

# Act on the Feedback

## Then Measure the Impact

*Since introducing  
360° feedback,  
Royal & Sun Alliance has achieved  
a 50% improvement  
in the effectiveness of its managers  
— as measured by their staff.  
Graeme Craig,  
General Manager - Corporate Services  
for Royal Sun Alliance,  
describes its process of  
feedback and development  
for managers.*

**O**ur managing director, Alan Bradley, says upwards feedback and the accompanying management development programme are among the most successful strategies we've ever introduced. And a senior manager describes them as "the best thing that has happened to me in my career":

The company decided to use 360° feedback in 1995, after a survey found that staff saw their managers as task focused: they wanted them to have a greater orientation towards the people aspects of management. To follow up on this, we asked consultant Dave Burton of Potential Development to lead a series of focus groups.

What came through was that people wanted more from their leaders. Yet when we tried to find out what that "more" was, it turned out to be different for everybody. It became clear that the usual training course would not suffice and that a more tailored programme for each individual would be more beneficial. We needed a process that was able to define individual issues, yet allow for the complexities and structures of a large organisation. It needed to be simple enough to describe observed behaviour, yet allow for only limited differences in respondents' interpretations of the questions they were asked.

We chose 360° feedback, precisely because it is not a training course, but is based on the reality of each individual's situation. The Upward Feedback product developed by Peter Farey of British Airways and the Leaderskill Group in Sydney was our selected instrument.

The very formal feedback process which Royal & Sun Alliance implemented is illustrated in the panel opposite.

## Upward feedback

*Royal & Sun Alliance*

*staff have to respond to*

*statements about their*

*managers in the annual*

*feedback survey. Here are*

*some of those items in the*

*instrument developed by Peter*

*Farey with the Leaderskill Group.*

I think that s/he should reflect this item:	less		as now		more
Fully using staff members' present abilities	-2	-1	😊	+1	+2
• Delegating to develop staff's abilities	-2	-1	😊	+1	+2
• Involving staff in decisions affecting them	-2	-1	😊	+1	+2
• Seeking views and opinions from everyone	-2	-1	😊	+1	+2
Authorising and supporting individual initiative	-2	-1	😊	+1	+2

"This is essential to gain and keep the confidence of those involved. It helps ensure confidentiality and acts as a safety control which maintains the integrity of the process," says Harvey. "The facilitator inspires staff to be more confident, to share their insights and suggestions."

**C**onfidentiality is another key feature of the Royal & Sun Alliance approach. While managers are encouraged to discuss their feedback with their managers, it is not compulsory. Participants in debriefs do not share the results and discussions with anyone else. Similarly, the contents of the individual coaching sessions remain confidential. Warwick Harvey says this is critical if, at times, frustrating.

"It would be great for management to have access to the information generated in coaching sessions and team debriefs. But the moment that happened, trust and openness would be lost."

Coaching meetings are held each quarter between the managers and one of the external consultants. These discussions cover issues arising from the feedback process, as well as other organisational problems and pressures. Because of the strict confidentiality, we believe participants find these meetings provide a safe environment in which they can discuss anything they wish — including topics unrelated to the specific feedback.

They can discuss personal issues, or concerns about their

careers, or seek help to cope with the changes and pressures they face. Wherever possible, the managers are guided to develop action plans which are then reviewed at the next meeting.

### No link to performance appraisal

Royal & Sun Alliance decided not to link the results of 360° feedback to our performance appraisal system, because the feedback process is focused wholly on development. In time, we may look for an appropriate link, but the current feeling is that honesty, trust, and openness would be undermined if staff knew their observations could impact on a manager's performance review.

Rather, we want to see that the behaviours which develop as a result of the feedback process flow into performance.

For Alan Bradley, 360° feedback has played a vital part in improving managerial behaviour at Royal & Sun Alliance.

"It's hard now to imagine the company without it. While the process will undoubtedly evolve, I'm sure it will continue to be an essential ingredient in helping our managers, me included, meet the expectations of our staff."

For Dave Burton, the company's attitude is a clue to the effectiveness of the feedback process.

"The commitment to the process at Royal & Sun Alliance is higher than I've ever seen for any traditional training."

