Attracting & Hiring the Best & Brightest: Bridging Recruitment Gaps within the Federal Government.
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Executive Summary

Attracting and Hiring the Best and Brightest: Bridging Recruitment Gaps within the Federal Government.

Recruiting the nation’s best and brightest into the US Federal Government is a mission-critical function of national security importance. In practice, the recruitment process is dysfunctional. It evidences silence, rigidity, isolation, and denial by all involved.

The facts: Less than half of the federal workforce (42%) expresses confidence in the government’s ability to recruit people with the “right skills”. ¹ Worse, less than half of federal HR Specialists (47%) are positive about their own HR colleagues’ abilities to recruit people with the right skills for their agencies. And the OPM’s collective view of its own recruitment capabilities is only slightly higher.

The consistent statistically significant differences between the view of the federal workforce with the views of recruitment practitioners and the agency regulating recruitment practices since the federal viewpoint surveys started, suggests the latter have an overinflated view their recruiting capabilities.

Until the agencies arrests the silence, rigidity, isolation, and denial surrounding recruitment practices, the government’s general inability to recruit people with the “right skills” will remain a critical public concern to the American people it serves.

This paper is about peeling back the causes of the low scores of confidence. It exposes problems with HR’s recruiting practices and the systemic hiring technology maladies, and sets a course toward remedies.

The merit principles of appointment or promotion to positions in the Federal Civil Service through fair and open competition were codified into law in 1978 (5 U.S.C. §2301). It segmented the federal civil service into two basic position types: the ‘Competitive Service,’ and the ‘Excepted Service.’ The appointment or promotion to the former, requires the jobs to be advertised publically with applicants subject to a transparent screening, evaluation and competitive examination processes leading up to selection. While the latter, due to the job’s more demanding or specialist requirements, permits each agency to govern how its jobs are advertised and how candidates are screened, evaluated and competitively examined prior to selection. Both still follow merit selection principles.

Within the Federal Civil Service, the Competitive Service is the more common of the two position types accounting for about two-thirds of all positions. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sets policy and regulates the hiring practices for Competitive Service positions. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), a congressional agency, keeps all executive branch agencies in line with in management of the civil service. The Merit System Protection Board (MSPB), a judicial agency, settles all disputes.

The primary federal hiring authority through which the government may select from the widest pool of the nation’s best and brightest people to join the civil service is known as Competitive Examining Hiring Authority (CEHA). This is the hiring authority from which the most meritorious candidates throughout

¹ Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2015. Please note that all evidence, policy statements, factual claims and statistics cited in the Executive Summary are repeated in detail and are sourced or referenced within the body of this white paper.
the nation may be rated and ranked via the “rule of three” or “category rating” methods, after which any well-qualified preference eligible candidates are ranked within the selection list.

The Problems: Over the past 15 years, the use of the CEHA has declined from being used more than all other hiring authorities combined (>50%), to being used between 25% and 30% of the time. The issues hiring managers have with the CEHA process is that it is taking too long to deliver good candidates or that it delivers poor quality candidates. The CEHA processes practiced by HR staffers and recruiters are not agile enough to attract and select the best and brightest – often taking up to twelve months to fill a vacancy for specialists, and around six months for administrative positions. Out of frustration, hiring managers are often forced to fill vacancies with contractors which drives up agency budgets. And despite at least two other hiring authorities that exclusively hire returned war veterans, who account for just 1% of the population, over 35% of all CEHA appointments today are offered to veterans and other preference eligible candidates.²

While much has been written about why this is, and despite the reforms that have been mandated, federal hiring is still no better. But unlike almost all other analyses, this white paper finds that the problems causing the unacceptably lengthy time-to-hire and the poor candidate quality issues plaguing all agencies have nothing to do with the legal or regulatory framework governing CEHA, but by an absence of any real assessment and examination of a candidate’s skills, and the way in which many federal HR Specialists recognize preference eligibility status within the CEHA recruitment workflow processes.

This paper finds that during the well-intentioned efforts of federal agencies’ HR to try to speed up the selection process, some of the critical recruitment down-selecting stages like initial screening questions; initial resume evaluation; knowledge and skill assessments for minimal qualifications; and the final examination – are being skipped and joined into one technology assisted self-assessment conducted by the candidates themselves.

The skipping and joining of the recruitment down-selecting stages and allowing candidates to assess themselves fundamentally corrupts the federal CEHA recruiting process. It effectively permits all qualified and unqualified applicants automatic and immediate entry to the “examination”

² Please note that all evidence, policy statements, factual claims and statistics cited in the Executive Summary are sourced or referenced within the body of this white paper.
stage of the process. And when the raw scores (of what are too often just simple screening questions) are “transmuted” (as per OPM’s DEU guidelines to scores between 70 and 100), suddenly all unqualified applicants become just as eligible for the position as the best qualified applicant. And whether or not this is then coupled with the rules for preference eligible candidates, CEHA chokes and collapses.

