

Innovations in Human Resource Management

Getting the Public's Work Done
in the 21st Century

Edited by Hannah S. Sistare,
Myra Howze Shiplett and Terry F. Buss



TRANSFORMATIONAL TRENDS IN
GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

M.E. Sharpe
Armonk, New York
London, England

About the Academy

The National Academy of Public Administration is an independent, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress to identify emerging issues of governance and to help federal, state, and local governments improve their performance. The Academy's mission is to provide "trusted advice"—advice that is objective, timely, and actionable—on all issues of public service and management. The unique source of the Academy's expertise is its membership, including more than 650 current and former Cabinet officers, members of Congress, governors, mayors, legislators, jurists, business executives, public managers, and scholars who are elected as fellows because of their distinguished contribution to the field of public administration through scholarship, civic activism, or government service. Participation in the Academy's work is a requisite of membership, and the fellows offer their experience and knowledge voluntarily.

The Academy is proud to join with M.E. Sharpe, Inc., to bring readers this and other volumes in a series of edited works addressing current major public management and public policy issues.

The opinions expressed in these writings are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Academy. To access Academy reports, please visit our website at www.napawash.org.

Copyright © 2009 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
without written permission from the publisher, M.E. Sharpe, Inc.,
80 Business Park Drive, Armonk, New York 10504.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Innovations in human resource management : getting the public's work done in the 21st
century / edited by Hannah S. Sistare, Myra Howze Shiplett, and Terry F. Buss.

p. cm. — (Transformational trends in governance & democracy)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7656-2314-0 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7656-2315-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Administrative agencies—United States—Personnel management. 2. Civil service—United
States—Personnel management. 3. Human capital—United States—Management. 4. Personnel
management—United States. I. Sistare, Hannah S. II. Shiplett, Myra Howze, 1944—
III. Buss, Terry F.

JK765.I56 2008
352.60973—dc22

2008028970

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of
American National Standard for Information Sciences
Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials,
ANSI Z 39.48-1984.



| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BM (c) | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BM (p) | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword | |
| <i>Paul A. Volcker</i> | ix |
| Preface and Acknowledgments | |
| <i>Terry F. Buss</i> | xi |
| 1. An Overview | 3 |
| <i>Myra Howze Shiplett</i> | |
| Part 1. The Challenge Ahead | |
| 2. Human Capital: Federal Workforce Challenges in the Twenty-first Century | |
| <i>J. Christopher Mihm</i> | 13 |
| Part 2. Understanding the Twenty-First Century Multisector Workforce | |
| 3. Challenges and Effective Practices in Managing the Multisector Workforce | |
| <i>Alethea Long-Green</i> | 25 |
| 4. Multisector Workforce Lessons Learned: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration | |
| <i>Laurie J. May</i> | 37 |
| 5. Getting the Best from “Most Efficient Organizations” | |
| <i>Bruce D. McDowell</i> | 45 |
| 6. Building Surge Capacity in the Disaster Workforce: Improving SBA’s Response to Mega-Disasters in the Future | |
| <i>Terry F. Buss and Joseph Thompson</i> | 55 |

Part 3. Transforming Organizational Culture

7. The U.S. Government Accountability Office: A Case Study in Human Capital Reform
David M. Walker 77
8. Strategic Human Capital Management in Federal Government: Principles, Strategies, and the Case of NASA
Elwood F. Holton III, Sean C. O'Keefe, Vicki A. Novak, and David M. Walker 86
9. Organizational Transformation: Strategic Succession Management and Leadership Development
Ruth T. Zaplin and Sydney Smith-Heimbrock 114
10. Four New Models of Networked Leadership Development
Kitty Wooley 131

Part 4. Innovation in Action

11. A New Look at Paybanding and Pay for Performance: The Views of Those Participating in Federal Demonstration Projects
James R. Thompson and Rob Seidner 147
12. Employee Retention and Engagement
Tim Rutledge 170
13. Building Relationships to Fix the Federal Talent Pipeline: An Innovative Approach in Chicago Provides a Model for Recruitment Success
Rob Seidner and James R. Thompson 185
14. Competencies for Success in International Leadership in Challenging Times
Daniel Spikes and John Stroup 202
15. An Agency-Level Look at Alternative Working Arrangements in Federal Government
Sharon H. Mastracci and James R. Thompson 214
16. Strategic Workforce Management: Innovation and Improvement at DTRA
Michael Simpson 234

