

Fostering a new way of working within Horsham District Council

Some years ago the Corporate Management Team at Horsham District Council recognised the positive benefits which could be had on service delivery by changing the way in which services work together. They knew that they needed to move beyond the departmental and operational approach which had worked for them in the past but was unlikely to serve them as well in the future.

After implementing Talent 360®, the managers of Horsham District Council gained:

- A relevant, straightforward self-assessment of their own competence against those capabilities and behaviours defined as 'The Horsham Manager' which would take the authority forward
- A practical, non-threatening, adaptable way to gather feedback from others incorporating the language and internal processes of the organisation
- A sharp focus on target areas for development

Peter Dawes, Head of Corporate Support Services, comments, *"Across the Council we recognised that the way we delivered local services was changing – and indeed this change became more rapid than originally predicted given the economic climate and public spending budgets. As such, we needed to encourage our managers to develop a new set of skills and we were committed to ensuring these were understood and embedded within our organisation."*

Looking across the organisation

The Corporate Management Team identified six Leadership Capabilities that were needed to deliver effective management and leadership: Communication; Leadership; Results; Empowering others; and an Awareness of Self and of the Wider Organisation. In essence they were looking to create more strategic –and less operationally-focused– managers. Peter comments, *"One of the most significant capabilities which underpin the day-to-day operations of our services is that of 'corporate awareness'. We ask our managers to look at how they can best operate across services, departments and teams and this more outward view can only come about from an enhanced awareness of themselves, the wider organisation and the interactions and connectivity between teams."*

'The Horsham Manager'

Having developed the six areas of Capability it was important for these not to remain merely as a list of 'ideals' but to root them firmly within daily working. The concept of 'The Horsham Manager' was born. Peter explains, *"It goes without saying that we expect our managers to be excellent professionals. But we expect them to be more than this. We want them to acquire the skills and to demonstrate the behaviours needed to deliver greater internal and external impact: it's about seeing beyond one's service area and becoming more 'rounded'. For some, this was a real shift in focus – and we needed to make sure they were supported as they developed."* The Horsham Manager – reinforced by an internal, resource website – is a concept which goes well beyond the use of the 360 but is supported by the insight the 360 provides.



"We know we are better in some key areas for us as an organisation – and the 360 is playing a part in that."

Peter Dawes, Head of Corporate Support Services, Horsham District Council



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“Extending and adapting the questionnaire could have created a challenge but with Head Light’s support and the Talent® system’s flexibility enabled us to create easily two tailored questionnaires.”

“Using Talent 360® has given our managers an easy-to-understand process and a sharp focus on the development areas needed.”

How to assess the Capabilities

Self-assessment had already featured within the Horsham District Council’s PDR process but with their plans to gather and combine views from more people, they realised that their current paper-based system was unlikely to continue to be practical. Peter explains, *“We needed to find a balance between a quick-to-complete set of questions and a valuable output which added depth and direction to the PDR process. The process we had was cumbersome, took too long to both complete and data analyse and added very little to the subsequent development conversation.”*

An off-the-shelf survey tool had been used as part of a senior management development programme and this highlighted the possibilities of 360 – if the right questions were asked within it. Peter continues, *“The information the 360 provided was useful, but we wanted more than this gave us. We knew that we wanted to design and create a 360 system that reflects specifically the way we do things, speaks our language and could include our Capabilities. With this in mind, we adopted Head Light’s Talent 360® system.”*

Translating the Capabilities into behaviours

The Capabilities explained what managers were expected to do to move the authority forward, but the next step was to convert these into observable behaviours. Debbie Hance, Head of Business Psychology at Head Light, comments, *“In order to bring any set of Capabilities to life, it is important to translate them into clear, straightforward behavioural statements that can be seen at work. This not only helps people understand the new Capabilities but also embeds them within the organisation.”* Debbie continues, *“We were able to support the work already undertaken by creating a set of 360 degree questions and statements which were tested with a number of focus groups across the authority; this ensured that the questions were understood and that people were able to give accurate feedback against the criteria. Involving people at this stage helped to create early buy-in to the 360 questionnaire.”*

Amending and extending the use of 360

The Capabilities identified initially by the Corporate Management Team at Horsham focused on the strategic and visionary but these had to adapt to reflect new ways of working and rapid organisational change. Peter explains, *“The Horsham Manager of today needs to have additional behaviours to those of only a few years ago – and it is vital that we are now able to reflect this in our 360 questionnaire: as our needs change, so too does our 360 tool.”*

As well as being adaptable, it also became clear that the Talent 360® tool could offer more value to the authority by expanding its use to include operational managers, including team leaders. Peter adds, *“After deciding to extend 360 to all our managers we looked carefully at the Capabilities we already used. We concluded that some were not relevant to team leaders and we knew it was important that we didn’t introduce a questionnaire which had little credibility.”*

To help develop a pertinent operational manager questionnaire, the team decided this time not to run a pilot but to hold focus groups and asked Head Light’s Business Psychology team to support the authority in designing and running these workshops. Peter comments, *“Working together with Head Light’s practical business psychologists gave us a great sounding board to check out our ideas and provided a different perspective to our thinking. It meant that we could still own the project internally and for it not to be seen as an external consultancy exercise, but still being able to draw on Head Light’s expertise and experience.”* Peter continues, *“The comment and discussion which took place proved really valuable: it meant that we were creating something which was not only appropriate, but had been developed specifically for Horsham managers.”*



“We owned the project internally and so it wasn’t seen as an external consultancy exercise, and yet we were able to draw on Head Light’s expertise and experience.”

Debbie adds, “It was great to work with the Horsham team and we facilitated a number of sessions across different levels and service areas. We then amalgamated the feedback which fed into the creation of a new questionnaire focused specifically at the operational manager level. We found that four of the initial core Capabilities were applicable across all managers – and we then sought to add in more relevant capabilities depending on the job level.” Peter comments, “*Extending and adapting the questionnaire could have created a challenge for us but the support we had from Head Light and the flexibility of the Talent® system meant that we were able to create easily two questionnaires – tailoring the language and the item content accordingly.*”

The feedback comes alive

After completing the 360 questionnaire within Horsham, the feedback conversation takes place between line manager and employee: this is a separate conversation to that of the appraisal. Peter believes that the greatest value of the 360 comes from the insight each person gets into where they are now – and where they need to be – and with Talent 360® the managers have access to valuable information which feeds into the Personal Development Appraisal process. This meant that familiarising the manager with the report and how to use it was an important part of the implementation process – and the team at Horsham included this within the initial implementation plan. Peter explains, “*Using Talent 360® has given our managers an easy-to-understand process and a sharp focus on the development areas needed. The feedback has been positive regarding the reports and the value of the information they give.*”

Going beyond the individual and next steps

But the use of the information goes beyond the individual development plans – and gives something to Horsham District Council which wasn’t expected. Peter explains, “*We knew the 360 would be valuable at an individual level but we have now started to use the information to look at areas of specific skill or talent when looking to build a project team or bring together a group of people.*”

Peter concludes, “*It’s still early days to look for any statistical trend which shows a greater demonstration of the Capabilities but anecdotal evidence, day-to-day observations and common sense suggest that by identifying the Capabilities we need in Horsham, making managers aware of what these are, giving them insight into how they measure up against these and then supporting their acquisition and development brings about real change in our people.*”

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