Unfortunately, these federal hiring recruitment practices are widespread and are embedded within agencies’ automated hiring technologies – literally making it a systemic problem. In the absence of any real skills assessment process prior to the examination (which is also often absent in the down-selection process), too many unqualified preference eligible candidates become “certified” for the position by HR and served up to the hiring managers for selection. So, instead of speeding the process up, the embedded systemic shortcuts pollute and corrupt the process with unqualified applicants to the point of either slowing the hiring process down or stopping it completely or for it to be restarted again.

While initially applied to the CEHA, these shortcuts are often duplicated by federal staffers under other hiring authorities – detrimentally effecting the time-to-hire and quality of candidates applying for Excepted Service and Senior Executive Service positions as well. The practice also has a negative effect harming the general reputation of many well-qualified war veterans, who are mistakenly perceived as the cause of the problems and suffer prejudice in the workplace.

The problems in federal hiring are not just with the endemic habit of skipping and joining recruitment workflows or its enablement by agencies’ automated hiring technologies. The reluctance of HR to be actively involved in the screening and evaluation of applicants is equally matched by the reluctance of agency leadership and line managers to involve themselves and their teams in ensuring that the screening, evaluation and examination processes required in the selection process is done in accordance with the law and regulation. This white paper shows that participation of the hiring line managers is trending down. Both HR and the hiring line manager are losing control of each other in the recruitment process.

But the more serious implications of skipping or joining the legal and regulated separate recruitment steps in the federal CEHA hiring process is that it potentially exposes the government to a much wider legal liability in defending hiring decisions. When the CEHA workflow processes are not followed all applicants have cause to question federal CEHA hiring practices and file suit – not just those who may feel their preference eligibility status was overlooked or used to prejudice them.

**The Solutions:** Arresting and fixing the federal hiring process requires immediate political attention. It demands the uncompromising support and engagement of agency leaders and line managers. And for the short term at least, it requires ready and willing HCM industry partners.

Toward taking the first correctional steps this white paper includes four interim action items the executives of federal agencies must collectively pursue. These include:
1. Creating a Chief Recruitment Officer position. Recruiting professional specialist RECRUITERS into positions physically seated among management and staff of divisions, bureaus and offices.

2. Optimizing, reconfiguring, or replacing the old automated hiring technologies used for CEHA hiring so as to prevent skipping and joining the legally deliberate separated recruitment screening, evaluations and examining steps in CEHA hiring.

3. Developing commercial partnerships with two or three recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) firms to fill mission-critical vacancies with contractors and permanent (direct-hire) personnel.

4. Training of all existing HR Specialists involved in staffing in the arts and sciences of recruitment.

The white paper also includes Plans of Action checklists for the President, Congress & OPM.

Additionally, the solutions contained in this white paper will be supported by two series of 30 minute webinar tutorials and consulting roadshows about recruitment best-practices and guidelines.

1. In “Bridging Federal Recruiting Skills Gaps,” the webinars will show agency leaders how to work better with HR in the recruitment process, and show HR how CEHA best practices find and recruit better candidates faster.

2. In “Recruiting for Federal Mission-Critical Skills Gaps,” the webinars will demonstrate a disruptive assessment platform for small to large scale project-recruitment efforts seeking cybersecurity specialists; auditors; HR specialists; economists; procurement specialists; finance and accounting specialists; R&D scientists; and medical, nursing & healthcare specialists.

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CTEC is a reputable leader at combining people, technology and processes to deliver simplified solutions to complex government problems.

CTEC is the federal government’s sole provider of a rapid project-recruitment and assessment gaming technology platform. It uses unique attraction and skill evaluation innovations, offering a 100% quality-of-hire and time-to-hire satisfaction guarantee to federal government agencies.
Losing the Best and Brightest!

When one reads a headline of an article in Government Executive stating "The Federal Government is Losing the War for the Best and Brightest," what exactly could that mean? That it’s not hiring anyone? No! It is hiring people. In fact, in 2011, 2012, 2013 & 2014, it had 140,472; 132,267; 99,219; 131,529 & 160,878 new people respectively in their first-year of federal employment. The headline means: the government is not competitive or competent enough to know how to attract or recruit the best.

Intelligence, competence and confidence are particularly important qualities to have in our federal government workforce. The people in federal agencies approve and issue our tax returns. They ensure the safety of our airports, borders and workplaces. They arm and equip our soldiers. They verify benefits, and lead almost all innovations made in science and technology. They help keep the lights on. And we expect them to keep any personal identifying information data they collect from us safe and secure. It is in the public interest that the federal government recruits the nation’s best and brightest.

The President’s Management Agenda (PMA) concerning federal employees and the working culture of the Administration includes these priority initiatives:

- Enable agencies to hire the best talent from all segments of society.
- Build a world-class federal management team starting with the senior executive service.
- Create a culture of excellence and engagement to enable higher performance.

The intent of the PMA is to improve the quality of federal talent employed into the civil service.