Part 5. Managing the Management of People

17. A Certified Assessment of Human Resources Systems:
An Innovative Pathway to Assurance
NAPA Fellows and Staff 245
18. Using Data-Driven Human Capital Decisions to Improve
Basic Personnel Functions
Edward H. Stephenson Jr. 263
19. Succeeding as a Strategic HR Partner: A Practical Approach
Tom Wimer 271

Part 6. Legislating Reform

20. Legislating Innovation in Human Capital Management:
Lessons from the Department of Homeland Security
Douglas A. Brook and Cynthia L. King 277
21. The Human Capital "Crisis" in the Federal Government:
A Modest Proposal
Alan P. Balutis 292

Part 7. Concluding Thoughts

22. The Path of Reform: Challenges and Opportunities
Hannah S. Sistare 307
- About the Editors and Contributors 315
- Index 323

- Lawler, E., III. 2001. "The Era of Human Capital Has Finally Arrived." In *The Future of Leadership*, ed. W. Bennis, G.M. Spreitzer, and T.G. Cummings, 14–25. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). 2005. "Literature Review: Succession Planning and Leadership Development." Washington, DC: NAPA.
- Office of Personnel Management (OPM). 2006. *Strategic Leadership Succession Model*. Guidance document for federal agencies issued by OPM. Washington, DC: OPM.
- . 2007a. *Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF)*. Washington, DC: OPM, Resource Center. Available at www.opm.gov/hcaaf_resource_center/1-5.asp (accessed 12/04/07).
- . 2007b. *Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) Systems, Standards and Metrics (SSM)*. Available at www.opm.gov/hcaaf_resource_center/assets/hcaaf_ssm.pdf (accessed 12/04/07).
- Palmer, P. 2000. *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Rooke, D., and W.R. Torbert. 2005. "Transformations of Leadership." *Harvard Business Review* 83(4): 66–76.
- Slater, P. 2001. "Leading Yourself." In *The Future of Leadership*, ed. W. Bennis, G.M. Spreitzer, and T.G. Cummings, 103–115. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Spreitzer, G.M., and T.G. Cummings. 2001. "The Leadership Challenges of the Next Generation." In *The Future of Leadership*, ed. W. Bennis, G.M. Spreitzer, and T.G. Cummings, 241–253. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Spreitzer, G.M., and R.E. Quinn. 2001. *A Company of Leaders: Five Disciplines for Unleashing the Power in Your Workforce*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Stone, A. 2007. "Planning for the Next Generation of Managers." *Federal Times*.
- U. S. Department of the Interior (U.S. DOI). 2006. *Leadership Succession Plan*. Available at www.doi.gov/hrm/doiplan.doc (accessed 12/04/07).
- Van Velsor, E., R.S. Moxley, and K.A. Bunker. 2004. "The Leader Development Process." In *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook*. 2nd ed., ed. C.D. McCauley and E. Van Velsor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Whitworth, L., K. Kimsey-House, H. Kimsey-House, and P. Sandahl, eds. 2007. *Coactive Leadership Coaching*. 2nd ed. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Zaplin, R.T., and S. Smith-Heimbrock. 2008. "Developing Leaders in the New Age of Government." In *Innovations in Public Leadership Development*, ed. Ricardo Morse and Terry F. Buss, 49–175. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Four New Models of Networked Leadership Development

KITTY WOOLEY

In 2003, four unrelated groups of federal employees (Feds) in Washington, D.C., began investing substantial amounts of personal time into generating solutions to two problems with which human capital practitioners everywhere are familiar:

- inadequate or ill-fitting support for inexperienced new hires, leading to feelings of isolation, and
- a disconnect between leadership training and succession planning, fueling employee disappointment and disengagement.

Either outcome makes it difficult for an agency to realize the intended return on investment. On that basis alone, the emerging solutions that follow are worthy of study. This chapter reports on new networks that have been generated by employees of several federal agencies—networks with the potential to turn these problems into solutions. Here, four such networks are labeled networked groups, because neither network nor group fully captures the potential of what is happening.

I have functioned as initiator, advisor, or observer in all four networked groups. All involve continuing inputs of discretionary energy by Feds for work-related purposes, have strategic development of the individual as an underlying theme, and constitute *de facto* leadership development. Three are interagency; all are multisector to a degree. Each has something unique to contribute to the human capital dialogue. To the extent that federal agency decision makers can embrace the mindsets associated with this activity, they can leverage them to increase employee ease and engagement, attract collaboration across dissimilar agency components, and equip bureaucracies to handle more complex problems. Better public service can result.

