever sets of analyses and visualizations that could be one of a number of things.”

Interior’s three-pronged data use strategy

DOI’s goal is to use the available data for three main touchpoints:

- First, reduce the burden to the bureaus for manual data calls that come up through the department and other agencies.
- Second, enable bureaus to benchmark against their peers and to access best practices from one agency or organization to another.
- Third, position the department to more effectively be able to advance collective efforts.

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Whatever quality it is, show it, let’s make it better, right? And then provide whatever sets of analyses and visualizations that could be one of a number of things.



— Robyn Rees, Division Director for Strategic Human Capital Initiatives, Interior

“Oftentimes, we’ll see federal government benchmarking small agencies versus small agencies, large agencies versus large agencies within the department,” Rees said.

One challenge faced by Interior is unlocking the human capital data and the fact that there is no one system for the data that is being collected. Rees, who comes from an IT background, said that while the agency wants its customers to be able to interact with one system, that ability is born out of interactions between multiple systems.

“Part of unlocking human capital data is understanding that the data is in various systems, and being able to access it and bring light to that data is one part of it,” she said. “So where in the absence of an integration of a system, for example, there are other technical ways we can join that data and do something with it.”

How Interior distills, visualizes data insights

The Office of Human Capital has already established itself as an organization that can develop enterprisewide visualization.

“We can crowdsource the feedback for those visualizations . . . through subject matter experts in the same virtual space, with the data folks building and deploying visualizations,” Rees said.

The visualizations are already assisting the department with new hires, retention, separations, exit data and capabilities around the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. The next steps are workforce planning, succession planning, career pathways and career ladders.

The information collected can help HR teams see how an employee moves between jobs and departments at the enterprise level and how certain skillsets can uncover newly realized career opportunities.

Our journey is to make sure that more people can access that data, that they can then build a baseline understanding of the business, that they can build muscle and analytical thinking.

— Interior’s Robyn Rees

“You must have the language and the ability to interact with the subject matter experts in order to truly unlock what that means in terms of strategizing and using evidence to triangulate a decision space,” Rees told the [Federal Drive with Tom Temin](#).

Interior makes use of many types of employees — data scientists, data analysts and IT experts — to do the work of analyzing its data.

“Our journey is to make sure that more people can access that data, that they can then build a baseline understanding of the business, that they can build muscle and analytical thinking. ... They’re asking more questions, and ultimately, we want to get them to a place where their decisions are based on evidence to the greatest extent possible,” Rees said.

“That’s the journey that we’re on, the journey that we’ll continue being on. I know as leaders of the department, we care a lot about evidence-based decision-making, and it truly is a collective effort. It has to have IT folks, business folks, data folks, leaders at the table in order to keep that journey strong and moving forward.” 

Listen to the full discussion between Federal News Network’s Jared Serbu and [Interior’s Robyn Rees on making smart use of HR data](#)

EPA keeps its finger on the workforce's pulse with HR analytics



BY DERACE LAUDERDALE

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), like many other organizations, gathers huge amounts of data about its workforce. But it's not just using that data to understand the present, the agency's also using it to plan EPA 2.0.

Helena Wooden-Aguilar, EPA's deputy assistant administrator for workforce solutions, said analyzing data can help organizations make better data-driven decisions, improve employee engagement and determine the future of a workforce.

"We have an office called the Office of Human Resources Strategy (OHRS), and a big part of that job is to take a look at the agency as a whole. What are the core jobs that we need to do to meet the mission of EPA, protect human health and the environment? Those are the conversations we have at the leadership level," Wooden-Aguilar said.

She emphasized the importance of HR analytics not just in supporting the mission but also analyzing data and translating it so that human resources employees at EPA can make decisions on workforce issues.

"We use data to help us better understand our customers right within the organization and how well we are performing. It's a dual purpose: It's making sure we meet our customer's needs and how we are doing," Wooden-Aguilar said during [*Federal Monthly Insights — Leveraging data and automation to drive HR transformation*](#).

"It gives us a right direction to move forward. We're always planning for the future. We like to keep our finger on the pulse of not just our current employees, but those that are interested in the

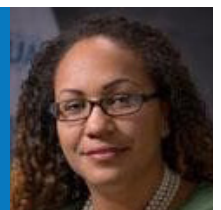
Environmental Protection Agency. So it gives us an opportunity to take a look at the different attributes that new employees would be interested in."

Determining EPA skill sets of the future

OHRS also uses data analytics to determine the jobs of the future that EPA will need to fill. Wooden-Aguilar said the office always tries to figure out where there are opportunities to fill skills gaps in EPA. The Office of Personnel Management is the primary data source for those efforts.