But for those of us who work in human capital management and study issues facing the federal government and its workforce know that the cause of the concern behind the above headlined statement are these: the poorly managed Competitive Examining Hiring Authority (CEHA) – the widest hiring authority coded into law for the federal government to actually hire the nation’s best and brightest; and the unacceptable time it takes to hire a federal employee – regardless of which hiring authority is used.

In the high-in-demand and short-on-supply labor market, the war for talent is won by organizations executing the best and fastest recruitment processes. This is why the lengthy and poorly executed federal hiring process effectively force federal agencies to often settle for whoever hasn’t yet been hired – those who comparatively possess perhaps second, third or

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4 Fedscope Data (using Sept 2015 cube)

5 The President’s Management Agenda: People & Culture Overview.
lower levels of intellect or competency. Obviously such a perception is unacceptable to the American people for whom the government exists and serves. It is also unacceptable for the best and brightest who may one day aspire to join the federal workforce. It also adversely affects the general morale and confidence the federal workforce needs to have to function. And it perhaps even detrimentally effects the perception of a federal worker’s future employability outside of it. No one benefits.

Federal Hiring Reform Actions

President Obama’s widely heralded Hiring Reforms in May of 2010⁶, was a topical remedy for the many maladies of federal hiring contained in the GAO’s 2008 testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management. It was noted to Congress that federal hiring “too often does not meet the needs of (1) agencies in achieving their missions; (2) managers in filling positions with the right talent; and (3) applicants for a timely, efficient, transparent, and merit-based process. In short, the federal hiring process is often an impediment to the very customers it is designed to serve,”⁷ and listed the six most significant problems⁸ which the 2010 “Hiring Reforms” then tried to address.

1. Passive recruitment strategies.
2. Poor and insufficient workforce planning.
3. Unclear job vacancy announcements.
5. Imprecise candidate assessment tools.
6. Ineffective use of existing hiring flexibilities.

In the Hiring Reforms Memorandum, the President encouraged agencies: to eliminate the use of requiring essays written against KSA’s; to engage the hiring line managers for whom the candidates would be working; for hiring managers to collaborate more actively with agency HR Specialists in the recruitment process; and for HR Specialists to adopt the Category Ranking method in the selection process.

Shortly after, the President’s Hiring Reforms the Partnership for Public Service and Grant Thornton published a report named “Seven Obstacles to a First Class Federal Workforce.”⁹ It documented the collective opinions of the federal government’s 70 leading CHCO’s and HR Directors. The biggest obstacle noted was how the government needed to recruit its workforce. The major contributors to this obstacle was the “arcane federal hiring system,” a lack of confidence in the hiring capabilities of their HR staff, and “insufficient resources are being devoted to training.”

Despite the President’s Hiring Reforms and OPM’s subsequent quarterly “Action Plan Summary – Enabling Agencies to Recruit and Hire the Best Talent,” no funding was or has since been allocated to support knocking this obstacle over. And it shows. In the government’s own “Hiring the Best” initiative

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⁶ Presidential Memorandum: Improving the federal recruitment and hiring process. May 2010.
⁷ GAO Testimony: Transforming Federal Recruiting and Hiring Efforts. May 2008. See p.3
⁸ Ibid. p.4
⁹ Closing the Gap: Seven Obstacles to a First Class Federal Workforce. Partnership for Public Service & Grant Thornton. August 2010.
on Performance.gov, the Q4 2015 update\textsuperscript{10}, evidences that: less than half of all managers are getting involved in the recruitment process and is trending downward.

Ever since the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has used the annual federal employee viewpoint survey (FEVS) to find levels of confidence in each agency’s ability to recruit appropriately competent people for each of their respective agencies, less than half of most agencies workforces have positive levels of confidence\textsuperscript{11}. Even less than half of OPM’s workforce is positive\textsuperscript{12} about OPM’s ability to recruit the right talent for itself! In the 2015 FEVS in October, 47\% Federal Government’s entire workforce of HR Specialists are positive about their work unit’s ability to recruit people with the right skills, while only 42\% of all federal employees are positive about their agency’s ability to recruit good people.\textsuperscript{13}

Another symptom of the continuingly poor hiring practices is that since the Hiring Reform Memo, the percentage of new hires who elected to drop out of the federal workforce before the end of their first year in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015 was 31\%, 30\%, 33\%, 24\% & 24\% respectively!