Why Do Networked Groups Matter?

Networked groups matter because they can do things traditional hierarchies can't. The governmental response to Hurricane Katrina, taken as a whole, should inspire a sense of urgency: another huge natural disaster, or similarly complex, nonroutine

event, will happen again. A credible response presupposes agile, well-coordinated, competent action by federal agencies, the private sector, religious institutions, civic organizations, and state and local government. (See Chapter 6 on Katrina and the federal surge workforce.) Don Kettl of the University of Pennsylvania anticipates some challenges that will accompany the development of innovative human capital solutions (Kettl 2006). One challenging circumstance occurs when those who possess key information work at the bottom of the hierarchy. As more new hires enter the federal workforce, this will increasingly be the case.

Agency first-line supervisors and middle managers, who are doing more with less and who may feel that they are fighting fires all the time, are understandably less concerned about rethinking organizational structure than about meeting deadlines that impact today's bottom line. A manager here and there may be conscious that an employee has begun requesting conference rooms for after-work meetings with other Feds, but as long as the requests do not interfere with the organization's ability to function, that's the end of it. As yet, there is surprisingly little recognition, anywhere in the community, that something new and potentially very helpful has emerged. The good news is that the dynamics of the networked groups can exist within agencies without reorganization or funding, as long as some flexibility exists and boundaries are somewhat permeable. The behaviors can coexist comfortably with strong internal controls, although not with micromanagement. The real control, though, derives from a participant's public service orientation and alignment with agency mission—something that the human capital community's emphasis on "line of sight" has begun to address.

The Ability to Generate the Right Relationships Is an Asset

Government thinking about human networks has not moved far beyond the challenges associated with controlling them. A radical exception is the establishment of Intellipedia, a breathtaking development in which a conscious tradeoff of some control for improvements in analytic speed and integration is under way (Walker 2007). The wiki accompanies a cultural shift across the intelligence community, from need to know to responsibility to provide. Mike McConnell, Director of National Intelligence (DNI), who explained the necessity of this shift in an April 4th plenary session of *Government Executive* magazine's 2007 Excellence in Government conference, indicated that the best intelligence depends on analysts' *reaching across* entrenched silos and *empowering counterparts*. At the beginning of a task, all parties may be total strangers. Some participants may be much less seasoned. Neither factor can be allowed to stand in the way of collaboration aimed at producing the best possible intelligence.

Networked groups described below also reach across silos and empower counterparts, for reasons that should interest agency executives. Connecting relationships signify access to talent, experience, and efficacy beyond an organization's boundaries. Once connected, self-starting participants' behaviors represent an

opportunity to increase employee engagement, retention, and even recruitment, if agency senior leaders are able to expand their mental models enough to embrace the behaviors the way DNI has begun embracing Web 2.0 culture. Challenging? Absolutely. But, as the intelligence community is demonstrating, a "both/and" solution can catalyze energy and creativity. The good news is that numerous young and middle-aged Feds are using their leisure time to set themselves tasks, master new skills, and link up with like-minded people in a manner that prefigures new capacity in government.

But Organizational Networks Are Nothing New, Are They?

Twenty-five years ago, John Naisbitt's *Megatrends* (1988) asserted that a shift from hierarchies to networks was occurring in response to the failure of hierarchies to support solutions to big problems. He observed that most hierarchies were unable to connect employees laterally, independent of their locations *within the organization*. Technology companies were seen as pioneering a shift in this area. While not every prediction ("smashing the pyramid") has come true, the networked groups described below harken back to two phenomena Naisbitt described: the egalitarian aspect of the horizontal link, and the fact that rewards can result from empowering others. And each networked group connects *across organizations* in different ways.

Those phenomena do not harmonize immediately with bureaucratic sensibilities, one reason why the full potential of the networked groups may not have hit the human capital radar, despite the fact that each has fairly broad reach. The largest has appeared in print and radio (e.g., Azaroff 2006; Hardy 2006; "FEDTalk" 2006) and has received invitations to partner from all sides. What has not emerged is a nuanced understanding of the reasons such networked groups exist or the true solution potential that they embody. Not everything about them is remarkable; for instance, it is still the norm that a small subset of members tends to do most of the work. But, in *every* networked group, one encounters hugely committed Feds who are building capacity *for government* on their personal time, who are hoping to be enlisted on the job for purposes that are worthy of their capabilities.

