

Vodafone drives change with 360 degree feedback



Vodafone Romania needed to align to the Vodafone Group talent management strategy and chose cut-e as the provider to support in a 360° feedback process with over 5000 raters

How to align the competencies and HR strategy, how to ensure acceptance of the process and finally, how to administrate such a complex project in a dynamic company. The project was well prepared from a content, political and communication point of view and successfully executed integrating the 360° feedback into the whole talent management strategy.

Vodafone Group Plc. is the world's largest mobile telecommunications company measured by revenues. The group operates networks in over 30 countries, has partner networks in over 40 further countries and has more than 80000 members of staff. Vodafone Romania, with over 3000 employees in its Bucharest headquarters, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Vodafone Group.

The challenge – achieving cultural shift and alignment

Launching the name Vodafone Romania was the start of a cultural shift and alignment process. Previously known as Connex, consequently renamed as Connex-Vodafone, Vodafone Romania was finally born in April 2006. At that time, Vodafone Group applied 360° feedback to top management only. As part of its policy 'think global and act local', Vodafone decided to pause a further cascade down in order to allow the new Vodafone Romania to transition and align better and to define the People and Talent Strategy and the People plan for Vodafone Romania.

In 2008, aligning further with global strategy, the competency model was redesigned according to the vision. Performance management, talent management and talent and leadership development had been successfully implemented by 2009 at Vodafone Romania. This was the perfect moment to take a snapshot using 360° feedback covering a broader population. At this point in time cut-e was chosen as Vodafone Romania's new 360° partner and provider.

The solution: designing, launching and securing support

More than 400 of the managers were scheduled to receive feedback from their line managers, colleagues and subordinates. This meant involving over 5000 people in the process. Vodafone wanted to focus on quality and due to the high volume and the time needed particularly for those who received multiple feedback requests, Vodafone decided to conduct and administrate the feedback in four different stages and customize them for different managerial levels.

Getting started: customizing the questionnaire to the Vodafone competencies
cut-e's first task was to develop a customized questionnaire based on the Vodafone competency model. This happened in close collaboration and with great commitment from Vodafone Romania's CEO, the human resources manager, but also the commercial, marketing, financial and technical officers. The final questionnaire covered 28 questions for eight competencies and two additional open questions and was developed in English as well as in Romanian.

Rolling out from the top: board members get feedback

The questionnaire for the pilot group of foci was shorter: In February 2010 six feedback recipients consisting of Vodafone Romania's Board members and Vice Presidents started with the first stage of the 360° feedback process. Only the relevant leadership skills were asked in their questionnaires and the editing time for all feedback providers of this group was thereby reduced from 20 to only approximately 10 minutes.

The benefits of the top-down approach: cultural change and acceptance

The concept of starting the 360° feedback process with the top management was hugely beneficial for many reasons: First of all, the participants' commitment is vital for the success of a 360° feedback and it is a lot more accepted if it is apparent that the top management not only supports the HR measure but is also an active part of it and benefits from it for own development measures. Furthermore, each previous process was an excellent learning process for its participants. Since the whole feedback process for all 410 foci was conducted in stages from the very top management going down the levels, it meant that the participants had the chance to get to know the system, the questionnaire and the process before being a focus themselves.

Multi-step and multi-channel communication to ensure full commitment

The communication in advance of the process was also planned very carefully in order to fully benefit from the HR measure and to get the emotional and cognitive commitment of all participants. Top management itself emailed all participants informing about the planned feedback process, the purpose and the goals, and the integration into the continuing HR development processes. The email communication was preceded by announcement during the leadership conference and during the weekly department meetings at director level. Afterwards the HR department sent out information about the administration of the process and details about the follow-up steps. Finally, details of the online system, login details and guideline how to answer the questionnaire were communicated by cut-e to all participants at the beginning of each stage.

Choosing the raters

For each process the feedback providers consisted of different groups: The line manager of each focus, a group of colleagues and a group of subordinates. Additionally, the focus itself had to answer the questionnaire as a self-evaluation. In order to make sure that the feedback of colleagues and subordinates would remain anonymous, both groups consisted of at least 4 people.

A system with the necessary flexibility

Vodafone provided cut-e with a list of feedback providers defined for each focus beforehand to be set up in the system. But since Vodafone is such a dynamic company with a changing structure, it was necessary that additional feedback providers could be added by the focus after consultation with the line manager. The previously defined feedback providers could not be changed by the focus.

Ensuring feedback on time

The foci and their line managers had two weeks to complete the list of feedback providers. Then the list was closed by cut-e and the actual rating process started for all feedback providers also within a two-week period. The feedback providers received their personal login data from cut-e for the online system and they could answer the questionnaire either in English or in Romanian. Where necessary, two or three reminders were sent out by cut-e in order to achieve a very high return rate of completed feedback questionnaires and to make sure that every feedback provider got the chance to give their input. cut-e regularly updated the HR managers about actual return rates and missing feedback.

The outcome: communication of results followed by development measures in feedback interviews

After each process had been completed feedback reports were generated by cut-e and sent out to the focus, the respective line manager and the responsible HR manager.

Following this, feedback interviews were scheduled for each focus. The top level of Vodafone directors received their feedback from external consultants. For the lower levels, the respective line managers conducted the feedback interviews. That way the second level could profit again from the first level and use techniques they had experienced in their own feedback interviews with their subordinates. Additionally, cut-e developed interview guides, provided to all managers, on how to interpret the report and lead the interview. The foci also received instruction guides on how to interpret their own reports.

From the feedback interviews practical and tangible development measures were agreed on and a development plan was designed.

Additionally, 13 group reports were generated by cut-e to determine deviations between different departments and groups and find out whether all competencies are covered.

In summary

The 360° feedback process was a big success at Vodafone Romania not only because the administration went smoothly. Vodafone also exemplarily kept with the three success factors of a 360° feedback process: transparent corporate communication before and during the process, gaining buy-in from the executive level and, last but not least, using 360° feedback for an integrated HR approach as a part of the whole talent management strategy.

"We are really happy to have found cut-e as our new provider and partner for our Vodafone feedback projects. We highly appreciate cut-e's excellent technology, their psychological know-how, their flexibility as well as the proactive and reliable project management."

Pia Simionescu, Consultant Capability and Talent Development, Vodafone Romania

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