



---

## Case Study

### Starwood Hotels Takes 360 Degree Feedback to a New Level

Jackie Caruso, M.A.

---

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. owns, manages and franchises some of the most well-known brands in the hotel industry. With over 1,000 properties and approximately 145,000 employees, Starwood is one of the world's largest hotel companies and one of the most well-respected in the industry.

#### **BUSINESS CHALLENGE:**

Starwood wanted to provide a valuable developmental offering for all leaders across the global organization. The organization had considerable experience with [360 degree feedback](#) in the past but over the years had decided to refine their approach and had developed specific criteria for this initiative:

- Implement an easy-to-use 360 degree feedback process to gain more participation across the organization,
- Tailor the survey questions to best address the skills most critical at various levels of the leadership team,
- Partner with a vendor that could deliver a highly flexible solution but at a very reasonable cost, and
- Customize the feedback reports to not only provide critical information on strengths and development areas but also to allow individuals to interpret their feedback report without the use of individual coaching.

The HR leadership team recognized that to achieve the above goals, they needed to partner with a vendor who not only had extensive experience working with large global organizations but also had a very flexible technology and consulting experts who could advise along the way (both in terms of [360 survey](#) design, as well as system customizations). Starwood chose viaPeople for this global 360 degree feedback initiative.

#### **SOLUTION:**

viaPeople worked closely with Starwood to clearly understand their objectives for this project. Most importantly, Starwood wanted to provide leaders with valuable insight in

terms of their unique strengths and development areas. In addition, they wanted to provide division leaders with critical talent data so each division would not only have information on which employee strengths to leverage but also what “talent gaps” may exist and need to be addressed.

viaPeople and Starwood implemented a three-step process to achieve these objectives:

1. Design 360 Survey Content
2. Configure a Customized, Multi-Lingual Solution
3. Provide Individual and Aggregate Reporting

### ***Step 1: Design 360 Survey Content***

The first step in the [360 feedback](#) implementation process was to ensure the 360 survey items not only included core leadership skills but also those constructs such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence and global perspective. The survey had to be specific enough to the role but be applicable to multiple levels of leadership. Every effort was taken to ensure a complete representation of skills while still limiting the number of questions. “360 Feedback is an incredible developmental opportunity, however balancing the leader’s time commitment as a part of this process is crucial to maintaining leadership buy-in and sustaining an effective annual feedback process”, says Jackie Caruso, Consultant at viaPeople.

### ***Step 2: Configure a Customized, Multi-Lingual Solution***

To ensure that the system was configured to best meet the needs of the management population, a pilot [360 feedback](#) program was conducted. This also allowed Starwood to choose from a variety of viaPeople system features which met their needs and would later serve as the settings for the global launch. Accuracy enhancers to ensure more variability in the data and the ability for raters to highlight specific items as strengths and development areas were some of the features chosen.

viaPeople translated the [360 degree feedback system](#) into 10 different languages. Their Translation Manager tool allowed local in-country reviewers to review translations in the context of the system and make real-time edits. This feature preserved the local language nuances to ensure clear understanding. “We feel it’s important to provide our clients with the version of Spanish that is used locally (e.g., in cities like Barcelona) versus our version of Spanish,” says Lisa Frischer, Project Manager at viaPeople. “The Translation Manager tool ensure that the translation process is handled efficiently, cost-effectively and in real-time,” adds Frischer.

Starwood had almost 2,700 leaders participate in the [360 feedback](#) process with over 15,000 raters completing surveys in the system. “We attempt to exceed our manager’s expectations when we implement developmental programs like this and after surveying a portion of our participants, feedback was very positive”, says Christine Fernandez,

Associate Director, Talent Management at Starwood. “In fact, 97% of those surveyed agreed that viaPeople’s site was easy to navigate.” adds Fernandez.

### ***Step 3: Provide Individual and Aggregate Reporting***

Providing individuals as well as division leaders with actionable talent data were the most important objectives for Starwood in this process. After all ratings were captured, viaPeople generated individual [360 degree feedback](#) reports that provided each individual with their strengths and areas for development. Aggregate reports summarized competency/skill averages across organizational level as well as division. Leaders would now have the information they needed to leverage strengths and mitigate any talent risks due to skill gaps across the company.

## **RESULTS:**

The Human Resources team at Starwood wanted this 360 degree feedback data to provide their leaders, and the overall organization, with a solid foundation for making leadership development decisions. The [360 degree feedback](#) data allowed the team to address a variety of individual and organizational aspects including:

### ***Individual Benefits:***

- A simple, easy-to-use 360 degree feedback tool
- A “self-paced” 360 feedback report complete with targeted questions to guide the leader through the process of uncovering strengths and development areas
- Specific interpretive tables and graphs in the feedback report which helped leaders analyze their data.
- A downloadable discussion guide for report recipients and their managers – what to focus on, how to lead and focus the discussion, and how to deal with emotions/defensiveness

### ***Organizational Benefits:***

- Competency/skill strengths and development areas across division and employee level
  - By better understanding the skill mix across the organization, Starwood was able to more effectively leverage the leadership strengths and refocus efforts where developmental opportunities may exist.
  - In addition, having specific data for each division allowed Starwood to target local training efforts thereby saving precious resources.
- Each divisional leader received an analysis of their division’s results so they can take specific actions on the data and have a better understanding of the team strengths/development areas.

The HR leadership team, along with other executives at Starwood, now have actionable talent data from which to create many different leadership development initiatives (such as

specific development programs targeted at common opportunity areas). At viaPeople, we believe that helping leaders understand their unique strengths and development areas is only one of the many benefits that can be gained from conducting a 360 feedback initiative and the Starwood implementation is a great example of how companies can provide the broader organization with measurable benefits as well.

### **About viaPeople, Inc.**

viaPeople, Inc. is a performance and talent management software and consulting services company. By combining the science of Industrial Organizational Psychology and an advanced, fully integrated technology platform, viaPeople, Inc. offers the time savings and cost efficiency of online implementation, the flexibility to customize to a client's specific needs, and the domain knowledge to help clients measure and improve the return on their investment in human capital. Visit viaPeople, Inc. at <http://www.viapeople.com>.