



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

**UNDERSTANDING AND RETAINING TALENT IN THE
SURFACE WARFARE COMMUNITY**

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Navy Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Community provides a vital, sophisticated capability to address increasingly dynamic and unpredictable threats around the world. Effective performance in the SWO Community requires a somewhat unique set of skills and capabilities, which center on life and work aboard ships at sea. Many SWOs find life at sea to be fun and exciting, filled with challenging jobs and camaraderie, and a balance that makes the hard work and long hours worthwhile and rewarding. Alternatively, for others the sacrifice seems unsustainable, and the SWO Community has battled mid- and junior-level officer attrition for many years.

To help combat such attrition, Community leaders have devised and implemented a number of progressive changes to enhance the SWO profession and to help retain talent. For several instances, it has recently increased its Department Head Retention Bonus, increased compensation to officers selected early for Department Head, and organized a number of alternate, parallel career tracks to expand flexibility and options regarding sea-shore rotation, education, specialization and other decisions affecting retention.

The goal is to retain, develop and promote the most talented SWOs. The construct *talent* remains somewhat ambiguous, however, and the most “talented” officers appear to be those receiving the highest rankings and strongest endorsements on their fitness reports (FITREPs). A key problem is, FITREPs are subject to increasing criticism regarding bias, subjectivity and foci on tenure over merit and current performance over future potential. Indeed, the Navy is in the process of reevaluating its performance evaluation process now. Moreover, results from our previous research suggest strongly that *talent* is a highly situated and nuanced concept, with key characteristics likely to differ with rank, role, job and other factors that vary over time. Hence it remains uncertain whether the talent we retain currently is the best to meet our present, much less our future, needs.

This qualitative study addresses the issue directly through three research questions: 1) What constitutes talent in the SWO Community? 2) Why do some talented

people choose to leave the Navy while others choose to stay in? 3) How can we retain talent in the Navy?

Eschewing the idea of using deduction and quantitative analysis through one or more top-down theoretic models of talent—approaches that presume a detailed understanding of what talent is and how to measure it—we choose instead to employ qualitative methods inductively and to build up a grounded understanding of *SWO talent*. Indeed, given the situated and nuanced nature of talent likely to exist, we look to develop and articulate an understanding by talking to talented people in the SWO Community directly. We all know the saying, “I know talent when I see it,” so we’re looking to understand what it is that talented SWOs see when it comes to talent.

Likewise, instead of speculating about why some people are leaving the SWO Community and why others are deciding to stay in the Navy, we ask talented SWOs why they’re choosing or considering one path or another, and we ask them also about friends and colleagues of theirs, building up similarly a grounded understanding of what they are looking for or missing. Far from informal wardroom conversations, broad focus groups or like approaches, however, we employ very well-established, grounded theory building methods, which provide a systematic, scientific process to develop an understanding inductively, from the data themselves.

Moreover, we focus specifically on people who have completed their junior officer (JO) tours, who have been identified as “talented” beyond the current FITREP process, and who have made the commitment (i.e., as O3s) to their Department Head (DH) tours. This represents a career decision point at which much SWO talent is lost historically, hence the perspective of talented officers at this point is highly informative.

Through independent analysis, we find considerable correspondence between participants’ interview responses and the set of Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs), suggesting that SWOs at the O3 level accept and exhibit many desired attributes of Navy leaders at their career phase. This is encouraging, and it reflects visionary leadership of the Flag Officers developing the NDLAs. Navy Leadership should be encouraged to find such good correspondence with its desired attributes. In a sense, our results provide independent evidence that the NDLAs are considered important and being exhibited at the appropriate time in a SWO’s career.

Additional results suggest that the SWO Community is working very well overall; that its recently implemented changes are serving their intended purposes; and that many talented people are being identified, recognized, promoted and retained as desired. Nonetheless, this community is no exception to having room for improvement, and through our grounded, independent study, we identify seven significant retention risks: 1) talented people not being assigned to challenging jobs; 2) unfavorable interaction with Chiefs; 3) unfavorable interaction with Detailers; 4) unfavorable CO/XO interaction; 5) lack of command opportunities; 6) difficult family planning; and 7) dissatisfaction with sea life.

Each of these retention risks offers potential for mitigation, and through our grounded understanding of the SWOs participating in the study—in addition to sage comment and guidance from the experienced SWO Captain serving as our Strategic Contact—we offer a set of eight recommendations to help address such risks and to retain talent.

1. Work to assess talent in advance of JOs' sea tours. We need to know whom our talented JOs are, and it could be helpful to gain additional insight into talent before their first shipboard assignments. Perhaps some kind of shipboard exercise, simulation or other assessment—producing validated indicators of SWO talent aboard ship—can be accomplished during BDOC (Basic Division Officer Course), for instance, or we might be able to identify some other performance markers stemming from SWO testing, commissioning sources or like venues. This could help to mitigate the issue of talented officers being assigned to unfulfilling jobs in the first place.

Additionally, we could implement more consistently a policy of reassigning JOs to different jobs periodically during their sea tours. This could be accomplished informally or via formal rotation program, and it could be accomplished via assignments to different ships or even aboard the same ship throughout an entire JO tour. In either case, in addition to giving CO/XO/DHs the opportunity to observe junior officers across a variety of roles, demands and requirements, it may benefit also by exposing JOs to multiple shipboard jobs—thereby limiting the length of time, if any, that talented people remain stuck in unfulfilling jobs.