\textbf{The Inherent Urgency}

The federal government, more than any other sector or industry, has been patently aware of its aging workforce. For the past 3 years, 10,000 baby-boomers have been retiring from the wider national workforce each day. But in the federal workforce, as of March 2015, over 28\% of the 2 million federal

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\textsuperscript{10} See slide 20 of the Progress Update in People and Culture on Performance.gov.
\textsuperscript{11} FEVS Government Management Report. See page 40.
\textsuperscript{12} OPM’s FEVS responses to “Does OPM recruit well? See Worksheet Q21_Part_2.
\textsuperscript{13} Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2015
\textsuperscript{14} Fedscope Data: Annual (1yr>Separations) / [(1yr>Employees)+(1yr>Separations)] x 100

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employees are over 55 many of whom are overdue to retire, and a further 17% are over 50 and eligible to retire anytime in the 5 years.\textsuperscript{15}

The global economic crisis in 2008, and the slower than expected economic growth, has caused many aged workers to stay working. But as the economy continues to improve, naturally, the exodus of federal retirees will accelerate. This means that to at least maintain the current federal workforce levels by replacing federal retirees (and while accommodating the first year new-hire drop-out rate), the federal government needs to be recruiting more than 250,000 new personnel annually for the next five to 10 years. This is just the minimal federal hiring requirement to enable agencies at current workforce levels!

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Federal_Employees_as_of_March_2015.png}
\caption{Federal Employees as of March 2015}
\end{figure}

If the status quo of recruiting in the federal government is as good as it can get, the federal government and the nation is on a collision course to chaos. For example: in 2011, OMB, GAO, OPM and the CHCO Council identified six critical government-wide skills gaps (one of which was the “human resources specialist”). However, in an update to this list in 2015, the GAO catalogues nearly two-dozen,\textsuperscript{16} and counting.

\section*{Getting to the Root Cause of the Federal Hiring Problem}

The federal government’s actual performance data and the federal workforce’s collective opinions both evidence that the federal government has lacked the effective skills and resources to recruit the best and brightest for a long time already. This same situation provoked the same conclusions in 2004.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Fedscope Data: Workforce Age.
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\textsuperscript{16} The GAO Report to Congress: The High-Risk Series Update See p.123. February 2015
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Here we are more than a decade later. And despite a long list of HCM expert diagnoses and prescriptions since 2004, cited and footnoted in this white paper, the “sickness” within the body of federal HR practices evidently still exists. It begs the question: is it embedded institutionally within federal HR practices from OPM out and into agency DEUs? The evidence suggests it is.

A Merit System Protection Board study published early this year is the closest any government report has come toward suggesting that it is an institutional problem. One that exists within the DEUs themselves. The study: “The Impact of Recruitment Strategy on Fair and Open Competition for Federal Jobs,” produces evidence to suggest the federal hiring malpractices have an adverse psychological effect within those presumed to be most knowledgeable and compliant with the federal hiring process (HR Specialists and their DEU Managers). It also points to the fact that poor federal hiring practices are further enabled by the automated hiring technologies that support them.

In 2010, the Partnership for Public Service also published an industry study on the contemporary institutional problems and weaknesses of federal hiring highlighting many of the same problems.

Analyzing Federal Hiring in Practice

Congress intended appointment to the civil service through competitive examination to be the norm, and that placement of positions in the excepted service is, as the name itself indicates, an exception to that norm, to be undertaken only upon a finding of necessity.

Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity. These are the principles behind CEHA.

There is no doubt that the CEHA method worked well for a while with CEHA accounting for more than 50% of all federal hiring prior to 2000. Then two things happened: lobbies representing war veterans were successful in pushing for the creation of two new hiring authorities specifically for veterans; and automated hiring technologies emerged and adopted by federal agencies to help manage the accelerating volume of applicants – many of whom were returning veterans. The attention and accommodations

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19 Ibid. p.41-42
veterans naturally received from political appointees in federal agencies throughout the Bush Administration is echoed still by those in the Obama Administration while the United States continues the wars it has been engaged in since 2001. This reality has had an impact within the HR bureaucracy, its overall hiring attitudes and practices with respect to veterans, and the technologies deployed to support and protect HR’s internal workflows and processes.

Federal HR Specialists have been under pressure to avoid trouble from veterans lobbies and their political appointed allies. As automated hiring technologies have been introduced, they have been configured to remove any errors of human subjectivity in each step in the hiring process, theoretically making them fairer for applicants, and have protected the HR staffing specialist who might otherwise show a prejudice or make a down-selection error and face a political or bureaucratic firing squad. With the automated hiring technology enabled candidate self-assessment process, federal staffers are now barely involved in the down-selection process at all. This is the problem.

Federal Hiring Authorities

There are many authorities through which a federal employee may be hired. These include:

- CEHA – Competitive Examination Hiring Authority
- VEOA – Veterans Employment Opportunity Act
- PP – Pathways Program (formerly Federal Career Intern Program)
- VRA – Veteran Reemployment Act
- Peace Corp Volunteers
- Presidential Management Fellows
- SCEP & STEP – Student Career Experience Programs
- 30 Percent Disabled Veterans
- DHA – Direct Hire
- Excepted Schedule A

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27 5CFR 315.605 Appointment of former ACTION Volunteers.
29 5 CFR §213.3401.
30 5 CFR §316.402 (b)(4).
32 5 C.F.R. §213.3102 & Excepted Service Policy.
Regardless which authority is used, the principles of hiring the best based on merit always apply. Each hiring authority simply limits the types or source of applicants from which selections are made.

