



## ACCENTURE FEDERAL SERVICES

# NEXT GENERATION TALENT ASSESSMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Federal agencies rely on public servants to execute their mission and impacting the lives of all citizens. These agencies serve constituents across a vast array of services ranging from economic growth and stability to providing healthcare and national defense. They require clear plans and structures to deliver these services to the public and achieve mission success. Without the public servants supporting these agencies, the organizations cannot effectively provide the services and outcomes expected by their constituents.

Historically, the public sector has struggled to compete with industry for top talent, oftentimes due to long time-to-hire metrics, a poor candidate experience during the hiring process, and the lack of predictive and valid selection assessments to evaluate and hire top candidates. The impacts of erroneous selection procedures are both financial and practical in nature. The cost of a bad hire is five times the amount of that individual's salary,<sup>1</sup> not accounting for the residual effects on the work unit, morale, productivity, and overall effectiveness.

**The public sector has much to gain by reevaluating and reinvigorating their selection processes, as 90% of employers in Fortune 500 companies who engage in various forms of job testing have found that assessments have been predictive of new hire retention and success.<sup>2</sup> A new and intentional focus on selection procedures can empower the public sector to strategically use their assessments to hire the best talent accomplish their mission and goals.**



## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN ASSESSMENTS: THE GATEWAY TO SUCCESS**

Federal agencies typically rely on the efforts of a small Human Resources (HR) department to manage, analyze, and maintain the selection process. The selection process often includes manual reviews of thousands of resumes for a single job posting, with recruiters tending to screen for specific attributes, such as education or specific experiences. This common practice, in addition to being inefficient, leads to significant unconscious bias towards women, minorities, and older workers, and opens the door to legal action. It results in the loss of candidates that do not fit the mold or candidates which could have been a great fit within the organization but were rejected or ignored because they do not meet a specific and historical standard. In recent years, agencies have started to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) in their hiring decisions. AI has the power to process a significantly higher volume of candidates in a shorter period, all but eliminating the issue of viable candidates being lost in the process. Combining the use of AI with the power of Industrial Organizational (IO) Psychologists and behavioral analysis, a more modern approach to assessing candidates with AI can result in better qualified candidates' onboarding. Agencies can exploit the teachable nature of AI empowering them to select for the specific traits that their ideal candidate would need to exhibit.



## **IMPROVING THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE AND RETAINING TOP TALENT**

The public sector increasingly faces the challenge of finding top talent and subsequently losing them during their lengthy hiring process. For one government agency, the time to hire is 408 days for administrative positions, which results in significant drop out rates and numerous vacancies. Candidates are unwilling to put their lives on hold while they wait for their careers to start. Agencies can reduce the hiring timeline and increase their chances of acquiring and retaining the competitive talent they desire by using AI. For example, using an AI-built computer to evaluate a candidate's resume, interview, written responses, or other assessment can help reduce or eliminate human bias in evaluating the candidate and decrease the time it takes for the candidate to move through the hiring process since the evaluation does not hinge on a human evaluator's schedule.

Digital and AI-based assessments can also help attract the new generation of talent, a generation that grew up with the internet and technology at their fingertips and expects as much from their employer. Federal agencies are beginning to take their talent assessments to the next level by leveraging gamification and mobile accessibility. This keeps candidates engaged throughout the hiring process while creating an opportunity for the organization to show that they are innovative, and ready and able to implement new technologies and processes ahead of their competitors.

By taking assessments online and mobile, agencies also open the door to candidates that may not otherwise be able to apply or interview for a position due to external circumstances. These assessments can be computer-adaptive, evolving as the candidate moves through the assessment, reducing the potential for cheating or recalling the same questions for repeat test takers. The main hiring event is conducted in-person at a specific time and location, with the burden of arranging travel, childcare, and taking time off work falling solely on the candidate. This is a significant burden for both the candidate and the agency, and automatically disqualifies qualified individuals who do not have the means to make it happen. Digital and AI-based assessments allow candidates to take the assessments when they are available, improving their hiring experience and their impression of the agency they are applying for.

The candidate experience can be enhanced by an assessment's power to provide a realistic job preview. Utilizing a realistic job preview is beneficial for both the candidate and the agency. It allows the candidate to get an accurate portrayal of what they would be expected to do on the job before they move further along in the hiring process or prior to accepting a job offer. It provides an opportunity for the candidate to assess how well they fit with the agency and self-select out of the process, saving an agency the time and money to evaluate an applicant who would later decide they were uninterested or invest additional time or resources evaluating them. Some candidates may come onboard and quickly leave the position after realizing the job was not what was expected. Studies have shown the majority of candidates reported their hiring process did not provide a good job preview, and due to the high cost of filling a role, agencies have a compelling case for leveraging AI to provide their candidates with a realistic preview of what their job would entail.



## **ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS WITH NEXT GENERATION ASSESSMENTS**

When done intentionally and accurately, assessments have the power to shape agencies' future workforce and achieve mission goals. The foundation of a reliable and predictive assessment is a job analysis, which details the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for success in a position. The job analysis informs the type of assessments that should be used, as well as the specific KSAs and competencies that will be measured and ultimately selected for. This is what empowers the agency to "create" their ideal workforce, a workforce made up of the carefully selected candidates that will be vital in the agency's success.

The public servants that make up the federal government are undoubtedly the most important asset in each agency, and the assessments used to acquire those "assets" warrants increased attention and prioritization. In the public sector, relying on historic and oftentimes archaic hiring processes will not only do a disservice to the agencies, but also to the American public for whom they serve. With the power of AI, agencies in the public sector can be better positioned to hire a workforce that best fits the position and is as diverse as the people they serve.

## Points of Contact

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## Resources

<sup>1</sup>CMA 2015, CMA case study on retention,  
CMA case study on person-job fit

<sup>2</sup>SIOF Statistics based on survey data  
collected in 2001 from 1,627 HR Managers

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