2. Set and enforce expectations of mutual cooperation and respect between JOs and Chiefs. Effective JO-Chief interaction is important to successful operations in every division aboard ship. However, not all Chiefs appear to be equally supportive of the Division Officers (DivOs) for whom they work. Some inherent personality mismatches are likely to be inevitable, and some JOs and Chiefs may be comparably more or less motivated to learn from and teach one another, respectively. Nonetheless, JOs could be taught and motivated to humble themselves and seek to learn from Chiefs, who in turn could be taught and motivated to make themselves available and strive to support DivOs. To the extent that such teaching and motivation fall short, and talented JOs continue to feel unsupported by their Chiefs, this appears to reflect a command shortcoming, which could be addressed at a different level (e.g., the Commodore).

3. Set and enforce expectations of responsive interaction between JOs and Detailers. Many JOs express dissatisfaction with Detailer support and mistrust of the detailing process. A key manifestation of inadequate support appears to stem from unresponsive communication. If Detailers were instructed to interact more responsively, then at least the SWOs may not feel as though they are being ignored. This could be as simple as business rules (e.g., “every SWO email will be responded to within two business days”; “an email will be sent to a SWO within two business days of receiving a telephone call”). This all assumes, of course, that the SWOs in question have begun their Detailer interactions at the appropriate timepoints and are not experiencing difficulties due to their own procrastination and inadequate planning or action. This assumes also, clearly, that adequate resources can be made available to support the likely increase in Detailer manning that would be required.

Further, SWO mistrust of the detailing process appears to center on an absence of process transparency and possible goal misalignment. Were SWOs able to understand the detailing process better, and were they able to attain greater visibility into the larger view of jobs needing to be filled, then they may feel more trusting toward the detailing process and people. Although a SWO can have faith that the Detailer is doing his or her best to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the Navy, some increased transparency may help to reduce his or her level of anxiety.

4. Set and enforce expectations of increased mentoring and coaching by COs and XOs. Many JOs perceive that their leaders only give orders and provide evaluations of recent performance, reflecting negligible motivation for sharing highly valued guidance and experience. This represents a challenging issue, however. COs and XOs are military commanders, with serious missions to accomplish in an inherently hazardous work environment. They require considerable latitude to do so in ways that make sense and that fit their leadership styles and experience bases. Nonetheless, a lack of guidance and mentoring, combined with toxic leadership and inhospitable command climate, is a strong dissatisfier for talented SWOs, and even one toxic CO/XO could potentially drive dozens of talented subordinates out of the Navy. Of course, COs and XOs are busy people, and burdening them with additional tasks and expectations could become counterproductive and undermine their primary objective: effective command at sea.

An alternate and possibly complementary recommendation centers on metaphoric crosspollination. This could be as simple as inviting the CO from a different ship in the DESRON to host a leadership question and answer session for an hour, or inviting one or more Department Heads from other ships to offer training or simply expand the range of social interaction with wardrooms of different ships. The idea is that young JOs could gain exposure to a wider variety of leaders—and leadership styles—from different ships, and hence benefit from the indirect, cross-command insight, mentoring and coaching that could emerge.

5. Reevaluate the performance evaluation process. Many junior officers seek to distinguish themselves through early command, in large part because they do not feel well represented by their evaluations, yet they seek to “practice” command in smaller, less stressful settings (e.g., something less demanding than as CO of a DDG) also. There are two issues here: 1) early command and 2) the performance evaluation process.

Addressing early command first, since there is only a fixed number of command billets, it’s unclear how many smaller or “practice” commands could be established. It’s unclear also whether serving as CO of such smaller or “practice” command would represent a better experience than serving as a key Department Head or XO under a more experienced CO. We leave this question to Navy leaders and policy makers, in addition to a topic of future research.

In terms of FITREP reevaluation, at the time of this writing, formal efforts to transform the performance evaluation process have been underway for over two years. In a section below, we consider, independently, how our study participants' responses compare with the Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs). Such attributes are intended to contribute to the growth of Navy leaders by describing the character qualities, behaviors and skills expected at different stages of their careers. By recognizing and incorporating this temporal dimension into the evaluation process, we can begin to focus on JOs' future potential in addition to their past and current performance. This could also serve to lessen the perceived inequity stemming from evaluation bias favoring tenure over merit (e.g., people having spent more time in a command receiving higher evaluations than their newer shipmates, regardless of performance), and it could help to identify and retain talent better. This represents an area of ongoing research.

For an advance look, we find that many NDLAs are mentioned—independently—as important character qualities, behaviors and skills by our study participants, and we find that such NDLAs apply at their intended target in terms of JO career progression. Navy Leadership should be encouraged to find such good correspondence with its desired attributes. In a sense, our results provide independent evidence that the NDLAs are considered important and being exhibited at the appropriate time in a SWO's career.

6. Continue to offer the recently expanded number of career tracks. This appears to help address some risk stemming from rigid career timelines and family planning difficulties, and the SWO Community should be congratulated for devising and implementing it. Nonetheless, life at sea—and away from family—is hard, yet it is central to the SWO profession and will likely persist as a driver of talent loss. This recommendation blends with Number 8 below but merits mention here first.

Perhaps we can think of ways to lessen the loss of time with friends and families while at sea. In our fathers' and grandfathers' Navy, people may have been content with reading books, writing letters, and exchanging sea stories with shipmates. In this age of ever increasing network bandwidth and computer connectivity, however, many JOs seek current, online and synchronous social interaction. Toward this end, even the smaller ships could be equipped with higher capacity networking capability, for instance, which

would enable people aboard ship to have richer and more frequent communications with friends and families back home.