Historical federal hiring data shows that the number of non-CEHA hiring authorities being used is expanding, while use of the open and public CEHA is shrinking.33

What is indisputable is that CEHA hiring opens federal employment to the largest candidate pool possible and enables the government to indeed hire nation’s best and brightest. From 1998 to 2001, CEHA authority hires accounted for more than 50% of federal hiring methods. But since the introduction of the VEOA (in 2000), FCIP and VRA authorities (both in 2001), the CEHA method has declined and hovered around 30% since 2005.34 And perhaps more significantly, since the wider adoption of technologies being used in the selection process since the introduction of the new hiring authorities exclusively for veterans, the number of veterans hired through CEHA had jumped to 35% in 2012.35

The obvious question here is: If only 1% of the nation’s workforce are veterans and there are at least two federal hiring authorities exclusive to veterans, why are 35% of all federal CEHA hires veterans?

Hiring well-qualified veterans into positions is a good thing. But it is not good for veterans, nor for the government if any candidate, let alone an unqualified preference-eligible, self-assesses themselves as qualified and is placed on a Certificate of Eligibles for selection without having gone through an objective assessment to determine if they may be examined where their knowledge and competencies for the role must be scored, rated and ranked accordingly. Even the Competitive Service Act 201536, which allows agencies to recycle Certificate of Eligibles for other similar vacancies (and which is currently awaiting the President’s signature), won’t fix this problem.

Again, the How & Why federal recruiters skip and join the legally coded down-selection processes is rooted in the colliding pressures HR Specialists are placed under to speed up the recruitment process and to accommodate our returning veterans of war. Ironically, while the automated hiring technologies are there to help achieve both, they only embed the problems systemically and allows HR Specialists to avoid any professional down-selection decisions.

The Common Atypical CEHA Hiring Authority Workflow

A candid response to an off-the-record question to any HR Specialist or HR Manager involved in the CEHA hiring process solicits the following general description of how federal CEHA hiring is practiced:

1. Opening the job: At the point of opening a vacancy on behalf of the hiring line manager for whom the selected candidate will be working, the HR Specialists in charge of the hiring process uses the position description to craft and load up a handful of questions to test the level of knowledge, skills and experience a potential candidate may have.

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33 CPDF Data
34 CPDF Data.
36 Competitive Services Act of 2015

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2. **Advertising the job:** They then post the job opportunity announcement to USAJOBS.gov inviting candidates to apply, and may leave it open for two to four weeks, generally.

3. **Selection process:** Unless candidates self-select themselves out of the role, they can easily game the questionnaires and self-select themselves in as meeting the minimum qualifications. Under the law for Competitive Service positions, all candidates that meet the minimum qualifications, become eligible for “examination” and selection to the role – subject to the rating and ranking rules for preference eligible candidates. So to save time, the HR Specialist also adds scores’ weights to the selective factor questions, so that the self-selection in or out of the Q&A process to find the minimally qualified, doubles as the examination process as well. The shortcut for the HR Specialist here is that he or she need not have reviewed a resume or conducted a quality review at all.

The HR Specialists then hopes that no unqualified preference-eligible candidate has gamed themselves into the examination (because even if they get 0% in the examination, they must be hired). If they have, the HR Staffing Specialist then hopes that a very qualified preference-eligible candidate has also applied and sticks around long enough to take the job if offered. But they often don’t.

4. **Making the Hire:** Hiring Managers are issued the list of candidates from which they need to make a selection (the ‘certificate of eligibles’). When a veteran is at the top of the list and not hired, a written justification not to hire them must be filed. If they have, the HR Staffing Specialist then hopes that a very qualified preference-eligible candidate has also applied and sticks around long enough to take the job if offered. But they often don’t.

4. **Making the Hire:** Hiring Managers are issued the list of candidates from which they need to make a selection (the ‘certificate of eligibles’). When a veteran is at the top of the list and not hired, a written justification not to hire them must be filed, and approved before they may be passed over or have the job re-advertised. The job cannot be advertised again for at least another month, at which time the same hiring practice is applied again with more fingers crossed. And anyone they do hire must occupy the role for at least three months before they can be “promoted” or moved into another role or terminated within the one year probationary period.

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37 Read “Fixing Federal Hiring: Deus Ex Machina” by former DHS CHCO Jeff Neal for more information.
38 As per OPM’s DEU Handbook. Using the Transmutation Tables referenced in Appendix J.
The Legal CEHA Recruitment Workflow

The Institutional and Technical Problems with Federal Hiring

Since the elimination of KSAs in 2010, both OPM and the MSPB have been aware that up to 90% of agencies’ HR Specialists are relying on automated hiring technologies to combine the evaluating minimum qualifications step with the competitive examination step.\(^{39}\)

The two legal and regulatory business rules the automated hiring technologies, including OPM’s USA Staffing software, follow to produce certificates of eligibles are these:


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1. Each applicant who meets minimum requirements for entrance to the examination and who is rated 70 points or more in the examination is eligible for appointment.\(^{40}\)

2. Applicant points rating rules as per the Transmutation Tables which convert raw scores equal or greater than zero obtained by applicants during any tests, to ratings between 70 and 100.\(^{41}\)

Federal recruiters and their automated hiring technologies confuse and conjoin the scores they give for the “minimum requirements for entrance” stage for the “examination” stage. This means anyone able to self-assess themselves as possessing the minimum requirements is already guaranteed a minimal score of 70 – even if they score 0% in any assessment of their competencies. And, if they are a preference eligible? There is nothing the HR Specialist can do…they are “just doing their job.”! This common practice adversely affects both the Rule of Three and the Category Ranking selection processes.

