

9-2006

# Introduction to the Special Issue: What We Can Learn from Large Scale Human Resources Initiatives in the Federal Government and Department of Defense

Roni Reiter-Palmon

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, rreiter-palmon@unomaha.edu*

Michael D. Mumford

*University of Oklahoma Norman Campus*

Michael A. Campion

*Purdue University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/psychfacpub>

 Part of the [Industrial and Organizational Psychology Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Reiter-Palmon, Roni; Mumford, Michael D.; and Campion, Michael A., "Introduction to the Special Issue: What We Can Learn from Large Scale Human Resources Initiatives in the Federal Government and Department of Defense" (2006). *Psychology Faculty Publications*. 27.

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/psychfacpub/27>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).



Running Head: INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

Introduction to the Special Issue:

What We Can Learn from Large Scale Human Resources Initiatives in the Federal  
Government and Department of Defense

Roni Reiter-Palmon  
Department of Psychology  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Omaha, NE 68182

Michael D. Mumford  
Department of Psychology  
University of Oklahoma  
455 W. Lindsey, Room 705  
Norman, OK 73019

Michael A. Campion  
Purdue University  
403 West State Rm. 476  
West Ladayette, IN 47907

What We Can Learn from Large Scale Human Resources Initiatives in the Federal  
Government and Department of Defense

Arguably, the government has some of the most complex and sophisticated Human Resource (HR) initiatives of any organization in the country. This is due to at least three reasons. First, the sheer size of the government requires sophisticated HR systems to manage the huge number of HR decisions required. Second, the HR systems in the government must respond to much greater external (public) scrutiny than any other organization because it is funded by government money and must be responsive to taxpayers interests and concerns. As such, fairness and defensibility are far more important factors than in other organizations. Third, the government HR systems must comply with many more laws and regulations than other organizations, thus placing constraints on informal judgment and discretion and requiring sophisticated formal decision-making systems.

The purposes of this special issue are twofold. One goal is to share information on new HR initiatives with other government and military organizations. Another, and perhaps more unique, purpose is to share ideas with the private sector. There is much the private sector can learn from the HR systems used in the Federal Government and Department of Defense (DoD). As obvious historic examples, consider the impact of testing programs originally developed during the First World War on the subsequent use of testing for employment in the private sector, or consider the impact of the Merit Principle originally articulated by the Civil Service on subsequent private sector practices in hiring, promotion, and other HR systems.

To serve these purposes, this special issue describes a large sample recent HR initiatives in the Federal Government or DoD. The first article, by Christina Curnow and Timothy McGonigle provides a good starting point by reviewing the effect of various laws and regulations on the government workforce and how those affect HR initiatives. Specifically in this paper, Curnow and McGonigle focus on the effect of these laws and regulations on the creation of a more professional workforce. They provide a theoretical context by examining theories of professionalism, and provide examples of three different professions that are various stages of professionalism. Finally, HR initiatives that were developed to address specific regulations and the needs of each profession are discussed. Professionalization is an issue that affects business and industry as well and we can learn from the HR interventions presented here about dealing with emerging professionalization.

Many HR initiatives in government and business rely on job analysis to provide the information that is necessary to guide the development and application of the HR application. The next two articles address this issue directly. In the second article in this volume, Roni Reiter-Palmon and her colleagues present a web-based methodology for the collection of job analysis information. This paper describes the development and implementation of a web-based job analysis system which uses the taxonomies of the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) as the starting point for the collection of both task and KSAO data. The article then discusses the application of this system in the U.S. Navy. The use of the web to collect job analysis information is particularly important to any organization with multiple locations, especially multi-national organizations.

The third article by Lauren McEntire and her colleagues also focuses on job analysis information, but in terms of how this information is used. McEntire et al. argue that the vast quantity of data available based on job analysis means that the may not be used appropriately or in a timely manner. To address this problem McEntire and her colleagues suggest the use of metrics which are algorithms applied to the job analysis data to help decision makers by providing useable data in summary form. This paper provides a detailed description of the process of the metric development aided by an example of developing a metric for essential skill requirements for the job. These metrics provide tools for using the large quantities of data that are available in today's organizations.

