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THESIS

**HARNESSING THE TRANSFORMATIVE TSUNAMI:
FLEET-WIDE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK REVISITED**

by

Daniel C. Rolnick

June 2012

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Marco DiRenzo
Kathryn Aten

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FLEET-WIDE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK REVISITED**

Daniel C. Rolnick
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.S., University of Southern California, 2005

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
June 2012**

Author: Daniel C. Rolnick

Approved by: Marco DiRenzo
Thesis Advisor

Kathryn Aten
Second Reader

William Gates
Dean, Graduate School of Business and Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

Since 1775, the success of the U.S. Navy has been borne of its strong, capable leadership. For generations, seafaring warriors have been cultivated from within, hand-selected, and groomed to fit the roles their fleet demands of them. Unfortunately, the recent firings of a few marquee officers suggest some tarnished organizational practices in need of polish. This thesis highlights obstacles impacting leadership development within the modern United States Navy. It also reflects upon various strategic, cultural, and technological trends that have shaped the Twenty-First Century naval workplace, as well as key organizational attempts to develop leaders of robust character. Using evidence from scholarly literature, the report champions one specific personnel development system called 360-degree feedback with which the U.S. Navy has enjoyed a storied past. By comparing the force-wide 360-degree feedback trials initiated by the Navy and Army in the mid-2000s, this thesis argues that the abandonment of the initiative by the Navy was a hasty misstep. Finally, this report advocates reintroducing Navy-wide 360-degree feedback because of its unique and timely benefits to today's fleet and concludes by coining a revised implementation strategy dubbed the "Transformative Tsunami" so as to remediate those weaknesses that befell its predecessor.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

This thesis highlights obstacles impacting leadership development within the modern United States Navy. Moreover, it reflects upon various strategic, cultural, and technological trends that have shaped the Twenty-First Century naval workplace, as well as the policy and programmatic attempts made by the organization to develop modern leaders of robust character. It champions a specific leadership development instrument called 360-degree feedback, with which the Navy has had a storied past, and gives a comprehensive review of its concept, intended uses, benefits, and limitations. By comparing the implementation strategies and subsequent outcomes of force-wide 360-degree trials initiated by both the Navy and the Army in the mid-2000s, this report argues that the Navy's abandonment of the initiative was a hasty misstep. Given the dynamic benefits of 360-degree feedback suggested by the literature, this report proposes a reimagined fleet-wide system be implemented using a novel organizational change model powerful enough to circumvent the weaknesses that befell its predecessor.

This research is timely and relevance for a number of reasons. Recognizing a bold shift in workplace culture, both the Departments of the Navy and Army have posited ambitious human resource strategies to meet the emergent demands of the Twenty-First Century workforce. Moreover, the growing number of technical billets needed to execute the modern range of military operations demands recruitment and retention of ever more intelligent, skilled servicemen. Complementary to pay and incentives, competing for top manpower with private employers in the modern era means overcoming two distinct challenges for the armed services: 1) conforming to the social norms of the civilian workplace in a effort to be perceived as an equally desirable place to work, and 2) adapting to an unprecedented level of organizational transparency, due to the increasing interconnectedness of information technology, so as to quell perceptions to the contrary. Both the Army and Navy have experimented with numerous "best practices" designed to alleviate these challenges. This paper devotes its attention to one such experiment—

fleet-wide 360-degree feedback—and coins a model for transformation persuasive enough to influence even the most resistant organizational culture.

B. BACKGROUND

Since 1775, the success of the U.S. Navy has been borne of its strong, capable leadership. As a whole, America’s naval leadership has always been top notch. For generations, seafaring warriors have been cultivated from within, hand-selected, and groomed to fit the roles their fleet demands of them. Unfortunately, the recent firings of a few marquee officers reveal some tarnished organizational practices in need of polish. The leadership development processes of an organization with as formidable a mission as the U.S. Navy warrant constant improvement and modernization. Weeding out poor officers, and making good ones even better is the lynchpin to maintaining this unrivaled fighting force for years to come. A series of organizational, cultural, and generational value shifts have left the fleet primed to evolve its leadership development, performance appraisal, and promotion processes. Recognizing the shortcomings, as well as the novel needs, of the modern naval workforce is the first step in generating sound policy; policy that will not fade into oblivion, as many unfounded ones do, but will spur lasting positive change.

Poor leadership can inflict grave harm to the Navy’s reputation, as well as to the command climate of its functional units. When asked to comment on the rash of recent commanding officer (CO) firings in a November 2011 *Navy Times* interview, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Jonathan Greenert stressed the importance of a “consistent screening process,” as well as the criticality of nurturing the “character development” of the Navy’s officer corps (Fellman 2011). In 2011, there were 22 COs fired from their posts (“Navy Firings” 2011)—the most since 2003 and nearly twice the annual average (Whitlock 2011). Figure 1 shows the number of Navy CO Firings by year since 1999.¹ Note the precipitous drop in firings between 2003 and 2004, possibly the result of a radical reactionary repression of CO autonomy in the wake of the record 2003

¹ Little public data exists describing the rates and reasons for detachments for cause of junior officers, this report assumes, however, that commanding officer firings represent a small, but insidious trend of professional and ethical lapses by leaders of all ranks.

statistic. Also note the distinct rising trend from 2006 hence; indicating that whatever quick fix had been applied in 2004 had limited staying power.

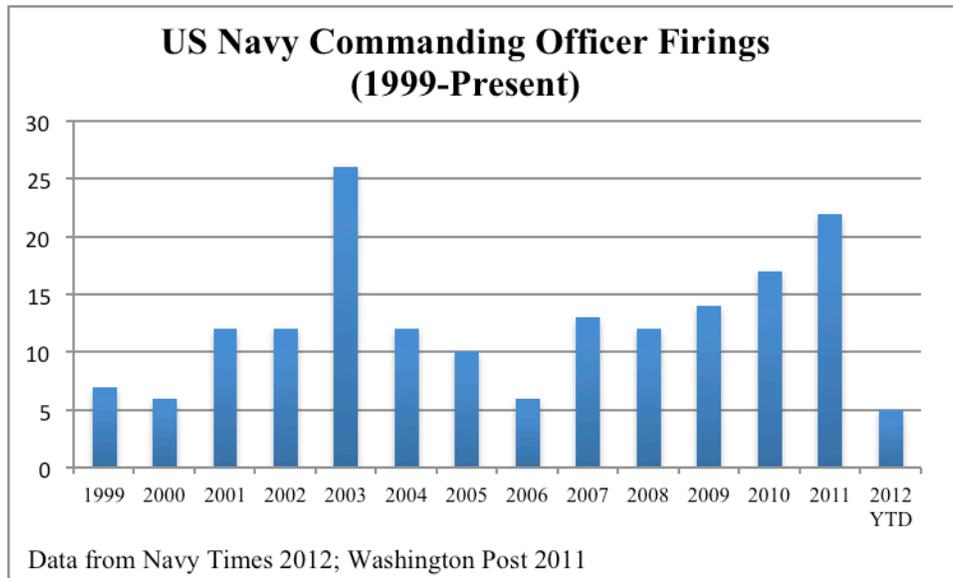


Figure 1. U.S. Navy Commanding Officer Firings (From: Navy Times 2012; Washington Post 2011)

Over the past decade, over 150 COs have been fired; since most were relieved due to personal misconduct including abusive leadership and fraternization, clearly something is amiss (Olson 2012). So hazardous is the current trend that the Navy Inspector General chartered an official review of the circumstances surrounding the 80 COs fired for misconduct between 2005–2010. The survey did not pinpoint any general reasons for ethical decay, but concluded that in many instances offending COs either lacked “insight into their motives and weaknesses to prevent them from knowingly engaging in unacceptable behavior or that they felt they had the power to conceal their misdeeds” (Olson 2012). The first conclusion indicates a mutual perceptual blindness amongst the officers, while the second indicates vulnerabilities in a key management control system—the Navy’s performance appraisal and prediction system.

Irrespective of the root cause, many of the offenses committed by these commanding officers are unconscionable by the standards of the modern workplace—especially when committed by men and women tasked with such integral, not to mention,

public roles within the organization. Headlines touting the details of these firings beg the question of why the Fleet repeatedly promotes officers of such questionable temperament and judgment to positions of profound import? Perhaps these officers unexpectedly manifest poor judgment to cope with the unique pressures of higher authority? Or perhaps, as the result of an inflated ego, they suddenly feel entitled to bend the rules like never before? As Elbert Hubbard writes in *The American Bible*, “Nothing unmask a man like his use of power” (Hubbard 2007)—a common sentiment in the Navy’s recent internal discourse on ethics. Wyatt Olson, writer for *Stars and Stripes*, remarks that a “so-called Bathsheba Syndrome has gained currency in the U.S. Navy in the past couple of years as it attempts to curtail commander misconduct” (2012). The Navy War College and Command Leadership School discuss the Bathsheba Syndrome as part of their ethics curriculum for perspective executive and commanding officers (Olson 2012).

Bathsheba Syndrome, a theory coined by University of Toledo professors Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longenecker, suggests that “ethical violations by upper managers are the by-product of *success*—not of competitive pressures” (1993, 265). Their article published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* highlights four privileges of success that can lead to ethical failings by senior leadership: 1) enhanced access to information, people, and objects; 2) unrestrained control of resources; 3) an ability to manipulate outcomes; 4) and a loss of strategic focus (1993). This philosophy merely serves as a scapegoat for *Big Navy* by drawing focus away from institutionalized character development initiatives and placing it on the deeds of offending officers themselves. That is, the concept of Bathsheba Syndrome seems to compel senior Navy leadership to scrutinize sitting COs, as opposed to investing in career-spanning character development initiatives aimed at systematically producing officers whose virtue transcends the temptations of power. Embracing the oversimplification that *power corrupts*, as the Bathsheba Syndrome proposes, obviates the need for an organizational fix to the process by which the Navy develops its leaders and instead draws focus to the management control systems that regulate the power given to those leaders.

This paper argues an alternate opinion to the theory of Bathsheba Syndrome. It is more likely that clues or even patterns of toxic leadership² existed throughout those fired commanding officers' careers; an assumption, which should encourage greater focus on continuous leadership development, as well as scrutiny of the Navy's performance appraisal and promotion systems since they, at times, seem to suffer from a critical mass of information asymmetry. After all, selection boards do not make a habit of promoting or appointing officers whose service records indicate anything shy of exemplary leadership and professional decorum. More importantly, by virtue of the fact that those offending commanding officers have been continually promoted throughout their careers, perhaps they felt that it is their results, versus their method for achieving them, upon which the Navy placed greater focus. Additionally, they may have perceived that abusive tactics sufficient to get the job done were not only warranted, but also rewarded, as evidenced by their regular promotion and stellar performance marks. Despite their contributions to mission accomplishment, the damage to unit morale and retention inflicted by consistently toxic leaders throughout their careers is profound. Furthermore, in the current system, even if a leader is aware of his/her severe deck-plate demeanor, he/she still has no tangible incentive to change a pattern of behavior that dependably delivers the results the Navy values, irrespective of how that behavior may impact subordinate stakeholders. In Chapter II, this paper explores shifts in organizational values that have suppressed the formerly institutionalized tolerance for toxic leadership behavior. In Chapter III, however, it also points out that the fleet's leadership development methods, as well as its performance appraisal and prediction systems still lack sufficient emphasis on character development to achieve the Navy's revitalized standards of decorum. Ultimately, this thesis proposes a means by which the Navy might better foster its evolving organizational values.

Following a 2001 Leadership Summit at Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), which featured then Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vern Clark, the fleet was abuzz with

² For the purpose of this paper, *toxic leadership* refers to any behavior by a leader considered abusive, unethical, or unprofessional by the standards of the modern workplace. The term *toxic leadership* appears to have entered the Department of Defense lexicon as a modifier for behavior otherwise described as *conduct unbecoming of an officer*.

initiatives aimed at fulfilling the needs of a Twenty-First Century workforce. One of more than thirty suggestions was for the Navy to adopt the corporate practice of 360-degree feedback³ (Lambert 2007). This technique involves collecting periodic competency-driven feedback from several coworkers about a target manager's performance. It is termed 360-degree feedback because unlike traditional top-down performance appraisal, multi-source feedback collects responses from superiors, peers, subordinates, and self. By virtue of the statistical axiom that several data points paint a more complete picture than single source, 360-degree feedback has gained wide-acceptance in the civilian sector over the past few decades (Morgeson, Mumford, and Campion 2005). The tool was originally designed to improve managers' self-awareness—a key trait shared by effective managers—but has evolved to be used as a complementary appraisal metric to top-down assessment and as an additional performance predictor during succession deliberations (Toegel and Conger 2003). Although both the Navy and the Army embarked on simultaneous service-wide 360-degree feedback pilot programs in the mid-2000s, the Army's initiative gained traction while the Navy's slipped into obscurity. Despite the fact that both organizations are impelled by a similar urgency to produce top-quality next-generation leaders, in this instance the Navy's transformation effort failed due to internal organizational pathologies, which did not exist or existed to a lesser degree in the Army.

C. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Given the common trends affecting personnel management across the Department of Defense (DOD), as well as the much heralded success of the Army's MSAF program, devise a plan for how the Navy might reinstitute a fleet-wide 360-degree feedback program to take best advantage of its benefits by alleviating biases in the assessment protocol and designing an assessment instrument with the proper intent.

³ To be referred to, hereafter, as *360-degree*, *360*, *multi-source*, or *multi-rater* feedback.

- By observing the dynamic factors that have shaped and continue to influence the modern naval workplace and workforce, propose a relevant organizational change model based on factors like cultural receptivity and organizational buy-in.

D. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This thesis is a collection of scholarly and defense-related research. Much like previous theses on the subject of multi-source feedback, such as the reports by David C. Nystrom and James M. Williams, its findings are conceptual in nature. This thesis does not draw upon exclusive survey or interview feedback, but rather extrapolates a fresh theoretical model from preexisting scholarly and defense-related literature. Based on extensive research, this paper attempts to tailor several generic conceptual models to fit the unique organizational context of the Department of Defense in a novel way.

E. THESIS ORGANIZATION

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter II highlights the evolution of Navy organizational values, underscoring modern cultural and technological externalities that uniquely impact the tone of the force. Chapter III gives a history of 360-degree feedback and explores the how the tool can be used as a change agent within the Navy. Chapter IV compares the use of 360-degree feedback within the Departments of the Navy and the Army over the last decade, with specific attention to the manner in which the two respective force-wide pilot programs were implemented. Given the evidence of 360s broad utility, Chapter V proposes an organizational change model called the Transformative Tsunami be used as a blueprint for future deployment of fleet-wide 360-degree feedback within the Navy. The final chapter summarizes the research and offers recommendations for revisiting fleet-wide 360-degree feedback.

F. BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

As the U.S. Navy grapples with how best to nurture the character development of today's officer corps, this research advocates reimagining and revisiting a forgotten initiative. Should the Navy choose to redeploy a fleet-wide 360-degree feedback system, this research draws upon the most recent scholarly and DOD evidence of how it might successfully do so.

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II. THE EVOLUTION OF NAVY ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

In a 2011 *Proceedings* article, retired U.S. Navy Capt. Kevin Eyer summarizes various strategic, technological, and social events of the last two decades that have shaped today's Navy culture—one that is stubbornly resistant to change but intent on making some (Eyer 2011). During the Cold War, *mission accomplishment* was the foremost standard of naval success. At sea, tough, uncouth, and even abusive leadership practices were seen as symptoms of the tense era preceding the fall of the Soviet Union. It was almost as though there was an institutionalized tolerance for any leadership tactic sufficient to get the job done. In addition, for generations this hard-nosed, seafaring culture has been caricatured for its pervasive use of vulgar language, sexism, and alcohol consumption. Since the life of a sailor was harsh, men were permitted liberties unacceptable by modern workplace standards. As a corollary, the *private* behavior of leadership was commonly perceived as irrelevant provided the job got done. Limited records exist of past CO firings prior to the 2000s; however the San Diego *Tribune* reported that the bulk of historical firings occurred due to captains hazarding their vessels and not because of off-duty behavior or *toxic* leadership (Eyer 2011). The Navy's organizational values have been altered as a result of the shift in strategic focus, the evolving gender and generational diversity of the force, as well as the novel impact created by modern technology on workplace transparency.

A. RECALIBRATING THE NAVY'S MORAL COMPASS

Following the self-destruction of its lone maritime rival, the Navy sought additional achievement metrics to supplement those, which suddenly felt less urgent. Drastic manpower cuts beginning in the 1990s left senior Navy leadership focused on strengthening the core remaining force. The Navy's top brass heralded *zero-defect* as the resulting cultural maxim. Preventable off-duty losses due to mishaps such as drunken driving or motorcycle crashes became unacceptable. In turn, the Navy began placing unprecedented emphasis on regulating the lives of officers and sailors both on and off-duty.

Senior Navy leadership began mining data on private behavior, which had previously existed off the radar. Deemed *indicators of work-related stress*, the Navy began systematically quantifying everything from alcohol-related incidents, to domestic abuse, to Navy-on-Navy assaults (“Tone of the Force” 2011). Local incidences soon became metrics by which command leadership was judged. Moreover, *conduct unbecoming* became a catchall label that could sink the career of any officer predisposed to this new definition of uncouth behavior. The post-Cold War Department of the Navy (DON) beamed a spotlight on private behavior, which had little to do with an officer’s professional abilities. The organization’s stringent observance of these recalibrated standards of excellence appears to cause officers to sully their careers at an unprecedented rate.

Another thorny obstacle for the DON, which emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall, has been the mixed-gender workplace. Although women have served in the operational Fleet for nearly 20 years, mixed-gendered commands persistently generate leadership challenges. When the CNO opened auxiliary ships to mixed gendered crews for the first time in the mid-1970s much of the social ramifications were downplayed in the interest of politics. The first study gauging the effects of gender integration on seagoing culture cited that chief petty officers and non-rated men had a positive opinion of integrated crews, while only petty officers felt women led to “a decline in discipline and leadership” (Thomas and Greebler 1983). Conveniently, the study also found the rise in sexual harassment to be “predominately verbal in nature” and these empowered, pioneering females able to handle it themselves (Thomas and Greebler 1983). Underplaying the dynamism of this cultural shift was a dangerous proposition for the Navy, which quickly devolved into a scandal that would alter organizational values and policies forever.

In 1991, the attention lavished Tailhook Scandal underscored the need for change in U.S. Navy culture—to the public, chauvinism appeared to be a core value of the organization. In an effort to promote a fresh, egalitarian image, the DON opened combatant ships to women 1994. Since then, gender-equality in the workplace has been the central focus of scores of sensitivity training initiatives across the fleet; and yet,

because of the unique live/work conditions of deployment life, problems persist endemic to mixed gendered crewing. With the integration of women on ships, fraternization policies have become all the more legitimate resources for maintaining good order and discipline in the workplace. As the Navy undergoes this transition, an interesting dichotomy presently exists between veteran personnel whose original fleet experience was shaped during an all-male era and millennial recruits for whom mixed-gender crewing has been a constant reality. As expressed in the following section, the perceptions and values of the latter occasionally clash with those of the former.

B. MANAGING A NEW GENERATION OF WARFIGHTERS

Since the lion's share of the active-duty military population are young employees, the coming-of-age of successive generations of recruits poses an additional human resources challenge to the organization. According to a 2008 study by the Population Reference Bureau, the median age of an enlisted service member is 27 and nearly half of the enlisted force is under the age of 24, compared with just 14% of the civilian workforce. The median age for officers is 32 years old, while their average college-educated civilian peer is 36 (Lee and Mather 2008). Such a youth oriented workforce requires the military bureaucracy to adapt its human resource strategy to the proclivities of each emergent generation of new recruits.

1. Veteran Values

Acclaimed journalist Tom Brokaw writes of America's *Greatest Generation*, who served during World War II, as one defined by hard work and devout patriotism (Brokaw 2004)—the bravery of whom enabled America's military to prevail in armed conflict otherworldly in size and scope. Two decades later, American policymakers sent that generation's offspring on an ill-fated foray into Indochina and, those who remain, now comprise the pinnacle of American military leadership. These high-ranking Baby Boomers now write the human capital strategies employed across the armed services. Although advances in organizational theory have become strong influencers of policy, naturally, the tastes of these officers were shaped by the cultural mores of their own generation and their years of professional experience.

Maestro of the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur once remarked, “Old soldiers never die; they just fade away” (MacArthur 1951). Leaders from the Baby Boom generation will gradually retire, making way for Generation-X who now make-up the bulk of the mid-level ranks of the officer corps—a fleeting corpus of manpower, since by design there are fewer billets available for senior personnel within the military than there are for the rank-and-file. The thinning of aging personnel is a spontaneous phenomenon in the military, where terms of employment are more commonly measured in years rather than decades, due to the fact that force structure demands a vertical versus flat organizational design. The impetus to attrite incessantly nags at the serving force, because unlike past generations today’s force is made up exclusively of volunteers who are demographically better educated, more often married, and more commonly female than the pre-1973 service (Lee and Mather 2008; Stafford and Griffis 2008).

2. Recognizing the Millennial Shift

Millennial generation employees staff the bulk of today’s armed forces; they are those born roughly between 1980 and 2000. The generational homogeneity of over three-quarters of the force should drive policy, more so than the rationale that *this is what has worked in the past*. A 2008 study by the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) asked the germane question: “Are there characteristics and challenges so specific to Millennials that the military must develop targeted policies in order to appeal to this generational cohort?” (Stafford and Griffis 2008, 2). The findings of the study were muddled and, admittedly, shortsighted since “the Millennial cohort is still young and has not been studied sufficiently, or systematically enough, to develop conclusions about its impact on various segments of society, such as the workforce” (Stafford and Griffis 2008, 3).

However, the CNA study points out that myriad popular resources paint descriptive narratives useful for guiding future research. Most notably, population economists point out that the Millennial cohort is the largest generational constituency in history with over 100 million members—that is a third larger than the Baby Boom generation. Common “core traits” run through the modern generation by virtue of the increasing ubiquity of personal technology, as well as the insular, albeit adulatory, nature

of their upbringing. Raised as “trophy children” and thereby imbued with a strong sense of self-esteem and self-importance, Millennials have also been the focal point of some of the broadest “youth-protection movements in American history”—a child focus, which experts believe has contributed to the generation’s a strong sense of “entitlement” and “specialness” (Stafford and Griffis 2008, 13–14).

The junior leadership paradigm has changed due to the blossoming diversity of the workforce and the contemporary traits, desires, and expectations of Millennial workers. Although scholarly studies pinpointing the evolving values of the modern *military* workforce are scant, as little time has lapsed since the Millennials joined its ranks, research suggests that Millennial employees in the civilian workforce are more individualistic than previous generations and require “targeted techniques for recruiting, managing, motivating, and retaining them” (Stafford and Griffis 2008, 14). They have realistic expectations of their first job in terms of compensation and job design, yet they also expect to advance quickly up the ranks. Like the constituents of Generation-X before them, they also place a premium on work-life balance. Most notably, they require and seek unique ways of doing things, which commonly defy convention and procedure (Ng et al. 2010; Stafford and Griffis 2008). Unfortunately for the modern sailor, such expectations diametrically contrast the common realities of Navy life. The military is a largely collectivist culture, one’s job is often not as advertised, advancement is regulated more by statute than merit, the size and mission of the organization demands adherence to standard operating procedures, and operational tempo requires sailors be away from home for days, weeks, or months at a time. Such a lifestyle places unnatural stress on any workforce, regardless of the generational makeup of its members. Failure to meet the evolving values of the modern Navy workforce further compounds that stress.

3. Zeroing in on Millennial Values

As implied by the language of the 2004 *Navy Human Capital Strategy* and the 2010 *Total Force Vision* statement described earlier, the DON is scouring the corporate landscape for organizational best practices aimed at strengthening its Twenty-First Century workforce. The DON conducted its first Navy-wide survey of the Navy Total

Force in 2010, highlighting “quality of work-life perceptions and other *hot button* issues.” From that survey, the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST) office established a baseline for attitudinal metrics affecting the Active, Reserve, and civilian components of the Fleet (Johnson et al. 2011).

Over 2,800 personnel, the vast majority of who were active duty service members, delivered responses in three broad categories: overall satisfaction with the Navy and career intentions, workplace climate, and career progression. Results were tabulated on an ordinal level according to a simple Likert scale of “satisfied” or “dissatisfied,” “likely” or “unlikely,” with “neither” serving as the tiebreaker. Enlisted service members responded less favorably in nearly every category, occasionally by significant margins. Satisfaction with total compensation, job satisfaction, and career intentions all rated favorably, while *command morale* severely lagged in the *overall satisfaction* category. As for *workplace climate*, aggregate data from officers and enlisted placed immediate supervisors and command leadership in the mid-seventieth percentile. Enlisted respondents felt most dissatisfied with the way in which command leadership dealt with subordinates, and conversely perceived that command leadership dealt more favorably with superiors in their chain of command. Officers felt the same, but to lesser degree. Significant dissatisfaction is also observed with respect the quality of communication between command leadership and subordinates (Johnson et al. 2010).

Results in the *career progress* category most explicitly underscore Millennial challenges within the military workplace. Officers and enlisted alike show significant frustration, indicating they have a poorly defined career path; and although most perceive that they understand the Navy promotion system, few are satisfied with it and even fewer believe the “most qualified and deserving workers get promoted” (Johnson et al. 2011). Congruent with perceptions regarding the shortcomings of the promotion system, respondents also felt that although they had a clear understanding of the Navy’s performance evaluation system, just a third enlisted and fewer than half of officers believe that the “most qualified score the highest on performance evals” (Johnson et al. 2010). Dissatisfaction with the Navy’s promotion and performance appraisal systems were the most glaring trends throughout the entire report.