Rich video conference, chat and social network capabilities are relatively common and inexpensive today, and life aboard ship could become less onerous and burdensome if people could stay up to date and interact with friends and loved ones using such capabilities. Streaming current music, games, movies and television shows could enhance people's experience at sea also. Of course, this would require a budgetary commitment to equip ships as such, and people aboard ship would need to have sufficient time away from job responsibilities to enjoy activities along these lines, but enriching people's off-duty time could serve us well in terms of retaining talent.

Perhaps we can also expand our vision in terms of ways to increase the number and quality of activities that are available aboard ship. One need spend only a short amount of time on a cruise ship, for instance, to appreciate the dramatic difference between it and a cruiser or destroyer. Cruise ships and warships clearly have different missions and are designed accordingly, but even small efforts to make life at sea more enjoyable and accommodating aboard warships could go a long way. Consider, for instance, the availability of more diverse, healthier meal options (Dare we use the word "cuisine"?) or drinking a glass or two of wine or beer at the end of the day (Such practice is permitted in some navies.). Either could represent a welcome ritual, and a commitment to adequate downtime and sleep aboard ship could pay dividends—in terms of talent retention and safety alike—too.

7. Work to support pregnant officers. The risk of losing talented people to pregnancy is specific to women, who may become unable to finish their sea tours, and who may fear becoming uncompetitive relative to their peers. Some women are able to plan children around the pockets of shore duty that are sprinkled into their career timelines, but such pockets may or may not coincide with the women's family plans or their metaphoric biological clocks, and some talented female officers may fear jeopardizing their careers or simply leave the Navy out of frustration.

Although the Career Intermission Program represents one approach to addressing pregnancy as a retention risk, it has limitations and consequences (e.g., transfer out of active duty). An alternate approach (suggested by one of our participants) could involve a

“year group rollback system” for female officers looking to have children earlier than the pockets of shore duty noted above. If a female JO were to get pregnant before or during a sea tour, for instance, then perhaps she could be sent to shore duty and rolled back a year group to stay competitive. It would likely require consideration of circumstance and merit for each individual case, but an approach along these lines might offer more flexibility to service women.

A related approach (suggested by another of our participants) would involve an effort to expand Tricare coverage to include fertility treatments for those who delay having kids for family planning. This represents emerging best practice to retain talent in tight labor markets (WSJ, 2018), and it could increase the perception that the Navy takes care of its own, especially those who do their due diligence to balance Navy service and career with family planning.

8. Finally, train JOs more thoroughly in advance of their sea tours. The relative lack of training represents an important dissatisfier. Many JOs perceive that the formal (ashore) training received before their sea tours is inadequate, and several participants in this study mention the 2017 accidents involving the cruiser *Antietam* and destroyers *Fitzgerald* and *McCain* for at least anecdotal support for this perception. After only a brief BDOC experience, new JOs go directly to their ships for their first operational tours at sea. Other Navy communities (esp. Aviation, Nuclear) have considerable training pipelines that officers must complete before their first operational assignments and before being entrusted with expensive Navy assets (e.g., aircraft, reactors). In its effort to get JOs out to sea quickly, the SWO Community may be sacrificing an opportunity to increase SWO competency levels aboard ship and contribute toward talent retention.

We could consider (re)instituting a lengthy formal training program prior to the first sea tour, for instance, or a substantial extension of BDOC may be more efficient, as another instance. We could even consider affording JOs a measure of independent self-study time to begin preparing for shipboard qualifications before the beginning of their sea tours. In any case, the JOs are sending a demand signal for increased training in advance of their first sea tours, and addressing such signal may provide manifold benefits in terms of retention, safety and efficacy.

Of course, much work would be required to implement the recommendations outlined above, and it is unclear what impact they would have upon the detailing process, morale, perceived fairness, recruiting, chain of command, retention and other areas. Moreover, some of these recommendations are clearly controversial, and others would increase pressure on already strained budgets. Nonetheless, they offer potential to help to keep talented SWOs from leaving the Navy. We leave the answers to Navy leaders and policy makers, in addition to topics for future research.

Indeed, through this study we have already identified several promising future research topics. More specifically, each of the recommendations proposed above (e.g., ways to assess talent in advance of JOs' sea tours, policy for reassigning JOs to different jobs periodically during their sea tours, improving JO-Chief and JO-Detailer interactions) can benefit from research to consider alternate approaches and to outline key decisions and implementation steps, and some recommendations (esp. informing efforts to transform the performance evaluation process) are primed for contribution through additional qualitative and quantitative research. Other important topics (e.g., rigid career timelines, family planning difficulties, challenges of life at sea, being away from friends and family, pregnancy, training, health and sleep) merit further investigation as well. There is so much additional knowledge required. Let's keep going.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Navy Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Community provides a vital, sophisticated capability to address increasingly dynamic and unpredictable threats around the world. These dedicated professionals navigate, maintain and fight warships all around the globe, every day and night, in any kind of weather, in Harm's way and in peace. Navy surface forces can utilize their own speed, endurance and weapons to project power far forward, maintain freedom of navigation through international waters, counter piracy, and conduct a host of other critical missions (e.g., antisubmarine warfare, air defense, ballistic missile defense, strike).