Of course, it’s not the fault of the automated hiring technology. The fault lies within the legally indefensible federal hiring workflow processes being applied, and the premature application of the transmutable score tables which the automated hiring technologies have been programmed to compute. Garbage in, garbage out!

While agency HR often point to the cited laws and regulations as the prime cause and problem with the competitive hiring process, the empirical evidence suggests it is not. The net effect of federal staffers using automated hiring technology to take shortcuts toward avoiding their justified professional intervention in the recruitment process is in fact unprofessional. This abdication of responsibility causes quality to suffer, it embeds the problem, and neutralizes the real value and purpose of any recruiting service. It adversely affects overall growth of the intellect and competency of the agency’s talent, and the agency’s performance meeting its mission.

The cloaks of silence, isolation, rigidity and denial, within which federal HR maintain these existing hiring practices, one can only conclude that federal hiring practices are, by definition, dysfunctional. It is corrupting the principles of open competition, and the federal government’s ability to attract and secure the best and brightest competitively.

The fact that OPM’s automated hiring technology, USA Staffing – used by more than 70% of all federal agency staffers\(^{42}\), has been complicit in and has enabled the current hiring practices, at least provides most agency HR departments a level of protection and cover from blame until now.

This unfortunate legacy potentially exposes the government to litigation difficult to defend. Agencies, the President, Congress and OPM must act to fix this immediately.

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\(^{40}\) 5 CFR 337.101(a).
\(^{41}\) OPM’s DEU Handbook. See Appendix J.
\(^{42}\) Read “Bigger is not Better for OPM” by former DHS CHRO Jeff Neal. July 30, 2015.
Winning the ‘War for the Best and Brightest’

Analogous to winning this “war”, agencies need soldiers with the skills and willingness to win and leaders who arm them with the leadership, intelligence and the necessary tools of trade to win.

To win, each agency’s executive office needs to embrace a new approach - a new set of operating principles towards effective recruitment.

Most importantly, this is a war each agency leader knows he or she must win. Leaders are accountable for meeting the mission. The passage of FITARA now makes every agency CIO solely accountable for all the systems and technical assets their agency uses – including the HR technologies or lack thereof used by their agency.

Arresting and fixing the federal hiring process requires immediate political attention, the uncompromising support and engagement of agency leaders and line managers, and ready and willing HCM industry partners.

Toward taking the first correctional steps this white paper includes four interim action items the executives of federal agencies must pursue. These include:

1. Creating a Chief Recruitment Officer position. Recruiting professional specialist recruiters into positions seated physically inside and among management and staff of divisional, bureau and the office lines of business. *(Secretary Carter’s recent announcement to create the Chief Recruiting Officer position for DOD[^44] is the first step in this process for DOD.)*

2. Optimizing, reconfiguring, or replacing the old automated hiring technologies used for CEHA hiring so as to prevent skipping and joining federal recruitment screening, evaluations and examining steps. *(HHS CIO Frank Baitman’s presentation at the 2015 FedTalks Conference[^45] listing Federal Hiring Processes as the government’s first priority of “Embracing Change in Federal IT” is another positive indicator that the federal CIO Council is already taking this problem very seriously.)*

3. Developing commercial partnerships with two or three recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) firms to fill mission-critical vacancies with contractors and permanent (direct-hire) personnel.

4. Training of all existing HR Specialists in the arts and sciences of professional recruitment.

[^43]: Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act Overview.
Fixing Federal Recruitment Together

To quickly and effectively action and embed solutions toward allowing the federal governments to succeed in winning the war for the best and brightest, this white paper lays out a solution engagement approach via two series of webinars, as outlined below; and mutually exclusive plans of action for Federal Agencies, OMB, Congress, and OPM, as outlined in the Summary Conclusions and Recommendations section.

CTEC invites government and industry to engage in solutions to federal hiring discussions over two series of 30 minute government webinars and agency roadshow events.

1. The first is a four part series called, “Bridging Federal Recruiting Skills Gaps.” This series is primed for agency executives, line managers, HR, and IT.
   
   Beginning in April 2016, these webinars show agency leaders how to work better with HR in the recruitment process, show HR how CEHA best practices can find and recruit better candidates faster, and show IT how to fix their agency automated hiring technologies.

2. The second will be a six part series called “Recruiting for Federal Mission-Critical Occupations.” This series is primed for agency executives, MCO hiring managers.
   