Alleviating these institutional shortcomings requires a multi-phased approach. Perhaps even though respondents believe that they understand the Navy's promotion and performance appraisal systems, grade inflation, fluid "Big Navy" manpower requirements, and the highly politicized nature of the ranking and boarding process makes the interwoven systems too dynamic to fully encapsulate in a simple definition. Such bounded rationality undoubtedly breeds vitriol at the command level, when a service member, perceived unworthy by his or her coworkers, is promoted based on a decision process that takes place outside the lifelines. An organization as large as the U.S. Navy must strive to employ the fairest, most transparent promotion and performance appraisal standards so as to avoid the pitfalls of equity theory.

Modifying the system will take time; however, improving two-way, intra-organizational communication is a good first step. In particular, one Millennial value that the Navy might immediately address is the expectation for constant feedback (Myers and Sadaghiani 2010). In their May 2010 *Harvard Business Review* article titled "Mentoring Mill," authors Meister and Willyerd write that Millennial generation employees "want a constant stream of feedback" and suggest that they might benefit from a system that enables them to provide candid feedback to superiors, as well. A fleet-wide system enabling Millennial employees to both give and receive structured, efficacious feedback may be just the prescription to mitigate ailing expectations.

C. TECHNOLOGY COMPOUNDS THE URGENCY FOR REFORM

Technology and social media have confounded matters further. In the days before advanced satellite communications, a deployed ship or battle group was, more or less, an isolated unit. Abusive or toxic leadership was the blight of the crew alone and could not be instantaneously reported outside the lifelines. Today, ships maintain several uninterrupted lines of communication to the community back home. In turn, disgruntled sailors can air grievances with the click of a mouse. For the first time ever, constant connectivity has opened a real-time window into life at sea. By virtue of advanced communications technology, Dr. Benjamin Carney, a social psychology professor at the University of California at Los Angeles highlights the fact that "no other military in the history of warfare has had that level of access to their families" (Chalmers 2011).

In addition, the rising popularity of social media, especially among the newest generation of servicemen, makes visible private behavior that was once confined to the wardroom or chief petty officer's mess. Not only are enlisted sailors more apt to stumble upon (or even publish) online photos of leadership acting improperly, but also senior Navy leadership is more attuned to the occasional poor decision by one of its officers. In exceedingly common instances, even self-preservation falls victim the rising tide of technological narcissism, as leaders' post their own exploits on public online forums. By virtue of modern technology, private behavior has greater potential to go public than ever before—*viral* even. The public nature of the modern fleet underscores the urgency with which senior Navy leadership must manage the responsible performance of all its stakeholders.

Social media quickly became such a mainstay in the daily lives of most Americans that the Navy had little choice but to embrace the technology. In 2010, the Navy Office of Information generated the Navy's first official primer on the responsible use of social media by naval personnel in its *Navy Command Social Media Handbook*. The handbook acknowledges that the armed services face a double-edged sword with respect to the availability of social media websites to the crews of deployed units. In fact, initially, DOD servers blocked websites like Facebook and MySpace due to concerns over operational security (OPSEC) (Chalmers 2011). While the preservation of OPSEC remains critical, as the ubiquity of social media has grown and bandwidth limitations receded, the military has found that the benefits of allowing access to such websites outweigh the risks. The unique manner in which social media enables service members to remain connected to loved-ones while deployed has been found to mitigate a certain degree of stress brought on by prolonged time away (Chalmers 2011). The *Navy Command Social Media Handbook* also points out that the technology is becoming a key pillar in the Navy's strategic communication strategy because it grants sailors a public forum to tell positive stories about their military experiences, since a dwindling number of Americans have served themselves. However, it caveats that position with the admonition that responsible employment of the technology by all service members is paramount (2010).

D. THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY'S *OFFICIAL* RESPONSE

While the preceding description may be an oversimplification of the challenges influencing the naval cultural landscape, incidences like these forced the Department of the Navy to turn its focus inward. As a result of this reinvigorated inward focus, the Defense Science Board Task Force on Human Resources Strategy, in February 2000, concluded:

The demands of the Twenty-First Century security environment are markedly different from those that shaped the manpower requirements and personnel systems and policies that are used in the [Defense] Department today. The current set of human resources policies and practices will not meet the needs of the Twenty-First Century if left unchanged. (“Human Capital Strategy” 2004, 1)

Since then, the DON has consistently highlighted manpower as its most valuable asset. Inspired by the board’s solemn insights, the DON set about on an ambitious plan to reshape its human resources policies.

Today, the Navy stands determined to continuously improve its Total Force, and especially its officer corps. Since officers shape the lens through which enlisted sailors view their naval experience, poor leadership has the tendency to breed contempt and low morale on the deck plates. At the unit level, just as sailors’ opinions of the Navy are influenced by the behavior of their division officers and department heads, junior officers are influenced by the behavior of their executive and commanding officers. A Naval Postgraduate School study published in 2008 concluded that leadership and cultural problems had a strong influence on poor retention rates of surface warfare officers. Such a strong influence, in fact, that in most cases monetary incentives could not offset the urge to resign (Stoker and Crawford 2008). This comes as no surprise, since the Navy’s junior-to-mid-level ranks are comprised predominately of *millennial generation* employees who rate “manager quality” as a top motivational factor (Ng et al. 2010).

Despite the urgency to make good on this reconstituted cultural awareness, in this era of fiscal belt tightening, it has become more important than ever to focus on initiatives likely to generate the best bang for the buck—hence, the surge in behavioral trend analysis. Presently, Chief of Naval Personnel tabulates a quarterly “Tone of the

Force” report, which tracks sailors on and off-duty behavior in five broad categories including: *Navy population, diversity, and equal opportunity*; *family well-being* such as abuse, divorce rates, and off-duty fatalities; *financial well-being*; *personal readiness* such as suicide rates, involuntary separations, desertion, and various felony-level crimes; and *alcohol and drug related offenses* (“Tone of the Force” 2011). This report and others like it illustrate the emergent demand for honest organizational introspection. As the most recent *Navy Total Force Vision* statement points out:

A ready Total Force, supported by a comprehensive continuum of care, is the heart of our Navy. We must attract, recruit, develop, assign, and retain a diverse, high-performing, competency-based and mission-focused force, while ensuring the welfare of our Sailors, Navy civilians and their families. By adhering to this vision, we will succeed in delivering the maritime force our nation and the Twenty-First Century demands. (“Total Force Vision” 2010, 10)

At the dawn of the new millennium, the Navy began to demand more from itself. This progressive *Navy Human Capital Strategy*, the predecessor to the *Navy Total Force Vision*, took shape in 2004. From the rhetoric contained in its founding document, notice how the policy objective has evolved during the six short years between it and the most recent:

The message is clear and stark—the DoN’s strategic environment is changing rapidly, deeply, and in all dimensions—social, economic, and political... Creating this modern, Twenty-First Century workforce along with the laws, policies, and systems to manage it will be a daunting task. This will not be done in a few months, but must be approached as a long-term, continuing process that needs to be started now, pressed forward in the near future, and nurtured on a priority basis for many years (“Human Capital Strategy” 2004, 18).

The 2010 document asserts a more codified mission statement; but still, the tools necessary for accomplishing the Navy’s ambitious manpower objective, as well as the metrics that determine organizational success, remain open for debate. Today, the Navy remains resolute to track any statistic that might suggest cultural decay and, by virtue of record retention levels, they are willing to punish perpetrators of poor behavior severely. Recent CO firings are a symptom of this hyper-introspection. Sadly, the behavior seems to persist in a segment of the population, only now is the Navy more inclined to quash it.

E. FLEET SENTIMENT ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

NPRST, the same office who produced the 2010 *Navy Total Force Survey*, have sampled the naval force's feelings on the matter of ethical behavior and character development in a series of annual quick polls dating back to 2006. The surveys relate strength of character to adherence to the Navy's Core Values (NCV)—honor, courage, and commitment. From the nearly 6,000 Navy personnel selected to participate annually, NPRST receives an average of 2,000 survey responses. Respondents are roughly 80% enlisted and 20% officer. Like the *Navy Total Force Survey*, officers consistently responded slightly more favorably than enlisted personnel (Uriell et al. 2011).

The most expressive interpretation of the feedback can be drawn from a comparison of the "Command Environment" and "Ethical Behavior" sections of the survey. In the 2011 survey, only 70% agreed with the statement: "Accountability, holding oneself to the highest standards of personal conduct, and decency are traits of most Navy leaders at my command" (Uriell et al. 2011). Similarly, just 64% agreed that their "leaders demonstrate ethical behavior and commitment to NCVs" (Uriell et al. 2011). Interestingly, 91% of officers felt that Navy Core Values were applicable to their everyday lives, while over 96% also felt that their personal values help guide them through tough moral decisions (Uriell et al. 2011). Why is the spread greater than 20 percentage points between officers who swear they adhere to strict personal ethical standards and the sailors who agree that they do? Perhaps a lack of self-awareness among the respondent pool accounts for the difference. A rating incongruence between how officers perceive themselves and how sailors perceive them is suggested in Figure 2. Most unfortunate is the fact that just 38% of all respondents reported they had not seen NCVs being violated in the last six-months (Uriell et al. 2011).

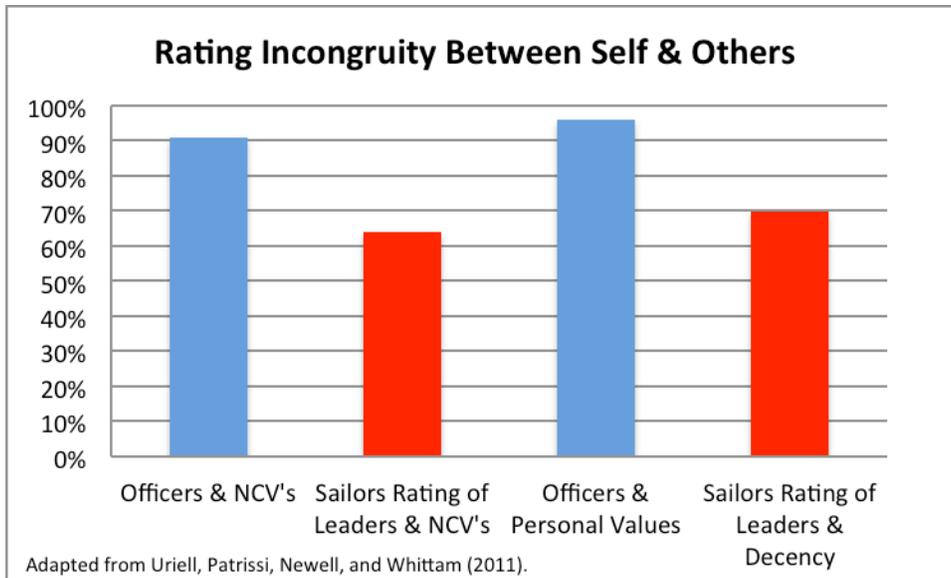


Figure 2. Rating Incongruity Between Self and Others (From: Uriell, Patrissi, Newell, and Whittam (2011))

Clearly the fleet is dissatisfied with the status quo, underscored by the fact that barely half of sailors surveyed believe that the Navy rewards competence (Uriell et al. 2011; Johnson et al. 2010). A change should be made that empowers all personnel to feel as if they play a part in the betterment of the organization. A fleet-wide system of 360-degree feedback may be just the tool to empower Millennial employees to feel like their opinions count, while simultaneously calibrating the self-awareness of its leadership.

Even if 360-degree feedback fails to gain favor as an appraisal or performance prediction metric, if instituted fleet-wide it could generate profound value as a management development tool—the purpose for which 360-degree feedback was originally designed. In addition, if the assessment is tailored for Navy leaders at various ranks, research shows that 360-degree feedback may also help reinforce organizational values and vision (Fleenor and Prince 1997). If done right, an institutionalized multi-source feedback system might have an overarching influence on the Navy’s overall personnel goals of improving development, retention, and promotion of innovative, impactful Twenty-First Century leaders.

III. ORCHESTRATING CHANGE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

The preceding chapter describes a series of challenges that have shaped the lens through which policymakers must now view the fleet. Today's Navy requires a diverse series of novel initiatives aimed at fulfilling the *zero-defect* objective conceived following the destruction of its lone blue-water rival, while simultaneously balancing the needs of its burgeoning Twenty-First Century workforce. Central to any initiative is strong, consistent leadership. The U.S. Navy has been afflicted by a recent scourge of senior officers acting in a manner unbecoming of their rank and authority; however the blight may run even more deeply through the junior officer ranks. Aside from scrutinizing only the worst offenders, it is important to note that no officer is a perfect leader. Even the best officers could benefit from marginal character improvements. This is a call for a fleet-wide tool like 360-degree feedback. Not only could individual naval leaders benefit from improved self-awareness, the tool may also hold much broader human capital management implications in the performance appraisal and prediction arenas if employed as an x-factor for decision making.

