

# Lesson 1: The Role of HR Professionals in the Federal Workplace

## Course Overview

Welcome to the Introduction to HR Management course!

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the federal HR profession and the context in which HR work is conducted.

## Lesson Overview

This lesson, the Role of HR Professionals in the Federal Workplace, will introduce you to the roles and functions of HR professionals in the federal government.

In this lesson, you will learn to:

- Describe the role and value of HR professionals in the federal workplace
- Describe the historical evolution of the federal workplace
- Identify the phases of the HR Life Cycles
- Identify the federal HR functions (HR disciplines)

## Federal Employment Statistics

The U.S. federal civil service workforce includes all non-elected, non-military employees of the government's departments and agencies. The federal government employs nearly 2% of the entire United States workforce. <sup>1</sup>

HR professionals have a large part to play in ensuring the effective operation of the government as partners in building the skills, competencies, and knowledge of our federal workforce. Listed are some federal employment statistics to give you an idea of the scope of your role as an HR professional.

Federal Employment Statistics	
Employees in the federal civilian workforce	2,000,000+
Job postings per year	360,422
New hires per year	100,000+
Separations or retirements per year	60,000

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<sup>1</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/01/09/the-percent-of-employed-people-working-for-the-federal-government-is-at-the-lowest-level-on-record/?utm\\_term=.64a676525a8a](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/01/09/the-percent-of-employed-people-working-for-the-federal-government-is-at-the-lowest-level-on-record/?utm_term=.64a676525a8a)

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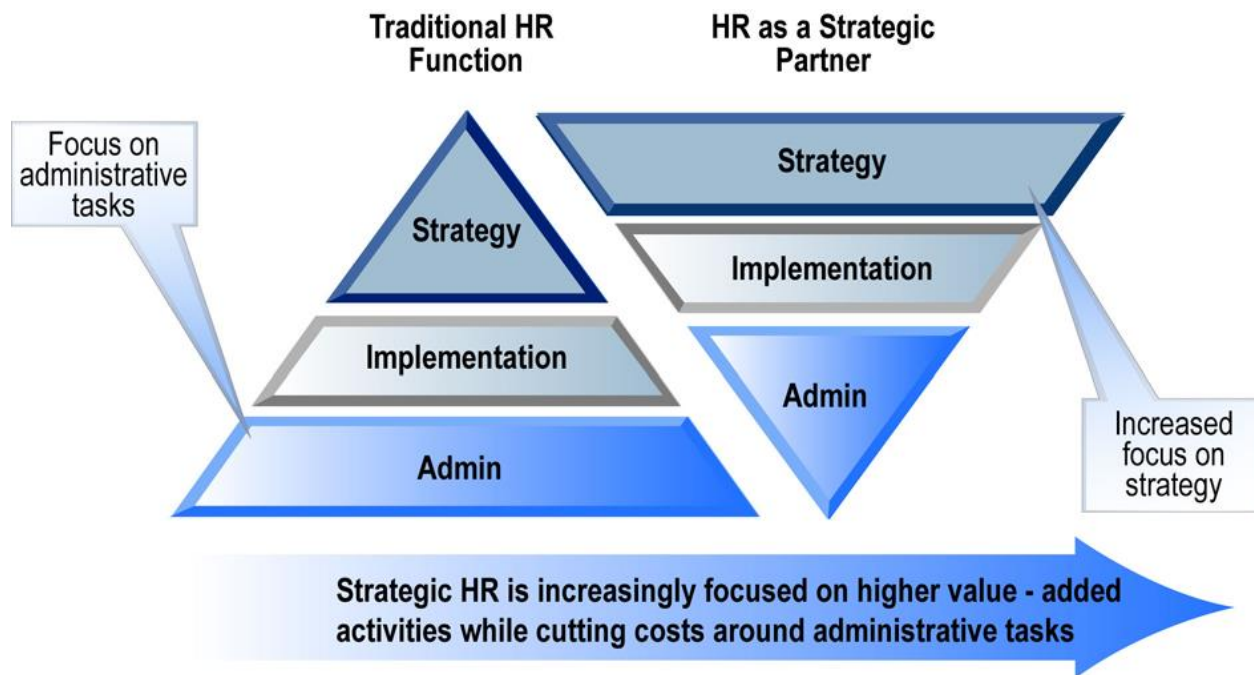
## Human Resource Management – An Emerging Role