   These webinars will demonstrate a new disruptive assessment platform. Webinar participants will witness the magic of “recruitment gaming” as we identify some of the nation’s best and brightest for the following mission-critical occupations:
   
   - cybersecurity specialists
   - auditors
   - human resource recruitment specialists
   - economists
   - procurement specialists
   - finance and accounting specialists
   - R&D scientists; and
   - medical, nursing & healthcare specialists

For more information, reference the GAO’s and the MSPB’s own federal HR management analysis and hiring best practice reports and studies.46

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46 For example: GAO’s Improving Federal Employee Engagement & MSPB’s List of Studies.
Summary Conclusions & Recommendations

The Federal Government of the United States cannot confidently assert to the American people that it is attracting, recruiting and retaining a workforce with the intelligence and competencies that are at least equal to the wider national workforce, nor superior to other countries’ national workforces either.

Unfortunately, the cited Government Executive article is correct: The federal government IS losing the war for best and brightest. Worse, it has been losing the fight for a very long time. While the Executive and Legislative branches have each made progressive efforts to improve the federal hiring process, being unaware of the root causes, their remedies have been topical and ineffective.

The colliding pressures on HR Specialists to accommodate the needs of veterans and quickly move applicants through the recruitment process has pushed HR to taking shortcuts outside of the legally mandated hiring processes. When these hiring practices are coupled with an over-reliance on automated hiring technology predominated by OPM’s USA Staffing system, it should be no surprise past reforms have been ineffective.

The four rules symptomatic of dysfunctional families: isolation; silence; rigidity; and denial - applies to the OPM and its network of too many agency DEUs. It is why it has been so easy to conceal, and so difficult to reveal.

Regardless of the extent of the dysfunction, the fact is federal CEHA hiring is in critical condition. If CEHA is to remain the best and fairest hiring authority for the government to hire the nation’s best and brightest competitively, action is required.

A checklist of recommendations for Federal Agencies, the President & OMB, Congress and OPM are listed below.

Recommendations for Federal Departments & Agencies

The corrective measures agencies must make are clear. This is not about rearranging deck-chairs. Federal departments and agencies leaders need to be decisive and uncompromising about finding the money and getting behind and driving this change. Begin by creating a new Chief Recruitment Officer position with the purpose of instructing and ensuring the agency’s DEU staffing department is transformed into a professional recruitment division possessing all the hallmarks of a competitive center of recruitment excellence and commercial best-practices. Then:

1. Seek outside help optimizing the automated hiring technologies used for CEHA. This may mean customizing, configuring or procuring: talent acquisition systems; valid assessments tools, tests and systems, & onboarding systems.
2. Seek outside help to recruit professional recruiters to the division and get them DEU certified.
3. Seek outside help training all existing willing and able DEU-certified HR Staffing Specialists in the arts and sciences of professional recruiting and monitor their performance.
4. Develop a commercial partnership with three or four private sector recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) firms familiar with federal hiring processes to be on standby to fill urgent short term positions and/or difficult permanent positions when required.

Recommendations for the President & OMB

To help OPM focus on its core mission without conflict of interest and toward removing a sector regulator from also competing with the private sector, our recommendations are for the President to issue an Executive Order for OMB to execute that includes:

1. Sell or spin-off OPM’s software assets, like USA Staffing.
2. Sell or spin-off OPM’s consulting services business units.
3. Use the sale proceeds of 1 & 2 (or find additional funding) to the support and execution of all the above recommendations for federal departments and agencies.

Recommendations for Congress

In 1978, Congress made “fair and open competition” a part of the first merit system principle, codified at 5 U.S.C. §2301. It also charged OPM with its core mission of crafting regulations and policies to implement the merit system and to oversee agencies’ hiring practices. OPM also administers federal pay, retirement and health and life insurance systems.

Today, Congress needs to ensure OPM concerns itself with its core mission. But most importantly, it needs to ensure OPM permanently removes itself from areas that cause a conflict of interest with its core mission. Currently, OPM competes with the private sector selling human capital software and services to the federal agencies which it regulates in the absence of such restrictions in breach of anti-trust violations, the Economy Act and Clinger-Cohen.

Some of these recommendation are items that can be managed by Executive Order and OMB. However, only Congress may code into law the necessary prohibitions to ensure OPM remains clear of its several conflicts of interest and keeps a permanent focus on its core mission. Therefore, the recommendations to Congress include:

1. Instruct OPM to focus on its mission and add value to the human resources departments of federal agencies. Particularly:
   a. Analyze the annual FEVS data and provide useful workforce management advice to agency leaders and Congress
   b. Recruiting best practices: Assist any and all hiring reforms with proactive best-practice advice
   c. Make recommendations to the relevant House and Senate committees on any workforce related matters
2. Prohibit OPM from competing against the private sector in the sale of human capital software – forcing the sale or spin-off of all software assets, like USA Staffing and USA Performance.
3. Prohibit OPM from competing against the private sector in the sale of human capital consulting services – forcing the sale or spin-off of all consulting service business units.