The unique reasons for detachments for cause are diverse. However many are the product of cognitive disconnects by officers who perceive either their behavior to be acceptable or that they will not be caught. Now imagine that a system existed, which altered officers' consciousness in a way that forced them to examine the full impact of their behavior. Social psychologists, Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund coined one means by which to do so in their 1972 work *A Theory of Objective Self-Awareness*. Their theory deals with the self-reflexive property of one's own consciousness. That is, exercising inward focus brings about an automatic comparison of one's self against a set of stated behaviors, attitudes, or traits. Moreover, if made self-aware that one was deviating from those prescribed standards of decorum, a natural righting function occurs in that individual's psyche (Silva and Duval 2001).

Objective self-awareness (OSA) theory has evolved over the last forty years; however, its psychological foundation remains intact. Subsequent research on OSA

suggests that should an individual find that his behavior deviates from prescribed norms, he/she will choose one of two avenues: work on reducing that discrepancy or avoid self-reflection altogether. Attribution theory, a corollary to OSA, describes the tendency for individuals to associate triumphs with intrinsic aptitude and failures with externalities beyond their control (Silva and Duval 2001). Individuals innately possess varying degrees of objective self-awareness, and methods have been devised for improving upon one's inherent quantity when lacking. Social psychologists agree that among other key traits, good leaders, or what recent literature terms "authentic leaders," tend to try to hone their self-awareness so as to promote and develop followership in the workplace (Avolio and Gardner 2005). Poor leaders shirk such efforts. Superior self-awareness and positive self-regulation enables authentic leaders to *lead by example*. Leadership researchers Luthans and Avolio sum up this sentiment by stating "[t]he authentic leader does not try to coerce or even rationally persuade associates, but rather the leader's authentic values, beliefs, and behaviors serve to model the development of associates" (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis and Dickens 2011, 1122). Clearly, OSA evades a segment of the current Navy leadership population as evidenced by the series of organizational climate surveys citing dissatisfaction amongst the current Naval Force with the personal and professional character of its leadership, as well as the sum of bad press emanating from the recent marquee firings. Performance prediction is a nagging managerial quandary, however methods exist by which organizations can hone not only the technical skill but also the emotional aptitude of its rising executives.

A. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF PERFORMANCE PREDICTION

In the same 2011 *Navy Times* interview described earlier, Adm. Greenert spoke of the challenge of selecting officers able to withstand the added stresses of command (Fellman 2011). Predicting future performance is the foremost hurdle to sound succession management. Although, forecasting a future executive's performance potential is challenging, research suggests that organizations that do it most effectively employ 360-degree assessment as an element of their overall personnel management strategy (Kesler 2002). If done correctly, including the results of periodic 360-degree feedback in an officer's service record might alleviate some inherent biases in Navy's

promotion and selection process; it may also unveil undesirable behavior that may otherwise go unnoticed in the current top-down, results-based performance evaluation.

For most succession decisions the Navy employs a boarding process akin to a version commonly found in the private sector. Appendix 1 is a narrative describing a generic CO selection process within the Naval Surface Force; other warfare communities within the Navy follow similar protocols. The Navy boarding process aims to predict an officer's future performance potential—a practice, which has several inherent limitations. This process, often referred to as a “calibration committee,” involves a constituency of senior executives who perform a consensus-oriented, forced comparison of a group of future executives (Kesler 2002). Succession management strategist, Gregory Kesler suggests that within these calibration committees, an over-dependence on results-based vice competency-based appraisal can lead to an “over-reliance on the truism that past accomplishments predict future performance” (Kesler 2002, 36). This is a common flaw in the Navy process where an individual's annual performance evaluations, or fitness reports (FITREPs), comprise the criteria by which decisions are made.

In the U.S. Navy, past results are heralded as causal predictors of future performance, hence the common selection board criterion that candidates' FITREPs indicate *sustained, superior performance at sea*. Unfortunately, documented accomplishments in an officer's FITREP are merely suggestive of, but not necessarily indicative of an officer's competencies. Research suggests, however, that past performance more accurately predicts future performance only in positions that demand “a similar level of task complexity” (Kesler 2002, 36). The career crossroads model, created by Walter Mahler and Stephan Drotter in 1986, graphically demonstrates the dramatic shifts in the intellectual and emotional demands presented by promotion to positions of increasing authority within an organization (Mahler and Drotter 1986). For demonstration purposes, Figure 3 illustrates this concept within the Naval Surface Force.

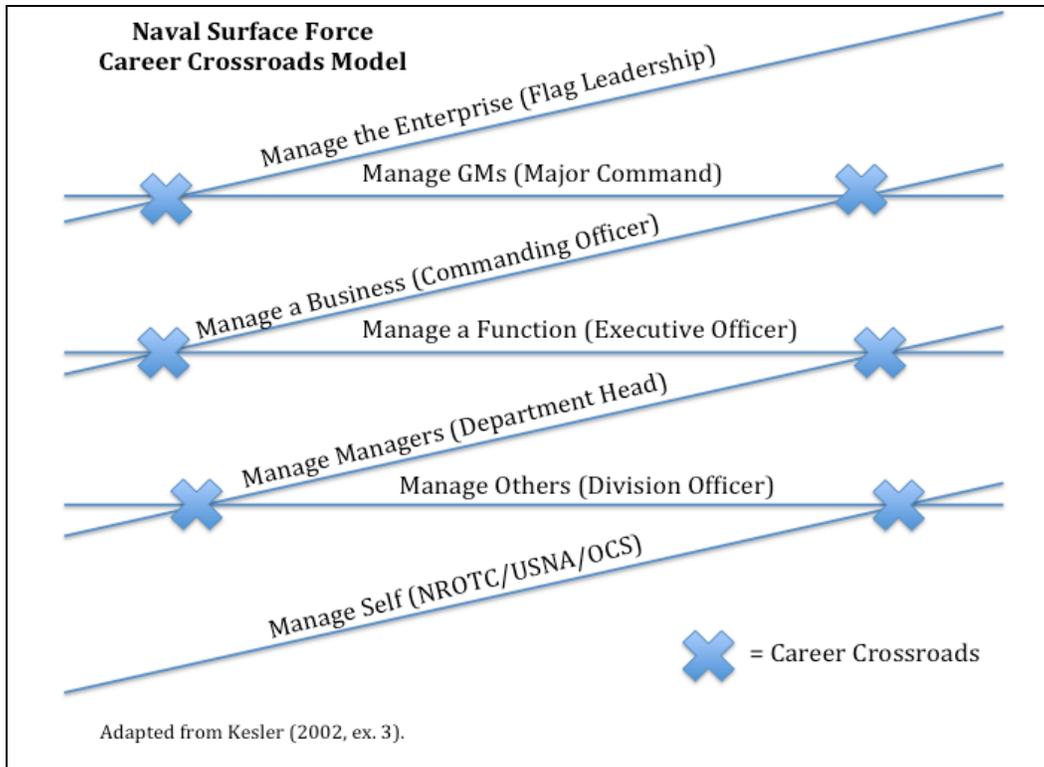


Figure 3. Naval Surface Force Career Crossroads Model

The seasoned executives on the selection board make interpretations based on the tangible accomplishments listed in the officer’s service record, but that assessment often falls short when predicting future performance demanded by high-stress, high-competency follow-on roles. The root of the problem is that the board process occurs in a vacuum—often none of the board members know the applicant personally and even if they did, they are roundly discouraged by the rules of boarding process from voicing character judgments about the individual that do not exist in their file. This would be fine if the service record consistently reflected the full measure of the applicant; however, as evidenced by some of the more publicized CO firings, red flags are often left out. Therefore the board members deliberate in a state of *bounded rationality*—their decision-making is constrained by the information exclusive to each officer’s file. This may seem like the fairest process possible; however, if a former superior never made note of a specific character or behavioral issue in an applicant’s permanent record, that flaw remains beyond the scope of the board’s decision-making criteria.

Strength of character is an integral component of positive leadership; yet FITREPs focus more on an individual's objective, quantifiable accomplishments rather than his or her character. Fleet Admiral Arleigh Burke once remarked about the nature of a man's character, "[T]here will always be wayward priests, crooked politicians, and wicked naval officers. In a highly moral organization, people who fall below the standard will eventually be recognized and removed from the organization" (Montor 1994, 272). As evidenced by the *wicked* naval officers who routinely slip through the selection process, sometimes the Navy fails to recognize character flaws before its too late. Weeding out the bad apples, or better yet, promoting objective self-awareness as to one's own deviation from prescribed standards is preferable to the black eye that these errant officers inflict on the organization.

B. A BRIEF HISTORY OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

1. Early Uses

360-degree feedback is not new to military organizations. The term itself is derived from a fighter pilot's habit of making a 360-degree sweep of the visible environment prior to takeoff (Rohan-Jones and Rohan-Jones 2003). 360-degree feedback as an organizational assessment tool was first employed by the German military in World War II, premised on the logic that multiple perspectives reveal a more objective, well-rounded insight about a particular event than a solitary account. Since then public and private organizations have employed 360-degree feedback as a management control system in an effort to glean multiple perspectives on initiatives that effect the entire organization. As the name implies, 360-degree surveys enable organizations to collect standardized feedback on policies, practices, and procedures from every level of the organizational hierarchy (Fleenor and Prince 1997).

2. Corporate Adoption

In a 1974 article in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, W. Harvey Hegarty found that feedback from subordinates led to positive changes in superiors' behavior. Corporate human resource-related multi-source feedback systems evolved from that concept, and countless subsequent applications have refined the practice for modern use

(Morgeson et. al 2005). Captivated by the novelty and potential utility of the tool, firms began employing 360-degree instruments for individual assessment and development en masse in the 1980s. Until that time, the strict vertical hierarchies of most organizations management structures overshadowed its wide acceptance. However, as organizational structures have flattened, 360-degree instruments have come to supplement, and in some cases supplant, traditional top-down, single-source appraisal systems (Fleenor and Prince 1997).

Driven by the impulse to employ increasingly innovative means for maximizing employee potential, private firms have embraced multi-source assessments for reasons beyond the flattening of their organizational structures. Business authors of the early 1990s championed the merits of 360-degree feedback systems as the technological crescendo of the era gave way to rapid changes in the industrial landscape. Author Kenneth Nowack highlights four additional reasons for businesses' growing receptivity to 360-degree feedback—the potential cost-advantage over traditional assessment metrics, the emergence of technology able to more easily facilitate 360-degree assessments, the modern emphasis on continuous measurement and improvement, and the need to generate feedback for managers at all levels, even those who lack promotion potential (1993).

3. 360s Practical Application Expands

Marketplace tumult in the late-Twentieth Century like mergers, downsizing, and restructuring underscored the urgency with which corporations sought improved leadership and managerial effectiveness. 360-degree assessments became vogue as a panacea for all managerial afflictions—one tool aimed at facilitating career planning, management development, improved communication, as well as fostering preferred leadership styles (Crystal 1994). In 1995, *HR Magazine* explained that as firms depart from strict vertical hierarchies, 360-degree feedback provides a sound means of aligning employee performance to overall organizational strategy (Hoffman 1995). Not only are 360-degree assessments effective at underscoring organizational competencies, they can also emphasize areas for developmental focus as well as problematic organizational trends before they impede success (Hoffman 1995).

As the tool gained traction in the private sector, management literature began suggesting specific caveats to implementation strategies and the proposed multi-purpose utility of 360-degree feedback programs (Morgeson et al. 2005). Research also suggested the importance of coaching or mentorship in concert with the tabulated results of each assessment when multi-rater feedback is used for developmental purposes (Peters 1996; Seifert, McDonald, and Yukl 2003). The mentoring process ensures that targeted individuals need not interpret the results of their 360-degree assessment by themselves—a practice that has proven to be an invaluable addendum to the original process (Seifert et al. 2003).

360-degree feedback was originally designed to improve managers' self-awareness, but has evolved to be used as a complementary appraisal metric to top-down assessment and as an additional performance predictor (Toegel and Conger 2003). In his article titled "Perceptions of reality: Is multi-perspective measurement a means or an end?" Walter Tornow describes four potential benefits of 360-degree feedback systems: 1) enhances self-awareness by aligning self-view with others'; 2) supplements the appraisal process because peers and subordinates offer unique perspectives to top-down assessment; 3) provides a framework by which organizations can amass systematic inferences useful for predicting employees' future performance during assignment or succession decisions; and 4) facilitates organizational change by aligning culture with strategy (1993). Broadening the intent of 360-degree assessment beyond management development, to the fields of appraisal and performance prediction has opened vistas of design and implementation challenges for organizations (Edwards and Ewen 1996). Scholarly literature on the subject suggests a litany of competing virtues and limitations to 360-degree feedback systems.

C. BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Today, organizations employ the results 360-degree feedback for management decisions ranging from compensation to promotion to job placement. Even though little empirical study exists of the longitudinal effects of 360-degree appraisal systems, the literature abounds with consensus that multi-rater feedback is best suited for personal and professional development (Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, and Summers 2001; Hazucha,

Hezlett, and Schneider 1993; Morgeson et al. 2005; Toegel and Conger 2003). Morgeson et al. takes note of the fact that the Center for Creative Leadership, an educational non-profit organization dedicated to leadership development research, restricts the use of its proprietary multi-source feedback instrument to developmental purposes only (2005). However, several firms have adopted tailored 360-degree feedback programs to be used for performance appraisal and prediction, as well. Brutus et al. explain that the most recent literature recommends 360-degree feedback systems be meticulously crafted to suit the demands of each unique organization (2006). In the 50s, Esso Research and Engineering Company was the first U.S. firm to adopt the practice of 360-degree feedback for employee evaluation (Bracken et al. 1997). Modern assessments have made strides in sophistication from those humble beginnings.

Proponents of 360-degree feedback praise its effectiveness as a managerial development tool (Brutus and Derayeh 2002; Dalton 1996; Hazucha et al. 1993). Such adulation hinges on the concept that people's managerial ability is not fixed, but rather they can learn and grow given the proper tools for improvement. Few can dispute the statement that managerial and leadership development is an ongoing process intricately linked to one's professional experiences (McCauley and Moxley 1996). As a development tool, 360-degree assessments derive their strength from the premise that *self-awareness* is the bedrock of sound management (Bailey and Fletcher 2002). Since 360s glean feedback from multiple sources, including one's self, comparing self-view with the views of other's generates value for the individual being assessed. Better alignment of self and other's views equates to superior self-awareness. Poor alignment implies a cognitive disconnect on the part of the manager (McCauley and Moxley 1996). A 1991 study of 155 U.S. Navy surface warfare officers in *Applied Psychology: An International Review* revealed that the more successful officers displayed better congruence between the leadership ratings they assigned themselves and the ratings assigned by their subordinates (Bass and Yammarino 1991). Congruence between self and others appears repeatedly in the scholarly literature as a key yardstick of self-awareness (Fletcher and Bailey 2003; Fletcher and Baldry 2000; Ostroff, Atwater, and Feinberg 2004).

Additionally, the literature contains several studies advocating multi-rater feedback as a means of improving self-awareness (Bailey and Fletcher 2002; Atwater, Brett, and Charles 2007)

1. How a Development Focused 360-Degree Feedback Instrument Works

Presently, two U.S. Navy schoolhouses offer 360-degree assessment to students as part of their curriculum; specifically, division officers at Surface Warfare Officer's School (SWOS) and incumbent executive and commanding officers at Command Leadership School (CLS) can submit to an assessment. For a brief period, surface warfare department heads also participated in 360-degree assessments as part of the SWOS curriculum, but funding was cut due to budget (Medina 2011).

Both SWOS and CLS employ a leading commercially available 360 instrument called PROFILOR® developed by PDI Ninth House, formerly Personnel Decisions International. Like other development focused 360 tools, PDI's PROFILOR instrument aims to enhance the self-awareness of a target leader (Medina 2011). Adapted from Luft and Ingham's ubiquitous Johari Window model depicted in Figure 4, PDI's tool works by enhancing the subject's own awareness of his or her strengths, job performance, and developmental needs (PDI Ninth House 2012). As part of the SWOS curriculum, division officers are asked to self-select a group of subordinates, peers, and superiors from their present command to complete the PROFILOR's diagnostic survey. Once tabulated, division officers are given a coaching session with a senior officer to discuss the otherwise confidential results. Figure 5 describes the Competency Window model that applies to the PROFILOR diagnostic—the goal of the assessment being to expand the cross-section between what an officer knows about himself and knows about the world around him, indicated by the upper right quadrant of the diagram.

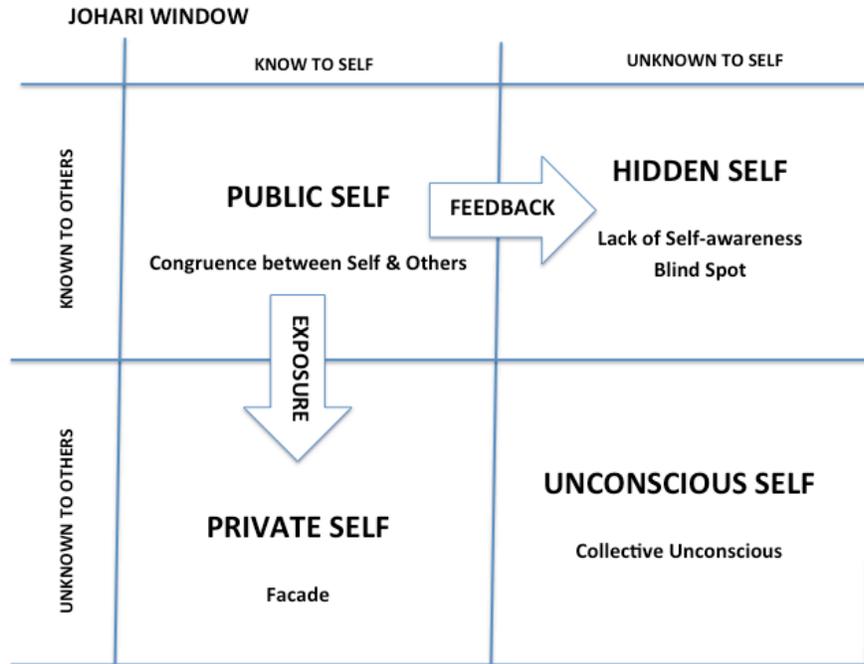


Figure 4. Johari Window (Adapted from Luft and Ingham 1955)

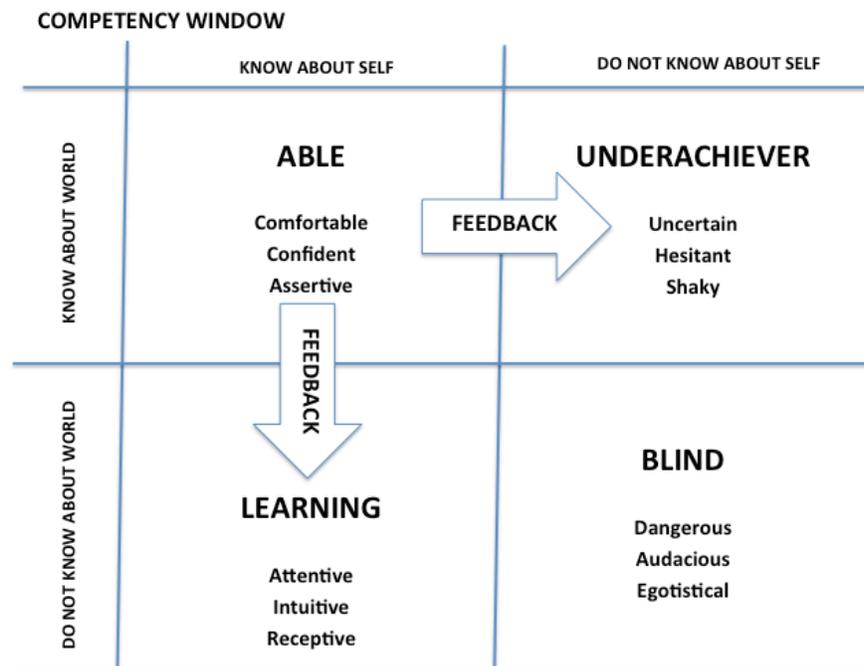


Figure 5. PROFILOR Competency Window (Adapted from Medina 2011)

2. Recommended Multi-Source Feedback Assessment Protocol

Researchers agree that 360-degree feedback programs that yield best results follow a clear and careful assessment protocol (Brutus and Derayeh 2002). 360s should be given on a regular interval, perhaps annually or every few years (McCauley and Moxley 1996). Training is a must and the stated goal of the assessment should be made clear to both the raters and the target employee (Toegel and Conger 2003). Confidentiality protocols are essential (Antonioni 1996; Budman and Rice 1994; Dalton 1996). When used for developmental purposes, only the target manager and, perhaps, a designated mentor should be privy to the results (Dalton 1996; Morgeson et. al 2005). When used for appraisal purposes the feedback becomes the property of the organization, although confidentiality remains imperative in all but decision making forums (Bracken et al. 2001). Additionally, subject buy-in hinges on organizational buy-in. If the target manager perceives that his or her employer views 360s to be of low priority, he or she may feel the same (Budman and Rice 1994). Most importantly multi-source feedback systems should be administered in a manner that eliminates as many cognitive, psychometric, and game-theoretical biases or obstacles from the testing process as possible (McCauley and Moxley 1996; Toegel and Conger 2003; Bowman 2009)

In the case of the PROFILOR protocol at SWOS and CLS, little, if any, effect can be tracked. As mentioned, research suggests, for best results multi-source feedback be given in a manner that alleviate as many procedural biases possible (Toegel and Conger 2003). However, in this instance subject officers are expected to choose their own raters introducing self-selection bias to the testing procedure; and, moreover, there is little recourse available to schoolhouse for students too busy to disseminate the surveys to raters prior to course attendance. Participation is highly encouraged, but the test is not mandatory. Although the PROFILOR's marketing literature indicates that it has delivered actionable results for almost half of *Fortune* 100 companies, at a cost to the Navy of around \$150 per assessment the way in which 360s are currently employed in the surface force might only generate minimal return on investment (PDI Ninth House 2012; Medina 2011). In fact, when delivered in this irregular fashion, the benefit-to-cost ratio of the program is indeterminable.

3. Program Design Considerations

Program design considerations become increasingly significant when an organization employs the results of 360-degree assessments for purposes other than development alone. Studies show that organizations must take great care before initiating 360s as a formal appraisal determinant (Antonioni 1996; Budman and Rice 1994). With the flattening of corporate structures, firms are more prone to seek appraisal metrics to supplement traditional top-down, results-based assessments of employee performance. An interesting dichotomy arises with respect to how various organizations perceive the “fairness” of multi-source feedback. On the one hand, firms believe feedback from multiple raters is more fair than the opinion of a single source; while on the other hand, research suggests potential skewness to the data when multiple raters know that their feedback will be used for compensation and promotion decisions of others (Antonioni 1996; Budman and Rice 1994; Dalton 1996).

Another consideration is that of collusion, which may occur between rater and subject if not alleviated by the testing protocol (Toegel and Conger 2003). Rater leniency by subordinates or peers asked to rate a superior may also result out of a fear of reprisal or a promise of reciprocity (Antonioni 1996; Budman and Rice 1994; Dalton 1996; Toegel and Conger 2003). Procedural fail-safes, like the randomization of rater selection, must be enacted in order for 360-degree feedback to work as an appraisal metric, yet biases may persist. Regardless, recurrent evidence suggests that the results of a single type of 360-degree assessment should not be used for multiple purposes. The testing protocol, timing, and even the language of the assessment is exclusive to whether the goal is managerial development or appraisal. Separate 360-degree feedback instruments should be tailored to each of the organization’s unique goals for the system—management development or performance appraisal and prediction (Toegel and Conger 2003).

4. Multi-Source Feedback for Multiple Uses

Although current research recommends limiting 360-degree feedback to development-only, a case can be made that structured feedback from multiple sources

may portray a more complete assessment of a target manager's performance than single-source appraisal (Fleenor and Prince 1997). Single-source appraisal systems are limited by the perspective and opinions of a single rater. Consequently, the criteria upon which a manager is judged are bounded by that superior's unique cognitive biases. For instance, a single-source appraisal may be subject to "halo-effect," if a supervisor judges a target employee based on reputation rather than actual accomplishments or competencies (Yukl and Lepsinger 1995). "Recency effect" has a greater likelihood of skewing single-source appraisals as well, especially in organizations that fail to systematically prioritize accomplishments. A rater may place more weight on the events that occurred most recently in the reporting period, downplaying those that occurred longer ago regardless of their relative significance (McGarvey and Smith 1993). Clearly such biases can occur in both single-source and multi-source appraisal systems, however appraisals sourced from multiple raters may limit the burden of individual biases on decision-making (Bracken et al. 2001; Fleenor and Prince 1997). If an organization hopes to broaden its use of 360-degree feedback to performance evaluation, it is imperative that it first have a long-standing corporate history with 360s for development-only (Atwater et al. 2007). This familiarizes employees with the tool and generates organizational buy-in as to its merits. Given the evidence of its broad corporate benefits, the Navy first sought to implement fleet-wide 360-degree feedback in response to an alarming trend poor behavior by some of its most public leaders.

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IV. COMPARING SERVICE-WIDE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK INITIATIVES

A. SMARTS-360 WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

Following a banner year of 26 CO firings, participants of the 2004 Surface Force Commander's Conference suggested implementing fleet-wide 360-degree feedback as corrective measure (Lambert 2007). Although the leadership failures were not warfare community specific, only the Surface Force sought a significant transformative solution. Unfortunately, the troubling rate of CO firings from all warfare communities over the past decade implies the Navy as a whole underestimated the urgency of its leadership woes.

