

# Use Data and Analytics to Improve Your Agency's Workforce Dynamics:

## Megetrends Video Series

**Tom [0:09]** Welcome, and thanks for joining us. My guest today are Ashley Madison. She's a partner for defense and security at guidehouse. And Lee Sheldon, she's a partner for data analytics at guidehouse. It's good to have you both with us.

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [0:21]** Thank you. Thank you.

**Tom [0:22]** Happy to be here. And our topic today is the workforce, the workforce dynamics. And it's interesting at one time, people talked about the post war dynamic. Nowadays, we talk about the post pipe post pandemic dynamic. And it really has changed things. So maybe let's start with giving us a sense of how your clients needs have changed. What are they asking of you in the post pandemic era when it comes to workforce workforce development?

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [0:47]** Sure, I'll start and then I'd love for Lee to chime in. You know, the pandemic, regardless of industry affected our clients in a myriad of ways from increased resignations and attrition, to labor shortages to employee burnout, particularly for some of our clients who work in the national security sector, who weren't allowed to take advantage of some of the new work modalities that were put in place in terms of telework and remote work. So our clients is particularly federal clients. If you think about budget sequestration, and some of the budget cuts that have happened over the last decade or so, unfortunately, some employee related programs had been cut. And so as this new normal hits, and and they have to shift to remote and hybrid work and deal with, you know, mass resignation, really, they're struggling to address some of these workforce realities that they're grappling with. And some of the old axioms are changing. And so we find our clients coming to us to understand how to build culture in a virtual or a hybrid modality, how to improve recruitment and hiring systems to address their talent shortages, how to rescale and upskill the workforce they do have, because they have to make do with the talent that they have Leanna if you want to add anything from what you're seeing, I

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [ 2:07]** think just to summarize, with everything that Ashley just overviewed, we are seeing a tremendous focus on the intentional use of data. So with all of these changes, and looking to the future, while many of our clients have always captured data, primarily Human Resources data, there is an exponential growth and demand for that data, how to best govern it, and then how to best use it to make strategically data driven decision makings off of that.

**Tom [2:41]** And just a quick follow up question on the burnout. Yeah. Is it people that were coming in, that were burning out or the people that could telework or both?

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [2:50]** I think it's both, you know, obviously, the Federal workforce like workforces across the United States, were grappling with school closures, you know, increase caregiving, we're grappling with, you know, not having daycare available, there were a number of challenges that I think impacted the workforce and you know, grappling with those new increased, you know, being a homeschool teacher or being a caregiver, etc. With having to maintain your full time work, potentially shift your work modality, that was stressful, even for those that had the opportunity to work from home. Those that had to go in were faced with the I think, frightening reality of at the time, a virus that we didn't understand the potential that going into work may be risking their lives, for those in the in the health care, you know, occupations, the fear of bringing something home to their family. And so I think there was burnout on both sides, those that had the opportunity to work from home, and then those who continue to have to work on the frontlines. Yeah,

**Tom [3:51]** having to keep that dining room neat for the background picture. If nothing else was difficult for people, you're getting to the data lead, let me just ask you this. Do the data show that, for example, increased use is coming in for AAPs. Because of the mental toll this might be taking on people? I

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [4:09]** think it definitely depends. But every individual had a different experience as a result of the pandemic. And you've probably heard time and time again, the emphasis around the customer experience. And that is something that is at the forefront at this point in time, and really wanting to better understand how to promote a safe workforce environment for staff across the board.

**Tom [4:38]** All right, and so now we're faced with a new set of challenges. And that is what comes next. Absolutely. There's a tug of war, you know, be between employee groups, in some cases, some of the unions and agencies and the White House and do we come back everybody or do we three days a week, two days a week, whatever the case might be. So maybe outline What are the next challenges? What are people asking you for as we are now fully, we hope post pandemic?

