SES 101: It's NOT a Mystery There's a Blueprint to Advance Your Career & For Entry into the SES

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I n t e g r i t y - S e r v i c e - E x c e l l e n c e

5 USC 3132(a)(2)

"Senior Executive Service position" means any position in an agency which is classified above GS–15 pursuant to section 5108 or in level IV or V of the Executive Schedule, or an equivalent position, which is not required to be filled by an appointment by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and in which an employee-

(A) directs the work of an organizational unit;

(B) is held accountable for the success of one or more specific programs or projects;

(C) monitors progress toward organizational goals and periodically evaluates and makes appropriate adjustments to such goals;

(D) supervises the work of employees other than personal assistants; or

(E) otherwise exercises important policy-making, policy-determining, or other executive functions.

Original Vision For SES

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- **CSRA focused on executive skills, not leadership skills.**

- **OPM was given responsibility for allocating SES slots, developing SES policies, and overseeing agency implementation.**

- **Currently, there are 8,100 career reserve SES slots; 1,200 SL/ST slots; and 900 limited-term, non-competitive SES slots.**

- **CSRA was built on a model of effectively & efficiently administering programs to produce results for the American people.**

- **Innovative concept was that SES serve just below Presidential appointees & are the link between appointees and the Federal workforce.**

- **SES are outside of normal personnel accountability rules.**

- **The SES traded this extra risk/responsibility for increased pay and benefits, but also reduced civil service protections.**

Government needs strategic leaders with:

- *An enterprise view* of public policy that transcends a commitment to a specific agency mission, political party, profession, or technical track.

- A world view that embraces the belief that *American democracy dynamics* provide a positive and continuing vehicle for change

- An understanding the importance of the *Merit System Principles (MSPs)* and *Prohibited Personnel Practices (PPPs)*. The Merit System Principles: Keys to Managing the Federal Workforce (mspb.gov)

Since 1978, Congress has created 105 white collar pay categories. There are up to 60,000 SES equivalent positions at agencies.

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Gallup research – Why Great Leaders Are So Rare

- Companies select wrong leaders 82% of time
  - 1 in 10 possess innate ability to lead
  - 5 in 10 can be taught this skill
  - But most companies have ineffective leadership development programs

"Bad leaders cost businesses billions of dollars each year, and having too many of them can bring down a company. The only defense against this problem is a good offense, because when companies get these decisions wrong, nothing fixes it. Businesses that get it right, however, and hire leaders based on talent will thrive and gain a significant competitive advantage."

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231593/why-great-managers-rare.aspx

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- Almost 70% of GAO's High Risk List underpinned by a human capital and/or leadership challenges
- Human capital management on the High Risk List since 2001.
- $1 trillion wasted annually.

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OPM has published guidance about the path to becoming an SES. Some of the key steps are:

1. **Participate in leadership development programs (Federal Executive Institute, AU's Key Leadership Program, Harvard's JFK School, Grad School USA, etc.).**

2. **Prepare Technical Qualifications (TQs) and Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs).**

3. **Enroll in your agency's Career Development Program (CDP).**

4. **Seek out mentors/coaches.**

5. **Have a well-rounded resume that embraces the ECQs and demonstrates that you have the leadership & management qualifications to be an SES.**
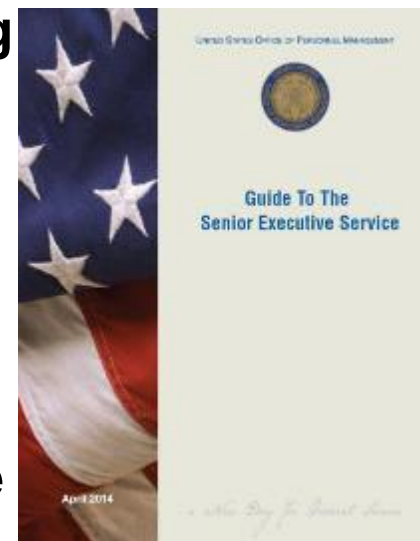
THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE (opm.gov)

If you follow the OPM traditional path, you will likely be disappointed. Reasons are:

1. Leadership development programs are expensive & very few get selected. Plus, it's subject to politics.

2. OPM guidance about ECQ prep leads to ECQs that are rote and mediocre.

3. Career Development Programs (CDP) are underfunded, subject to politics, and only 30% of graduates end up as SES.

4. Mentor/coaching programs are few and far between and are usually poorly managed.

5. <u>This is the one good piece of advice:</u> Have a well-rounded resume that demonstrates that you have the SES leadership & management qualifications.

