Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service: Implementing 360 as a Change Initiative

The context: The capability to draw on the 360 experience within the Police Force

With no track record of true 360-degree feedback within the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, but with years of expertise and experience of 360 within the Northamptonshire Police Force to draw from, the Service was able to move from a standing start to implementation within a few weeks.

The solution: Educating across the workforce

Together with the development team at Head Light, Caroline Oppido, HR Manager, Leadership and OD at Northamptonshire Police, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and Northamptonshire OPFCC, worked to create a 360 questionnaire designed specifically for fire services.

Built on the levels of fire services leadership behaviours and drawing on other key behaviours within Blue Light organisations, Caroline and her team were instrumental in creating the final 360 questionnaire that became the Edition used across other fire and rescue services.

Understanding of 360-degree feedback within the Service was scarce. There had been no experience of using 360 although some paper-based 180-degree feedback had been used to limited effect.

Caroline comments: *"With no history of 360, there was very little understanding about how it worked and what was expected. We were starting with the very basics – and needing to educate managers and leaders across the organisation, sometimes correcting false assumptions and managing cynicism."*

As such, Caroline made comms a priority. She invested time in getting the messages clear and relevant – and timetabled for implementation.

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Communications is always an ongoing process – and rarely can there be too much or starting too early.

Caroline adds: *"As with any change, it takes a while, and you have to keep reiterating the value and benefits – and what needs to happen."*

> ""Messaging and communications are so important – and we saw them as fundamental to the success of the programme."
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> *Caroline Oppido, HR Manager – Leadership and OD, Northamptonshire Police, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and Northamptonshire OPFCCFire and Rescue Service*

With experience, Caroline also recognises the value from utilising the 360 data to inform other talent areas.

"We need to help senior leaders understand why we are doing 360 – and what they can do with the information strategically.

"We know that we need to make sure that 360 is not seen as a standalone exercise and part of this is by talking about feedback across our entire leadership development offering."

The outcome: Implemeted on time and receiving positive feedback

Caroline hit the HMICFRS deadlines – due, in part, to her experience of implementing 360 at Northamptonshire Police and also the fact that the Service already made use of the PDR platform from Head Light that includes a 360 module.

The feedback has been good. Those who have received the feedback have found it to be a "*very positive experience".*

All Services adopting the Fire Edition of Talent 360 have the potential to share cohort data and allow them to benchmark against levels of competencies at a national level. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue aim to revisit the 360 in two years and, before then, aim to start to make use of the data within the in-built analytics portal to examine overall Service leadership strengths and the Service development needed.

Takeaways

Get the comms in place.

Make sure the Service understands what 360 is (and isn't) and how the data will and will not be used. Build a programme of communications across whatever media and channels are available. Keep sharing the messages as it is unlikely that everything will be read and people will remember!

Educate. Don't assume people know what 360 is about.

Unless experienced, people, be they participants or feedback providers, will have little understanding of the 360 process, what is expected, the anonymity and the value of the report. Build this across the communications plan.

Encourage and remind.

Even the best automated process requires the human touch. Reminders, personalised emails, reiteration of the purpose and timeline and constant encouragement are all needed.