Implementing an engaging new PDR system at Northamptonshire Police

Northamptonshire Police sought to design a new PDR system with input from across the Force. A working group helped to ensure all points of view were accommodated and a roll-out programme combining communications, support and help from advocate videos made sure that PDR engagement was the strongest ever witnessed by the Force.

The challenge: Introducing a Performance Development Review (PDR) system that goes beyond expectations

Northamptonshire Police had no solid, Force-wide PDR system in place. Frustrated by this, some managers had developed their own paper-based systems to make sure the PDR process went ahead. But with no standard PDR in place it became difficult to engage people to see the value of PDR as an essential tool in managing people and their performance and development.

Caroline Oppido, HR Manager, Northamptonshire Police, explains: ""*We know performance management is vitally important to our Force and that our managers are trained and committed to it. However, without a simple-to-use system, it was hard for them to engage with the process and to see its value. It was impossible for us to collate and analyse reviews, and report on this information confidently.*" Sara Postlethwaite, Leadership and Management Development Trainer, Northamptonshire Police continues: "*We had no clear and consistent message about why the PDR was valuable. If anyone needed an excuse not to complete it, the lack of an easy-to-use and standardised system gave them it!*"

The solution: Bringing together a working group to define what is needed

The team knew that scoping the new system would require input from beyond the HR and L&D teams. Caroline explains: "*From the outset, we recognised that a cross-functional working group was key. We wanted to have as much input as possible from as many areas as possible that would help to shape and decide on any new system we designed. Information services, information security, corporate communications, operational officers at different levels, police staff, managers with a keen interest in PDR, project management, HR, professional standards – all were part of the working group.*" Furthermore, Caroline and Sara had been gathering feedback continuously from participants on its leadership programme about what people wanted from a PDR system. "*At the core of the feedback, and our drive for the project, was the single recognition that PDR should be integrated into day-to-day work. It had to be really simple to use, intuitive and encourage engagement. We knew that if we had to write a long user guide for the system, we would have fallen short of our aim.*"

Selecting a system - choosing Talent Performance

With specific organisational features, language and processes, some Forces might assume that the best PDR systems are bespoke ones that are built in-house and integrated with other incumbent software. This was not the case for the Northamptonshire team. They wanted a system already proven to be adaptable and flexible in similar settings that met the requirements of the working group and could be up and running quickly. Talent Performance was selected.

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Working with Head Light to tailor the system – and involving the wider group too

Caroline and Sara configured each screen of their new PDR system based on the feedback they had gathered looking at the words used, the headings of tabs and boxes, and what each person would see on screen. The team returned to those who had provided initial stage feedback, showed them the system, and checked if anything else needed to change. After a further round of tweaks, the pilot study took place involving the entire IT department and a small team within CID. *"It was a good way to test out the system and to seal engagement with the final version that we would eventually deploy across the Force."*

The role of advocate

The cross functional working group helped to create a pool of advocates. One officer videoed himself getting started with the system and shared this with colleagues. Caroline explains: *"It's an amateur video showing someone navigating around the screens. It shows how easy the system is to use and how users can work it out for themselves. Throughout the video, he makes comments as to how good the system looks. The video itself is unpolished and is yet somehow more credible for that. It has had a big impact on getting PDR talked about and on to people's radars – and we could never have predicted that."*

Support and communications: essential components to the project

The team knew that more formal communications would also play a key role during the initial project stages and the later roll-out. *"Having a comms professional within the working group meant we were able to get the message right, focussing on the positive, on bedding down the system and laying the foundation for the next phase."* The team has also invested time in supporting its users. Initial training took place remotely. Sara hosted several drop-in webinar sessions to get users viewing the system and recorded video clips of specific common tasks that she made readily available by uploading them to the Intranet.

A PDR system that people talk about

One of the most validating discoveries has been the extent of the positive feedback. Sara explains: *"People taking the time to tell us how good the PDR system is unheard of – and yet that is what is happening. We get positive messages sent to us and we have been told that this is the best PDR system we've had in the Force for 15 years. When our Chief Constable reacted to our Twitter post showcasing the very positive feedback, other Forces took note of what we were doing."*

The outcomes to date: engagement levels exceeding expectations

Talent Performance provides a range of analytics and reporting functionality as standard which enables Caroline and the team to access real-time stats. It also allows them to look at how specific operational areas are doing – and to compare them. *"We wish to evidence good leadership and build a positive culture within the Force. We now have the PDR system that can record, track and measure this."*

Within three months of the initial roll-out and PDR engagement has reached record levels with 77% of people having at least one performance objective set. Sara comments: "*These engagement results far exceeded expectations. We had better engagement results in three months than we had ever had across an entire 12 month period. Now, users are wanting to include links to their own development objectives and plans. We know that the demand to use the system more will grow.* "