

Federal Workforce Development to Ensure Digital Transformation

Highlights from an August 2022 Roundtable

Improving the state of the Federal workforce has been a hot topic of conversation for industry experts in both the public and private sectors for many years now. But as technology continues to change and accelerate, the need for skilled talent within government increases. To ensure a smooth and robust transformation into the digital future, Federal agencies are beginning to take more concrete steps to recruit talented applicants and reskill an existing workforce.

The Advanced Technology Academic Research Center (ATARC) in partnership with Red Hat recently held a roundtable discussion with topic experts from various Federal agencies on how to identify opportunities and strategies to reskill, retain and recruit a talented workforce with the expertise required for future digital transformation. Roundtable participants shared some of the challenges they face when recruiting and retaining open source talent, and how workforce development programs can develop new, non-traditional talent through certification programs to help fill skill gaps.

Overall, roundtable participants agree that delays to digital transformation within the Federal government are caused primarily from human behavior and organizational challenges, rather than problems with technology itself. Agencies represented on the panel are taking various steps to close the skills gap, including waiving degree requirements when hiring, offering non-traditional training and certifications, and embracing the culture shift needed to realize a digital future.

Re-Thinking Job Qualifications

Roundtable participants are beginning to question the reliability of certain job qualifications that were once the golden standard to gauge whether a candidate will be successful in a role. Agencies should start to consider what requirements are self-imposed by hiring managers, and what education is actually required to successfully work in a specific role?

It was noted that much of the current focus when hiring is on identifying the most qualified talent in order to hit the ground running, rather than hiring a solid team player to upskill later.

According to [The 2020 Open Source Jobs Report](#) published by the Linux Foundation, 93% of hiring managers surveyed found it difficult to find employees with enough open source talent. Roundtable participants shared that while hiring skilled talent is challenging, agencies need to better identify and define the specific skills needed for a role and communicate these desired qualifications to the candidate. Candidates may not realize they qualify for a role based on how the job description is communicated.



"Let your workforce tell you what they're interested in, and then allow them through experiential learning to build their resume so that they can be competitive in those positions of the future."

Agencies can streamline the application process for candidates by offering realistic job descriptions that reflect the actual skills needed to be successful in the role, instead of relying on traditional degrees or certifications to determine qualifications. Roundtable participants suggest that many job requirements are assumed by staff who may not have a direct role in qualifying candidates.

The new OPM guidelines acknowledge that agencies should not require degrees for many technology positions due to the fast moving nature of the industry. By focusing job qualifications on skills and potential, the Federal government can increase its competitiveness in this hiring environment. The responsibility is now on hiring managers and HR teams to understand what a role looks like today, and what skills might be needed for a role tomorrow.

Roundtable participants also highlighted the need for agencies to prioritize the agency's mission as well as team building

when hiring. Agencies should understand what skills are needed to fulfill the mission now and into the future, and determine the appropriate workforce development solution to get them there.

Workforce Development Solutions

As technology accelerates, job qualifications that were once the golden standard, like college degrees, do not always predict success on the job. Non-traditional technical certifications available through workforce development programs often teach more relevant skills that can give existing employees and job candidates alike a competitive advantage.



Life experience means something. Whether that new hire came directly out of college or decided to pivot and find a new career, we need to give them the tools to do their best."

Reskilling the existing Federal workforce is one way agencies are bridging the skills gaps for professions in cybersecurity and site reliability engineering. Mentorship, training and internships within and across agencies allows employees to pick up new skills and develop a bigger picture of the cyber posture. Additionally, agencies can address the widening skills gap by accepting non-traditional technical certifications from workforce development programs, like Red Hat's program created to address the technology talent gap.

Red Hat's workforce training programs offer skill-building options to both career changers and career starters at entry-level technical positions. Their training and certifications provide students with the skills and knowledge employers are seeking. Red Hat certifications align with a variety of job roles and are a key indicator of job candidate quality.

Culture Change Across the Board

As Federal agencies begin shifting their mindsets by developing a culture of training and accepting non-traditional

certifications for certain jobs, agencies can better prepare for a quickly advancing future. As new technology emerges, agencies must be willing to hire based on certain traits versus explicit experience. The culture shift must also involve increasing transparency among younger generations. These digital natives are entering organizations that are behind in technology, which can result in issues with recruitment and retention if agencies are not proactive with training and technology adoption. Moreover, agencies should be honest with their need for young talent to help modernize government.

Culture change within an agency extends beyond recruitment practices and into modernizing operational practices. There is, and will likely always be, resistance to change. Workforce development is not only about learning hard skills, but also relearning soft skills to meet the needs of a digital future.

Key Takeaways:

- Innovation adoption involves both **hard and soft skills**
- The **skills gap is more of a culture problem** than a technology problem. Instilling a culture of change means not only being able to stay modern, but to roll with the punches
- Agencies should **reconsider hiring requirements** to include **non-traditional students**
- **Changes should be mission driven** with a focus on team building and tools for better access, especially for flexible and remote work options
- Workforce development requires **experiential learning** and training, so that candidates gain relevant skills to qualify them for a position

Learn more about **Red Hat's [Workforce Development Program](#)**. Reach out to us at NAPS-Training@redhat.com