Preparing the Next Generation of Federal Leaders: Agency-Based Leadership Development Programs | IBM Center for The Business of Government

SES Accessions Template

SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE (SES) ACCESSIONS TEMPLATE

EXECUTIVE POTENTIAL
Outstanding performance and contributions

EDUCATION - Highly Desirable – Master's Degree

STRATEGIC LEVEL DEVELOPMENT
Highly Desirable: Senior Development Education (SDE), **plus 1** or more: Leadership in a Democratic Society, Senior Executive Fellows, National Security Mgmt, Leadership Assessment and Feedback Seminar, Executive Business Mgmt, 2 equivalent courses from other colleges, universities or agencies

FUNDAMENTAL COMPETENCIES
Interpersonal Skills, Oral Communication, Integrity/Honesty, Written Communication, Continual Learning, and Public Service Motivation

STRATEGIC LEVEL ASSIGNMENTS (demonstrates corporate view and breadth in GS-14/15 (or equivalent)
Highly Desirable - Leadership positions at more than one agency/location **and** HQs or regional level postings

Executive Core Qualifications

Leading Change
Creativity & Innovation
External Awareness
Flexibility Resilience
Strategic Thinking
Vision

Leading People
Conflict Management
Leveraging Diversity
Developing Others
Team Building

Results Driven
Accountability
Customer Service
Decisiveness
Entrepreneurship
Problem Solving
Technical Credibility

Business Acumen
Financial Mgmt
Human Capital
Management
Technology
Management

Building Coalitions
Partnering Political
Savvy
Influencing/Negotiating

Touchstone for career planning, development and mentoring

Basis for SES candidate qualification requirements

Integrity - Service - Excellence

OPM's CCAR Model

- **ECQ narrative should include 2 to 3 examples (per ECQ) of relevant experience that matches ECQ criteria.**
  - **Describe specific challenges, actions and results**
    - **C**hallenge: Describe a specific problem or goal
    - **C**ontext: Individuals and groups you worked with and/or environment in which you worked to address a challenge
    - **A**ction: What you specifically did to address the challenge
    - **R**esult: Measures/outcomes that had some impact on the organization - demonstrates the quality and effectiveness of leadership skills
- **Number of examples not as important as ensuring experience matches ECQ criteria.**
  - Optimal number of examples is two.
- **Focus on recent leadership experience, education, & training**
  - General rule: Within past 8-10 years

- **Have you done a self-assessment?**
  - Have you ever been humbled?
  - Who influenced your leadership style?
  - What have you learned from your leadership experiences?

- **Have you maintained your resume and skills catalog?**
  - A Master Resume should be constantly evolving and should contain:
    - Normal job and education status.
    - A skills catalog aligned with the ECQs.
    - A listing of honors/awards/published papers & speeches/presentations.
    - A section devoted to your leadership positions.
  - Maintain a Master Resume and a Working Resume.

- **Have you practiced your interviewing skills?**

- **Have you done your competitive intelligence?**

Step #2: Become Unique

- **Tell the story of you.**
  - What is your leadership philosophy?
  - What are your business principles?
  - Are you a change agent or are you risk adverse?

- **Do you know what the ECQs are really asking for?**
  - Why is "building coalitions" important?
  - How do the merit principles affect leading change?
  - How can you lead people in a political environment?
  - Is business acumen about saving money or something else?

Step #3: Practice Merit System Principles On a Daily Basis

Planning – "All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest."

Monitoring – "The Federal work force should be used efficiently and effectively."

Developing – "Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance."

Appraising – "Employees should be retained on the basis of the adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards."

Rewarding – "Appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance."