Traditionally, the role of HR professionals has primarily been concerned with the hiring, onboarding, and separation of employees. These functions were largely process-oriented and transactional in nature. Today's HR professionals are expected to function as strategic partners.

The need for strategic human capital management, with its emphasis on achieving results, is part of a continuing evolution of traditional human resources management practices in government. The underlying expectation for these changes is that strategic human capital management will ensure agency mission requirements drive all HR activity.

As HR organizations evolve, fundamental changes are taking place with regard to how human resources are managed. Transforming HR implies inverting the process-oriented workload with strategic capability. Creating a strategic HR structure enables the HR function to participate as a strategic member tightly connected to the business rather than as a reactive and administrative function. This approach delivers the best value and service excellence to the organization and stakeholders (such as the public and applicants).

The graphic below is an example of the traditional HR function versus HR as a strategic partner.



## Voices of Experience

The table below describes how HR Specialists have put the concept of HR as a strategic partner into action.

HR Specialist
<p><b>[Abigail]</b></p> <p>I've worked with a particular hiring manager on a few occasions and she always complains about the quality of the applicants that we have been referring to her. The last time we worked together to fill a vacancy, I made sure to include some quality review activities. Once I received the online questionnaires completed by the applicants, I compared their resumes against their responses and adjusted the scores and placement on the certificate as appropriate. I also suggested we use an additional assessment tool to help increase the validity and quality of the candidates we referred. Since the position was going to require a lot of writing, we asked for writing samples.</p>
<p><b>[James]</b></p> <p>One of the hiring managers I was working with wanted to use both delegated examining and merit promotion procedures to fill a vacancy. I understand why he wanted to do this. He wanted to ensure that he cast the widest net possible and got the best candidates for the position. I feel that to be a better strategic partner, I can serve the hiring manger better if I advise him on the most effective and efficient recruitment sources based on historical hiring patterns for that position. In this case, I looked at the data about the unused rate for certificates referred using delegated examining procedures and found that the unused rate was very high, so I suggested we use recruiting under merit promotion procedures.</p>

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## History of the Federal Civilian Workforce

The following information describes some key points in history that have shaped today's federal workforce.

### 1828 – The Spoils System

The Spoils System was a practice where a political party, after winning an election, gave government jobs to its voters as a reward for working toward victory, and as an incentive to keep working for the party—as opposed to a system of awarding offices on the basis of some measure of merit independent of political activity.

The term was derived from the phrase "to the victor belong the spoils" by New York Senator William L. Marcy, referring to the victory of Andrew Jackson in the election of 1828. Jackson was not happy with the federal employees who had been around since the Washington administration and whom he considered "corrupt." In one year, he removed nearly 10% of government employees from their positions despite there being no evidence to support their removal. The Spoils System existed for five decades, until the assassination of U.S. President Garfield by a disappointed office seeker in 1881.

### 1883 - Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act

Two years after Garfield's assassination, reformers began demanding a civil service system, which resulted in the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883. This Act stipulated that government jobs should be awarded on the basis of merit or ability to perform the job rather than political connections or affiliations. The Act provided for the selection of government employees through competitive examinations and made it illegal to fire or demote government employees for political reasons. It also established a Civil Service Commission to administer the civil service of the United States federal government.

Before 1883, only 10% of the government's 132,000 civilian employees were placed under civil service with the rest at the disposal of the party power. Today, more than 90% of the 2.7 million federal civilian employees are covered by merit systems.

### 1978 - Civil Service Reform Act

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 abolished the Civil Service Commission and established in its place the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA), and the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB).

