



Developing aspiring leaders across organisations

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Ian Lee-Emery, Head Light

Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) supports local public sector organisations in their drive to increase efficiency and improve services, they provide specialist regional support in areas including people and leadership development and performance improvement. IEWM encourages collaborative working and sharing good practice but also enables the Partners to benefit from collective service development, procurement and delivery in areas such as senior leadership. Partners include Local Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

The challenge

In 2008 IEWM earmarked funding for people and leadership development activities and asked partners in the region where this funding could be best spent. Over 27 organisations agreed they wanted support to develop an aspiring senior leaders programme and the Catalyst Programme was formed.

“It became clear as we planned the development programme that the delegates would benefit greatly from having a snapshot at the outset of how others see them with regard to their leadership capabilities and so we looked to include a 360-degree questionnaire. We felt that this information would help the delegates signpost their own areas of strength and development need,” commented Samantha Darby, Senior Regional Projects Coordinator at IEWM 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. We knew we wanted a 360 process included, and we also knew that our situation with multiple Partners with differing needs, processes and terminology were unique but essential to take into account. Added to this was our need to be as self-sufficient as possible and for the programme to be sustainable even after the initial funding. Cost has always been a key consideration for us and so we’re constantly looking for innovative ways of providing service to our Partners. We therefore not only wanted a system that could be used for the Catalyst programme but something that could provide 360 access to all public sector organisations in the West Midlands. In short, we had a long list of requirements that we wanted the 360 system to meet.”

Samantha researched the market thoroughly and invited a number of organisations to tender before asking Head Light to work with her.

The solution

“As we looked at the various options we had, we realised that Head Light with its established on-line Talent® system would give us the flexibility as well as the simplicity and ease of use that we - and our Partners - needed. What is more, they were able to take our competence framework and deliver a bespoke, customised and psychometrically validated questionnaire for our Catalyst programme delegates – and deliver this within a tight timeline.”

“IEWM needed a system which could manage the complexities of running 360-degree reviews concurrently for multiple organisations, provide a platform for collaboration and benchmarking 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.’” commented Ian Lee-Emery, Head Light.

In addition to the Catalyst Questionnaire, IEWM and its Partners created three generic questionnaires which would be appropriate for use with operational managers, middle managers, and top tier managers.

To do this, they worked with the consulting team at Head Light who brought together and analysed the competences used by some of the Partners and also those from the Chartered Management Institute, the latter offered by Head Light as part of their software.

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Samantha Darby, Senior Regional Projects Coordinator

“The consultants at Head Light, led by Debbie Hance supported us greatly during the conversations and discussions we had with the Partners about competences and we realised the value of their expertise and experience to drill down and to understand what was needed and how best to reach agreement. Again, we ran a pilot, gathered sufficient data and Head Light performed the same psychometric analysis as before to ensure the questionnaires were valid and robust.”

The success of the implementation of the competences in the questionnaire and the feedback of the reports would be vital to the overall success of IEWM's offering to its Partners. Head Light initially ran training sessions to help IEWM understand and interpret the reports and now they are cascading that information across the region.

The results

“Working with Head Light offers us great self-sufficiency. We now have our own generic 360 questionnaires and each of our Partners is able to have their own tailored section of the system and manage their own reviews.”

“Despite this customisation of the system for our quite sophisticated set-up, we've found the reports comprehensive and easy to read, understand and interpret. The dashboard and monitoring capability that Talent® provides is excellent: it really helps us in understanding where we are in the actual process of review completion. And we have had great feedback from those delegates and raters on the ease of use of it all, and this is without needing provide them any training on how to use the system.”

Samantha comments further “As a result of using the system, we made a few suggestions for additions 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.”

Next steps

The first cohort of the Catalyst programme is due to complete within the next few months when they will re-evaluate themselves and be re-assessed by others using the 360 tool again: they'll be able to see the shift in how their colleagues see them.

Now that IEWM has its own system set-up configured for Partner use, Samantha explains that each Partner can now choose whether to up-skill and learn how to manage the system and carry out the feedback themselves or continue to seek support from IEWM. “We've had a number of pilots running with individual authorities wanting to access questionnaires for a specific talent group and I expect this to grow.”

“It's a highly beneficial tool for us – and goes beyond just the initial Catalyst programme support. We can look at the information from a regional perspective and take a look at the areas of development need as well as looking at the capabilities we have internally and how these could be deployed across the region.”

“Working with Head Light is working with a true partner as both parties understood what was expected and the team at Head Light never failed to deliver. The project had a tight timeline and the dates, as always, shifted but because the communication between us was strong, and they were very responsive, we understood where we were in the overall project and they managed to deliver what we wanted on time and on budget.”

“As we have ‘customers’ of our own – essentially our Partners – it is extremely important that we deliver the support that they demand and quickly. Head Light clearly demonstrate their commitment to great customer service time and time again - they underpin our success.”

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