

Developing aspiring leaders across organisations within the public sector

West Midlands Employers (formerly Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands - IEWM) supports local public sector organisations in their drive to increase efficiency and improve services and partners with Local Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and the local Primary Care Trust (PCT). Providing specialist regional support to these Partners in areas such as people development and performance improvement, it encourages collaborative working and the sharing of good practice.

The introduction of Head Light's Talent® platform to host their customised version of Talent 360® has enabled West Midlands Employers as the manager of the service to:

- Offer its Partners tailored 360 questionnaires for different levels of management, using the language and processes defined by the Partners themselves.
- Incorporate its own competency framework.
- Run and manage different questionnaires, self-sufficiently.
- Access and incorporate the business psychology expertise and experience of Head Light.
- Demonstrate the impact and value of the 360 questionnaire on leadership development participants.

The initial challenge

In 2008, the then IEWM earmarked funding for people and leadership development activities and discussed with its Partners where best to spend this investment. They agreed that the focus should be to develop a programme for aspiring senior leaders and what is now called the Catalyst Future Leaders Programme was designed. *"It became clear in the initial planning of the Catalyst Programme that the delegates would benefit greatly from having an initial snapshot of how others see them with regard to their leadership capabilities and so incorporating a 360 degree questionnaire seemed obvious. We believed that the information a 360 process could provide would help the delegates signpost their own areas of strength and development need and help to focus their attention as they progresses through the programme,"* commented Samantha Darby, People and Leadership Consultant at West Midlands Employers and responsible for the planning and delivery of the programme.

Samantha continues, *"We wanted to get the programme up and running as soon as we could and, while we knew we wanted a 360 process included, we also knew that it was essential to take into account the differing needs, processes and terminology of our multiple Partners. Added to this was our own need to be as self-sufficient as possible and for the programme to be sustainable after the initial funding."*

"We needed therefore a system that not only could be used for the Catalyst Programme but a system which had the potential of providing 360 questionnaires to all public sector organisations across the West Midlands. In short, we had a long list of requirements."



"We know that it was right choice to select the Head Light system."

Samantha Darby,
People and
Leadership
Consultant, West
Midlands Employers



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“The Talent® system, offered us both the flexibility, and simplicity and ease of use that we – and our Partners – needed.”

“Head Light demonstrates its own commitment to great customer service through its support of us and does this time and time again – Head Light underpins our success.”

The solution:

“We looked at the various options and talked to a number of potential suppliers. We realised that Head Light, with its established online Talent® system, offered us both the flexibility, and simplicity and ease of use that we – and our Partners – needed. On top of this, they were able to take our own competence framework and deliver a bespoke, customised and psychometrically validated questionnaire for our Catalyst Programme delegates – and delivered this within a tight timeline.”

Ian Lee-Emery, Managing Director of Head Light comments, *“When we started to work with IEWM, it was clear they needed a system which could manage the complexities of running 360-degree reviews concurrently for multiple organisations, as well as providing a platform for collaboration and benchmarking and yet be simple to use and easy to understand. Our multi-tenant SaaS-based Talent® system is highly configurable and was able to deliver this straight ‘out of the box’.”* As well as the Catalyst Questionnaire, IEWM and its Partners created three generic questionnaires which could be used with Operational Managers, Middle Managers, and the Top Tier Managers. They worked with the consulting team at Head Light who brought together and analysed the competences already used by some of the Partners with those from the Chartered Management Institute (offered by Head Light as part of their software).

“The consultants at Head Light supported us greatly during the conversations and discussions we had with the Partners about competences and we very soon realised the value of their expertise and experience to drill down and to understand what was needed and how best to reach agreement. As we had with the Catalyst Questionnaire, we ran a pilot scheme, gathered sufficient data and then Head Light performed the psychometric analysis to ensure that the result was a bank of 360 degree questionnaires which were valid and robust.”

“As we knew that the success of the Catalyst Questionnaire and the other three questionnaires would be measured by the value of the feedback process, the acceptance of the competences and the impact on the organisations, it was important that we all understood the reports and how to interpret them. Head Light ran initial training sessions for us after which we were able to cascade that information across the region.”

The outcome

Several years on from the initial launch of the Catalyst programme and over 220 people have been through the programme and Samantha and her team have monitored the feedback from delegates.

“We’ve been delighted with the impact that the programme has had on the delegates with 97% of delegates agreeing – or strongly agreeing – that the programme had helped them to enhance their leadership capability. We’ve seen delegates stating, unprompted, that the use of a 360 review at the beginning of the programme has been one of the best elements of the programme allowing them to gain a greater understanding of themselves and their behaviours. They are then using the rest of the programme to enhance their strengths and work on their development areas.”

“In addition 93% of those who have been through the WM360 process agreed or strongly agreed that the WM360 system was easy to use and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that the report useful and easy to understand.”



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“We’ve also asked those who have been through the other 360 questionnaires and their experience of our now-branded on-line WM360 facility. We received some very specific comments on the value of the process – and we are pleased to receive these:

“It has proven very valuable in my achieving a new senior management role within local government.”

“Was fundamental in creating objective feedback in black and white that I could not ignore. It made me pay attention to areas that were less visible to me and the questions challenged the areas important to local government that other performance reviews do not cover.”

“The feedback has helped me to concentrate on the areas that are important and where I need to develop.”

“I thought the whole process flowed intuitively.”

“Very good experience –very easy to use, understand and monitor progress.”

Samantha sums up: *“With results like that we know that it was right choice to select the Head Light system.”*

Next steps

The original intention was always to be self-sufficient and indeed, after the start-up funding from IEWM, West Midlands Employers took over the management of the 360 system and has extended its use.

“Using the Talent® system has offered us great self-sufficiency. We now have three of our own generic 360 questionnaires as well as a 360 for elected members and a customised on-line WM360 system configured for us and our Partners who can choose to have their own section of the system and manage their own reviews or we are able to manage the process for them. We’re able to look at the information from a regional perspective and consider the areas of development need as well as looking at the capabilities we have internally and how these could be deployed across the region”

“For us the next step is to look at a ‘director-level’ questionnaire – looking at the tier of people already in senior leadership positions.”

Samantha continues, *“As a result of using the system, we made a few suggestions to Head Light for additions to the system which we wanted. Head Light listened to us and incorporated them in their next release. They’re proactive at asking for feedback, acting on it and then letting everyone know what’s new.”*

“Working with Head Light is about working with a true partner: both parties understand what is expected. The initial project had a tight timeline and because the communication between us was strong, and the Head Light team were very responsive, we were all able to deliver on time and on budget.”

Samantha adds, *“As we have ‘customers’ of our own – our Partners – it is extremely important that we deliver the support that they need and that we do this quickly. Head Light demonstrates its own commitment to great customer service through its support of us and does this time and time again – Head Light underpins our success.”*

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