Effective performance in the SWO Community requires a somewhat unique set of skills and capabilities, which center on life and work aboard ships at sea. Although work aboard ships is organized across various departments and divisions, everyone must work together, in an integrated manner, to ensure safe passage and mission success while underway. This requires strong discipline and hard work, where mid- and junior-level officers, for instance, devote long hours to standing watches, leading departments and divisions, earning warfare and shipboard qualifications (e.g., Officer of the Deck [OOD], SWO, Tactical Action Officer [TAO], Engineering Officer of the Watch [EOOW]), and maintaining their health and fitness with the remaining time available.

Many SWOs find life at sea to be fun and exciting, filled with challenging jobs and camaraderie, and a balance that makes the hard work and long hours worthwhile and rewarding. Alternatively, for others the sacrifice seems unsustainable, and the SWO Community has battled mid- and junior-level officer attrition for many years. To help combat such attrition, Community leaders have devised and implemented a number of progressive changes to enhance the SWO profession and to help retain talent. For several instances, it has recently increased its Department Head Retention Bonus, increased compensation to officers selected early for Department Head, and organized a number of alternate, parallel career tracks to expand flexibility and options regarding sea-shore rotation, education, specialization and other decisions affecting retention (NAVADMIN 206-16, 2016; SWO Community, 2016).

The goal is to retain, develop and promote the most talented SWOs (SWO Community, 2016). The construct *talent* remains somewhat ambiguous, however, and the most “talented” officers appear to be those receiving the highest rankings and strongest endorsements on their fitness reports (FITREPs). A key problem is, FITREPs are subject to increasing criticism regarding bias, subjectivity (Bjerke et al., 1987; Donaldson, 1996) and foci on tenure over merit and current performance over future potential (Faram & Tilghman, 2017).

Moreover, results from our previous research (Nissen & Tick, 2017) suggest strongly that *talent* is a highly situated and nuanced concept. Far from general and monolithic, talent seems to be aligned with a person’s knowledge and capability within an organization setting. This will vary clearly across warfare communities (e.g., SWO talent will involve different elements than IWC talent), but characteristics of talent will likely also differ with rank (e.g., junior [JOs] vs. senior officers [SOs]), role (e.g., leading a department or division vs. standing watch), job (Kraus, 2016) and other factors that vary over time. Hence it remains uncertain whether the talent we retain currently is the best to meet our present, much less our future, needs.

This qualitative study addresses the issue directly through three research questions: 1) What constitutes talent in the SWO Community? 2) Why do some talented people choose to leave the Navy while others choose to stay in? 3) How can we retain talent in the Navy?

Eschewing the idea of using deduction and quantitative analysis through one or more top-down theoretic models of talent—approaches that presume a detailed understanding of what talent is and how to measure it—we choose instead to employ qualitative methods inductively and to build up a grounded understanding of *SWO talent*. Indeed, given the situated and nuanced nature of talent likely to exist, we look to develop and articulate an understanding of SWO talent by talking to talented people in the SWO Community directly. We all know the saying, “I know talent when I see it,” so we’re looking to understand what it is that talented SWOs see when it comes to talent.

On the surface, this may appear somewhat biased and circular: we’re asking SWOs who have been identified as “talented” about their perceptions to build up a grounded understanding of *SWO talent*. Clearly the perceptions are from people for

whom the current performance evaluation system is working. Nonetheless, every study must begin somewhere. We choose to begin with people who are considered to be “talented” at present, and we focus on those who have elected to stay in the Navy. This provides us with insight into the components of talent: the kinds of attributes, traits, attitudes and behaviors exhibited by “talented” SWOs.

For comparison¹, a follow on study could examine people who are not considered to be “talented,” or for contrast, we could seek out the perceptions of “talented” people who have elected to leave the Navy, and the kinds of talent attributes, traits, attitudes and behaviors identified here can inform top-down quantitative studies addressing large populations. Hence this study lays down a foundation of talent components for comparison, contrast and further investigation.

Moreover, not all of the talented SWOs in our sample frame are necessarily happy with how they’ve been treated, and some people on the margin may have chosen to leave the Navy had certain (unknown to us) circumstances been even slightly different. Thus, their perceptions provide additional insight into the kinds of motivators and dissatisfiers that they and others face. This can help to inform Navy leaders interested in accentuating motivators and mitigating dissatisfiers in order to help retain more talented people.

Toward this end, instead of speculating about why some people are leaving the SWO Community and why others are deciding to stay in the Navy, we ask talented SWOs why they’re choosing or considering one path or another, and we ask them also about friends and colleagues of theirs—those who have elected to stay in the Navy as well as those who have decided to leave—building up similarly a grounded understanding of what they are looking for or missing. Far from informal wardroom conversations, broad focus groups or like approaches, however, we employ very well-established, grounded theory building methods, which provide a systematic, scientific process to develop an understanding inductively, from the data themselves.

Moreover, we focus specifically on people who have completed their junior officer (JO) tours, who have been identified as “talented” beyond the current FITREP process (e.g., independently, by an experienced SWO Captain serving as our Strategic

¹ Three complementary studies could address the other quadrants of the 2x2 matrix: talented vs untalented and staying in vs leaving the Navy.

Contact), and who have made the commitment (i.e., as O3s) to their Department Head (DH) tours. This represents a career decision point at which much SWO talent is lost historically, hence the perspective of talented officers at this point is highly informative.