The Networked Groups

Young Government Leaders (YGL)

Megan Quinn of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Steve Ressler of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began hosting happy hours in 2003 out of a sense that there were not enough ways for young Feds to connect, inside or across agencies. Gatherings over the next two years consisted of a steadily growing group that convened at locations near downtown Washington, D.C. In 2005, the group co-hosted a happy hour with Labor's Effective Advocates for Development (LEAD), a young Fed group at the Department of Labor. In the same year, a website

(www.younggovernmentleaders.org) was launched, committees were established, and the first of a series of YGL articles appeared in the *Public Manager*. The founders, who had been invited by several organizations to participate on panels about recruiting and retaining young Feds, were careful to delegate opportunities to other YGL members. This generous and strategic decision freed the founders to pursue additional marketing activity in order to build name recognition that would attract members and invitations to participate in government human capital conversations. Simultaneously, a group of young Feds began meeting in Atlanta and requested YGL chapter status, the first of several non-Washington-based Feds to do so (see Figure 10.1 on pages 136–137).

In March 2005, the founders attended an Evening of Excellence hosted by the Council for Excellence in Government. The program was designed to honor a State Department employee, Susie Baker, who had won a Senior Fellows Award for her contribution to the growth of YPro (see below). Susie chose to invite a panel of interesting young Feds, who talked about intergenerational leadership with a room full of senior employees from across government. Steve Ressler and other young Feds lined the walls. There was a palpable tension in the room until one of the panelists answered a senior manager's loaded question in a beautifully nuanced way—at which point everyone in the room relaxed and the dialogue caught fire. Three of the four networked groups described here were in the room that night, a stimulus for further YGL expansion to acquire a senior advisor and set up a Yahoo! Group that still supports the executive team. Since then, YGL has partnered numerous times with the Council for Excellence in Government, the National Academy of Public Administration, other good government organizations, and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) conference planners in recruiting and retention discussions. YGL members now serve on a Council for Excellence in Government advisory board and the board of editors of the *Public Manager*.

As of June 2007, more than 1,000 young Feds from most civilian and military agencies had registered at the YGL website. By then, after-work programming had expanded beyond panel discussions to include a joint happy hour with Young AFCEA (a spin-off of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, which tailors professional networking events to younger IT contractor employees), a financial education seminar, and an interactive session on self-mentoring, with a self-employed educator and business writer, that was attended by nearly seventy-five young Feds. The year before, YGL developed formal strategic planning and considered ways to develop financial support (as well as the things such support would allow YGL to do) as Megan Quinn headed off to graduate school. This was done under the leadership of two committed Government Accountability Office (GAO) analysts, Adrienne Spahr and Katherine Walker, following the development of bylaws and an election process. Active YGL members were elected to fill public relations, communications, strategic planning, social networking, and membership committees, as Walker chaired professional development. Experience in a particu-

lar discipline, such as public relations, was not a prerequisite for that committee's chairmanship, although prior service on a committee was.

This illustrates a YGL way of life that is rare in civilian government: cross-training. One of the reasons this group has expanded so much is that it gives young Feds a way out of the boxes to which they've been assigned within their agencies. The executive team, committee members, and ad hoc volunteers acquire advanced skills or knowledge as they realize that they need them and will be able to use them right away. For instance, YGL leaders learned how to vet incoming partnering proposals from for-profit organizations in 2006 to ensure that federal ethics rules would not be violated, and returned a new member's proposal in 2007 accompanied by a concern about Hatch Act compliance. People with a variety of job classifications learn how to plan events, write press releases, get restaurant space for happy hours, book conference rooms at other agencies, and anticipate unintended consequences. Members are gaining experience and savvy at an accelerated rate, as they benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas that occurs when different agency cultures come in contact.

U.S. Department of State Young Professionals Society (YPro)

YPro and YGL members take responsibility for their own development in many of the same ways, although the former was designed specifically to foster relationships and career development among young State Department foreign service and civil service professionals and has a formal membership process. As an employee organization formally recognized by the State Department, it collects membership dues from over 500 members and accounts for expenditures. It was established by Elizabeth Ash and Stephanie Hallett in September 2003, following an open house that they organized to confirm sufficient interest. Ash and Hallett, new hires at the State Department the year before, met on Take Your Child to Work Day and discovered that they had one big thing in common: they felt isolated from most other employees because they were considerably younger. In addition, Ash had not had the benefit of new employee orientation, because she began work as a contractor. Hallett (the sole HR practitioner among the founders, who is now overseas) and Ash decided to explore how to create a State Department affinity group in order to gather other young employees. After they wrote bylaws, recruited an advisory board, and received approval from a sponsoring organization, Hallett and Ash kicked off the new professional and social networking group. Committees include: professional networking, overseas outreach, mentoring, social networking, administration, membership and recruitment, and marketing.