"We currently use a federalwide data source, then there's another dataset that we collect at EPA. We survey our new employees to try to collect some data on what are the things that are important to them," Wooden-Aguilar told the [*Federal Drive with Tom Temin*](#). "We also use dashboards to actually take data that's voluntarily given to us and visualize it. That's an important piece. I've been

We use data to help us better understand our customers right within the organization and how well we are performing.



— Helena Wooden-Aguilar, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Workforce Solutions, EPA

in the government for about 20 years, and I realize that people want to see not just raw data, they want to see it in a very beautiful way, in a very digestible way.”

Wooden-Aguilar said OHRS considers itself a bridge between data crunching and data analytic translators. While data is collected in the agency, OHRS plays a role in analyzing the data and translating it for a better understanding of the workforce. For example, it can help track employees who left EPA but also why they decided to leave and what roles they were in.

EPA also realizes that it must compete for talent with the private sector, nonprofit organizations and other government agencies.

People want to see not just raw data, they want to see it in a very beautiful way, in a very digestible way.

— EPA’s Helena Wooden-Aguilar

“I’m happy to say that EPA is in the top 10 of employers in the federal government. So we continue to really take seriously how we’re showing up in the workforce,” Wooden-Aguilar said. “We are out there recruiting constantly — trying to ensure that we are showing up in the right way. We are definitely in competition with a number of departments and agencies. But I like to say to young people when I speak to them, ‘A yes to the federal government is a yes to EPA, regardless of where you go and what you do.’ ” 

Listen to the full discussion between Federal News Network’s Eric White and EPA’s Helena Wooden-Aguilar about [keeping ahead of workforce needs](#)



DC airports authority takes data-driven approach to hiring, retention, development



BY DAISY THORNTON

Running an airport requires a workforce with the same skills as a small city: Each one has its own first responders, tradespeople, engineers, IT teams and human resources staffs. The only professions they don't need are doctors and teachers.

It requires that airports therefore take a holistic and data-driven approach to human resources to ensure they can consistently recruit, hire and retain talent, said Tanisha Lewis, vice president for diversity, inclusion and social impact for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA).

"Our human capital management system provides us with data on every employee at every point in their journey, whether it's the initial hire, job progression or termination. With that data, we're able to predict what skill sets we need,

what skill sets we'll be transitioning, whether there are employees retiring or moving on to better opportunities like promotion," Lewis said during [Federal Monthly Insights — Leveraging data and automation to drive HR transformation](#).

"And so we really use the human capital management system as a tool for planning our future needs. That, along with assessments and interviews and discussions with our employees, really help us to develop a workforce development plan that not only addresses current skill sets but skill sets of the future."

Using HCM data to plan forward

That plan for workforce development is important because Lewis said the average tenure of an authority employee is around 15 years. Being able to identify skill sets, address skill gaps and prepare employees for future roles is essential. In fact, Lewis said it helped MWAA create succession plans for 80% of its leadership in 2023.

The data is taken from performance evaluations, resume data, interviews, conversations and surveys conducted with employees throughout their tenure about their current roles, skills and aspirations for the future. That data, paired with employee engagement scores, helps establish an HR predictive analytics system that can help determine what employees are at risk of potentially leaving. With that knowledge ahead of time, MWAA can plan how to develop staff to backfill positions before people even leave.

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— Tanisha Lewis, Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion and Social Impact, Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority

“We focus on developing skills and talents that are tied to the overall business plan. And this plan is often evaluated for the effectiveness and the ability to address the needed skills to run the Airports Authority,” Lewis told the [Federal Drive with Tom Temin](#). “So we look at building skills that create a resilient organizational workforce. We work to identify those skill sets, identify gaps, create strategies and programs that help us build and apply the needed capabilities — all with the focus on our employees. So it’s really important that we take a look at every phase of the organization, every role, and ensure that we have the correct skill set.”

80%
Percentage of leadership team
succession plans created in
2023 — attributed to use of the
authority’s HCM system

SOURCE: Tanisha Lewis of MWAA

Gaining agility in the workplace

Another thing that helps MWAA retain its employees is the flexibility of workplace arrangements. Although a large portion of the authority’s employees are considered essential, many teleworked throughout the pandemic. Since then, the organization has been navigating return to work and has settled into a hybrid work situation with employees in the office three days a week and teleworking the other two.