In 2007, the Naval Surface Force initiated a pilot program to test the fleet-wide utility of 360-degree feedback⁴ (Bowman 2009). The Surface Force pilot was based on the Chief of Naval Operations' now-discarded Five Vector Competency Model, which described five first-order competencies intrinsic to sound leaders (mission accomplishment, leading people, leading change, resource stewardship, and working with people) and sixty-eight second-order competencies related to those first order traits (Bowman 2009). For the pilot, the Navy developed six rank-specific versions of an automated, web-based survey, which it named System Measures Assesses and Recommends Tailored Solutions or SMARTS-360, to be delivered via Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). Each version contained unique test questions geared toward a target manager's level of responsibility—civilian work center supervisor, chief or master chief petty officer, division officer, department head, and commanding officer (Bowman 2009). Unlike the Navy's top-down, single source fitness report (FITREP) system the 360-degree pilot program was aimed at personal and professional development only, and *not* at performance appraisal (Bowman 2009; Lambert 2007).

Rollout of the SMARTS-360 pilot program occurred on the heels of other small-scale uses of multi-source feedback in the Navy. In 2002, three and four-star admirals

⁴ Submarine Squadron 20 initiated a small-scale (i.e. about 5 officers) multisource feedback program for its incumbent COs in May 2005, but the results were not made public (Lambert 2007).

began taking a senior level 360-degree assessment based on commercial products developed by the Center for Creative Learning (CCL) and Personnel Decisions International (PDI) as part of their *Leadership at the Peak* seminar. That year, the Navy's Executive Learning Office also introduced 360-degree feedback as part of its curriculum for newly minted flag officers as part of its Navy Flag and Executives (NFLEX) course. By 2004, specially nominated commanders and captains also took multi-rater assessments as part of the Navy's Corporate Business Course held at NPS (Bowman 2009). However SMARTS-360 had a broader scope than any previous initiative.

The admiral who spearheaded the pilot program, then commander of the Naval Surface Force, Vice Adm. Timothy La Fleur championed the process as an "excellent performance feedback tool" (Lambert 2007). Remarking on his experience with 360-degree feedback, Admiral LaFleur stated:

I personally benefited in receiving the best feedback in 34 years as a naval officer on how others see me. Honest, constructive feedback from seniors, peers and subordinates enhanced my leadership skill set, and I think it can do the same thing throughout the Navy. I am a big advocate for 360 going Fleet-wide in the next few years. (CNSF Public Affairs, 2004)

Ultimately, the surface warfare pilot program collected 360-degree feedback on 624 mid-level leaders from 18 surface ships and 5 shore commands (Bowman 2009). Anecdotal reports expressed that the feedback was constructive and actionable, although there exists little quantifiable evidence of the impact of SMARTS-360 with respect to personal or professional development (Bowman 2009; Lambert 2007). Design controls were too lax and the duration too brief to determine the long-term impact of the pilot program on participating leaders. In his comprehensive study of the SMARTS-360 pilot, Dr. William Bowman of the United States Naval Academy points out a series of design flaws that should be addressed in future iterations. He acknowledges the nascence of the program admitting that many of the flaws can be overcome by simple design tweaks, yet his comments point out a more harmful challenge to the program at large—the fact that naval leadership failed to stress the importance of the initiative to the fleet (2009).

Dr. Bowman supports this argument by inferring that command leadership did little to ensure follow-through by mid-level leaders pegged to participate, as evidenced by the fact that fewer than half of the ratees had more than six raters, 35% had no ratings from a superior, and 20% lacked ratings from peers or subordinates. The significance of the initiative failed to trickle down to the unit level. An issue, he points out, because survey efficacy depends on maximum feedback from all angles—superiors, peers, subordinates, and self. More sources of diverse feedback improve the quality and validity of response data and fewer than six responses may yield skewed results. He also highlights the fact that “there exists no information as to its impact on leadership development at the program participant level,” in part, since no follow-on protocol was ever adequately promoted to ensure participants found a mentor with whom to discuss his or her results, nor created or followed up on Individual Development Plans (IDP) based on their unique development needs (2009, 79).

When used solely as a management development tool, efficacy of a 360-feedback program can only be interpreted if the subject pool manifests fewer toxic leaders in the years following implementation, as compared with a control group. Since the pilot ran for less than three years, SMARTS-360 was never given the chance to benefit from such patient appraisal. Also, somewhere in the process the intent of the pilot program became distorted. Instead of the SMARTS-360 instrument being used exclusively as a leadership development tool as it was designed, Dr. Bowman found that “most efforts directed at the pilot project findings, however, have focused on the use of SMARTS-360 data to assess command-level performance of ship safety and readiness records, cultural awareness, and personnel retention”—a blurring of purpose roundly discouraged by the scholarly literature (2009, 79).

Dr. Bowman’s analysis clearly indicates that the fleet attempted to interpret the SMARTS-360 data in a manner for which it was not originally intended. This perversion of the leadership-development instrument is precisely what Ready and Conger warned against with their *make-believe metric* pathology. Time and again, researchers have also caveated that when 360-degree feedback is to be for leadership-development purposes, the results of the assessments should become the property of the targeted leader alone

(Fleenor and Prince 1997). Giving the organization access to the specific results for appraisal or statistical analysis has the potential to skew rater feedback (Antonioni 1996; Fleenor and Prince 1997). Bowman writes:

The initial impetus for command assessment rather than personal development came from a naval bureaucracy interested in using SMARTS-360 data to determine if one could identify statistical correlations between SMARTS scores by command and ship safety as measured by accident scores across various levels of safety infractions. Statistical correlations were also developed between SMARTS average command scores and ship readiness data provided by the Surface Warfare community. (2007, 67)

The Navy ultimately shelved SMARTS-360, and a program of its sort has yet to gain fleet-wide acceptance. SMARTS-360 appears to have failed not on the basis of the tool's merits, but rather due to an inadequate implementation strategy. SMARTS-360 was likely unsuccessful for two reasons: 1) it did not garner sufficient organizational support because the Navy perceived the program to be more of a productized curiosity as opposed to a tool engineered to facilitate urgent transformation, and 2) because its original intent (e.g. development-only) became distorted before the initiative gathered enough momentum. Even though the majority of pilot participants showed incongruity between their ratings of self and ratings by others—a key indicator of imperfect self-awareness—Dr. Bowman encapsulates SMARTS-360s demise stating:

It seems obvious that if the Navy is ever to take seriously the concept of organizational-wide implementation of SMARTS-360 like feedback programs, it must provide additional research dollars to see to what extent SMARTS-360 is used and to what extent it is perceived to help in one's career development...Currently, the concept of SMARTS-360 appears to rest on the ability of the feedback program to give organizational administrators and operational commanders aggregate output data of the pilot project in an attempt to develop and rank command-wide performance indices. (2009, 64)

B. MSAF WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

By contrast, the U.S. Army has staked a more vested interest in 360-degree feedback by virtue of their stronger cultural urgency for first-rate, battle-ready leadership. In a series of articles titled “Toxic Leadership” and “Toxic Leadership: Part Deux”

written for *Military Review* in 2004 and 2010, distinguished leadership professors Army Col. (ret.) George Reed and Lt. Col. (ret.) Richard Olsen highlight an equally poisonous leadership trend permeating the Army ranks to that which runs through the Navy. Colonel Reed calls the affliction *toxic leadership syndrome*; telltale symptoms of which include: motivation driven solely by self-interest, a general lack of concern for the wellbeing of others, and a personality or interpersonal technique anathema to positive unit cohesion and command climate (Reed 2004). The authors address survey and focus group data suggesting that nearly all mid-grade officers admit having worked for a toxic leader during his or her career, and more importantly, more than half of respondents have contemplated leaving the Army because of it (Reed 2004; Reed and Olsen 2010). They recognize that toxic leadership will likely never be eradicated, however through better use of command climate assessments and a possible service-wide 360-degree feedback system the Army might better “monitor the kind of leadership that is actually being exercised on its behalf” in order to “intercede when those positions of authority fail to act in accordance with the organization’s core values” (Reed and Olsen 2010, 63). The 2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) echoes a persistent urgency for reform stating that roughly “one in five Army leaders report that their immediate superior demonstrates toxic leadership behavior. Four out of five Army leaders (83%) report observing a leader who demonstrates toxic leadership behavior in the past year” (Riley, Hatfield, Nicely, Keller-Glaze, and Steele 2011, vii).

In response to mounting arguments advocating reformation of the Army’s leadership development practices, the Department of the Army conducted its own small-scale 360-degree assessment pilot program beginning in February 2004 (Hinds and Steele 2010; U.S. Army 2008). However, while their sister service’s SMARTS-360 program withered on the vine, the Army’s has since blossomed into a service-wide program of record with an annual budget of \$3.5 million, an automated online infrastructure, and an official policy directive mandating all Army leaders be assessed at least every three to six years (U.S. Army 2009; McHugh 2011).

By design, the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) is akin to SMARTS-360 in many ways. Individual feedback is confidential except to the target manager and MSAF's express purpose is improving self-awareness and leadership development (U.S. Army 2008).

As of September 2011, over 37,000 Army leaders had been subjects of targeted assessments, and nearly half-a-million personnel had participated as raters (Gasbarre 2011). 84% of the managers receiving feedback viewed the MSAF process as having a positive impact on their leadership development, while over 98% of targeted managers express that they would recommend the management development tool to others (Gasbarre 2011). MSAF strictly adheres to the Army's tailored guidance for leadership and leader development. Questions are routinely updated in order to maintain relevance within the confines of the Army's prevailing cultural values (Hinds and Steele 2010). The online infrastructure presently has the capacity to assess 60,000 Army leaders per year, enough to give every leader MSAF every three to six years (Gasbarre 2011).

Interestingly, although MSAF was intended for developmental use only, most leaders who participated felt that MSAF should be combined with officer and non-commissioned officer evaluation reports (OER/NCOER) (Drylund 2009). The Army is investigating ways to refine the MSAF process so as to alleviate procedural biases—a critical step in making MSAF responses part of Army leaders' permanent records (Tan 2011). As of September 2011, the Secretary of the Army signed Army Directive 2011-16 mandating that all OER's indicate that the rated officer has initiated or completed an MSAF in the last three-to-six years. Directive 2011-16 declares that the results of the MSAF are for "self-assessment" only and will not be used as a basis for appraisal (McHugh 2011). This directive shows the Department of the Army's full support of the MSAF program and likely foreshadows the Army's broader employment of MSAF results in the future.

Academic literature on 360-degree feedback cautions organization's to take great care before employing multi-source feedback for anything but managerial development (Morgeson et al. 2005). Therefore, before the Army can include the results of MSAF in a leader's service record, numerous procedural biases should be addressed. Although the

evidence varies with respect to the usefulness of 360-degree feedback for appraisal and performance prediction, one possible benefit of including MSAF responses in an OER/NCOER would be that the service record may reflect a more well-rounded or complete picture of the subject leader. An unbiased summation of how both peers and subordinates perceive the competencies of a target officer could prove invaluable to selection or promotion decisions.

Within the unique cultural context of the DOD, both the benefits and limitations of 360-degree feedback remain largely untested due to the brevity of its service-wide application. In the Army, more than the Navy, the framework has been set for a broad inquiry. Most participants in both the SMARTS-360 and MSAF programs gave favorable immediate assessments as to the impact of 360-degree feedback on their personal and professional development (Bowman 2009; Hinds and Steele 2010). However, both programs are too recent to capture the longitudinal effects on behavioral trends among participants.

C. A MODEL FOR CHANGE

In his seminal work “Leading Change,” Harvard Business School professor John P. Kotter describes an eight-step model, illustrated in figure 6, for implementing lasting organizational change (1996). Although his model prescribes a macro-level formula for organizational transformation, the concept can be applied to finite goals as well, such as the likelihood of success of a unique initiative aimed at one or more of an organization’s core competencies. Observe the following model at work in the case of service-wide 360-degree feedback. Kotter’s model can be applied to the pilot programs undertaken by both the Navy and the Army. The following description suggests programmatic shortfalls in the Navy’s implementation of SMARTS-360, which contrast starkly with the Army’s more earnest rollout of MSAF.



Figure 6. Implementing Successful Change (Adapted from Kotter 1996)

The first step in Kotter’s model may be most critical, since it sets the process in motion. Upon recognizing a deleterious trend affecting an organization, establishing a sense of urgency by broadly and forcefully communicating the need to overcome the potential crisis or embrace the impending opportunity acts as the catalyst for change. Underestimating the gravity of the situation effectively undercuts the transformation process. As a rule of thumb, Kotter warns that the urgency rate to implement change within an organization is high enough “when about 75% of [an organization’s] management is honestly convinced that business as usual is totally unacceptable” (2007, 98). The Navy’s SMARTS-360 program was aimed at the Surface Force alone, whereas the Army’s MSAF program was aimed at service-wide leadership development from its inception. Mandatory participation by only a segment of the fleet suggests paltry resolve on behalf of the Department of the Navy. If SMARTS-360 truly had the full support of top Navy leadership, it should have been applied fleet-wide from the start. Pilot program or not, a better approach would have been for the DON to prescribe participation by a fraction of units across all warfare communities. Despite deck plate exaggeration to the contrary, toxic leadership is not just a problem in the Surface Fleet.

