

The “Dinosaur Killer”

An Overwhelming, Unavoidable Force of Nature Changing Climate of World’s Workforce — Its Name: “The Information Revolution”

Janice R. Lachance, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, spoke at the 1999 U.S. Air Force Civilian Personnel Workshop Oct. 13, 1999. This article presents key excerpts from her remarks, emphasizing workforce learning, development, and education.

We have spent so much time getting ready for the new millennium that we may have lost sight of the fact that we are already in the midst of a time of dramatic change.

How we lead this change will mean the difference between success and failure as a federal workforce.

The “Dinosaur Killer”

People talk all the time about the impact of this change on our workforce and our society. I am here to tell you that the impact is already being felt — it is real, it is significant, and for those caught unaware, it will be catastrophic.

Lately, I have been talking about something that I call the “Dinosaur Killer” — and no, I’m not talking about some giant asteroid striking the planet, as recent movies have suggested.

Instead, I am talking about an overwhelming, unavoidable force of nature that is changing the climate of the world’s workforce and ushering in a new age — this time we are calling

the Dinosaur Killer by the name of “The Information Revolution.”

More and more information is becoming available to an ever-expanding number of people around the world at an ever-increasing pace. New technologies, new work environments, new needs for skills and learning — all these changes are having a deep impact, at work and at home, in societies around the globe.

And rest assured, the demands of the Information Revolution will kill our 20th century dinosaurs — those organizations that cannot, or will not, adapt to the new global realities of the next millennium.

At OPM, we have been working hard to fight off the Dinosaur Killer by anticipating the specific nature of work and the workforce of the 21st century, and by seeing what OPM can do now to create and sustain learning environments.

Adapt or Be Pushed Aside

We already see the trends for the next millennium. And the theme is “Adapt or be pushed aside.”

Organizations are already learning that they must adapt to changing missions and become more diverse and more flexible.

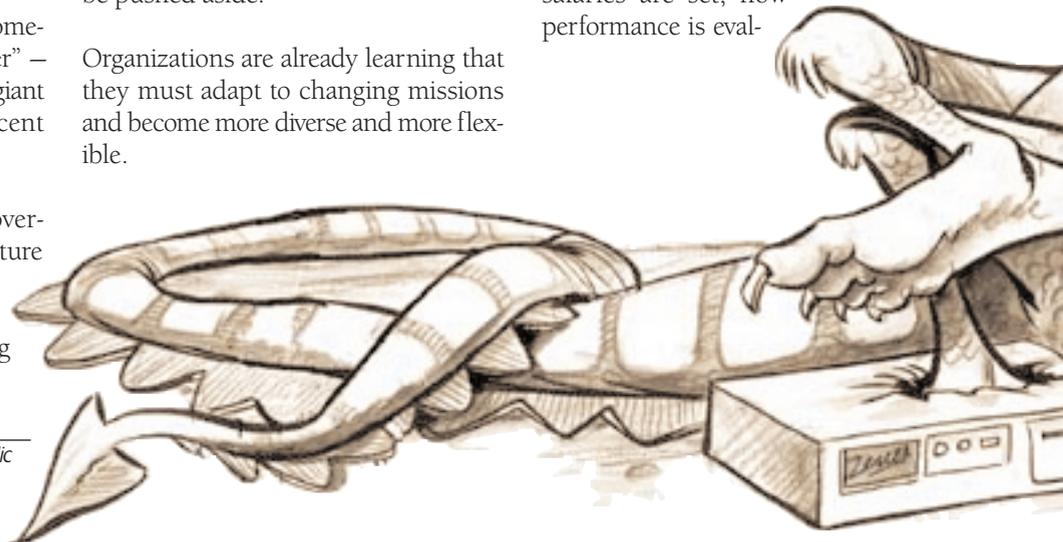
Situational Workforce

In the years ahead, organizations will no longer have a permanent workforce, or even a temporary workforce; instead they will have what I call a “situational workforce.” Needed work will be done by a blend of core employees in cross-functional teams and by temporary employees, consultants, and contractors, when necessary.

Full-time, lifelong jobs and job descriptions are already disappearing, and instead, employees are increasingly being called upon to be generalists — omnivores in the new world order, with the tools to survive and flourish at many different tasks and in many different environments.