“It’s been working out well for us,” Lewis said. “And I must say that our talent development strategy this year made a significant shift. As employees return to the workplace, we have placed an enhanced focus on psychological safety and emotional intelligence

If your outreach isn’t intentional around skill sets, then you’re not fruitful.

— MWAA’s Tanisha Lewis

so that we could prepare everyone for that return to 100% interaction with individuals or even that hybrid situation. And so it’s been an amazing experience. Our employees have responded well to the change.”

And recruitment starts early for MWAA. Lewis said the authority performs outreach as early as middle school and high school. It also has partnerships with universities across the country to build awareness of the opportunities it offers. The organization also partners with other associations and groups to advertise positions around specific skillsets that it’s looking for and to develop targeted talent pools.

“If your outreach isn’t intentional around skill sets, then you’re not fruitful,” Lewis said. MWAA seeks qualified and diverse candidates, and “we do that through rigorous and continuous outreach.” 🔄

Listen to the full discussion between the Federal Drive’s Tom Temin and [Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority’s Tanisha Lewis on the benefits of HCM data in planning for future skills needs](#)

Data-driven HR planning requires data integration

BY TOM TEMIN

The government's personnel teams and leadership have to be able to answer: "How are we going to ensure that we have the right workforce in the coming years and decades ahead to deliver on federal missions?" said Matthew Cornelius, managing director for federal industry at [Workday](#).

To do that, human capital management teams across government need better data and tools to capture insights from that data, Cornelius said.

To help, Workday is taking what it's learned from commercial and state and local government clients and applying it to federal ones, he said.

"Part of that work involves helping agencies break down data silos that exist and consolidating data on a single platform," Cornelius said. That way, chief human capital officers and their staffs, technology and program leads — even department heads and cabinet secretaries — can have a unified, comprehensive view of their workforces.

Gaining an enterprise-wide yet in-depth view of employees — their talents, experiences, training and career goals — also contributes to retention and planning.

"What that means is that human resources managers then have access to in-depth details.

That's job descriptions. That's structures within program offices. That's training needs and where people are in their federal journey," Cornelius said during [**Federal Monthly Insights — Leveraging data and automation to drive HR transformation**](#). "They can see information at the individual level but also across the enterprise too."

He said Workday provides these views through a core HR management platform that can ingest and normalize data from disparate systems for various HR activities and any associated bespoke agency systems.

If understanding the workforce in totality and individually matters, then so does connecting that understanding to the financials that underlie personnel and everything an agency does, Cornelius said.

We have to give managers visibility across their current teams and the current structure of the people that they manage — and think about what that means against their budgets and how that ties to workforce needs.



— Matthew Cornelius, Managing Director for Federal Industry, Workday

“We have to give managers visibility across their current teams and the current structure of the people that they manage — and think about what that means against their budgets and how that ties to workforce needs.” Workday is able to integrate its HCM core with its financial and payroll offerings to close the gap, he said.

Merging the data

Agency people concerned with the IT underlying all of the systems contributing to a total view of human capital may question how so many disparate datasets can merge, given their varying formats.

No single answer exists, Cornelius said. “We are aligning all of Workday’s capabilities with the Office of Personnel Management data classifications, regulations, rules and procedures. And on the financial side, we’re doing the same with the Treasury Department.”

He said that the federal data-sharing environment is more challenging than that of the commercial world “agencies and contractors have to comply with the Treasury financial requirements and also the OPM regulations when it comes to HR.”

Uncertainty on several fronts is also driving the need for a data approach to HR management and planning, he added.

“You have budget uncertainty with congressional appropriations,” Cornelius said. “You have people that may or may not retire. You

If you’re at the Department of Transportation and you know you’ve got a major deficit of air traffic controllers, solving that challenge is a very different challenge than another agency knowing that they broadly need to improve their cyber workforce.

— Workday’s Matthew Cornelius

have the still-lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and how that’s affecting work-life balance and how that’s influencing employees’ professional decisions.”

The result? HR systems must not only show conditions as they exist today, they must also let managers ask what-if questions about possible future workforce scenarios — whether broadly across the organization or for specific groups or even specific employees.

“For example, if you’re at the Department of Transportation and you know you’ve got a major deficit of air traffic controllers, solving that challenge is a very different challenge than another agency knowing that they broadly need to improve their cyber workforce,” Cornelius said. “Agencies have different challenges. Being able to have those individual use case scenarios for the government and being able to show agencies what possible different paths look like, it’s incredibly powerful.”

Watch the full discussion between the Federal Drive’s Tom Temin and Workday’s Matthew Cornelius on the value of taking both a wide and deep view of employee data