The law stipulated that agency heads could move career senior executives into any position for which they are qualified. It also:

- Established the merit system principles, which are designed to ensure fair and open recruitment and competition and employment practices free of political influence or other non-merit factors
- Established the prohibited personnel practices, which are employment-related activities that are banned in the federal workforce because they violate the merit system through

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some form of employment discrimination, retaliation, improper hiring practices, or failure to adhere to laws, rules, or regulations that directly concern the merit system principles

- Delegated authority of competitive personnel actions to agencies

### Did You Know?

#### **President Theodore Roosevelt – A Heart for Civil Service**

President Theodore Roosevelt fought to make strides for a merit based civil service system. He began with setting the foundation of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 and laid the foundations of the modern federal government during his seven years as President.

One of President Roosevelt's goals was the modernization, expansion, and reform of the federal government. As part of his administration, the Civil Service Commission drafted and implemented the foundations of the modern merit system. His reforms included:

- Definitions for "just cause" for which an employee could be dismissed
- Requirements for stricter compliance of the restrictions against political activity by federal officials
- Regulations forbidding disbursing officers from paying the salaries of persons illegally appointed to civil service positions
- The establishment of the modern job survey in the Federal Service
- Position-classification plan based on duties

### Federal HR Lifecycle

As with many other areas of operation, HR activities follow a cycle. The federal HR Lifecycle is divided into four phases, which follow the stages of employment.

#### Strategy

In the Strategy phase of the HR Lifecycle, agencies strategize, organize, and plan for managing their workforce. The Strategy phase focuses on policy that has two sub-functions:

- **HR Strategy** includes developing human resources and human capital strategies and plans; establishing human resources policies and practices; managing current and future workforce competencies; developing workforce plans; developing succession plans; managing the human resources budget; providing human resources and human capital consultative support; and measuring and improving human resources performance.
- **Organization and Position Management** designs, develops, and implements organization and position structures that create a high-performance, competency-driven framework that both advances the agency mission and serves agency human capital needs.

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## Acquire

In the Acquire phase, agencies recruit and hire employees. This includes:

- Developing a staffing strategy and plan
- Establishing an applicant evaluation approach
- Announcing the vacancy
- Sourcing and evaluating candidates against the competency requirements for the position
- Initiating pre-employment and on-boarding activities
- Hiring employees

## Sustain

Employees spend most of their time in the Sustain phase, and most HR systems and functions pertain to this phase, including performance management, employee development and engagement, benefits and compensation management, employee relations, and labor relations.

## Separate

In the Separate phase, employees depart from the federal service, usually for another job or to retire. The term “separation” should not be taken too literally. This phase is one of transition; “separating” employees may later return to federal service, and many of them and their family members or survivors receive retirement and other benefits. For example, they may continue to receive healthcare benefits.

Separation also involves knowledge transfer from departing employees, which can be facilitated using a variety of collaboration tools. Even if the separation is only a movement of an employee from one federal agency to another, agencies should have a process in place to facilitate knowledge transfer between the outgoing employee and his or her colleagues to ensure the continued success of the organization’s mission.

## Federal HR Functions

Now that you understand the HR Lifecycle, let’s look at the primary HR functions in the federal government.

### Workforce/Succession Planning

Workforce and succession planning is a multi-year approach to managing human capital. It is a proactive and systematic process, which aligns strategic planning, human capital, and budgeting to meet organizational goals and objectives through forecasting mission critical talent needs; analyzing current workforce and talent supply; and developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies to close gaps. It addresses issues such as workforce environmental concerns, the need to review functionality of jobs, workforce forecasting, career/occupation broadening, and the need to better utilize existing recruitment and retention strategies. Workforce planning is an excellent example of collaborative efforts between HR and Management.

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## Strategic Management of Human Capital

The strategic management of human capital is a critical component that lends to the effective and efficient operation of government. Strategic Human Capital Management (SHCM) is intended to help federal agency leaders to better manage their organizations' most important asset—their people. Federal agencies that acquire, develop, and retain high-performing employees with the appropriate skills and competencies are better able to respond to the needs of the public on a daily basis and in times of crisis.