Fewer jobs will fit into a neat job description. And our core government employees will be called upon to perform one role today and another tomorrow.

Obviously, this has significant implications for how skills are valued, how salaries are set, how performance is eval-



Editor’s Note: This information is in the public domain at <http://www.opm.gov/speeches/1999/usaf1099.htm>.

uated, and how learning needs are assessed and met.

Organizations will have to look at the bottom line and weigh the cost of investing in specialists who can only do one thing very well, versus the benefit of using generalists who can perform multiple tasks and who are adaptable to changing organizational needs.

Work Processes Changing

The way work is organized is also being affected by the speed of change. Work processes are increasingly driven by what employees know – that is to say, how the work is done is increasingly dependent upon the level of knowledge the employee brings to the job.

The more knowledgeable an employee is across disciplines, the better job she or he can do, and the more valuable she or he becomes.

The result of this trend is that the distinction between working and learning is becoming blurred – part of every employee's job will be to keep learning about the ever-changing work to be performed. The Clinton/Gore Administration realizes this, and has made lifelong learning a priority in its efforts to improve the federal workplace.

Decentralized Operations, Decision Making

Another trend we see is that federal government operations and decision-making authority will continue to be decentralized.

For example, we are working to promote partnership and empower front-line employees to give them a greater say in problem solving and workforce improvements.

We must find ways to promote the potential of our employees – making them more knowledgeable, more adaptable, and better able to meet changing needs.

The fact is, I remain committed to developing the full potential of our current workforce. It is good for the employees, good for morale, and good for the bottom line.

Shift in Organizational Structures

Another change we will see is that federal agencies will shift from the hierarchical, Industrial Era structures that we are familiar with to “inter-networked” structures that improve and integrate service delivery and improve the design of government.

We are moving from the ponderous organizational dinosaurs of the 20th century to the fleet and nimble gazelles of the 21st. In the military, this is being seen not only in a new emphasis on more mobile fighting forces and “Rapid Deployment Forces,” but also in leaner organizational structures and simplified lines of communication.

On Call 24-7

Where and when work is accomplished will increasingly be driven by customer and employee needs. The growth in telecommuting and working from home will continue as well as expanding traditional work hours to meet the needs of our customers – customers who have their own work schedule and family obligations. As Department of Defense employees, this is not news to you – DoD is always ready anyway, 24 hours a day. Now the rest of us are learning what it's like to be on call 24-7!

Manager's Role Changing

Middle management will continue to experience shrinking ranks and changing roles. The manager's role will become more that of a leader, a coach, an enabler, and a teacher rather than a giver of assignments and evaluator of performance.



JANICE R. LACHANCE

Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Janice R. Lachance is the Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). She was sworn-in as Director by Vice President Al Gore Dec. 10, 1997, after a unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate Nov. 9. At the swearing in ceremony, the Vice President called Lachance “the voice of fairness for federal employees and for excellence in government, and a champion of working people everywhere.”



The U.S. Office of Personnel Management is the federal government's human resources agency. While daily providing the American public with up-to-date employment information, OPM ensures that the nation's civil service remains free of political influence and that federal employees are selected and treated fairly and on the basis of merit. OPM supports agencies with personnel services and policy leadership including staffing tools, guidance on labor-management relations, preparation of government's future leaders, compensation policy development, and programs to improve workforce performance. The agency manages the federal retirement system, as well as the world's largest employer-sponsored health insurance program serving more than nine million federal employees, retirees, and their families. In addition, the agency oversees the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) through which 4.2 million federal civilian employees and military personnel raise millions of dollars for thousands of charities every year.

As director, Lachance oversees the agency's workforce of 3,700 employees and has an annual budgetary authority of approximately \$27 billion composed of discretionary and mandatory requirements. She also has responsibility for the administration of the federal retirement, health, and insurance programs that total about \$488 billion.

Lachance is the Chair of the National Partnership Council and the President's Task Force on Federal Training Technology. She is also a member of the President's Management Council; the President's Commission on White House Fellow; the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults With Disabilities; the President's Interagency Council on Women; the Planning Committee Forum for Health Care Quality Measurement and Reporting; the Inter-Departmental Council for Hispanic Educational Improvement; and the Advisory Committee on Veteran's Employment and Training.