**Recommendations for the Office of Personnel Management**

To ensure the above plan for agencies and the government’s universal compliance with the merit principles and open competition is universal, OPM should order, under its authority to do so in 5CFR 330.503, for agencies to:

1. Immediately optimize their automated hiring technologies in compliance with CEHA hiring workflow processes, including measures preventing federal hiring malpractice.

2. Immediately recruit and resource a new cadre of HR Specialists with professional recruiting skills; provide professional recruitment training to appropriate existing staff, and develop commercial relationships with several RPO services.

3. Take steps to create a new job classification for these recruitment specialists. One that rewards them with aggressive monthly recruitment frequency performance incentives.

4. Request the OPM OIG to start an investigation after 90 days, on OPM’s own progress with respect to the orders 1, 2 & 3 above.

To enable agencies to recruit the necessary people to fill mission-critical roles, OPM should exercise its government wide authority under 5 U.S.C. Section 3304 and 5 CFR Part 337, Subpart B to extend the period of Direct Hire Authority and Excepted Service position classification status to all positions recognized in the GAO’s February 2015 Report to Congress: “The High-Risk Series Update” under “Strategic Human Capital,” including all government-wide skills gap positions, as previously recognized by the CHCO Council Working Group in 2012.

Some of which include: specialist managers; human resources specialists and recruiters; cybersecurity specialists; telecommunications specialists; contract specialists; correctional officers; oil and gas facility inspectors; health industry auditors; accounting and finance specialists; economists; and the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) functional community.
Appendices:

The Federal Hiring Solutions Webinar & Roadshow Series

1. Bridging Federal Recruiting Knowledge & Skills Gaps

The four webinars in this series will begin the process of embedding these essential operating principles for effective federal recruiting:

  A job for “recruiters” not “staffers.” What’s the difference and why it’s important.
  - **Who should attend?** Senior Agency Leadership Executives & Senior HR Leaders
  - **When?** Thursday April 21, 2016 @ 1pm ET

  Taking control: The importance of modernizing automated hiring technologies.
  - **Who should attend?** Senior Agency Leadership Executives, OCIO & OCHCO Leaders
  - **When?** Wednesday April 27, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Federal Recruiting Practices: Part 3. Down Selecting Candidates to the Competitive Examination.**
  The how and when to rate, score, and rank the better qualified candidates.
  - **Who should attend?** OCIO & OCHCO Leaders, HRIT & HR Specialists
  - **When?** Thursday May 5, 2016 @ 1pm ET

  Client control. Candidate control.
  - **Who should attend?** OCHCO Leaders, HRIT & HR Specialists
  - **When?** Thursday May 12, 2016 @ 1pm ET
2. Recruiting to Fill Federal Mission-Critical Occupations

Webinar participants will have a window into the “gaming” platform to witness its magic as we identify the nation’s best and brightest from the following occupations:

- **Hiring the nation’s best technical and cybersecurity specialists**
  - Who should attend? Agency CIOs CTOs CISOs Deputies & IT Managers
  - When? Thursday May 19, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best buyers and procurement specialists**
  - Who should attend? Agency CAOs Deputies & Senior Acquisition Managers
  - When? Thursday May 26, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best recruiters and human resource specialists**
  - Who should attend? Agency CHCOs Deputies & HR Managers
  - When? Thursday June 2, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best economists & auditors**
  - Who should attend? Treasury Agency Executives, Agency OIGs & Deputies
  - When? Thursday June 9, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best finance and accounting specialists**
  - Who should attend? Agency CFOs & Deputies
  - When? Thursday June 16, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best research and development scientists**
  - Who should attend? DOD & DOE Agency Executives and Scientific Program Managers
  - When? Thursday June 23, 2016 @ 1pm ET

- **Hiring the nation’s best medical, nursing & healthcare specialists**
  - Who should attend? DOD, HHS & VA Agency Executives and Medical Program Managers
  - When? Thursday June 30, 2016 @ 1pm ET
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Mr. Davidson’s career has centered on the industrial functions of public relations and human resources. From coordinating all PR for the United Nations in the South Pacific – some 30 years ago, today he directs collaborative efforts for CTEC to improve the performance of US federal agencies and increasing the human capital of their workforces.

For the past 15 years, Mr. Davidson has led sales and marketing for leading human capital management technology and services companies. His clients have included most of the Cabinet level Departments and many large and small Independent Agencies.

Mr. Davidson has also managed the sales and delivery of permanent and contract recruitment services for the Australian Federal & the New South Wales and Victorian State Governments at Hudson, Australia’s leading personnel contracting firm to government. In 2000, at Australia’s leading technology recruitment firm, Mr. Davidson was recognized as Australia’s best IT recruitment sales and delivery professional.

Mr. Davidson holds an M.B.A. from Charles Sturt University, and a Bachelor’s degree in Communication from Mitchell College.

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