In the fourth article Bernard Nickels, Partick Sharpe, Kim Bauhs, and Anne Holloway Lundy provide a review of a specific program, the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program. This program is unique in several ways. First, this program has been in existence for over 25 years allowing for the longitudinal assessment of its effectiveness. Second, this program is designed to provide a selection system to a variety of organizational units in the Federal Government. Individuals selected by this program all go into management positions, but otherwise their jobs and educational backgrounds vary greatly. Nickels and his colleagues provide a review of the selection system development over time to match changing program requirements and increase in applicants. They then discuss the reliability, effectiveness, and validity of the selection system. Finally, they provide a critical review of the difficulties encountered when implementing such a large scale program, and the solutions developed to address these issues.

The next article by Jerry Hedge, Walter Borman, and Mark Bourne details another large scale selection system. In this article, Hedge et al. discuss the development of a career development and advancement for the U.S. Navy. Specifically, the article outlines the development of a weighting algorithm to determine how performance in five distinct domains is combined to create a final score used for advancement purposes. In addition, information about the further detailing of the performance domain and developing a performance appraisal system is provided. Advancement systems can be developed in a similar fashion not only for the Navy.

Another important HR function is that of training. The next three articles in the special issue provide some insight into the issue of training and training design in large and complex organizations, specifically in the military. In the sixth article in the special issue, Reiter-Palmon and her colleagues detail the importance of understanding and defining occupationally-specific skills. The article outlines a procedure for the development of occupationally-specific skills and details possible HR uses, with a focus on its use in training. Finally, the article provides examples of some of the ways in which occupationally-specific skill information is being used in the U.S. Navy as well as in industry.

The next article, by Eric Day and his colleagues provides a system that allows training developers to determine the best approaches when designing training. The Integrative Training Design Matrix (ITDM) presents a system in which information from job analysis and needs assessment is linked to training design. The article outlines what information is necessary in order to make these decisions, such as information about learning difficulty or location. The authors then uses the four dimensions identified to

create a matrix of six different cells, and review the literature so that suggestions regarding training design can be made.

The eighth article in this special issue also has a focus on training. Alexander Alonso and his colleagues focuses on team training in a specific setting of health care and regarding a specific issue of reducing medical error. This article provides an overview and evaluation of the current efforts to reduce medical error using team training. In addition, a new program, TEAMSTEPPS (Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety), which was developed as a response to previous programs, is described. The article concludes with a discussion of lessons learned from the implementation of this new program. Private sector organizations can utilize both the team training development as well as the lessons learned in implementation.

The ninth article, by Brian Cronin, Ray Morath and Pat Curtin focuses on broader issues in HR, and evaluates the use of technology for HR purposes in the public sector. This paper describes several recent large scale technology interventions such as automated collection of job data, online recruitment and online testing. The article focuses not only on the systems used, but on the needs assessment that resulted in system selection and development, difficulties in implementation, and a case study of an unsuccessful technology adoption to illustrate the issues facing technology use in managing HR functions in the public sector. The use of technology for HR is prevalent and the discussion is illuminating for any HR professional who is considering implementation of a new HR technology system.

The last paper in by Rebecca Harris Mulvaney, Melissa Zwahr, and Laura Baranowski provides the broadest perspective. This article, as the first article in this

issue, also focuses on the role of laws and regulations on accountability and what this means to HR managers. This paper specifically focuses on the implications of these laws and regulations on performance measurement and performance management, and discusses the challenges of implementing a performance measurement or management system in large organizations such as the government.

In conclusion, this special issue provides a summary of some of the interventions, innovations, and HR initiatives that are currently occurring in the Federal Government and DoD. Each article provides us with a description of a problem facing HR in the Federal Government or DoD, and provides an HR intervention suggested as a solution to that problem. In addition, these articles provide a frank discussion of the difficulties facing the implementation of these new HR interventions in addition to the solutions. As a whole, these articles provide a glimpse into the future direction of HR in large organizations, and possibly the innovations that would be adopted by many business and organizations tomorrow.