Prior to becoming the agency's director, Lachance was appointed OPM's Director of Communications in 1993 and its Director of Communications and Policy from 1994 to 1996, where she was the agency's primary spokesperson with national and local media; and directed media relations, public affairs, marketing and internal communications, overseeing a staff of 24 and a budget of \$2.8 million. Lachance subsequently served as OPM's Chief of Staff from 1996 — 1997. She was appointed deputy director by President Clinton in August 1997 and served briefly in that position before assuming the position of acting director.

An attorney, Lachance's career includes work with federal agencies, congressional offices, and labor unions. From 1987 until she came to OPM, she served as the Director of Communications and Political Affairs for the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL CIO, where she directed the political, media, and public affairs programs for the nation's largest federal employee union.

Her early career includes extensive congressional experience, including Communications Director for Congressman Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), Administrative Assistant to Congresswoman Katie Hall (D-Ind.), and Staff Director and Counsel for the House Small Business Subcommittee on Antitrust and Restraint of Trade.

Born in Biddeford, Maine, Lachance holds a bachelor's degree from Manhattanville College, Purchase, N.Y., and a Law degree from Tulane University School of Law, New Orleans, La.

In other words, they either grow the wings they need to survive, or they will become extinct.

But, through all of this, we must ensure that we never as an organization lose sight of the people involved. The business of government is still the business of people helping people, after all.

With that said, let me offer some words of caution:

Work Division, Skill Obsolescence

We have to guard against work being divided into smart jobs and dumb jobs, thus dividing the workforce and society into “haves” and “have nots.”

We will have to cope with skill obsolescence that leads to job displacement and organizational restructuring.

Employee Privacy

Our increased capability to monitor employees by computer may erode their rights to privacy.

Learning — An Economic and Pocketbook Issue

In addition, information technology also provides an example of a workforce learning need. Technology literacy is required in almost all occupations, and this constitutes a special challenge for us in keeping employees up-to-date on current applications.

In fact, for the individual, survival and success in the distributed, high-tech workplace depends on her or his ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn.

That, in and of itself, is quite different from past workplace learning and development challenges.

Workers' values are also changing in America. Workers may be loyal to their profession, but as their employers become less loyal to them, they are also becoming far less loyal to the organizations they work in than they were a generation ago.

One element of this phenomena is that workers have come to expect that their

employer should address their learning needs. And, they will choose those employers that provide them with the most educational opportunities.

Learning has become an economic and pocketbook issue for employees, and unions are increasingly interested in the training needs of employees.

These trends in the nature of work and in the workforce constitute significant challenges for workforce learning, development, and education.

Creating, Sustaining the Learning Environment

You are probably asking yourselves, what is OPM doing to create and sustain a learning environment in the federal government?

Workforce Planning

Because learning and continuing education are so important today, OPM is encouraging federal agencies to increase their use of workforce planning. We want agencies to do a better job of forecasting skills changes and anticipating workforce trends and needs.

Linking Training Priorities to Performance Objectives

Agencies must use learning as a strategic management tool throughout the organization, and change how training and learning are managed in federal agencies, so that training priorities are linked to performance objectives and training decisions are linked to performance development.

We are encouraging agencies to forge learning and performance development partnerships among various occupational groups, managers, employee representatives, and the human resource development community to develop resources and support for improved organizational performance.

Maximizing Use of Technology in Learning Programs

We are also actively encouraging agencies to use technology in their training and organizational learning programs, and support federal learning technology

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Lifelong Learning

And we are committed to providing lifelong learning for every federal employee.

So, how do we plan to prepare federal workers for the new millennium?

Well, as we look at the direction being provided by the Clinton/Gore Administration, we find confirmation that human resources development is the re-

sponsibility of the entire organization – and it is a lifelong process.

Two current administration initiatives illustrate this point.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING ACCOUNTS

Earlier this year, the president issued an Executive Order for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies titled, "Using Technology to Improve Training Opportunities for Federal Government Employees."