Step two involves establishing a powerful guiding coalition within the organization to function as change agents. Within the hierarchical systems of the armed forces this step appears trivial. In the Navy, for instance, if the CNO promulgates a policy change, subordinate commanders execute that new policy. However, Kotter argues that a successful change process transcends mere decrees by an organization's top leader. To cut through the turbulent waters affecting fleet policy, lasting change requires that the CNO's wave-piercing hull plane atop a wake of supportive subordinate commanders who "come together and develop a shared commitment to excellent performance through renewal" (2007, 98).

The third step demands the guiding coalition establish a concise vision for the future. The armed forces are no stranger to grandiose vision statements fraught with flowery, ambiguous prose, but Kotter warns that success is borne from "a picture of the future that is relatively easy to communicate and appeals to [all stakeholders]" (2007, 98). Step four calls for that vision to be broadcast powerfully and effectively to all stakeholders. Not only is direct communication of the vision paramount, but also members of the guiding coalition must embody and promote the aims of the new initiative. Also, since acting on the vision requires the efforts of many, organizations should strive to remove obstacles to implementation and participation (Kotter 2007). In the case of force-wide 360-degree feedback, making the process less time consuming and more of a unit-level priority will exponentially improve participation.

Transformation initiatives should also plan for and highlight short-term wins. Over the long haul, followership depends upon achieving visible, incremental successes. However, organizations must also be cautious not to declare victory too soon. Just as sailors do not abandon their mooring effort until all lines are over, lasting change demands that organizations consolidate and build upon incremental successes until their ultimate objective is achieved. The final step in Kotter's model piggybacks on the previous, lasting change must be anchored to organizational culture (2007). To advance the docking analogy, just as sailors apply a steady strain on all lines until their ship is pier-side, so too shall organizations not relent until new initiatives are made fast to their cultures.

Amplifying the effect of applying Kotter’s model, in the article “Why Leadership-Development Efforts Fail,” organizational behavior experts Douglas A. Ready and Jay A. Conger zero in on three *organizational pathologies* that prevent modern organizations from successfully implementing next-generation leadership development systems (2003). Pathology #1 has a unique bearing on human resource related initiatives like 360-degree feedback. The authors warn that “[o]wnership of resources, especially human resources, is old world thinking and does not reflect the reality of organizational life today” (2003, 84)—a concept that ties Kotter’s *guiding coalition* to *empowering others to act*. Due to the pitfalls of power politics and competing self-interests between the divisions of an organization, accountability for leadership development requires a transparent team effort between the top-leadership, HR specialists, mid-level leadership, and the targeted high-potential junior leaders themselves (Ready and Conger 2003).

Pathology #2 deals with a concept the authors refer to as “The Productization of Leadership Development” (2003, 85). Ready and Conger speak of myopic organizations who fail to align leadership development efforts to strategy, instead opting to employ a hasty patchwork of “commercial products that have limited relevance to their actual needs” (2003, 85). Misaligned leadership development efforts enjoy evanescent priority on the agendas of senior leadership and as a result overall organizational buy-in also quickly fades. Ready and Conger voice concern that “[d]uring tough economic times, top executives decide to curtail investments in leadership development, ushering in the return of a more Darwinian model of leadership—‘the cream will rise to the top’” (2003, 86). This mindset holds unique relevance in the case of the Navy’s fleet-wide 360 pilot, which by some accounts evaporated due to budgetary considerations. The *productization* pathology posed an additional detractor to SMARTS-360. In an era of mounting operational and administrative requirements, officers and sailors alike have difficulty prioritizing their daily obligations, particularly those which could be perceived to be faddish or transient.

The final pathology deals with the modern organizational need to quantify everything and relates to a previous discussion about the impetus for the Navy’s *zero-defect* policy. The authors caution “[t]he philosophy that dominates so many

[organizational] cultures today is that initiatives that cannot be measured have no value” (2003, 86). However, they also point out that unlike most other capital expenditures, leadership development efforts require metrics of effectiveness that cannot be plainly quantified. Scrutinizing any organizational change is important, however sometimes organizations attempt to apply “make-believe metrics” to leadership development efforts that simply do not make sense (Ready and Conger 2003). In the final analysis of SMARTS-360, Dr. Bowman indicated that a critical failing of the program was the Navy’s attempt to employ feedback data in a manner contrary to their original intent. Ready and Conger’s model is depicted in Figure 7.

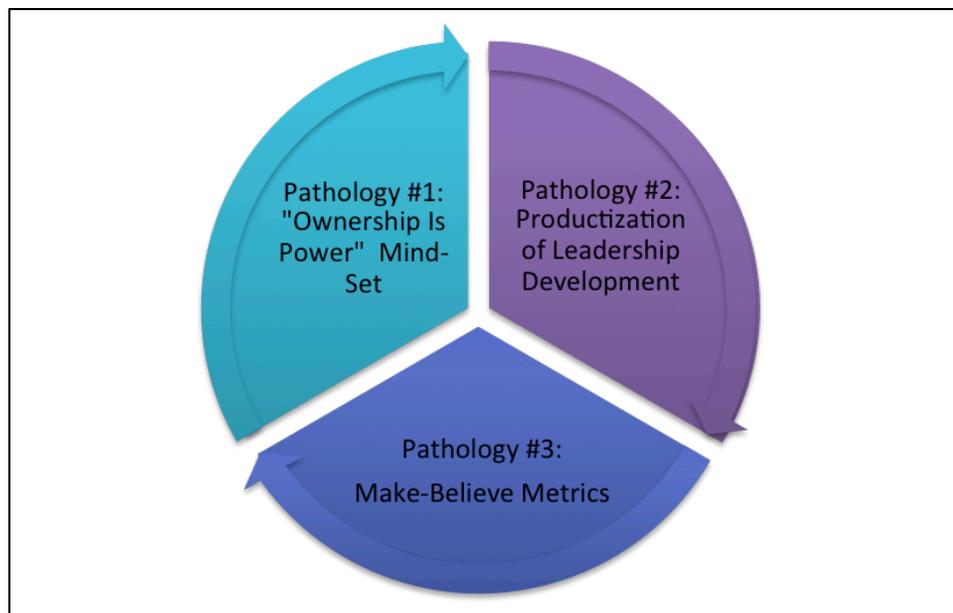


Figure 7. Why Leadership Development Efforts Fail (Adapted from Ready and Conger 2003)

Lessons learned from each of the preceding conceptual frameworks apply to both the Navy and the Army’s multisource feedback initiatives. Although both military services set upon the same ambitious goal of mitigating the dynamic challenges of Twenty-First Century leadership development, the Navy’s initiative failed to take root because of grave weaknesses in its design. The following chapter suggests a revised implementation strategy for a future fleet-wide 360-degree feedback program based on the successes of the MSAF program, as well as Kotter’s and Ready and Conger’s models.

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V. A WAY FORWARD IN A CULTURE PRIMED FOR CHANGE

Leadership development has been an organizational core competency, which has defined the United States Navy for generations. Yet today the fleet faces disruptive influences occurring both within and beyond its lifelines that have inspired a revolution in its cultural values. Much to the chagrin of its bureaucracy, a sinister thread of toxic leaders hold fast to antiquated traditions unacceptable by modern standards of decorum. Today, the Navy must choose to invest in novel human resource systems that align their purpose with the revised goals of its Human Capital Strategy, or else it is doomed to endure repeated offenses by personnel who have hung on to old-fashioned modes of thinking. The seafloor has shifted 20,000 leagues beneath the great battleship, how it plans to ride the resultant tsunami to shore will shape generations of naval leaders to come. Figure 8 suggests a step-by-step model for change.

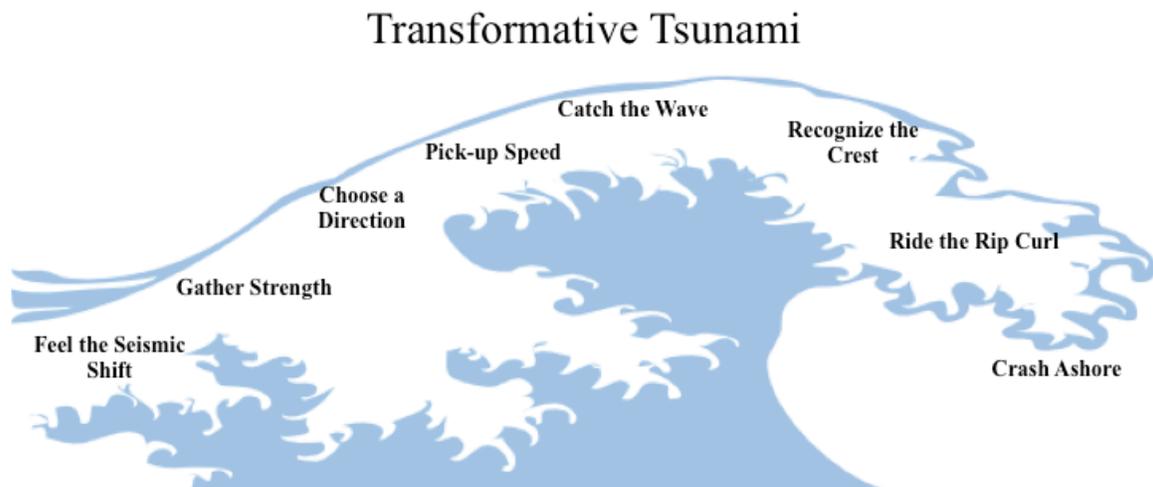


Figure 8. Transformative Tsunami (Adapted from Kotter 1996)

A. THE TRANSFORMATIVE TSUNAMI

1. Feel the Seismic Shift

A seismic shift has occurred influencing the landscape of the modern workplace. Traditional naval values and tolerances have been displaced by the tectonic collision between strategic, cultural, generational, and technological changes brought about by the Twenty-First Century. As a result the Navy has turned its focus inward, recalibrating its moral compass and taking a round-turn on the public and private behavior of its officers and sailors like never before. *The need for sound character development* has become a ubiquitous sound bite on the lips of senior leadership struggling to compensate for the myriad public firings that continue to erode the Navy's image. So cataclysmic the shift values that the Fleet demands a dynamic set of novel solutions to right itself.

2. Gather Strength

Part of what has made the Army's MSAF program so successful are the scores of research papers published by the Center for Army Leadership touting the program's merits. Ample scholarly coverage has given senior leadership cause to embrace the initiative. This researcher believes that one of the key shortcomings of the SMARTS-360 pilot was its failure to garner support from a powerful enough guiding coalition. On the contrary, from early in the process, senior leadership lauded the Army's pilot program; Generals Ray Odierno, Army Chief of Staff, and Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have been consistent public proponents of MSAF. The Navy's program never benefited from the same caliber of corporate support, causing it to fizzle when fiscal pressures abutted its limited record of results. For a future fleet-wide 360-degree program to succeed, support must start with the Chief of Naval Operations and permeate to the type commanders, not the other way around.

3. Choose a Direction

The vision for change must be clear. If the Navy seeks refined character development, 360-degree feedback is an effective tool for improving self-awareness and correcting toxic leadership behaviors. However repeated trials have shown that the

program's goals must align with its design. That is, a specific protocol must be followed if the feedback is meant for developmental purposes rather than appraisal. The Navy must be honest with itself. If the program aims to develop individual leaders then it should have no other metric for success; and, furthermore, its results should not be used for predictive or appraisal analysis. The original SMARTS-360 protocol had a blurring of purpose when individual feedback reports were aggregated in an effort to identify statistical correlations with respect to unit safety—an appraisal application that sullied the program's intent. If commanders know, or even suspect, that their unit is being assessed on the data collected, grade inflation becomes incentivized. This impedes the goal of honest feedback and introspection.

In a recent article published in the *Journal of Business Psychology*, researchers David W. Bracken and Dale S. Rose underscore four critical design factors that give 360-degree feedback programs their best chance at creating behavioral change amongst participants—1) relevant content, 2) credible data, 3) accountability, and 4) organization-wide participation (2011). Despite the program designer's best intentions, SMARTS-360 lacked a clear vision that included these four features. Table 1 illustrates the four critical design factors in a Navy context and recommends a codified vision for a future fleet-wide program.