## Personnel Actions

A personnel action documents most actions that are taken regarding an employee. These can include anything ranging from their initial appointment, duty station changes, performance awards, cost of living increases, separation, or transfers. Personnel actions also provide for mass realignments and organizational restructuring. Personnel actions are documented by an SF-50 and are usually stored in the employee's Official Personnel Folder.

## Employee Surveys

OPM oversees, conducts, and supports various government-wide and agency surveys. Results of these surveys inform government-wide human resources policy and agency-specific initiatives. This includes a mandatory annual employee survey and customized surveys to assess a wide range of human capital management areas. Additionally, agencies can also conduct their own surveys for a variety of purposes, including organizational assessments, climate surveys, onboarding surveys, and training needs surveys.

## Staffing

HR professionals assist with every level of staffing in the agencies of the federal government. This includes working with subject matter experts and hiring officials to develop job analyses, identifying critical competencies for recruitment, developing effective job opportunity announcements; creating and applying assessment tools to identify best-qualified candidates to hiring officials; and advising hiring managers on merit system principles in the hiring process.

## Position Classification

OPM issues classification and job-grading standards that provide occupational information and grading criteria for positions covered under the standard government-wide classification systems (i.e., General Schedule and Federal Wage System) after consulting with agencies. Agencies use these standards to determine the proper pay plan, occupational series, position title, and grade of each position. Classification is closely related to compensation in the federal government because, under the General Schedule, which includes white-collar occupations and the Federal Wage System, which covers trades, crafts, and labor occupations, the determination of a position's correct grade directly translates to a prescribed rate schedule for basic pay.

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## Compensation and Benefits

**Compensation** encompasses developing and implementing compensation programs, administering bonus and monetary awards programs, administering pay changes, managing time, attendance, leave and pay, and managing payroll.

**Benefits** entails establishing and communicating benefits programs, processing benefits actions, and interacting as necessary with third party benefits providers.

## Performance Management

Performance management is more than the end of year appraisal. It's about translating goals into results. Performance management focuses not only on individual employees, but also on teams, programs, processes, and the organization as a whole. Public agencies have a greater challenge to define and measure results than private sector organizations, whose results are almost exclusively tied to financial goals. Public agencies are also required to comply with complex regulations that govern their performance management programs.

## Labor Relations

Labor Relations involves working effectively with federal labor organizations, which represent over 1.1 million federal employees. It includes negotiating and administering labor contracts and collective bargaining agreements; managing negotiated grievances; and participating in negotiated third party proceedings.

## Employee Relations

HR practitioners are the best resource for supervisors and managers as they deal with employee performance or address related issues or concerns. Human resource professionals play a critical role in advising managers. Employee relations involves addressing employee misconduct, addressing employee performance problems, managing administrative grievances, providing employee accommodation, administering employees assistance programs, participating in administrative third party proceedings, and determining candidate and applicant suitability.

## Evaluation

Evaluation encompasses assessment of compliance with merit system principles, and supporting laws, rules, regulations, Executive Orders, and OPM standards, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of personnel policies, programs, and operations.

## Learning and Development

To assist in achieving an agency's mission and performance goals by improving employee and organizational performance, the law prescribes that,



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"the head of each agency, in conformity with this chapter, shall establish, operate, maintain, and evaluate a program or programs, and a plan or plans thereunder, for the training of employees in or under the agency by, in, and through government facilities and non-government facilities."

This includes tuition reimbursement programs, professional development, and targeted career training.

### Lesson Summary

Congratulations, you have completed Lesson 1: The Role of HR Professionals in the Federal Workplace.

In this lesson, you were introduced to the roles and responsibilities of HR professionals within the federal government. Now that you have completed this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the role and value of HR professionals in the federal workplace
- Describe the historical evolution of the federal workplace
- Identify the phases of the HR Life Cycle
- Identify the federal HR functions