

Chapter LXVI

A Model for Reengineering IT Job Classes in State Government

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INTRODUCTION

For public-sector administrators burdened with the task of recruiting and retaining information technology (IT) professionals, these are difficult times. A shortage of IT personnel combined with intense demand for new technology skills has made recruiting and retaining staff harried pursuits; additionally, the demand for technical workers in corporate America keeps rising (Pawlowski, Datta, & Houston, 2005). This demand for workers with leading-edge IT skills is exacerbated by the looming retirement of seasoned government workers, estimated at a 30% reduction in public-sector workforce across state governments by 2006 (Council of State Government [CSG], 2002). Despite the mounting demands on IT to be leveraged in state governments as a cost-reducing and efficiency-increasing tool (Levinson, 2003), even with economic recovery (Information

Technology Association of America [ITAA], 2004) many scholars and industry analysts fear a widening shortage in available IT professionals (Pawlowski et al.). Pawlowski et al. suggest that for state governments, more so than private-sector firms, the problem has become acute, heightened by not only recruitment and retention barriers (CSG, 2000), but also by an ideological backlash against contracting for IT services with offshore firms (Hira, 2004). In recent research, barriers to recruitment (low base salaries, lack of qualified candidates, a poor image of civil service, and limited advancement opportunities) and retention (inability to compete with the private sector, low base salaries, insufficient reward systems, and lack of advancement opportunities) were documented through a survey of 400 IT professionals working in state agencies and universities (Pawlowski et al.). The ubiquitous nature of information technology at all levels of government and the

core requirement to recruit and retain qualified technology professionals calls for an expansion in the body of research; this research can provide invaluable insight into the success and failure in public-sector information technology human resource practices. The intent of this research is the utilization of the DeMers' (2002) seven-pronged approach to critically examine Mississippi state government agencies with the expected result of assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the IT personnel classification system. This leading-edge and highly effective IT personnel classification system, designed specifically to improve IT recruitment and retention, was implemented by the State of Mississippi in partnership with the Hay Group, an internationally known human resource consultancy.

BACKGROUND

Information technology has become crucial in the innovation of government service delivery in the day-to-day operations of many public-sector agencies at the federal, state, and local level (Heiman, 2002; Modesitt, 2002). Indeed, public-sector agencies at all levels depend on information technology in order to accomplish their varied missions (Babcock, Bush, & Lan, 1995; Fletcher, 2000). Specifically, state governments have invested heavily in information technology. To that end, at least 420,000 IT personnel, representing more than 20% of executive-branch state workers, are employed throughout the 50 states (Brown & Brudney, 1998). Varying authors have noted the tension between private- and public-sector organizations in recruiting and retaining experienced IT professionals (Agarwal & Ferratt, 1999). Careful and systematic analysis of research conducted finds that many scholars have discussed and agreed that examination of existing public and private IT recruitment and retention strategies can aid in the formulation of a more effective, forward-thinking human resource

policy (DeMers, 2002; Lan, Riley, & Cayer, 2005; Pawlowski et al., 2005). Indeed, DeMers sets forth a seven-pronged approach toward IT recruitment and retention, created from an assimilation of "realistic government strategies" (DeMers, p. 28). The objective of DeMers' best-practice approach allows public-sector agencies the ability to build human resource policies to compete with the private sector for the recruitment and retaining of the best and brightest IT professionals.

According to a United States Department of Commerce report (1998) entitled *America's New Deficit: The Shortage of Information Technology Workers*, 1,134,000 new IT positions will be created between 1996 and 2006, and an additional 240,000 already existing positions will have to be filled due to retirements. According to the *America's New Deficit* study, the reasons for the shortage are varied, including a general lack of interest in the field and a belief that there is an excess of IT workers already. According to a related United States Department of Commerce report entitled *The Digital Work Force: Building Information Technology Skills at the Speed of Innovation* (1999), information technologies represent more than 25% of the growth in the current U.S. economy, and the entire information industry employs almost 7.4 million people with an average salary of \$64,000. The *Digital Work Force* study also reports that job growth in the IT field will increase at a rate of 137,800 jobs per year; an industry that grows so fast needs workers, but fewer people are entering the IT field. Inherent differences between managing public and private IT organizations have long been recognized (Cats-Baril & Thompson, 1995). Businesses, individual citizens, and nongovernmental organizations empowered by the Internet are creating new challenges that public agencies will not be able to meet unless they become much more technologically savvy (Naim, 2000). State governments are faced not only with a shortage of information technology workers, but also with the prospect of losing out to corporations in the

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