Although YPro limits membership to State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development employees, it has partnered with organizations as different as the CIA young professionals group, Miriam's Kitchen, and the World Bank. With their counterparts in the other affinity groups, YPro chairs serve on the Diversity Advisory Council convened by the Office of Civil Rights, YPro's sponsor. YPro members are regular participants in new employee orientation sessions. A

Figure 10.1 **YGL Perspective on Recruitment and Retention of Young Professionals**

CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING TOP TALENT TO FED CAREERS

- Many young professionals choose jobs in the private sector because it takes too long to hear back from federal positions they applied to
- Many young professionals don't know the benefits of public service or the types of challenging and rewarding careers offered

Some Possible Solutions to Attract Young Professionals:

- Market the benefits of public service and develop performance systems that offer incentives
- Emphasize that government careers can be challenging and rewarding (they provide an opportunity to serve the country and fulfill personal interests)
- Offer student loan reimbursement
- Design true "pay for performance systems" (e.g., bonuses tied to performance)

Strategies for More Effective Recruiting:

1. Develop a hiring process that is quicker, clearer, and less burdensome
 - OPM should take the lead in streamlining the online application process, incorporating electronic responses to and updates to applicants, and a better communication mechanism between USA jobs and agencies
2. Take advantage of career fairs held at universities, colleges, and other venues
 - Deliver on-campus presentations that are equivalent in quality to those delivered by private sector companies
 - Establish relationships with career centers to help spread the word (especially for lesser-known agencies)
 - Put on more job fairs and more vigorously publicize them
 - Emphasize opportunities, benefits, perks, and other advantages of federal employment and clearly explain the government hiring and promotion process
 - Utilize young Feds groups, like YGL, to participate in recruitment fairs for specific agencies or for the federal government in general (through OPM or Partnership for Public Service "Call to Serve")
3. Offer internships or similar short-term programs
 - Design innovative internship or short-term employment that get young professionals in the door quickly and allow both the agency and young Fed to determine if there is a match for the long-term (e.g., offer conversion to full-time at the end of a successful intern program)
 - Create more professional development programs, like the Presidential Management Fellows Program
 - Develop more internship and training programs that are geared for undergrads
 - Establish grad/post-grad internship/scholarship/training programs with less strict eligibility requirements (i.e., programs that aren't available only for GS 14/15 candidates or for individuals with 4–5 years' experience)

4. Take proactive steps to bridge the gap left by retiring feds
 - Work with upper management and Human Resources to accelerate recruitment and hiring practices
 - Utilize Internet job-search resources, including USA Jobs, monster.com, "Best Places to Work," and so forth.
 - Encourage positive word of mouth—especially from Young Feds' friends who are federal employees themselves

CHALLENGES FACING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN RETAINING TOP TALENT

- Private sector jobs are booming, providing ample choices and often higher pay for types of jobs similar to those offered in government
- Gen X, Y, and Z are less interested in job security, more interested in challenging, fulfilling careers

Some Possible Solutions to Retain Top Talent in Government:

1. Continued development opportunities
 - A balance between work responsibilities and career development activities
 - The opportunity to try different assignments in house or outside the agency, which may benefit the entire agency
 - Encouragement and approved leave to attend lectures, conferences, and so on, to gain knowledge and new skill sets that benefit the organization
 - Provide training opportunities or detail assignments (IT Exchange Program and the Voyagers Program)
2. Promote uniquely challenging environment with direct application and effect on the nation, including
 - A culture that supports the office's mission and strategic plan (or the opportunity to work on developing the same for the office)
 - Opportunities to move into leadership positions as rewards for good work
 - Travel opportunities
 - A sense of being appreciated or recognized
 - An opportunity for employees to see how their work "makes a difference" and how it fits into the larger government picture
 - The chance to work with others who share their passions and work ethic
 - Opportunities to network with other future leaders in their work
3. Ability to influence policy decisions and design high-quality programs on the ground
4. Support from and open communication with supervisor and peers
 - Clear and frequent communication of expectations, goals, individual development plans (with goals, milestones, and benchmarks), as well as clear and frequent feedback on job performance and progress
 - Motivation and inspiration for the ultimate attainment of SES/GS14–15 positions
 - Advice or, if possible, mentoring
 - Positive incentives instead of negative incentives to stay in the same office
 - An environment of mutual respect, given experience levels; this is especially important in offices where an age gap exists
 - Encouragement to attend non-work-related functions such as retirement celebrations, office parties, and so forth, in order to enhance new employees' familiarity with the rest of the office's staff