This qualitative approach exhibits no prejudice or judgment against quantitative methods. Indeed, we are conducting a quantitative companion study in conjunction with this one. Every research method has its comparative strengths and weaknesses, which are known well. Quantitative methods offer the power of numbers and statistical analysis, for instance, and they are able to address large volumes of data, generally quite quickly. Internal validity and reliability are relatively strong generally with quantitative methods, and researchers have an easier job of claiming to be “objective.” However, quantitative methods have a difficult time addressing “how” and “why” research questions, and even many “what” questions can be troublesome. Notice that the three research questions centering this study include a “what,” and “why” and a “how.”

Metaphorically, quantitative methods are air campaigns. They strike quickly, generally from the top down, and can cover great areas, generally with comparatively little effort by the warriors conducting the missions. However, they leave many targets untouched, can inflict collateral damage, and are rarely effective alone. Campaigns in the Middle East over the past 15 years help validate this characterization. Indeed, experience suggests that lasting results require ground campaigns also, some aspects of which involve close, even house-to-house combat. This is metaphoric qualitative research: getting on the ground and close to data, understanding them in depth, despite their inherently messy and disorganized nature. There is a time and place for both research methods. Given our interest in trying to define and understand *talent* as a situated and nuanced concept, this approach seems most appropriate at this stage of our study campaign.

The balance of this report begins with some background information regarding the SWO Community, after which we elaborate on our qualitative research method. The bulk of the report articulates our qualitative data analysis and findings, which we summarize through a set of recommendations and conclusions to complete the report. Three appendices are included with the qualitative instruments used in this study.

II. BACKGROUND

In this section we summarize very briefly the nature and composition of the SWO Community. We also summarize some relevant previous research on retention and talent.

A. SWO COMMUNITY

The Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) profession is comparatively ancient, dating back to the beginning of naval warfare, and relatively homogeneous. Paradoxically, proficiency at surface warfare was such a fundamental of naval skill, that it was not recognized as a distinct warfare community until the early 1970s. Although the moniker applies to anyone who has earned the SWO Pin, by “SWO” we refer principally to Navy officers that lead and operate surface combatant vessels, especially those designed for surface warfare with their own weapons. This would exclude submarines, which operate submerged, aircraft carriers, which fight with airplanes, and other craft that do not use their own weapons in a surface warfare role. Hence in the current era, this points us principally toward cruisers and destroyers (CRU-DES), littoral combat ships (LCS), frigates and like vessels, as well as the various sub-types that constitute the Surface Navy’s Amphibious Force.

SWOs have traditionally followed a relatively rigid career path, with sea-shore assignments and rotations mapped out explicitly from JO to SO (SWO Community, 2016). The clear emphasis of initial assignments and rotations centers on gaining experience and proficiency at sea, typically with the first four years or so serving aboard ship. After completing the Basic Division Officer Course (BDOC), officers report to their first division officer (DivO) tour, during which time they would promote to Lieutenant Junior Grade (O2). The Advanced Division Officer Course (ADOC) would generally precede their second DivO tour, during which time they would likely face one or two Department Head screening boards and promote to the rank of Lieutenant (O3). Throughout these years at sea, they would also stand watches and earn their OOD and SWO qualifications. Exact career paths may differ a bit, and some officers may earn additional qualifications (e.g., TAO, EOOW) as well.

A shore tour of roughly three years follows these two DivO tours, and those previously selected would then complete Department Head School before returning to sea for one or two Department Head tours (with a possibility of early command) as they are screened for Lieutenant Commander (O4). Signing up for the Department Head tour(s) generally involves a major commitment of additional service time in the Navy, and this has posed a retention challenge. Indeed, the Navy O3s selected to serve as Department Heads appear to comprise a particularly insightful population to study in terms of SWO talent and retention. Having been selected to become Department Heads, the Navy clearly views them as particularly valuable human capital, and facing a major commitment of additional service time, these officers have an important decision to make in terms of career and lifestyle.

As noted above, this traditional, rigid career path for JOs has expanded recently with multiple tracks that offer increased flexibility. The traditional path remains an option still, but officers now have four alternate tracks to follow as JOs. 1) The Accelerated Warfighter track may involve a single, longer DivO tour at sea followed by Warfare Tactics Instructor (WTI) training and subsequent WTI utilization as an O3. 2) The Enhanced Readiness track includes the two, traditional DivO sea tours followed by assignment on shore either teaching and training or pursuing graduate education at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) or elsewhere.

3) The Accelerated Skillset Building track begins with a single DivO tour followed by time on shore for developing skills through graduate education before embarking on the second tour at sea. 4) The Nuclear track has the first DivO tour followed by time on shore at the Naval Nuclear Power School and Nuclear Power Training Unit. The second DivO tour is in the engineering plant of an aircraft carrier.

Additionally, within each of these tracks, officers have an opportunity to pursue the Career Intermission Program (CIP), which provides a one time, temporary transition from active duty to the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) to allow service members to pursue personal or professional goals outside the service while providing a way for their return to active duty. JOs retain their benefits during this period and then rejoin active duty to continue their SWO careers. Only time and empiric evidence will tell whether

these alternate career tracks increase retention of talented SWOs. We begin gaining some insight into this question through the present qualitative study.

B. RETENTION AND TALENT RESEARCH

Retention in the Military has been studied for many decades (Singer & Morton, 1969; Rocco et al., 1977; Hurlock & Montague, 1982; Cooke & Quester, 1992; Sullivan, 1998; Christensen et al., 2002). A great many retention studies look backward, trying to make sense of historic data. Makarenko (2014), for instance, identifies a positive correlation between unemployment in the US economy and SWO retention. This suggests that with the economy near full employment today, retention may be more of a challenge than during the period of and following the Great Recession.