Source: excerpted from 5 U.S.C. 2302

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- **You must create experiential learning opportunities.**
  - **Young leaders need opportunities to exercise their leadership muscles by leading teams, participating on task forces and other ways to gain actual leadership experience.**
  - **Community leadership is also relevant and important.**
  - **You can create your own opportunities.**

- **Don't be afraid to ask to go on rotations or details.**
  - **If your boss says you are too important to spare, run, don't walk because that boss doesn't have your best interests in mind.**
  - **Network, network and network some more to learn about opportunities.**

- **Join a professional society.**
  - **You can exercise your leadership muscle.**
  - **You can network and build your resume.**

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Steps #1-4 are *Necessary,* But They are Not *Sufficient to Become an SES*

Competition is Stiff: There are over 85,000 GS-15s and half have said they want to be SES. In addition, military and private sector execs are increasingly wanting to join the government.

Incumbency Beats Qualifications: Sadly, most agencies hire from within and value a known quantity.

It's Who You Know, Not What You Know: It's a fact that hiring officials hire people they know or look like them.

Agency Dynamics Are Always An Issue: You never know what goes on behind closed doors.

3 Simple Steps to Becoming a Thought Leader

#1:   Choose a Profession: Whether it is HR, Procurement, Policy, Finance or whatever, make an intentional choice about the profession you will build your career upon.

#2:   Research, Publish & Present: Every profession has a society with annual meetings & publications. Identify the "hot issues" in your profession and research/publish/present about them.

#3:   Volunteer & Outwork Your Competition: Serve on inter- and intra-agency working groups; volunteer for the CFC; step up as a team leader; and never say no to a political.

We Live In An Increasingly Interconnected World
&
Thought Leaders Will Unravel This Puzzle
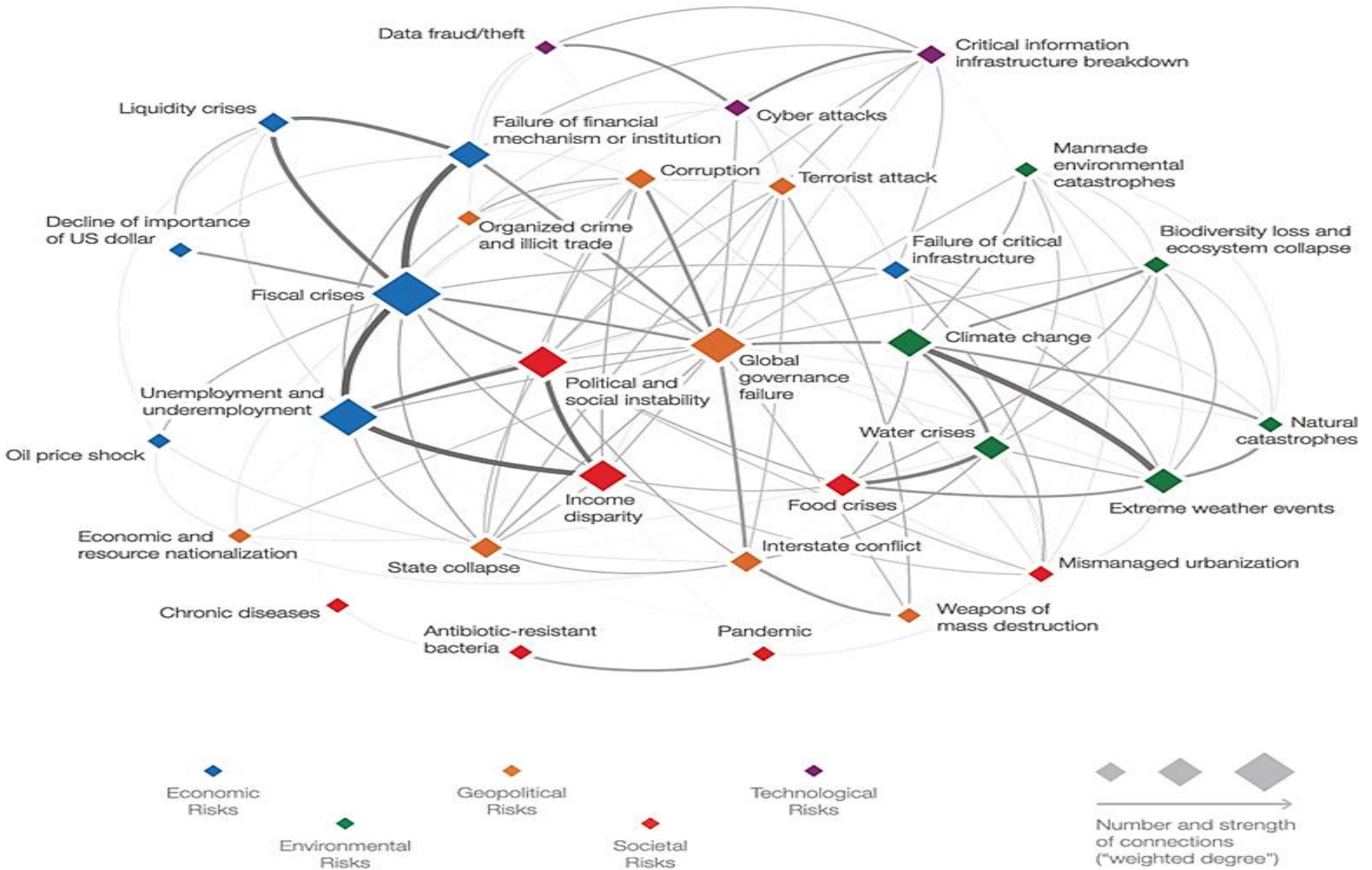
Thought Leadership Opportunities Abound
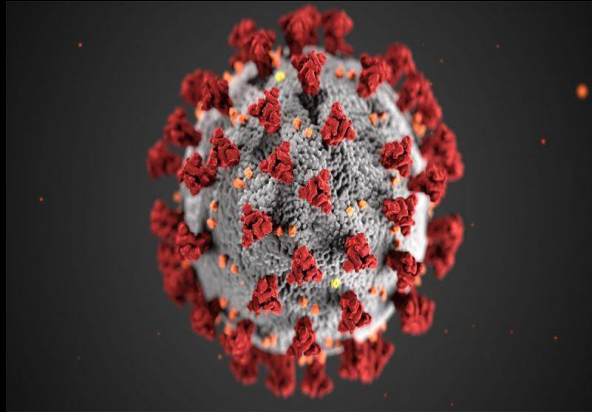
Pandemics are Endemic