Note: Drafted by YGL leadership in 2006.

rich variety of offerings occur at various times of the day and week. Sample event titles, as reported in the group's 2004–2005 annual report, follow:

- Unwritten Rules of the State Department with Mac Sadoris
- Meet Paul Foldi from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- Happy Hour with World Affairs Council
- USA–Panama World Cup Qualifier
- Evening of Diplomatic Networking at Meridian International Center
- Professional Reading Group led by Donald Jacobson

YPro, like YGL, sends out a weekly e-mail event listing to members and supportive others. Some participants in the other three networked groups keep tabs on YPro's ever-changing offering. This innovative program, including the practices of its co-founders, may represent a turnkey solution for some agencies that are challenged in supporting new hires.

Conversations About Leading (CAL)

Conversations About Leading (CAL) was begun by Jackye Zimmermann, a former university French instructor and fine arts aficionado who manages the Editorial Policy, Publications, and Printing group at the Department of Education (ED). CAL began in April 2003, following the September graduation of two dozen ED employees from the Council for Excellence in Government's Fellows Program. The idea, incubated as Zimmermann experimented with happy hours as a way to see the other program participants again, was for the group to stay together and find ways to deliver a return on investment to the agency. The author and two graduates from previous years formed a steering committee that has operated continuously since then. In September 2004, Zimmermann received an Honorable Mention through the Council for Excellence in Government's Senior Fellows Award Program in recognition of the idea's promising potential.

About 350 people receive invitations to CAL's events, including current and former fellows, prior speakers, Presidential Management Fellows, and other interested employees and guests. Anyone who expresses interest is added to the mailing list. Decisions are made by e-mail; in-person meetings are held to a minimum because the planners work in widely dispersed buildings in Washington. The monthly brown-bag sessions are conducted in centrally located buildings. Attendance ranges from fifteen to thirty people. Although the original aim—to keep the senior fellow cohort together—was never realized, a broad variety of young and middle-aged Feds, individual contributors, and managers finds value in the sessions and has continued to come together in dialogue. Regular visitors come from Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Treasury, and two prior guest leaders (retired Feds, who deliver process communication training to National Aeronautics and Space Administration employees and teachers nationwide) come from Mary-

land when they are not traveling. Each August, a two-hour retreat is held in lieu of programming. The retreat is attended by past participants and interested visitors, whose input helps shape the slate of guest leaders for the next eleven months. Visiting leaders speak pro bono, as there is no budget for travel or honoraria. In its one expenditure per year, the steering committee uses personal funds to donate dessert and drinks for the retreat. Overall, the arrangement is light and fast enough to be sustained month after month under all workload conditions.

The first guest leader was Thomas P. Skelly, director of ED's Budget Service since 1997 and holder of three Presidential Rank Awards. Over time, the group has looked outward for others who lead by example and who are willing to engage with the group. For example, in June 2007, *Conversations About Leading* hosted Don Jacobson, director of the Consular Training Division at the Foreign Service Institute, Department of State. Don, a YPro mentor who invests his discretionary time to improve government, is known for developing a website, www.govleaders.org that aggregates leadership development content from many sources. Perhaps the high point in CAL's history was a visit from Christian McBride, the jazz bassist from Philadelphia who has performed with many jazz greats and is now co-director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem. His presence and perspective on leadership delighted participants, who spent 90 minutes considering how it is that a jazz band can work, given its complex and improvisational nature.

At one point, a leading-from-the-middle theme was sustained for several months, to model the steering committee's belief that true leadership is primarily about behavior, not position. This concept of leadership is seen by the committee as a key enabler of an employee's assumption of responsibility, feelings of efficacy, and engagement in mission. If leadership can be about behavior, then everyone has the potential to become a leader. However, if leadership is only about position, then it follows that employees whose names are not found on the organization chart are not leaders and are unlikely ever to become leaders—and thus are not responsible to exercise leadership in their sphere. Two completely different story lines follow from these beliefs, with vastly different consequences for the organization.