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [5:06]** Absolutely. There's definitely increased pressure from OPM from Congress, in certain instances, the White House to see, particularly federal employees come back to the office. But there are a lot of benefits that we've seen as a result of some of the remote work in in terms of talent acquisition and hiring, when you're not hiring someone for the DC Washington area or particular work location, it does open up new talent pools, and the federal government has long had a challenge with bringing in the critical talent that they need, whether that be younger college graduates, whether that be those in the cyber and STEM fields. And so, you know, with remote work, fully remote work in particular, you have access to new talent pools that perhaps you could not access prior to the pandemic. And so shutting off these new avenues to close critical talent gaps, that's a hard case to make. I also think that in the pandemic, you saw a little bit of the pendulum swinging from the the sort of balance of power with the organization and leadership to the employees, employees, were able to better I think, integrate their personal and professional responsibilities in a way that they didn't have the opportunity to in the pre pandemic period. So, so taking away perceived gains, if you will, from employees, has impacts from an employee engagement standpoint, potentially from a nutrition standpoint, and it needs to be balanced carefully. And so I think clients are grappling with not only, you know, what is the right balance, how many days in the office, how many days at home, but also how to create equity in the work environment? For those that never were able to participate in remote work or telework, how do you create an employee experience and environment where there's there seems to be equal access to opportunity equal access to flexibility. So clients are grappling with equity and the return to work, how to continue to retain talent that they brought in, particularly when the private sector as data showing, many organizations are keeping remote work. And so it's something that our clients are really struggling with. Lee, do you want to share any examples from your clients? Yeah, I

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [7:23]** think it also comes down to how best to optimize the workforce in this new hybrid environment. A lot of data has been showing that individuals are actually more efficient, working from home better usage of time, right, less frustration from the traditional morning commute in which some people just really throws their day off, as you can imagine, but to Ashley's point, coming back to the flexibility that is really now on the table, and the a bit of fear, right, in terms of losing staff practitioners at the idea of mandating return to work and not keeping that flexible mindset.

**Tom [8:07]** And can you measure these things? I mean, you mentioned there's an exponential growth in data, other than the traditional that you might have about the workforce, what are some of the data elements that agencies organizations should maybe consider developing to get that good view of what's going on with the workforce? Yeah,

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [8:25]** it's, it's a great question, in particular, because what we are seeing is that struggle right now where a lot of data has been collected historically. But there is now a broader need to collect new data. But unless clients actually have the process defined, they can't naturally start collecting that data. But it does really come across the entire lifecycle of an individual from their employee opportunities, their promotion candidate, See also looking at feedback in terms of exit interviews, as well to learn from those scenarios to then reapply and improve in the future. Yeah, because

**Tom [9:10]** you know, workforce planning has been a challenge for the government, it's on the higher risk list year in year out too. So, you know, maybe discuss some ways to get at that database approach to workforce planning, so you can maybe change things.

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [9:25]** A couple of things I would add to what Lee was talking about, as we've also seen clients using employee engagement data, so comparing, you know, employee engagement data that they collected during the pandemic, and now as they've started to reintegrate to the office. So we've seen a emphasis on employee engagement data, an attempt to have productivity data, I think, in certain functions like acquisition and other functions in terms of like HR processing, you know, they have a lot of transactional data. So I do know clients doing some comparisons to understand The Productivity impacts. Gao recently put out a study that they were mandated by Congress to perform sort of a study of studies, if you will, comparing private sector data during the pandemic period. And it has shown, you know, some increases in productivity now that that is not the federal workforce and data. But it does give you some tangential ideas that there are perhaps anecdotal gains in productivity. But certainly, it has to be balanced with some of the things that you miss out when you're not in the office in terms of mentoring in terms of employee relationships, that you gain exactly on that collaboration that you might want to do for brainstorming or those types of engagements, which can often be more effective when you're in person.

**Tom [10:47]** And there's also the issue of when you get to equity, not every job is available to remote

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [10:54]** work. Absolutely, absolutely. And that's a huge impact. I think my clients are primarily in Homeland Security and in the Department of Justice. And as you know, as law enforcement professionals and national security professionals, they didn't have the opportunity to work from home. And so the emphasis now is on creating an equitable employee experience. So those that that didn't get those perceived, you know, flexibilities or gains, feel that, that they're having an equal employment experience. And so my clients are having to get creative and what that means so