Similarly, Clark (2016) identifies a positive correlation between the timing of graduate education and retention of SWO Department Heads who earn a masters degree after five years of service: they are more likely to retain than those who don't or who earn such degrees before or earlier in their careers. This suggests that graduate education during a SWO's career can represent an effective retention tactic. Further, Mundell (2016) identifies a lower retention rate for female officers than for their male counterparts, but no difference is found in promotion rates to O4. Although the study does not focus on SWOs specifically, it suggests that men and women may have somewhat different career and education needs. Like the study above, graduate education also shows a positive correlation with officer retention.

Alternatively, some promising studies estimate retention models for officers in general (Parcell et al., 2003), in communities such as aviation and surface warfare (Parcell & MacIlvaine, 2005), and to assess diversity (Kraus, 2013). By developing models, such studies equip us to look prospectively, which is important. We're working to address *future* talent losses, not simply to understand those that took place in the past.

One relatively recent study (Snodgrass & Kohlman, 2014) also looks prospectively. Instead of developing models from historic data, however, it grounds data by asking sailors directly about their plans in terms of staying in or leaving the Navy. This direct, prospective approach aligns well with our interest in developing a grounded understanding. Although the present study focuses more on talent than retention, there is clear complementation.

Nonetheless, the idea of asking sailors directly is not new, for the Navy administers broad surveys routinely. For instance, until being discontinued several years ago, the ARGUS survey (Frith, 2007) would ask sailors about their quality of life and like questions. The Career Viewpoint Survey (CNP PAO, 2014), as another instance, similarly invites sailors to provide advance input regarding career decisions prior to key milestones (esp. end of duty obligated service, end of minimum service requirement, projected rotation date). Soliciting advance input seems important², particularly if the Navy is sufficiently agile to do something to prevent talented people from leaving based on the results.

Although such surveys are advertised as voluntary and confidential, it is unclear whether sailors have complete trust in the confidentiality of an official Navy system or whether they feel that their inputs matter (Anonymous, 2015). As explained in the next section, our approach of conducting interviews anonymously—for research purposes—and destroying any personally identifiable information, helps to bridge the confidentiality barrier. Plus, we focus on one community at a time, with a more situated and concentrated lens, to help convey the potential visibility of our results.

Talent remains a challenging topic of study, however (Corley et al., 2015). A decade ago, research and consulting in this area were deemed problematic, with little data to support practitioner claims (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Later review research noted significant progress, but issues with clear definitions and conceptual boundaries remain (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This theme continues with more recent, extensive literature reviews (Tarique & Schuller, 2012).

Alternatively, a promising link established with knowledge management (Schroevers & Hendriks, 2012) helps to bring considerable academic rigor and successful practitioner experience to bear on the talent management topic, which is consistent with the Navy’s own knowledge management practices: “Knowledge management is the alignment of people and processes, enabled by technology” (DON CIO, 2016). This suggests strongly that talent is not some universal state or trait. Rather, it appears to be highly situated and nuanced—far from general and monolithic—that is dependent, for instance, upon the specific processes and technologies associated with the knowledge

² The Navy also administers the Career Viewpoint Exit Survey to members as they leave the service.

required for a person to exhibit talent. A “talented” person in one domain may represent an “untalented” person in another.

Consider, for example, a Chess grand master—a truly talented person in the domain of Chess—who is left stranded in the middle of the Amazon Jungle. Without considerable training and experience *with jungle survival*, would such person even live through a single day? Likewise, take an Amazon Jungle native—a truly talented person in the domain of jungle survival—and enroll him or her in a Chess tournament. Without considerable training and experience *with Chess*, would such person even win a single game? Nissen (2014) goes further, explaining how the *balanced* interaction between people, processes, organizations and technologies is key. This perspective gives ever greater credence to our bottom-up, situated, grounded approach to understanding talent, beginning with the SWO: talent seems highly likely to differ tremendously across organizations, domains and circumstances.

Indeed, contemporaneous and complementary research within the Navy (Palmer, 2017) views talent as a tripartite construct comprised of skills (innate and learned), performance, and potential for improvement and innovation. The researchers refer to the three parts as technical capacity, process maturity, and absorptive capacity, respectively. They go further, defining *Navy Quality* (personnel) as the degree to which there is a correlation and alignment between an individual’s talent and the job requirements (p. 8). This parallels, complements and reinforces our proposition that talent is nuanced and situated: talent is job specific in this view.

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III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this section we elaborate on our research method. As noted in the introduction, we seek a direct, grounded understanding of SWO talent, so we employ very well-established, grounded theory building methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Such methods equip us to develop an understanding inductively, from the data themselves, as opposed to relying upon a deductive, top-down model likely to be too general and coarse for our situated and nuanced concept *talent*.

Moreover, it provides a systematic, scientific process for qualitative research, one that both guides and encourages repeated iteration of data collection and analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Such repeated iteration is noted widely as key to grounding theory in the data of a qualitative study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and enables us to focus persistently on the SWO Community as a potentially unique and revelatory case to study (Yin, 1994). Results from this case study could then become even more useful in comparison with other Navy communities as complementary and contrasting cases, offering potential to elucidate insights unattainable through other research methods.

The site selected for this study provides a rich environment for investigating SWO talent. We're able to build upon contemporaneous work (Palmer, 2017) investigating why a seeming large and unacceptable number of SWOs are leaving the Navy after completing their minimum service requirement (MSR). This work parallels ours with a situated and nuanced perspective for talent, as noted above, and it seeks to develop a tripartite model.

