



Developing authentic leadership

Thames Valley Police is the largest non-metropolitan police force in England and Wales and, as with other forces, strives for both police staff and officers to become better leaders

The challenge

Thames Valley Police is the largest non-metropolitan police force in England and Wales and, as with other forces, strives for both police staff and officers to become better leaders.

Alison Sercombe, HR Business Partner for Leadership and Career Development, commissions leadership tools and training to help leaders to be more effective in their roles across the force. Alison comments, "Our focus is very much on the individual and providing them with tools to give them self-insight and to help them become more self-aware."

"We believe that self-awareness leads to knowledge which in turn leads to a more authentic style of leadership. Our senior leaders and the talent management group are encouraged to take a look at themselves – and then, more importantly, urged to take action."

"I knew the benefits of using 360 but within our force we used it in hard copy format. This made it difficult to track the progress of the process, hard to produce the report and it wasn't conducive to effective, facilitated feedback. That said, we very much wanted to use a 360 tool without all of the bureaucratic paper chasing and to have the freedom to do as many as we needed."

The solution

Alison knew that Hertfordshire Constabulary was using Talent 360 from Head Light as part of their selection process for promotion. "I'd heard that they used a tailored, on-line system and so wanted to know more."

"We met Head Light, discussed our needs and saw its on-line talent system. The system is impressive and the possibilities are endless," comments Alison.

Getting it agreed internally required some persuasion in terms of the initial investment but once in place Alison was quick to implement the system. "The old paper-based 360 was generic and there was a labyrinth of paper to wade through. It didn't use the language or the competencies that we recognise and consequently the recipients felt a little distant from it. With Talent 360 we use the Police's National Integrated Competency Framework which speaks the language of the force and our users can relate to it. We can also share questionnaires used by the other forces that have Talent 360 and make use of the benchmarks and comparison data the system creates."

The force has, over time, introduced a coaching culture with individuals identified as being able to deliver feedback internally and act as coaches and mentors. Alison had anticipated a growing demand for 360-degree feedback and understands that, in her environment, a face-to-face discussion about the results is essential for getting an understanding, buy-in and a commitment to personal development. To meet this anticipated demand, she decided to train an internal pool of 360-degree feedback facilitators, all of whom were experienced HR and L&D professionals who had both a strong skill set and a knowledge of the organisation on which they could capitalise.

Alison invited Head Light to run two bespoke workshops, focusing on interpreting the reports and giving feedback, and on dealing with challenges and difficult situations. These workshops were well received: delegates commented that "It was pitched just right for our needs" and helped them "deal with challenges to the process." As a result, Thames Valley Police has a pool of about 12 trained feedback facilitators who can all share their learning and experiences on an ongoing basis as the force increases its numbers of participants going through 360.

The feedback facilitated by Alison and her coaching pool is received very well. "The participants really understand why the competencies are included, where they sit in relation to demonstrating these and how then to develop them."

"The system is impressive and the possibilities are endless"

“Working with Head Light is a really positive experience. As a team they are forward thinking and good fun – and their considered thought and conversation around the issues is highly valuable.”

Alison Sercombe, HR Business Partner Leadership and Career Development

“We have only been using the tool for a year and it’s made such an enormous impact already.”

The results

“The appetite is huge for the 360”, continues Alison, “and quite often I get phone calls from people who have previously been a reviewer for someone’s 360 and now want to take part as a participant themselves. This ad hoc use has surprised – but delighted – us as it shows the thirst for self-development.”

“We have only been using the tool for a year and it’s made such an enormous impact already. There have been, on more than one occasion, situations where an individual has received feedback that has come as a real shock. We worked with them to help take the feedback on board and then take action. It’s clear to me that the process that started with the use of Talent 360, followed by coaching and action has improved self understanding.”

“Working with Head Light is a really positive experience. As a team they are forward thinking and good fun – and their considered thought and conversation around the issues is highly valuable. They are proactive in developing our use of talent management tools and taking it all to the next level. I have a notebook in which I make notes of things to talk to them about when we meet up and, when we do sit and talk, I always seem to come up with some new ideas or solutions.”

Next steps

“We have used Talent360 where honest feedback needed to be shared highlighting clearly how others see individuals and how they behave. It flags the real issues that need to be dealt with and enables more pertinent development plans to be written.”

In these times of budget restraints Alison can see an increase in the number of people wanting to take up a 360 to obtain a better insight to how they are performing. “Police officers and staff both want to understand where they need to develop to maximise the opportunities available.”

“As we can use this tool ‘on-demand’ and without any additional usage costs, we can take an inclusive view of ‘talent’ here and use 360 as a technique open to everyone. This is so much better than it being viewed as a ‘right of passage’ for a select few,” Alison concludes.