

7. Revised Specification

- 7.1 As we pointed out in Section 2, we gathered comments on the draft specification for a management and leadership development self-diagnostic tool (see Figure 4 above) from ELWa and the WMC, from 3 focus groups of owners/ managers from SMEs, and through a very wide range of informal comments from interested individuals from SMEs who formed, in effect, an additional ‘virtual discussion group’.
- 7.2 Several basic issues need to be stressed at the outset. The point that most SMEs demonstrate no current **demand** for a self-diagnostic tool to assess management and leadership strengths and weaknesses (see section 5) needs to be repeated.
- 7.3 Recent changes to ELWa funding arrangements for training/ development had also been an issue for a minority of the SMEs involved in our discussions, with the uncertainty in particular *“not being at all helpful”*.
- 7.4 Yet to confirm the point that underlying levels of **need** are much greater, and that higher levels of **demand** can be encouraged given careful presentation, the research team were genuinely surprised at the enthusiasm for ‘some form of’ self-diagnostic tool. Groups often ‘talked themselves into’ a position where an appropriately designed and supported tool was seen as capable of addressing at least some of the concerns they see within their own organisations, and those they know of elsewhere.
- 7.5 Most of the points covered in Figure 4 were reinforced even more strongly by this part of the overall work programme (testing a ‘revised’ specification). In particular, it was consistently indicated that any tool must:
- have attractive, interesting presentation
 - have good links with other business support services
 - be quick to complete (but must not be ‘superficial’)
 - offer more in-depth options for ‘high priority’ topics
 - support achieving business priorities, not just managers’ “bright ideas”
 - lead to timely support being available for those completing the tool, to avoid the danger of people *“putting it to one side; then forgetting to do much with it”*

- lead clearly onto good-quality development support and programmes.

7.6 Specific points made to develop further the draft specification in Figure 4 included:

- using case studies to promote the tool
- the attraction of having a 'facilitated' option – working with an adviser or development specialist for those welcoming this kind of support
- using the tool several times to assess 'distance travelled' as the manager improves his/ her skills
- being able to be used even with 'not interested' managers as a way of getting their attention - *"it would have a bit of a curiosity value ..."*.
- generating results that clearly segregate out 'management' and 'leadership' capabilities, which may differ in terms of the roles people fulfil, and the development routes which are feasible/ appropriate.

7.6 These inputs suggested a need to revise the draft specification somewhat, to give the version outlined in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Revised Specification for Self Diagnostic Tool

Note: elements in italics represent changes to the initial specification (as in Figure 4); elements in bold are additional changes to Figure 4.

The tool should:

- be based on the new occupational standards for managers
- *cover all potentially relevant competencies, but **be capable of 'homing in'** on high priority areas rapidly*
- **offer modules and options, so that managers may gain more detailed information about key areas for them/ their organisation**
- be of immediate interest to managers who give little thought to personal development; **minimise the use of jargon, and terms which will not be familiar to those without formal management education**
- *link into other business support activities where appropriate, **both for promoting the tool and supporting the implementation of its findings***
- be designed for use by hard-pressed, time-poor SME managers
- be **attractively presented**, stimulating and user-friendly
- be available in *paper-based and on-line* formats
- **be capable of effective use both as a 'free-standing' tool and through 'mediated' discussions with an adviser**
- be relevant to SME needs – *both the needs of owner managers themselves, and the needs of the business*
- be able to be completed (in part at least) in no more than 20 minutes; **if modules are available, these will almost certainly take longer**
- **give results that are seen to be 'robust', 'reliable'**
- *lead on to more in-depth diagnostic techniques where appropriate*
- identify strengths as well as weaknesses
- point to development needs
- **be capable of periodic re-use to assess 'distance travelled'**
- link into a range of high-quality, flexible development activities **so that findings can quickly and effectively be acted on**
- be available, at no cost, to anyone who wishes to use it (*high-quality follow-on programmes ought normally to be charged for, however*).