We're able to build further upon our recent qualitative study of talent in the Information Warfare Community (Nissen & Tick, 2017), which involved qualitative interviews with information warriors while they were studying at the NPS. This enabled us to solicit their prospective input regarding factors that could influence their *future* decisions to leave or stay in the Navy. Further, students at NPS (and like education institutions) have had an opportunity to detach from the demands of everyday Fleet work and to reflect upon their careers—past and future—over 18 months or more while in school. This enables study participants to think over the longer term, with fewer,

everyday, pressing issues to contend with. This arguably serves very well our research purpose of understanding SWO talent as a revelatory case.

Studying a revelatory case such as this represents theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and makes it suitable for analytic generalization (Yin, 1994). As demonstrated several years back in the context of strategic learning (Thomas et al., 2001: 332), this calls in part for case selection of “a unique exemplar of a particular phenomenon to bring key dimensions to light.” Through study of this revelatory case, we seek to bring the situated and nuanced nature of talent to light and to illuminate patterns with potential to inform retention.

We employ three techniques for data collection: 1) document review, 2) strategic contact, and 3) interview. Briefly, document review provides important background information about the SWO Community. It also helps the Investigator to ask informed interview questions. Additionally, the Researcher has candid, confidential and sustained access to a Strategic Contact (i.e., a senior, experienced SWO). This senior naval officer is very experienced with military organizations and warfare processes in general, and he has considerable experience with surface warfare in particular. Such experience includes serving as Operations Officer (OpsO) on a DDG during his Department Head (DH) Tour, Executive Officer (XO) on another DDG, Commanding Officer (CO) on a third DDG and CO on a CG, in addition to numerous, impressive staff and shore assignments. This data-collection technique complements the other modes well. The Strategic Contact represents a ready source of military grounding and SWO perspective for consultation by the Investigator over the course of the study, and this naval officer knows talent when he sees it.

Semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) comprise the central method for collecting our qualitative data. Although we do pose a small number of common questions to all participants, such questions are very open-ended, asking participants to tell about their experiences, feelings, observations and perceptions. We want to hear what the participants have to say—in their own words—not impose a bunch of theoretic, survey questions. Further, the interviews are conducted with probing (Nelson et al., 2000) and snowballing (Reich & Kaarst-Brown, 1999) techniques, and they continue until theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is reached. Because we focus in particular

upon SWO talent, which is a relatively narrow topic, such saturation is reached after the first set of interviews, indicating sufficiency in terms of the sample frame. Each interview involves about one hour of oral interaction, often with follow up via email, telephone and additional meetings.

It is important to reemphasize that this is a qualitative study, not a quantitative analysis, and our interest is much more toward theory building than theory testing. Hence, as noted above, we perform theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), not statistical sampling, and we pursue analytic generalization (Yin, 1994), not statistical generalization. As such, we adhere to very well-established procedures for qualitative data collection and analysis (Denzin, 1994). Such procedures do not dictate that we attempt to develop large, random samples.

Quite to the contrary, we look for a small sample that will be informative, that we can understand in depth, and that will reveal both similarities and differences across participants. Additionally, we work deliberately to select participants who are likely to provide the kind of grounded data that we seek through interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Toward these ends, our recruitment process emphasizes volunteer participants. The idea is that people who volunteer are likely have something to say, both positive and negative. This helps to ensure smooth, candid, flowing interviews, and it increases the likelihood of collecting data that are considered important by the participants, particularly as our interview techniques enable us to probe and home in on different topics across the various participants. This provides considerable contrast to mandatory surveys with standard questions. Our recruitment script is included in Appendix A for reference.

Nonetheless, we ensure that our sample frame focuses on SWOs viewed as “talented” by the Navy, homing in on O3s who are eligible and have been selected to serve as Department Heads, who have been identified as “talented” beyond the current FITREP process (e.g., by our Strategic Contact), and who have made the commitment to their Department Head (DH) tours. We also ensure that we collect the same background information from each participant, so we have a common basis of comparison. This is the same background information used in a companion quantitative study, so we can compare qualitative and quantitative findings and results. The background information questionnaire is included in Appendix B for reference too.

Plus, we further ensure that we ask at least some of the same interview questions to all participants, so we establish a base set of responses for comparison and contrast. Most study participants answer these questions in writing before their interviews. This streamlines the process and provides a good basis for asking other questions through probing and homing in on different topics across the various participants. The common set of interview questions is included in Appendix C for reference as well.

To summarize the sample frame, all study participants are assigned currently (or were assigned recently) to the NPS for graduate education, and all have been identified as “talented” beyond the current FITREP process (i.e., by our Strategic Contact). As noted above, such NPS students are highly suitable for this study, because the investigators are collocated on campus with participants, who have an opportunity to detach from the demands of everyday Fleet work and to reflect upon their careers—past and future—over 18 months or more while in school.

It is important to note that these are not the typical kinds of students used in much academic research. Indeed, far from the inexperienced college freshmen who participate in myriad psychology, marketing and other studies—the external validity of which is wholly suspect—all participants in our sample frame are mid-grade military officers (O3), with five to seven years of military service, who have come to the NPS with leadership experience directly from operational tours at sea. These people know the Navy, and their incorporation in our sample frame enhances the external validity of this study greatly.