The World Order is Up Ended

China is the New Russia

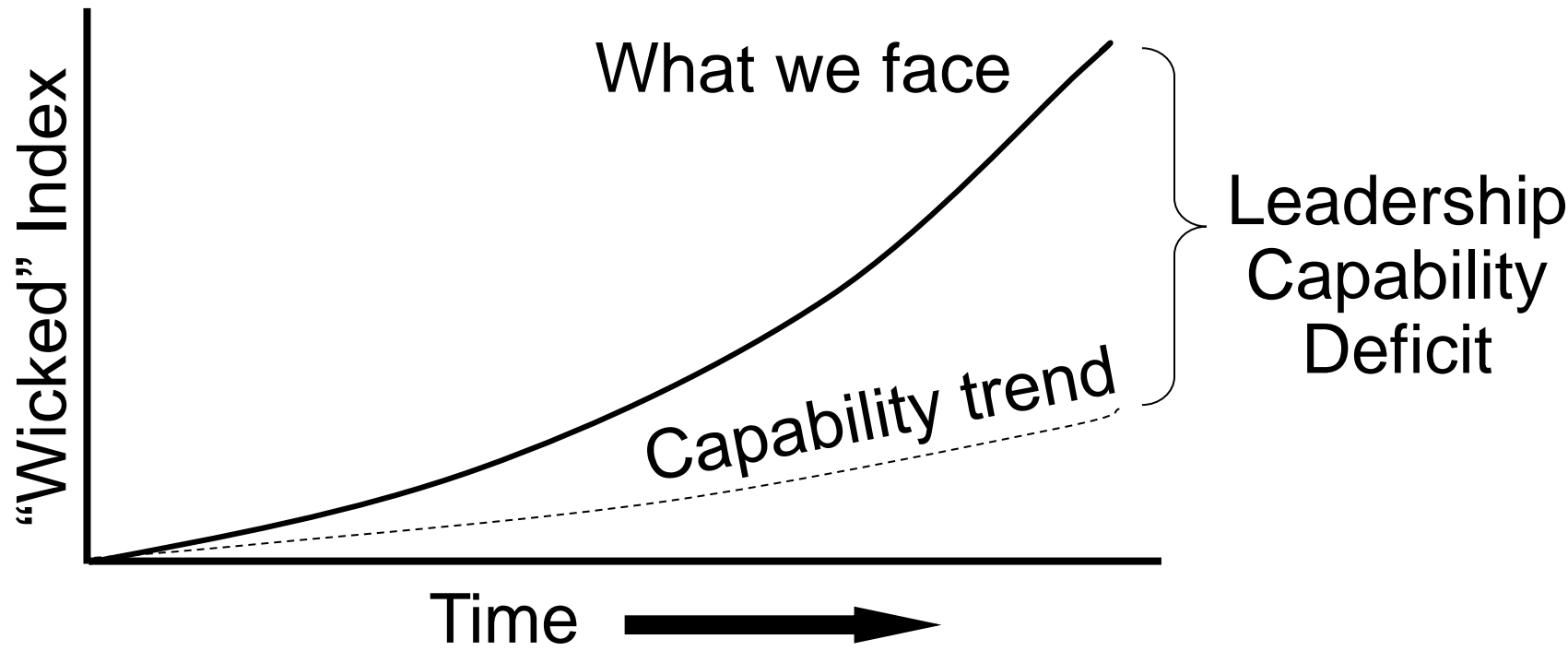AI is No Longer Sci-Fi Fantasy

Climate Change has Arrived

Trust in Government is Broken

CSRA was created in 1978.   The world has changed, but Federal leadership practices have not.

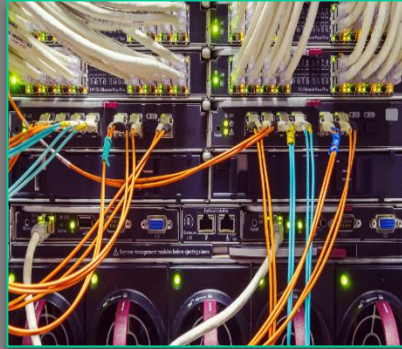**Alliance of Latino Leadership & Policy**

Technology is Everywhere

Tsunami of Data
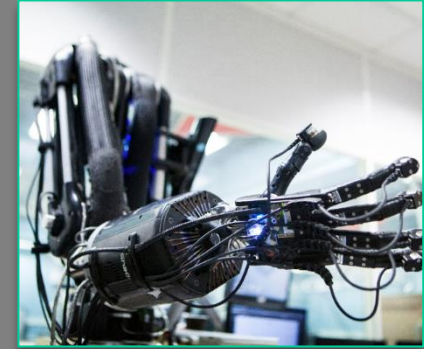
AI, Cognitive Computing, Robotics

Jobs Vulnerable to Automation

Diversity/Generational Change

Careers – 100 year life

Explosion in contingent work

The World is Evolving
So, Too, Must Government Leaders

Technological advances will change the way work is done.

An increased reliance on nonfederal partners (e.g., contractors or grantees) to achieve policy goals will require new skills and competencies for which agencies will need to identify, recruit, and hire.

Fiscal constraints require agencies to reexamine and reprioritize what the federal government does, how it does business, and as appropriate, who conducts its business.

