

Thames Valley Police

Assessing success, with help
from The HOW Factor™

ORION CASE STUDY



ORION
Transforming HR

The background and context for change

Thames Valley Police is the largest non-metropolitan force in the UK, covering 2,200 square miles of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. It has a resident population of 2.1 million and over 6 million visitors a year to police. Like the rest of Britain's public sector, this 8,500-strong organisation has faced more challenges than ever to streamline support functions and to release resources to the front line. The pressures on the force as a whole were felt equally by the HR function. In Thames Valley's case their response was not to follow but to take the lead in demonstrating how they could become more efficient whilst also making a more strategic contribution to the effectiveness of the whole business.

The other obvious pressure on the sector as a whole is the huge degree of scrutiny placed on its performance. Performance targets are not just monitored internally but are also highly visible to both the general public and politicians alike. It could be said that this had led to an overly cumbersome focus on measurement, perhaps to the detriment of the real job of policing. The arrival of a new coalition government coincided with a stated objective to reduce the mass of targets and allow a greater level of freedom to focus on the business of cutting crime and catching criminals. Against this backdrop, a focus on measuring what matters and providing the organisation with real insight into the performance of its people was a key driver of the redesign of the function.

A Clear Line of Sight

Developing and articulating a clear strategy for the function was the role of Dr Steven Chase, HR Director, and his team. Ensuring alignment with the wider force strategy was relatively straightforward with a very clear and explicit business planning process that covers all elements of the organisation's activities.

A three year strategy is agreed with the police authority which is then comprised of a series of annual Force Delivery Plans. These prioritise the six strategic objectives to be achieved by the force as a whole, which in turn drive the development of individual departmental plans. The measurement of performance against these objectives is the focus of a series of Force Performance Groups whose role it is to review performance and assess and agree priorities for improvement.

At the beginning of this transformation journey, it is fair to say that the focus of HR was necessarily at a relatively transactional level, with the ambition to contribute at a more strategic level still some way off. The analytics used to assess performance were very much of a quantitative nature, capturing transactional volumes of HR activity. The function had limited ability to assess the real impact of its people management activities. Planning how to achieve this shift was the first of a number of challenging steps.

Designing the right service

With a need to refocus, whilst delivering 20% savings, Chase and his team decided this would be best achieved by sharing transactional services in recruitment and employee administration across business units. The high level design envisaged was made up of three components. A new Shared Services Centre (SSC) would be set up with four main functions - Recruitment & Employee Administration; an Employee Service Desk; Systems Support & Management Information and Strategic Resourcing. Meanwhile, Internal Consultancy, Leadership and Management Development and HR Strategy and Standards would be provided from new Centres of Expertise (COEs) and the role of the HR Generalists would transition to HR Business Partners (HRBPs).

The team knew that this kind of approach was in widespread use in both the public and private sectors, but it was critical for them that this was the right model for their organisation. Having established an outline plan, TVP wanted to check its robustness and develop a detailed implementation approach. They used independent consultants, Orion Partners as a 'critical friend' to provide them with challenge but also the confidence to develop a plan that would work. The broader police sector was also considering the collaborative sharing of services and it was important to ensure Thames Valley Police would be ahead of the curve if this went ahead.

The redesign and implementation was delivered over a period of eighteen months and after the project was completed feedback showed business and staff associations were happy. The final figures showed a cash reduction of nearly 35% against their target of 25% (at the same time meeting their FTE reduction of 20%). The success of the redesign of HR was then instrumental in helping the Force deliver a more widespread change to the shape of the whole organisation with a move to a new Local Policing model.

A Performance Culture

As already outlined above, a rigorous approach to the monitoring and measurement of performance has been built into the Performance Group structure with individual Performance Groups assessing the delivery of their component of the Force Delivery Plan. HR is no exception and it is the HR Performance Dashboard that provides the focus for this group to review and agree what is required to ensure that performance meets the standards set. As mentioned previously, prior to the transformation programme, the focus of this group had largely been on volumes of transactional activity delivered, on inputs rather than outcomes.

Although it is still critical for the function to have tight control of the input data in areas such as recruitment, attendance and people development, it is the impact of these numbers on force performance that is now the topic of debate. The move to a centralised delivery model for HR operations activity has led to a more robust service as well as a much higher degree of transparency and visibility of all operational activity. This has delivered a greater level of confidence in the accuracy of performance data so that the discussion is now more around the 'so what?' of the numbers rather than the numbers themselves. There are also now additional measures which allow an objective assessment of the HR team's contribution to wider organisational strategy and which tie directly back to achievement of the Force Delivery Plan. Example extracts from the current scorecard are shown below.