Senior Fellows and Friends (SFF)

Senior Fellows and Friends grew somewhat accidentally out of a dinner engagement in July 2003, following a conversation between the author and Jim Trink, now at the Federal Aviation Administration, about his research on the unique, vital strengths of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) middle managers and how that focus was helping them improve agency performance. Other senior fellows, including a DHS leadership coach who helped set up the dinner, and acquaintances who were focused on improving government were invited to attend. Ten people subsequently met in an Arlington restaurant, looked at Trink's data and accomplishments, and engaged in a spirited dialogue with him. After a few weeks, some of the participants inquired about the *next* dinner. This pre-

sented the author with a choice that aligned with a *business goal* (do something to generate a return on investment for her agency after having been sent through a high-quality leadership training program the year before) and a *personal goal* (invent a sandbox in which Feds and others who wanted to improve government could have ideas, escape the limitations of their employers' outdated assessments of them, and egg each other on to develop ways to create personal updrafts that could lead to improved mission delivery).

The original 10 have grown to about 375 people from government, local corporations and nonprofits, universities, and good government organizations. Their rank, which is not on display during the evening, ranges from senior executive to young Fed, with an occasional intern, although most participants tend to be mid-level. Attendance ranges from one to three dozen, although the average is about two dozen. The emphasis is on the practice of friendly collegiality and constructive conversation that can open mental or physical doors for participants. Events, mostly dinners, originally were held about four times per year but now occur more frequently. They are offered at the founder's cost, prepaid or on an honor system, depending on the extent to which restaurants with dedicated meeting spaces and decent food require prepayment. That setup has been found to remind participants that they are responsible for their performance, whatever the task (in this case, RSVP'ing, showing up, ensuring that the author recoups costs and the wait staff is adequately tipped, and so on). In four years, all participants have risen to these high expectations, and that enables SFF to continue.

As with all the other groups, guest speakers are invited to appear pro bono, and they do. The opportunity to talk about one's work with a group of Feds and colleagues from other sectors is appealing to many. The speaker lineup has varied widely, including such guests as Roz Kleeman, an extraordinarily accomplished former Fed now at George Washington University; Mike Frenz, who handled real estate transactions for the 2002 Winter Olympics and is now a vice president at Ginnie Mae; Brian Friel, a *National Journal* columnist who writes "Management Matters" for *Government Executive*; Chris Mihm, managing director of Strategic Issues at GAO (who also is looking at the intersection of bureaucracy and network); and many other talented, constructive individuals who are making a difference. Participants have found creative ways to leverage new relationships with speakers, as in the case when a senior State Department employee connected a visiting Russian with Mike Frenz to discuss Ginnie Mae business practices a few weeks after Mike's appearance.

A sentence in the *Wall Street Journal's* June 8, 2007, review of "Ocean's Thirteen" provides an apt comparison: "The director, Steven Soderbergh, and his large, cheerful cast have managed to make *the least possible movie that still resembles a movie* [italics added], as opposed to 'Ocean's Twelve,' which resembled nothing more than a ramble through European scenery" (Morgens-tern 2007, W2). This describes SFF. It is the least possible structure that can enable a rolling conversation about government and leadership, to which some

of the same people return again and again. Active membership revolves slowly as people take jobs in other cities, develop other interests in retirement, or get too busy at the office. Once, a project management leader who presides over monthly chapter dinners in Maryland was astounded by the fact that so many people who could not come RSVP'd "No" at Evite.com—and then proceeded to explain *why* not. He thought that this behavior (routine for SFF) signified a high level of interest.

Perhaps such interest springs from the fact that there is almost no focus in the human capital community on activating the untapped potential of long-time employees. This seems odd because many baby boomers will not retire within the next three years. It is as though OPM and agency heads do not believe that people continue to learn and grow in middle age. If that is true, then they overlook one piece of the solution to the retirement tsunami. In late 2006, Harvard professor Steve Kelman devoted an entire column to the damage done by supervisors who do not believe that people can change (Kelman 2006). Most agencies do not excel at talent management yet, and perhaps the lack of belief in people's ability to change is one reason why. It would benefit human capital practitioners to pay attention to specific management practices at various levels that either foster or destroy employee capacity-building, and then develop compelling stories that can be used to teach agency leaders how to mitigate the impact of supervisory underestimation of employee capability on talent management.