Critical Design Factors for Creating Sustainable Behavioral Change	
Design Factor	Department of the Navy Application
Relevant Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customize a series of Navy-specific survey instruments geared to various leadership-levels written in language that reflects organizational strategy, readiness-expectations, values, and history.
Credible Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set a minimum threshold for rater responses (e.g. 3 subordinates, 3 peers, 1 superior, and self) - Ensure raters receive adequate training on the purpose of the survey and have had adequate time to observe the subject. - Randomize rater selective to alleviate self-selection bias. - Ensure survey questions are unambiguous and the the rating scale is relevant, clear, and reduces rating errors.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make participation mandatory on the part of the raters and the subject. - Ensure the subject follows-up with an assigned mentor to review the feedback and develop an individual action plan. - Follow-up by the subject with his/her raters shows raters that the subject has taken their feedback for action and is highly predictive of a perceived change in leader effectiveness by raters.
Organization-wide Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All members can be exposed to the Navy's expectations for its leaders. - Demonstrates that the Navy demands accountability for the behavior of its leadership and promotes a sense of consistency for all stakeholders. - Gives Navy comparative data on all leaders and improves rater reliability due to repeated exposure to the survey. - May promote value shifts by systematically reaching all members.

Table 1. Critical Design Factors for Creating Sustainable Behavioral Change (Adapted from Bracken and Rose 2011)

4. Pick-up Speed

If a revamped 360 initiative is made to work, strategic communication of its benefits is paramount. Proper messaging is a force multiplier. Sailors are asked to participate in myriad beta-tests of productized productivity improvement devices (e.g. TORIS/TFOM, SWOS At-Sea, SMARTS-360, NKO courses, etc.) but rarely are their organizational significances made clear from the outset. If leadership expects its next experience with fleet-wide 360 to be a success, all personnel must be aware of its purpose and its intended benefits to their own careers.

5. Catch the Wave

Empowering the fleet to catch the wave is critical. The Navy must direct units to make participation as routine as the periodic FITREP process, just as the Army has by

tying MSAF to its OER/NCOER. Although the Army has been careful to emphasize the confidentiality of individual feedback reports, connecting MSAF to the OER/NCOER creates a critical link in the mind of the participant between the developmental tool and the organization's preferred appraisal metric. In turn, Army leaders may be apt to follow the developmental recommendations of their 360 feedback reports as a means of improving their periodic appraisals. Linking 360 surveys to a major organizational ritual like periodic evaluation reports also intensifies the tool's significance in the mind of the user.

6. Recognize the Crest

For the wave of change to reach shore, the Navy must adequately and properly highlight short-term victories. Poll participating personnel for their opinions on the instrument's relevance to their personal and professional development. From the very beginning, the Army has diligently reported the short-term successes of MSAF by publishing glossy annual reports touting its positive results. As MSAF matures, its relevance and impact appears increasingly in Army literature including official reports by the Center for Army Leadership and countless articles in trade papers such as *Army Times* and *Stars & Stripes*. Additionally, since the organization is also measuring the effectiveness of the program's delivery infrastructure, it is beneficial to also advertise participation rates. Ease of incorporation of a new program into the fast-paced operational tempo of the modern Navy is a triumph in itself. However the Navy must be cautious not to again attempt to flush out measures for success for which the program was not originally designed. This was a critical failure in the SMARTS-360 program.

7. Ride the Rip Curl

Once the new 360 initiative has gained wide acceptance, the Navy should use feedback about its strengths and weaknesses to sustain momentum. Perhaps the language of the individual questionnaires needs revised? Or the survey protocol is impractically time consuming? Maybe the testing procedure resulted in unforeseen biases that need to be eliminated? It is best to continuously consolidate improvements to make a refined initiative superior to the original.

8. Crash Ashore

With the shoreline in sight, the Navy must take great care to ensure the wave collides with ample force to create a lasting impact on organizational values. Sustainable behavior change is the product of organization-wide accountability. Top leadership must publicly embrace the merits of the new system; mid-level leaders must accept and take action based on the feedback they receive; and raters must take each survey they submit seriously. Once in place, an indoctrinated fleet-wide 360 process can be an impactful tool for communicating and instituting future changes across the Navy. Long-term employment is likely to improve the self-awareness of all Navy leaders, thereby mitigating toxic habits, which are contrary to modern expectations for workplace decorum.

Furthermore, should development-only 360-degree feedback become cemented in the Navy's organizational repertoire the possibilities for the tool's wider use are endless. Once policymakers and personnel accept 360-degree feedback as a routine organizational priority, the groundwork is set for expanded application. That is, once *buy-in* becomes universal, instead of a fleet-wide program engineered for development-only, the Navy might then begin experimenting with different multi-source feedback instruments aimed at performance appraisal and prediction.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Various strategic, cultural, and technological trends continue to shape the Twenty-First Century naval workplace. Most notably, the absence of an equally matched foe, like the Soviet Union, has inspired the Navy to adopt new internal metrics for organizational success independent of the formerly exalted goal of keeping the Communist threat at bay. During no other period in U.S. history has the Navy placed greater emphasis on preserving and nurturing its human capital—as evidenced by the myriad policies and programs engineered to provide a comprehensive continuum of care to naval personnel and their families. Yet improvement is incremental, and while the fleet has made much headway, it faces the perpetual challenge of rooting out and/or reeducating toxic leaders who linger in its ranks. Toxic legacy behaviors have no place in today’s progressive, gender-integrated fleet. Technologies like social media have further enhanced the transparency of the naval workplace occasionally revealing embarrassing reminders of the Navy’s *saltier* past.

Fortunately, the Department of the Navy views the task of developing leaders of consistent, sound character a modern organizational imperative. In a recent official blog post titled “Maintaining High Standards” the CNO, Adm. Jonathan Greenert, reinforced that sentiment by stating:

As leaders we need to make it a priority to not only lead with the greatest competency and tactical skill, but also live our lives with integrity and character. We need leaders to earn and build the trust of their shipmates and expect it in return... My goal is to ensure the officers appointed to leadership positions embody these principles. The screening process for leadership must be consistent, objective and fair for all. We also need to ensure we are building the character of our future leaders from the beginning in order to help them succeed. This will include opportunities for training at each level of development and appropriate resources to carry out the missions we ask of them. (2011)

As the result of a rising trend in CO firings the Navy adopted the corporate strategy of 360-degree feedback—an instrument shown to enhance the self-awareness and emotional intelligence of participants. The fleet-wide pilot program called

SMARTS-360 aimed to mend the troubling trend. Unfortunately, the original SMARTS-360 program imploded due to its lack of senior and mid-level support as well as its inconsistent programmatic vision. Around the same time, however, the Department of the Army deployed a similar service-wide multi-source feedback program called MSAF directed at equally damaging leadership challenges. Yet, while the Navy's pilot program faltered, the Army's has achieved rock-solid purchase within the organization due to a series of factors. From the beginning MSAF was backed by a formidable guiding coalition of senior generals whose vigorous support permeated the ranks and elevated the program's organizational significance. Furthermore, the Center for Army Leadership has consistently championed the program's successes by publicly lauding its capabilities, highlighting growing survey rates, and publishing positive testimonials by participating soldiers. Since its release, program managers have capitalized on lessons learned and refined the MSAF infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of the Army. Today, while SMARTS-360 is all but forgotten, MSAF has become interwoven in Army culture as a routine requirement for all Army leaders.

Unfortunately, in 2011 the Navy endured another banner year of CO firings underscoring an unresolved behavioral quandary. The need for improved, right-fit methods of character development persists. Although 360-degree feedback is still used minimally within the fleet, its current employment generates little measurable return on investment. Navy culture is primed for a change. It is time to revisit fleet-wide 360-degree feedback. However, SMARTS-360 2.0 requires improved design considerations. Table 2 codifies various scholarly recommendations into a quick reference guide describing features of two distinct types of 360-degree feedback programs that might better suit the Navy if a program were adopted to be employed fleet-wide—one for development only and the other for decision making. As a caveat this report also recommends that the Navy adopt a robust organizational change model, called the “Transformative Tsunami,” for implementing a 360 initiative capable of enduring transformative influence.

A 360° Feedback Program that Fits Navy Objectives

Program Feature	Development Only	Decision Making
Fleet-wide Implementation	Immediate (with Training)	Multi-Phased
Owner/User of the Feedback	Individual Officer	Warfare Community
Type of Assessment	Job Specific Skills	Core Competencies
Questionnaire Length	80+ Questions	30-50 Questions
Response Scales & Report Format	Within Person Ranking of Skills	Between Person Comparisons
Assessment Frequency	By User Request	Regular Interval
Rater Anonymity	Complete	Complete
Privacy of Feedback Report	Copy to Individual Officer & Mentor (by request)	Copy to Service Record & Individual Officer
Individual Development Plan	Recommended	Recommended
Usefulness of Results	Personal & Professional Development	Promotion, Selection, & Staffing Decisions

Table 2. A 360-degree Feedback Program that Fits Navy Objectives (Adapted from Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, and Summers 2001, table III)

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APPENDIX O-5 COMMANDING OFFICER SELECTION BOARD SCREENING PROCESS

In the Naval Surface Force effective leadership drives organizational success. Identifying new leaders to replace old ones is a routine hurdle for any organization striving to remain viable generation after generation. Within the United States Navy a sound succession management strategy has been critical to sustained dominance of the seas. Within the Navy, leadership positions come in many forms, however, arguably, the most coveted is that of Commanding Officer (CO) of a warship. This is the process by which the Surface Navy chooses new COs for its Commander/O-5 level warships.

In 2010, the Naval Surface Force adopted a “fleet-up” strategy when it comes to Executive Officer (XO)/Commanding Officer succession, which means once selected for command an officer will spend 18-months as a ship’s XO before being succeeded by another officer, so as to rise to the role of CO of the same ship for an additional 18-months. This plan aims to extend the continuity of senior shipboard leadership.⁵ Selection cycles for O-5 XO/CO fleet-up candidates occur annually at the behest of the Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) and take place at Naval Personnel Command (NPC) headquarters in Millington, TN.

Each selection cycle a committee or “board” of twelve officers reviews the records of all eligible or “in-zone” applicants and determines the best officers for the limited billet list. The board is made up of 9–10 senior, post-command Captains/O-6s including Division Director, Surface Warfare Assignments (PERS-41) and 2-3 flag officers, one of whom serves as board president. Boards are scheduled to convene for five days, but may conclude sooner if the choices are clearer cut. During any single cycle, many more officers are “in-zone” than there are available XO/CO billets; this makes the process an arduous one and board members take the task of finding the right captains for the modern Fleet very seriously. Taking command of a U.S. Navy warship is a distinct privilege bestowed upon only a select few surface warfare officers. Not only

⁵ Previously, XOs would not automatically become the ship’s CO following their 18-month tour.

are Commanding Officers imbued with responsibility over a costly national asset, but they are also charged with the safety of well over 200 onboard souls and the ability to inflict grave harm on countless more. It is in the Navy's best interest to select only the most highly qualified officers for these jobs. The board occurs behind closed doors and all deliberations with the exception of the final list of selectees are kept permanently confidential.

Under the current system, surface warfare officers received two "in-zone" looks from a selection board—meaning if an officer does not make it one year, he may try again the next.⁶ In preparation for an upcoming board, applicants are responsible for ensuring that NPC has their complete, accurate service record on hand for board members to review. Key elements of a complete service record include: a full-length color photograph of the officer in uniform in his or her current pay-grade, all fitness reports (FITREPS) showing continuous service from commissioning to present⁷, an officer data card (ODC) showing all of the officer's professional qualifications, and a command recommendation typically from the first flag officer in one's chain of command. Officers displaying any information in their service record that could be perceived as adverse are permitted to also include a letter to the board explaining the shortcoming. A staff of O-3/O-4 junior officers from around the Surface Force is recruited by NPC to help compile eligible service records in the days preceding the board. Those junior officers then serve on the board in an administrative, non-voting status throughout the week.

On Monday, when the board convenes, PERS-41 explains the ground rules to all participants and the board members retire to designated cubicles in which each reviews a random set of service records—perhaps 10–12 depending on the size of the applicant pool. When the board reconvenes, the senior officer who reviewed his or her record presents each applicant to the rest of the board. Presenters are expected to diplomatically lobby for their candidates. A full-length photo, ODC, and list of every FITREP score that officer ever received is displayed on three large LCD screens at the front of the

⁶ Presently, a 3rd look is given to sitting executive officers that screened for XO under the former system.

⁷ The dates must not show a break in service longer than 30-days without explanation. A break longer than 30-days could indicate that a FITREP is missing.

boardroom. Reviewers are permitted to write comments on the documents displayed on the screens.⁸ After the brief presentation, board members vote using confidential, individual keypads by their seats. Votes are cast in denominations of 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100 with 100 being the best. The scores are then averaged and the applicant is given a total score. Standout officers receiving a perfect 100 after the initial round of voting are often scraped of the top and placed on the “selected” list, officer’s receiving particularly low scores are usually placed on the “non-selected” list. Those in the middle range of scores are rolled to the next round in a process called the “squeeze,” during which a different board member reviews their record, annotates comments, and the process repeats itself. Repeated votes are conducted during which the top candidates are placed in the “selected” pile and poor candidates are placed in the “non-selected” pile until all available billets are filled.

⁸ Comments are meant to draw attention to specific positive and negative attributes of the officer’s record.

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