Tackle Bureaucracy and Develop the Professional Skills of all Staff

- Senior Leadership Programme Attendance
- Number of contacts undertaken
- Career interviews for female
- Career interviews for BMEbusiness managers.



Deliver Transformational Change at a Force Level

- No. At Risk
- No. Redeployed
- No. of Early Retirements
- Compulsory Redundancies
- Voluntary Redundancies



Shape the Direction of the Force an Create the Right Employment and Working Environment

- Employment Relations Data
- No of grievances , No of Disciplines, No of Resignations before Hearings
- No of Employment Tribunals
- Flexible Working
- Delivery of agreed standard for police staff recruitment job close-ready to hire
- Service Desk customer contacts
- Service Desk resolved first time
- % Police Staff to have PDR within 2 months of joining
- % of Staff to have initial PDR within 3 months of start of financial year
- OHU overall force waiting times for Mgt Referral appointments

Example HR Performance Scorecard 2012

A time for reflection

Having delivered this significant change both within the function and the wider Force the HR team felt it important to stop and reflect and see what they might learn from the process. They turned again to Orion Partners who have their own unique approach to measuring strategic impact. Based on research undertaken with a wide range of both public and private sector organisations, Orion have identified a number of key characteristics evident in organisations who both formulate and execute effective people strategies. These are grouped into the following categories: Leadership & Purpose, Insight, Collaboration, Discipline and Communication.

The How Factor – Orion Partners 2011

In Orion's experience, critical to success is less the what of the strategy but more the how of execution, hence the name they give to their assessment framework - the HOW Factor. Two years on from this initial work was a good time to review the long-term impacts of these changes – specifically to see if HR was providing a stronger strategic service to the organisation.

To assess the effectiveness of Thames Valley Police's HR function, Orion needed to get a number of perspectives. In particular, they needed to speak to the people on the receiving end – the line managers, business leaders and staff.

So the assessment had three parts:



Interviews with Chief Constable, Sara Thornton, along with a number of her senior management team including Chief Superintendents and the heads of specialist functions like IT and procurement.



A survey, completed by line managers.



Interviews with each member of the HR leadership team – including the heads of the shared services specialist teams like Reward and Leadership Development, and Business Partners.

The right questions

To the business people Orion interviewed and surveyed, they asked questions about their people priorities, their relationship with HR and what changes they had noticed.

But the acid test for a people strategy is whether it delivers strong leaders with the right skills into the business. So Orion also asked questions about the quality and change in leadership within the business itself. From these answers it was possible to interpret which of the five How Factor characteristics were showing through strongly within HR, and which ones potentially needed more focus.

Using the 'How Factor'

So what were the results? HR was seen as being more proactive since the restructure (a combination of 'collaboration' and 'discipline' factors). Line managers felt the organisation's objectives and goals were much better defined (a combination of 'leadership and 'communication' factors). However, there were also a number of areas to focus on. For example, HR needed to be yet further improve its use of using data, management information and local business knowledge to help influence the business's thinking on people issues (an important element of demonstrating 'insight').

Focus for the future

For all three parts of the assessment Orion provided findings and recommendations against each of the five How Factor characteristics. These included feedback on what Thames Valley were doing well and what to focus on in the future, like:



Leadership and purpose

Filling capability gaps between different leadership and management levels.



Insight

Improving the use of data and professional judgement to shape force-level strategy.



Communication

Getting the right reaction to the policy guidance they create through great communication.

Future Focus

“In Thames Valley, the force’s productivity strategy has reduced business support costs such as HR... The force and authority work closely together and have applied a considered, thoughtful and evidence-based approach to the development of a new operational policing model, which is designed to prioritise neighbourhood policing.”

The Rt Hon Nick Herbert MP, Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice, 26 January 2012

If the last two to three years have seen significant change for the organisation, the next two to three promise to be no less eventful. Many of these changes go beyond the boundaries of the Force itself as they are as a result of wider sector developments for both the structure of policing and workforce reform. It is safe to say, however, that the transformation Thames Valley has already achieved position it very well to wide this next turbulent wave.