**Tom [11:26]** equals not necessarily the same for everybody. Exactly. All right, we're gonna explore that a little bit more, but first, we're going to take a short break. My guest today are Ashley Madison. She's a partner for defense and security at guidehouse. Lee Sheldon is the partner for data analytics at guidehouse. I'm Tom Teman, host of the federal drive, you're listening to evolving complexity series workforce dynamics, sponsored by guidehouse here on Federal News Network. Welcome back to the evolving complexity series, workforce dynamics sponsored by guidehouse here on Federal News Network. My guest today are Ashley Madison. She's a partner for defense and security at guidehouse. And Lee Sheldon, a partner for data analytics at guidehouse. And I'm Tom Temin, host of the federal drive and your moderator today. And before the break, we were talking about the idea of workforce planning, which is something the government needs to improve. And maybe Lee, we'll start with you, how can you help clients in the government do a better job of workforce planning? And I have a feeling you're gonna say it starts with a data bases.

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [12:30]** It's a great question COVID caught everyone off guard, the world was not prepared. And that has taught us a lot in this post pandemic era that we're now all sitting within is how do we prepare for the next event? And what does that look like. And on the positive, we were able to collect quite a myriad amount of data throughout the COVID pandemic, that we're now looking to better use to predict how we need to be prepared in the future. So not only looking at our current workforce, and understanding the roles, the location or the locality of our of our workforce, but using analytic modeling, to actually run scenarios to understand what type of processes need to be established or hardened. So that way, if an event occurs in future, we are prepared, we know how to handle working with our workforce to pivot and adjust while maintaining the current state.

**Tom [13:43]** And can these analytic constructs in this way of doing it also be used and applied to say workforce planning in terms of future skills, because this comes up as over and over again, as a problem for agencies. We don't have the people that we need now, because of contemporary changes in the market or the technology, whatever it is that we need.

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [14:04]** And with technology in particular, it is instrument, it's booming. And so it's a it's a struggle for everyone at this point in time to understand and not only that you will continuously have individuals retiring from the workforce, and if you do not have a retention plan or a strategy in place to backfill that individual. How are you going to maintain your operations? So, to be honest, that is probably one of the most prominent trends we see in workforce is preparing for our staffing and helping our clients understand not only how to use data to help inform that, but also what roles do you truly need. Roles are ever evolving. And analytics and technology are becoming more two the forefront. So how do we actually enable individuals to have some of those skill sets? Recognizing that not everyone's technical? Not everyone's purely functional. But what does that mix look like?

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [15:13]** And I think workforce planning, it can take two sides of the coin. A lot of our clients are asking us for workload staffing models to understand how many people do we need to meet current demand in certain functional areas? How many will we need to meet if demand shifts, so sort of that future scenario planning, but also workforce planning, it can be data driven, but take a skills approach. So looking at critical skills that you need in the workforce now, whether that be analytics, whether that be enterprise risk management, whether that be critical IT skills around application development? And understanding what is that current supply that we have? What do we believe that future demand to be based on certain programs? And what are the gaps and with the gaps? That's when we tried to develop different workforce interventions, whether that's recruiting to bring in new talent, whether that is retention, because you know that this is a critical talent segment. So what can you do to increase the likelihood that they're going to stay with an organization, and it may also involve rescaling and upskilling. You know, there are certain positions series and types that have natural adjacency. So so maybe someone who's a budget analyst has the aperture and the right knowledge and skills abilities with the appropriate training to become a financial manager. And so clients are looking for not only the data to tell them, where do I have gaps, how to best prepare, but also the ancillary strategies to close the gaps once identified.

**Tom [16:41]** Yeah, in fact, sometimes workload and skills intersect. I mean, this came up with one agency the other day, that has to regulate and give licensing approval for a new form of technology for nuclear power plants. It's completely different from what they were approving 60s 70s and 80s. And so they need the people that can understand this new technology, and therefore, calculate how many applications we're going to have what the workload might be. So two skills and workload combined. So glad

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [17:14]** you mentioned that, too. And what we're also coaching our clients are is sometimes not to hire for a particular skill, but to hire for a learning aptitude, because the half life of skills is getting shorter and shorter. So over an employee's life, they're going to have to refresh their skills, learn new technologies, a number of times. And so rather than hiring someone for, say, their Python skills, hiring them for, you know, their ability to acquire new skills, their aptitude to learning, and so that's something that we have to balance in targeting particular individuals with a skill set, versus hiring people that have the ability to acquire the skill sets that you'll need over time.

