



Tarrant County Human Resources Improves Management Development Programs With Help From Assess Systems™

CASE STUDY: TARRANT COUNTY

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Serving a growing population of approximately 1.7 million, Tarrant County government oversees an urban area rich with industry and commerce. From its county seat of Fort Worth, Texas, this forward-thinking county government emphasizes ongoing employee development opportunities spearheaded by its Human Resources (HR) department.

Tarrant County Human Resources provides HR functions for the county government's 37 departments and 4,300 to 4,400 full-time employees. Due to varying degrees of decentralization, this HR group must supply the right level of involvement for each department and collaborate with department heads, elected officials, governing boards and employees. The HR department's management development efforts target ongoing career growth for effective long-term service.

Challenge ►

Need for Comprehensive Assessments for Management Development

Proactive about its aging workforce, in early 2007 Tarrant County Human Resources saw the need for a succession-readiness evaluation across the county government. The HR department conducted a workforce analysis, completing a five-year workforce snapshot projection in which key leadership positions were identified and potential retirements forecasted. Although much training was already offered, the analysis that resulted from the evaluation revealed a need to groom leaders, address skills gaps—some of which were significant—and transfer critical knowledge from leaders and managers.

After the evaluation, the HR department created the Management Development Institute (MDI) for manager training. To target the right competencies, the department wanted assessments that included a 360 evaluation and a personality assessment for management development. "We wanted to provide management training that was competency-specific and focused on the skills and behaviors managers needed to develop or enhance instead of casting a net and hoping that it met individuals' needs," said Jeannette Johnson, PHR, Organizational Development Officer for Tarrant County Human Resources. "We really didn't have a good feel for what was needed and whether it would make the impact we wanted."



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Solution ►

Cost-Effective Assessment Tools Providing Autonomy

Tarrant County Human Resources sought assessments that could tie into its recently implemented SAP® upgrade without overlapping with SAP’s talent-management and performance-management capabilities. Such a duplication would drive up expenses and prove less cost-effective—something the county commissioners were not likely to authorize, having made a significant investment in SAP. In contrast, **Assess Systems** offered a flexible, customized, cost-effective solution with assistance that empowered the HR team. **Assess Systems** prefers to tailor its business to meet clients where they are so they can use solutions in ways that make sense for them.

“What I liked most was that we had the flexibility to administer the assessment tools in-house and minimize consultant fees. We didn’t have to continually spend money to bring consultants in because there was no part of the work we couldn’t do ourselves,” said Jeannette.

Training effectiveness was a critical element. The development program was 70 percent on-the-job training, and **Assess Focus 360** was the ideal measurement tool. Taken after **Assess 360** (**Assess Systems**’ comprehensive 360° assessment), **Assess Focus 360** is a shorter evaluation addressing behaviors the initial 360 identified for improvement. “**Assess Focus 360** would allow us to re-assess an individual in the areas in which we provided targeted development,” Jeannette said. “The key is to see if development is working.”

Initial Driver for the Development Program and True Test of Learning

Assess Systems helped the HR department develop competency models, providing certification training so the group could create models on its own. After preparing the personality inventory and customized 360 assessments, **Assess Systems**’ consultants conducted orientation sessions for all interested parties to ensure buy-in from users. “Those information meetings removed the fear of the unknown because people could ask questions about what the assessments measured and—equally as important—what the tools did not measure,” said Jeannette. “People became more comfortable with the assessment process. They weren’t skeptical about nominating their employees.”

The resulting 360 ratings and innate assessment feedback provided faster, more actionable feedback than a paper-based system. “The responses I had from managers who took the 360 was that they got very relevant information—it was very accurate. The 360 gave us a better gauge as to how a person is seen in the department and whether employees and the person’s peers and manager are actually seeing some change in that individual’s behavior. I think it’s a truer test than applied learning,” said Jeannette. The innate personality assessments revealed some underlying reasons behind observed behaviors and also provided additional data to consider with respect to development.

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After taking the assessments, participants were debriefed on the results. Development plans emerged with competency-based goals. Subsequent development classes used **Assess Systems’** workshops such as the Leading Others Development Workshop. “The **Assess Systems** workshops let us connect the 360 and personality inventory and tie them into each person’s development plan,” Jeannette said.

Result ►

Cost Savings and Extended Use of Assessment Tools

The HR department multiplied efficiencies by repurposing the competency models for the MDI courses. “In the past, training was not necessarily competency-based,” said Jeannette. “Now we’re able to look at competencies in which individuals need the most development and determine what management courses and other development activities are most appropriate. We aren’t shooting in the dark.”

The assessments enable the HR group to bridge the skills gaps in the leadership pipeline and focus training resources on the areas where the organization needs it most. In the future, the HR department hopes to offer assessments to employees outside the management development program, including senior staff members who have expressed interest.

“**Assess Systems** has been exceptionally helpful,” Jeannette said. “Beyond the assessment tools, I’ve been very pleased with the level of support **Assess Systems** has provided—even to the point of giving us guidance on how to get buy-in from our department heads. It’s a challenge most people don’t have, and **Assess Systems** helped us through the process.”



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