Evolving mission requirements challenge agencies to adapt their work and workforces.
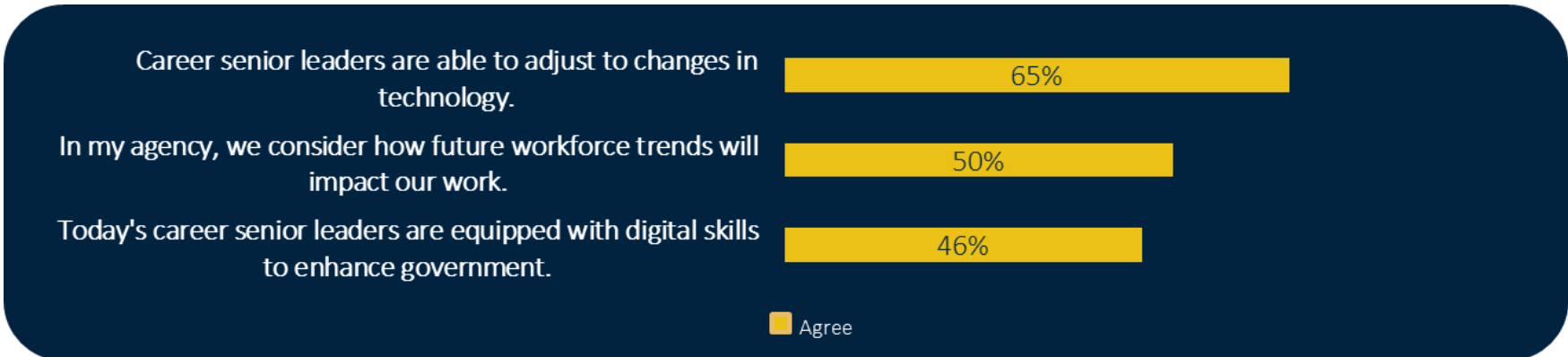
Changing demographics and shifting attitudes toward work may require new skills to manage a diverse workforce that seeks purpose, autonomy, and career mobility.

Source: GAO analysis. I GAO-19-181

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Leaders indicate their agencies are not prepared for the future of work.

With the rise of technology and automation, government leaders must be ready to harness new ways of working. While 65% of respondents feel leaders are able to adjust to changes in technology, only half (50%) indicate their agencies consider how the future of work will impact their mission, and less than half (46%) indicate they are equipped with the digital skills to improve government.

	Agree
Career senior leaders are able to adjust to changes in technology.	65%
In my agency, we consider how future workforce trends will impact our work.	50%
Today's career senior leaders are equipped with digital skills to enhance government.	46%

Anticipated Impact on the Federal Government

Without the ability to operate differently and capture value in this new era of work, Federal government will be unable to synchronize technology and processes to improve operations and achieve mission-critical work.

Recommended Solution for Agencies

Develop the organization, operations, and behavior necessary to promote a digital mindset and transform the way work is completed.

Half of respondents indicate their agencies are not prepared to attract and retain top talent.

76% of respondents feel there are exciting opportunities for workers of all ages, but less than half understand how to manage a multi-generational workforce. Further, respondents indicate their agencies lack the planning and preparation to attract employees from outside employers and retain top talent.

There are exciting opportunities in the federal government for workers of all ages.
76%

Career senior leaders in my organization understand how to manage a multi-generational workforce.
46%

My agency has a plan to attract talent from outside the Federal government.
27%

My agency is well prepared to retain top talent.
22%

☐ Agree

Anticipated Impact on the Federal Government

The workforce is becoming more age-diverse (e.g., Millennials, employees working into retirement age), and managing the workforce of the future will require collaboration across generations. If agencies do not retain and develop a diverse and inclusive workforce, engagement, collaboration, and innovation will suffer.

Recommended Solution for Agencies

Develop recruiting and retention strategy with a focus on developing an inclusive culture. This will require developing inclusive leaders who come to work enabling all employees to unleash their full potential.

Successful leadership requires better management infrastructure.

Leaders don't feel supported by infrastructure that enables their development or their ability to manage and develop future leaders. Less than two-thirds of respondents believe the performance review system is fair and accurate, and only 26% feel their agency evaluates career senior leaders to identify skills gaps. Less than half (46%) of respondents indicate their organization has an agency-wide leadership development strategy.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT

26% INDEX SCORE

To what extent does the federal government provide **infrastructure to support leader development?**

Agree | Neutral | Disagree

And...

I believe that my performance review is a fair and accurate reflection of my performance. — 64%

My organization has an agency-wide leadership development strategy. — 46%

My agency evaluates the career senior leadership cadre to identify critical skill gaps. — 26%

Agree

Anticipated Impact on the Federal Government

Without identifying skills gaps and fostering knowledge-sharing, major gaps in key knowledge, skills, and abilities will impede the government's ability to achieve mission-critical work.

Recommended Solution for Agencies

Understanding the knowledge, skills, and abilities of current employees and forecasting future needs and gaps will ensure that mission-critical needs are met and the government can continue looking to the future.

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