Its purpose is to organize and promote the use of technology to enhance learning in the federal government. It establishes a Government-wide Task Force, which I chair, and a private sector Advisory Committee.

The Task Force is made up of federal leaders who are working to craft recommendations on how we can effectively integrate technology into the training of the federal workforce.

In July, I was very pleased to sign the Task Force's initial set of recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts for federal employees, [who] were on a fast track. For those of you who haven't heard about Individual Learning Accounts, they are resources – either dollars or hours – set aside for individual employees to use for their professional development and learning.

Soon, we expect the president to endorse these recommendations, and we will work with a number of agencies to establish Individual Learning Account pilots. The results of these pilots will serve as the basis for OPM's government-wide guidance for agencies [that] choose to implement such accounts. We make our remaining recommendations to the president in July 2000.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EXPANDING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

To complement the work being done by the Task Force, the president also directed OPM to establish an Advisory Committee on Expanding Training Opportunities.

The Committee will be appointed by the president and will be made up of private-sector representatives – from research, education, labor, training, and information technology.

They will make an independent assessment of how the federal government is doing in integrating technology into training programs; how federal government programs, initiatives, and policies can drive training technology so that all Americans have training opportunities; and how the federal government can encourage private-sector investment in the development and use of high-quality instructional software.

They will also look at what the federal government's role should be in research and development for learning technologies; and what the options are for helping adult Americans finance the training and post-secondary education needed to upgrade skills and gain new knowledge.

Whether we invest in our employees is no longer a question. The question is how. One of the “best” right answers is: use technology to design, develop and deliver training government-wide.

The Task Force and Advisory Committee will give us a road map. All we will have to do is follow it.

This Task Force is a powerful example of our efforts to muster federal resources and new instructional technologies to make education, at work and at home, easier and more convenient for the federal workforce.

This Federal Learning Technology Strategy came out of the Vice President's Lifelong Learning Summit, which took place last January.

This event heralded a vision and call to action for lifelong learning for all Americans.

Vice President Gore told the group, “Realizing our potential will require investing in education and learning for all of our people throughout their lifetimes.”

“Rest assured, the demands of the Information Revolution will kill our 20th century dinosaurs – those organizations that cannot, or will not, adapt to the new global realities of the next millennium.”

So, we must ensure that the federal government's policies regarding employee training apply to every employee. And I believe we are on the right track.

Cooperation Between Labor And Management

This Administration also understands that cooperation between labor and management can be a powerful vehicle for improving the performance of government. At agencies like the U.S. Mint, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Social Security Administration, and the Customs Service, partnerships between labor and management are saving millions of taxpayer dollars and dramatically improving the delivery of service.

That's what the President's Executive Order on partnership is all about: labor and management working together to make the government work better for the American people.

As the administration looks to renew its commitment to partnership, OPM is eager to play a strong leadership role. We will do everything we can to help

agencies and unions find better, more effective ways of conducting business. Building successful partnerships is not easy, but training, education, and facilitation can make all the difference in the world, and OPM will work hard to make sure that agencies and unions get the resources they need to succeed.

I continue to believe that unions and agencies have a common interest in delivering the best possible service to the American people, and OPM will do its very best to help stimulate the creation of true workplace partnerships where that can be achieved.

Giving Agency Managers Tools, Strategies They Need

As the federal workplace changes, OPM is responding with new tools and strategies to provide agency managers with greater flexibilities for recruitment, performance management, and retention tools.

We have been working hard to provide those tools over the last decade. We have introduced many changes that have made a real difference in these areas. For example, the delegation of examining to agencies, an automated database of all government jobs that is open around the clock, and a flexible framework for performance appraisal that supports individuals and teams.

But our job is not done. We need more tools and strategies that meet the challenges of today's workplace.

At the beginning of this year, Vice President Gore announced his commitment to civil service improvements at the Global Forum on Reinventing Government. The essential components of these improvements are twofold.

First, we must have flexible performance and pay systems that support high performance, and encourage employees to do their best; and, second, we have to be able to create flexible recruitment and hiring systems that permit alternative selection procedures, authorize agencies to make direct job offers in critical areas –like information technology –and per-