

## The role of 360 degree feedback in the merging of organisations

The merging and bringing together of organisations to create a single new organisation always presents challenges – and it was no different when a number of local councils combined to become a single Authority.

After working with its HR Partner and introducing Talent 360®, the organisation had:

- Clarity of what was needed to deliver and lead the change through the identification of clear Leadership Qualities
- A way to benchmark how leaders currently perform – and the areas for development
- The ability to generate and share easy-to-understand reports enabling a degree of ownership and self-sufficiency
- Pertinent signposts for development through the Leadership Development Programme thereby providing a clear link between assessment and training investment
- A clear, accurate overview of the process and a measurement of engagement with the initiative
- A demonstration of the Authority's investment in, and commitment to, the development of its people.

“The introduction of Talent 360® is seen by our people as a positive step forward in delivering the Council's vision. It demonstrates clearly to our people our investment in them and the commitment we have to giving the best service to our service users.”

### The initial challenge

The Workforce Development Manager at the new Authority explains the initial priorities and how they took their first steps. *“As we started to look at the different operational practices in place within the former organisations and how these were managed, it became clear that we not only needed to map out the new vision of the organisation but also consider the competencies and skills needed by those we were expecting to lead and deliver this. Knowing what we wanted was one thing: in tandem, we needed to review where our people were placed currently with regard to these qualities. And as our Leadership team shaped how we would move forward, a number of what we call Leadership Qualities emerged.”*

### Developing – and measuring – the Leadership Qualities of the future

These Leadership Qualities were important competencies which were understood to be crucial to take the organisation forward. The Workforce Development Manager explains further, *“The Qualities identified were those that we expected to see within our senior leaders and managers. Other organisations may choose to call these competencies but we wanted to use terminology which had real resonance for our people and which could be understood instantly. They focus on how leadership is displayed and deployed rather than the actual job of leadership.”* Having identified these Leadership Qualities, the Council's Corporate Management Team agreed that the next step was to see how prevalent these Qualities were across their current leaders – and, perhaps more importantly, how they could be developed and selected against. To help with this an external HR consulting firm was appointed to help develop a 360 degree feedback questionnaire to measure these Qualities and to then manage the deployment of this across the Council's people.



## Deploying the 360

During the first year of the implementation, 70 senior members – Assistant Directors, Heads of Service and Chief Officers – completed the 360 programme. To ensure that the 360 feedback became an integral part of the Personal Development Review, the individual leader and his or her line manager were able to generate the report themselves which resulted from the combined feedback generated from the Talent 360® system. The report was then discussed during the Personal Development Review meeting. The feedback on the reports has been good.

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*“Both the line managers and those receiving the feedback have found the reports easy to understand and able to identify quickly the areas of strength – and those where development and improvement needs to be made. They like the spider-like summary of scores as this gives an at-a-glance summary of the strengths and areas of development need and this goes down really well with all those taking part.”*

The interpretation of the report was seen very much as a key element to the initial roll-out of the 360 – as well as collecting high quality and important feedback. The Workforce Development Manager continues, *“We knew that to get the most of the 360 we needed to furnish our people with an understanding of how to give useful feedback, how to read the report and how to create the ‘next steps’ in order to develop the key Qualities. We put in place training for both the managers and their teams and developed an FAQ document for all those asked to rate other people. Over time we have adapted this resource as questions and queries arise: it’s a good example of a living document and has served us well.”*

As well as feeding into the individual development plans for the initial cohort of people, the 360 information also fed into the Leadership Development Programme attended by these managers. This meant there was a clear link between the initial feedback and the investment in developing specific areas of need. Once all the reviews had been made, it was possible to take an authority-wide view of the needs to their managers. The four lower scoring Qualities from across the organisation were targeted specifically for improvement across the Council and, as the same questionnaire was to be used for the second year review, first year results were used as a benchmark against which progress is measured.

## Extending and adapting the 360 programme

One year after the initial deployment and the use of the 360 was widened to embrace the next tier of 150 managers. *“Some adaptation and tailoring took place for this group of managers and we were delighted that the Talent 360® system was able to accommodate this quite easily. We have had to acknowledge that some of our identified Qualities are of less significance for this level of manager as they may not be dealing with the more strategic elements of their service and for this reason, their 360 questionnaire has been slightly reworded in places, and some of the less relevant Qualities taken out.”*

*“We noticed that this tier of managers were initially more wary of the process itself as they hadn’t had exposure to such a system before but after working through the questionnaire and the feedback, they found the ‘process’ quite motivating. It was good for them to see their own strengths set out before them and to look at ways to build on these.”* Implementation and operational processes were also updated. Initially the managers and the workforce development team wanted to retain a clear line of site of the day-to-day working of the 360 degree feedback process – seeing who was being invited to rate an individual and how the programme as a whole was progressing.

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This was an important element to the success of the deployment as it meant the Authority had a detailed view of what was happening, even though they had outsourced the day-to-day project management. However, having been through what is to be an annual cycle of 360 reviews, implementation issues have been ironed out and the trust and understanding is now there with their people and they have been able to step back from the process a little more and allow the external HR consultancy to liaise directly with the users.

#### Areas of learning following initial implementation

As with any new initiative the process is tweaked and shaped over time and this Council found that additional guidance on rating was needed for those completing the questionnaires. They discovered that people were very positive in their ratings of people – perhaps too positive – and so emphasised in the briefing training the need to be honest and open in the feedback and to evidence feedback where possible. While the process is anonymous and confidential and this is stressed strongly in briefings on the new system, there is a natural caution for any new process and so is re-iterated again with their people.

#### In summary

The Workforce Development Manager concludes: *“The introduction of Talent 360® is seen by our people as a positive step forward in delivering the Council’s vision. It demonstrates clearly to our people our investment in them and the commitment we have to giving the best service to our service users. Going forward we will extend this and link into our performance management process.”*

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