**Tom [17:51]** And that leads to the question of the readiness of the hiring and HR workforce to use these data and analytics. You know, I remember the days when if you were a manager, you had a black book of people you knew in the industry, and someone wonder what they're up to, you know, give them a call. And that was that was recruiting that was, you know, workforce planning, not so much today.

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [18:12]** It's much more regulated in the federal government, as Lee will tell you, do you want to talk about some of the ways we're helping to use data to improve recruiting and hiring processes,

**Tom [18:22]** and also getting the hiring managers and the HR managers equipped so that they can use data and analytics, as opposed to whatever strategies they had, you know, in the past,

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [18:32]** what data is also really helping to inform is success in terms of how are they doing in terms of some of their targeted hiring events, people are being very intentional in terms of how they're using their time to target and recruit candidates into agencies, and some are better than others. And that's natural, but understanding that success or where there might be opportunities to even change the strategy to how they are even looking to recruit. That is where you can use data to help drive how to change your process. We are seeing a lot of human resources, data also coming more to the forefront in terms of transparency, not traditionally held just within the HR environment, but really wanting to promote broadly across agencies, how we're doing, right, how are we doing in terms of internal hiring, versus external hiring? And with the increase with diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, people are now desiring that information and feeling that if it's withheld, then something could be wrong. They want to know what's happening. And that is drastically changing how data is being used and shared.

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [19:54]** Yeah, I think I'll just add, we work with a lot of clients to create dashboards that help them To understand the efficacy of different phases within the hiring process, where they're losing candidates so that they can drill into that and try to identify the root causes. Additionally, we're working with clients within the Department of Homeland Security and other places to automate certain parts of the hiring process, whether that's resume review, whether that's adjudicating applicants for a basic qualifications. And so what that does is it does free up some of the manpower and resources and time of federal employees to apply to other parts of the process where they can have more value additive activities. And so we see it not only helping them understand the ROI and how they're doing, but also to accelerate that time to hire overall, which is, which is always a pressure. You know, you always hear people complaining about the federal hiring process. I think the data can also help underscore where the problem really is. I think there's anecdotally L, it's the background check, it takes so long, or, Oh, it's the candidate not scheduling this physical fitness test or the data helps dispel some of those myths and really show where some of the problems are and where the opportunities for efficiency and effectiveness may lie.

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [21:11]** Yeah, the only other thing I would just add is, that is also assuming that all of this data does exist. And what we are finding is that a lot of data does, and a lot of data hasn't yet been collected. And so a lot of processes have been established. But until enough time has gone by, you don't have enough data collected to actually help really inform your analytics. And so it is a hybrid approach, taking what you have, but also working to grow the volume of the data that you're collecting to have an even better story. And that is something a lot of our clients are very focused on at this point in time, right creating, integrating

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [21:54]** the disparate data, view data from OPM, if you have data from other partners, whether you're using external marketing and branding firms to help drive your recruitment, you have multiple disparate data sets that aren't recorded in the same way. I mean, Lee deals with this all the time. Well,

**Leigh Sheldon - Guidehouse [22:11]** and many of our federal agencies, of course, all use the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey as a starting point to understand their own employees. But now what we're seeing is that data is fantastic. But what more can we now add to that to get an even more holistic and more even granular understanding of our employees? Right,

**Tom [22:36]** the more granular the more you measure, what's the old saying you can't change it or control it, if you can't measure it. That's right. And the service doesn't really give you fine enough grained information to be able to control anything or change, change and input.

**Ashley Mattison - Guidehouse [22:48]** Well, and we always say with my clients that if it's measured, it matters. And so trying to make sure that they set up the right measurements so that they really, truly are measuring the things that matter and it's yielding the insights that will help them make, you know, improvements to their processes.

**Tom [23:05]** All right, thank you so much for a great discussion. My guest today have been Ashley Madison. She's a partner for defense and security at guidehouse and Lee Sheldon as a partner for data analytics at guidehouse. I'm Tom Tim and you're listening to Federal News Network. For more on this discussion, please visit [Federal News network.com](https://www.federalnewsnetwork.com) and search guidehouse

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