A looming retirement wave and stiff competition from the private sector are prompting state and local government agencies to revisit their talent recruitment strategies. According to a 2016 Center for State and Local Government Excellence report, 17 percent of state and local government employees altered the age they expect to retire — 25 percent of those who are 55 or older now expect to retire sooner. Additionally, 54 percent of personnel executives reported higher levels of retirement in 2015 than 2014.

As highly skilled, veteran employees head for the exit, government agencies struggle to attract millennials who are projected to represent 75 percent of the workforce by 2030. Resource-strapped and often hierarchical in structure, many agencies find it tough to compete with private sector perks. Lower entry-level pay, a cumbersome hiring process and challenges meeting evolving job expectations also make it increasingly difficult for the public sector to lure fresh talent.

The good news is the market is in the midst of a transformation. According to a survey of members of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources and the National Association of State Personnel Executives, 77 percent of governments hired new staff in 2016 — an increase from 27 percent in 2013.

It's clear the time is ripe for today's state and local government agencies to reinvent their approach to attract and retain talent. Rather than assess candidates based on age-old criteria such as level of education and work history, agencies are more frequently evaluating and implementing automated talent solutions to support the hiring, on-boarding and nurturing of employees.

Using a combination of sophisticated computer algorithms and rich data, automated talent solutions can identify quality candidates who most closely align with role requirements. Moreover, these data-driven solutions can predict candidate success, thereby reducing turnover and increasing productivity.

A New View of Performance

For state and local government agencies to become more strategic in their hiring practices, a critical combination of science, technology and analytics is needed. Using this three-pronged approach, agencies can transform their strategies for hiring, developing and retaining the best people for the right jobs.

The first step entails creating a custom blueprint for each job title by analyzing the characteristics and performance of existing employees. This is accomplished by gathering behavioral data on employees via a comprehensive online performance assessment. Next, this data is analyzed against job-related performance data to create individual performance profiles. These profiles serve as important benchmarks for success and provide agencies with a common lexicon for defining employee performance.

Based on these reports, agencies, with guidance from behavioral scientists, can determine which personality traits and skill sets are most likely to lead to high-performance levels and which are more likely to produce less stellar results.

Over time, performance expectations can change, which is why it’s critical for behavioral scientists to carefully vet performance profiles for accuracy, and then regularly compare them against up-to-date hiring and performance data.

Put to the Test

An online candidate assessment is a critical tool in any state and local government agency’s recruitment (or talent management) arsenal. More than simply a means for gathering data on multiple behavioral, cognitive and cultural traits of a candidate, data-driven computer models can help assess a candidate’s fit for a position, as
well as predict the likelihood of someone being either a high or low performer.

Consider, for example, a candidate who applies for a police officer opening in the field. On paper, she appears to be the perfect fit: 15 years of experience, great references, with all the right credentials. What the candidate’s qualifications don’t reveal is that she doesn’t perform well in high-stress environments, and may crumble under the pressure of field work.

Now imagine that same state or local government agency using data analytics to assess the potential job candidate. Using behavioral, cognitive and cultural traits to expose the candidate’s working style and preferences, it would quickly become apparent that she is better suited to a slower-paced office environment.

A number of benefits stem from this innovative approach. For one, the candidate is placed in the right position, thereby resulting in higher productivity levels. And because she’s someplace where she’s able to perform well, she’s happier — a boon to workforce morale and employee satisfaction. All of this results in increased retention rates and reduced hiring costs for the agency.

**Science, Technology and Analytics Lead to Better Outcomes**

Data analytics heralds a new recruiting model for state and local governments. Long gone are the days of relying on résumés and lengthy one-on-one interviews to determine a candidate’s fit. Rather, automated talent management solutions add objectivity and science to the recruiting process by linking behavior to real business outcomes.

Data analytics can enable agencies to find the right person for the right job, thereby reducing turnover and minimizing the high price of recruiting and the productivity cost of vacant positions.

However, by leveraging innovative technology, agencies can also demonstrate a forward-looking approach to talent management — an incentive for today’s millennials to become public servants. And automated talent solutions can help with succession planning. Moreover, gathered data can shed light on the entire employee life cycle, identifying skills gaps as they arise and uncovering employee strengths and weaknesses.

For instance, an employee struggling to keep pace with current workloads can have a negative impact on productivity levels, and is often a prime candidate for attrition. However, by identifying the risks associated with this employee using data analytics, an agency can ensure he or she receives additional training and mentoring. Conversely, employees exhibiting key strengths can be placed on an accelerated career path or receive high-impact coaching to be groomed for career advancement. Either way, automated talent solutions let agencies keep their workforce more productive and attrition rates low.

**Building a Strong Workforce**

If the public sector truly wants to recruit and retain the brightest and most productive workers, it’s time to find new ways to tap into talent.

A potent combination of science, technology and analytics can help agencies revamp their approach to hiring, so they can recruit and retain the best candidates for the right positions. A custom blueprint for jobs, a lexicon for defining success, online assessment tools and data analytics can work together to create benchmarks for hiring top performers. By gathering these behavioral, cognitive and cultural traits, agencies can hire strategically while identifying skills gaps and predicting workforce needs. It’s precisely these smarter hiring and retention strategies that will help agencies better serve their constituents now and well into the future.

*This piece was developed and written by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Infor.*

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**Endnotes**


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