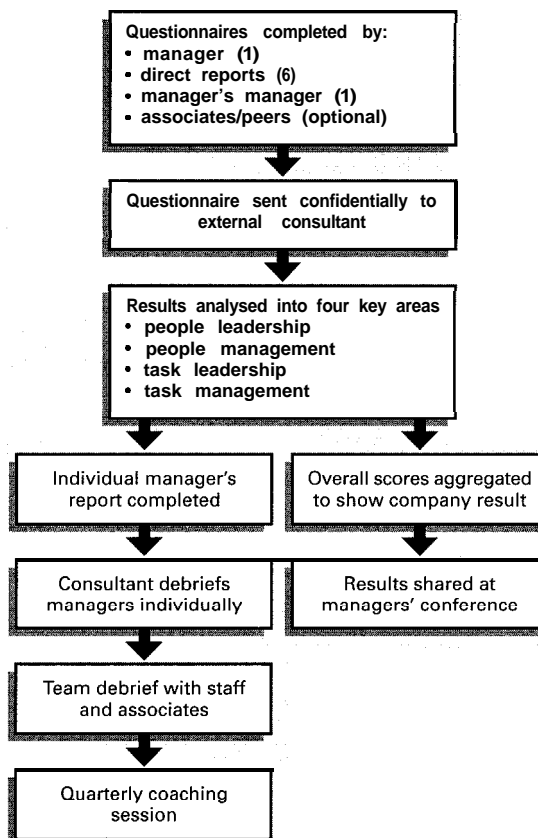
To support the desirable changes in manager behaviour identified by the feedback process, we set up a management development programme. This was a series of one-day workshops which focused on those areas of management which the overall company feedback identified as needing attention. The introductory workshop was led by Dave Burton and a range of presenters were brought in for the others.

For Royal & Sun Alliance, the results are so pleasing that we now have 80 of our managers and supervisors involved in the programme — which means virtually all 458 staff have the opportunity to provide feedback.

The demands of the programme have also grown, to the extent that Judi Grace, winner of the 1997 WISE Women's Network Award, now works with Dave Burton as a debrief facilitator and coach. In particular, they facilitate the team debriefings where staff speak to their managers about the results of the feedback. Here, the focus is on the particular behaviours which staff would like to see the manager stop, start or continue. These debriefs typically last two to three hours. Similar sessions are held with managers' associates. The debriefs are a key to the success of the feedback process.

"I felt a sense of excitement at seeing a group of people tackle real issues that were important to them. The group were able to define the issues for themselves and make sound