Recommendations for Agency Leaders

Each networked group described above has characteristics that can prompt new thinking and practical action by agency leaders. Two of many possible paths are outlined below.

Make More Room for High Performers

This recommendation would require substantial commitment and courage from all parties and would have corresponding transformative potential.

Host a discussion with the YGL executive team at the agency and encourage inexperienced new hires to become active YGL participants. *Commit* to an ongoing relationship with the latter, build rapport, and have periodic discussions about what they are learning, how they think it can be applied within the agency, and what they think are barriers to such application. *Follow* the barrier discussion as far as it goes. If, at some point, a need for dialogue about generational differences comes up, have a facilitated dialogue. Keep it professional and follow it as far as it goes. Everyone learns; everyone has to give a little. Executives and managers hear things they may not want to hear, but their understanding grows and they come to respect their workforce. Employees of all ages hear things *they* may not want to hear, but they get more savvy about how government works and thus come to respect agency leadership. *Develop* incremental solutions, not grand plans, that

support the mission and encourage self-starters to take more responsibility. *Coach and support* supervisors as they make adjustments. *Move* self-starters away from supervisors who cannot adjust.

Establish an Informal Leadership Development Mechanism

This recommendation is intended to complement formal agency leadership programs, not replace them. It arises from the knowledge that the selection process for any such program is imperfect, and people are missed—or, they “turn on” when it’s “too late.”

Agency human capital executives could put out a call for collegial employees who have demonstrated an ability to work across boundaries and with many different people, charter a workgroup, and task it with the development of a recommendation for the establishment of an agency-based networked group within a specific timeframe. Rather than handpicking representatives from each component, the networked group way would be to follow the energy, letting employees self-select. If they have the abilities described above, they will reach into every component on their own initiative. The workgroup could be instructed to travel to the departments of State and Education in order to gather information from YPro and CAL leaders, returning to the agency to work through it and brainstorm formats, programming, and all other aspects including group leadership during facilitated sessions. Programming content, and the extent to which a new group would be structured, would vary by agency culture and business challenges. A discussion of draft recommendations and questions with executive sponsors would allow the parties to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. After getting necessary buy-in at the chief executive officer (CXO) and program executive level and ensuring that the new leaders understood agency expectations and how to handle logistics, the executive sponsors would then mobilize internal communications to support publicity drafted by the new leaders. All employees should be encouraged to attend as they choose, and supervisors should be encouraged to enable their attendance. Executive sponsors would be well advised to form a permanent bond with group leaders and meet periodically, establishing a pipeline that connects employees with the chief human capital officer (CHCO) and provides the agency with another mechanism for implementing CHCO Council best practices as it invites employees to accelerate their own growth.

Conclusion

To focus on numbers or any other single characteristic of a networked group is to miss the point, which is that both newer and seasoned Feds are using their own time in very positive ways to develop abilities that accomplish results and add value in the workplace. To the extent that CHCOs and other CXOs are able

to see and respect such efforts, this presents them with an opportunity. People will see what their filters let them see. From one angle, any of the above could be seen as groups of people who are merely playing at leadership. But look at the outputs and preliminary outcomes that have been achieved primarily on employees' discretionary time: don't they speak to many current needs in government?

References

- Azaroff, Rachel. 2006. "Hire Me Already!" *Federal Computer Week*, October 9. Available at www.fcw.com/article96316-10-09-06-Print (accessed 10/22/07).
- "FEDtalk: Young Federal Workers." 2006. February 17. Available at www.federalnewsradio.com/index.php?hlpag=5&nid=35&sid=712178 (accessed 10/22/07).
- Hardy, Michael. 2006. "Megan Quinn and Steve Ressler: Accidental Organizers." *Federal Computer Week*, October 9. Available at <http://test.fcw.com/article96352-10-09-06-Print> (accessed 10/22/07).
- Kelman, Steve. 2006. "A Learning-Oriented Workplace Produces More Positive Achievements but Also More Mistakes." *Federal Computer Week*, December 18. Available at www.fcw.com/article97093-12-18-06-Print (accessed 10/22/07).
- Kettl, Donald F. 2006. *The Next Government of the United States: Challenges for Performance in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: The IBM Center for the Business of Government.
- Morgenstern, Joe. 2007. "Film Review." *Wall Street Journal*, W2, June 8.
- Walker, Richard W. 2007. "Government Taps the Power of Us." *Federal Computer Week*, May 21. Available at www.fcw.com/article102750-05-21-07-Print (accessed 10/22/07).