## Royal & Sun Alliance A very formal upward feedback process

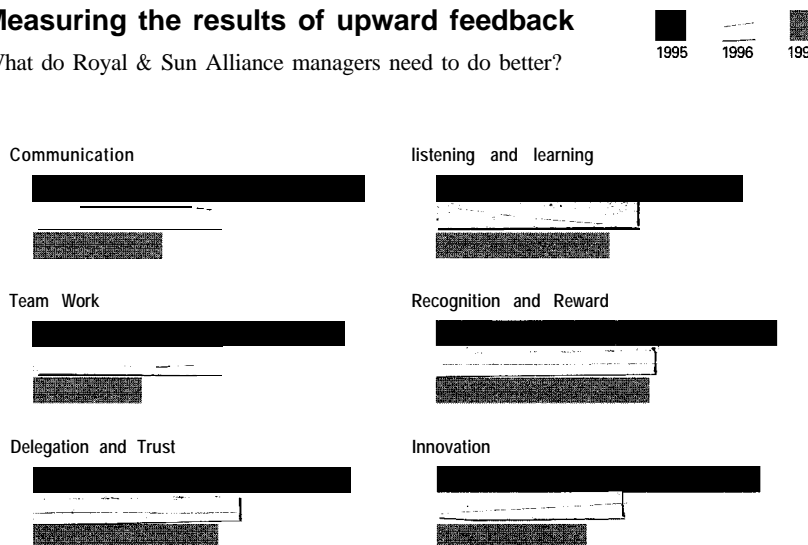


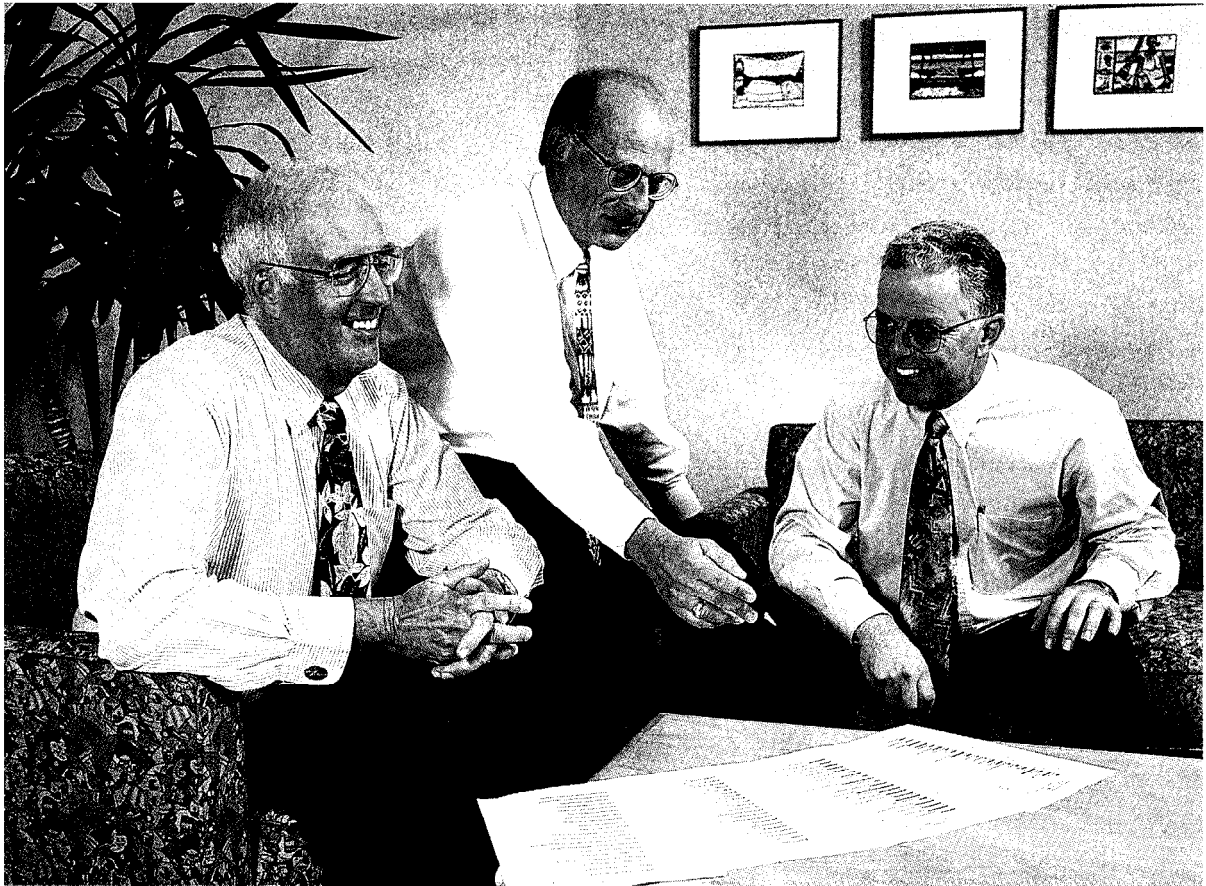
### Results beyond expectations

Dave Burton says the latest results show the company has made significant improvements in addressing the "unmet needs" of its staff. Less restrained, chief executive Alan Bradley says the results have been "beyond our expectations". Those results are illustrated for the six areas which staff identified three years ago as most needing attention.

### Measuring the results of upward feedback

What do Royal & Sun Alliance managers need to do better?





*Potential Development's Dave Burton (centre) discusses Royal & Sun Alliance's upward feedback results with managing director Alan Bradley (left) and human resources manager Warwick Harvey.*

suggestions for change in a way that supported and included their manager," says an outsider who observed a recent debrief.

"It was an incredibly honest process. Staff were talking to their manager and being listened to. They raised issues for the manager to work on and he stressed his need for their support and encouragement to achieve desired outcomes.

"The facilitation role was crucial to gently steer the group towards positive resolution and affirmation. Having an independent facilitator enabled the group to deal with emo-

tional vulnerability and talk about issues which affected them on a deeper level. The facilitator guided the process in a way that was effective and supportive for all concerned.

"Perhaps the most important thing was that the group knew what the problems were and what solutions needed to be implemented to solve them."

### **Independent facilitation critical**

Our Human Resources Manager, Warwick Harvey LFIPMINZ, stresses the importance of high quality independent facilitation.

"For 360° feedback to work, the company has had to open itself to high levels of honesty from staff and be willing to address the issues that emerge. Because the process is facilitated by a neutral person, the energy is directed into constructive issue definition, impact analysis, and solution development phases. Staff are in the strongest position to define the issues, consequences and solutions.

"The neutrality of the facilitator is essential to maintain credibility. Because Dave Burton is independent of the company, he's removed from political or vested interests.