On the other hand, this whole sample frame reflects some intentional bias: All study participants are relatively junior officers (O3). These O3s have reached career points at which many talented officers choose to leave the Navy—yet all of our participants have chosen to stay in through their DH tours—so this represents a very appropriate group to study. Nonetheless, as suggested above, it could be very insightful to conduct a paired qualitative study to understand the talent, needs and motives of their peers who have chosen to leave the Navy. We leave such study to subsequent research.

Further, each of our study participants has elected to attend graduate school before the DH tour instead of serving on a shore assignment elsewhere (e.g., supporting Fleet operations). Some may contend that our participants reflect less talent and

motivation than such peers. This highlights the potential for an insightful follow on study to examine the differences between NPS SWOs and their “talented” peers in alternate shore assignments, and we leave such study to subsequent research³.

To enhance candid responses, and to reassure participants regarding anonymity, we choose not to use a tape or video recorder for interviews. Nonetheless, extensive notes are taken and summarized immediately following each interview, and collocation on the NPS campus enables the Investigator to follow up with interviewees where deemed necessary to clarify issues, to delve more deeply into topics of interest, or simply to verify facts, notes and comments.

In terms of coding, following Gioia and colleagues (1994) in part, we employ a multistage analytic approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation. In the primary stage, data collected and analyzed through the course of our interviews lead to first order coding (van Maanen, 1979), accomplished in a manner comparable to open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which reflects terms used directly by organization participants. In other words, adhering to our grounded approach, we employ *in vivo* codes in the primary stage, using terms from the interviews themselves to code each passage and section. This helps to keep the coding process as close as possible to the data. Investigator reactions and analyses generate corresponding first order interpretations, which are meaningful to organization participants also. Where warranted by theoretical sampling, many first order interpretations may lead us to additional data collection and analysis at the same level, reflecting terms used directly by organization participants. This first order analysis grounds our interpretations in the data.

In the secondary stage, we treat first order interpretations as “data” for second order analysis. This second order analysis augments its first order counterpart with theoretical insight and comparison, bringing in the investigator’s perspective that is informed by the literature, in a manner comparable to axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Gioia and colleagues (1994: 367) explain the benefits of using such a multistage

³ Indeed, some Navy communities appear to view officer time spent at the NPS negatively. Some (anonymous) sources, for instance, have asserted that the most talented SWOs eschew graduate education and choose instead shore assignments that benefit the Fleet directly, arguing that such choice is career enhancing. However, a graduate degree is notably important for promotion to O6, and officers electing graduate school assignments may be more foresightful than their peers. This presents an opportunity to conduct a paired study. In either case, as noted below our O6 Strategic Contact helps us to identify a pool of “talented” SWOs, regardless of whether their NPS choice is career limiting or foresightful.

approach. They include exposing and integrating different aspects of the phenomena of study that are revealed separately through first versus second order analysis and interpretation.

Although informant views can reveal the rich means or methods by which members can construct reality ... they usually do not address the deep structure of experience. Similarly, although the researcher views tend to gloss the richness of lived experience, they place in *bas-relief* the dimensions or structure of phenomena. Because the knower and known are interdependent in this process of understanding, however, the most desirable approach is to triangulate insider and outsider views.

As with the first interpretation stage, these second order interpretations may lead us in turn to collect and analyze additional data, to refine our first order interpretations, to augment our second order analysis, and so forth. This second order analysis bridges grounded data and interpretations with theory, and it helps us with the emergence of themes, accomplished in a manner comparable to selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Additionally, regarding the Investigator's background and biases, he is a tenured full professor of Information Science and of Management at the NPS, and although he is a Navy civilian, he comes to the study independently and without operational military experience. This allows a relatively fresh look at the SWO Community, but one that includes considerable familiarity and experience with knowledge, talent and retention in industry and other sectors outside the Military, in addition to many years of research addressing diverse aspects of military organization, personnel, training, education and operations. Hence the Investigator is neither a jaded insider or a naïve outsider.

Further, the Investigator comes to the study with no particular statement to make or point to prove. Rather, he comes seeking to understand SWO talent inductively, from a grounded perspective, and to elucidate possible approaches to retaining talented SWO personnel. Hence initial coding of data is conducted in a manner that lets the data speak for themselves and that uses study participants' own terms. This helps to ensure that initial interpretations are both grounded firmly in the data and meaningful to organization participants.

Finally, in addition to the well-accepted methods and techniques outlined above, the study also employs many of the proven tactics for qualitative research outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994: 262-276), which include taking a low profile, sampling people with different views, triangulating across multiple data-collection techniques, multiple verification efforts, and seeking an *emic* perspective (Bernard, 1998). Such tactics serve to mitigate potential bias (e.g., stemming from a single Investigator). Moreover, repeated member checking (Denzin, 1994) is accomplished through periodic interaction with our Strategic Contact and follow up with the study participants. Comments pertaining to the interview summaries and findings are also received from the Strategic Contact, participants in the study, experienced SWOs and other researchers, and a preliminary summary of study findings and implications is shared with the participants and others for comment.

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IV. RESULTS

In this section we report the study results. We begin by summarizing the backgrounds of our study participants. We then summarize the key first order codes applied to our interview data. This is followed by second order analysis and the emergence of themes from our qualitative study. The section concludes with summary discussion and a set of recommendations for leaders and policy makers, after which we include some comparison of interview transcripts and codes with the set of Navy Desired Leader Attributes.

A. PARTICIPANT BACKGROUNDS

In this section we summarize the backgrounds of our study participants. The corresponding data are collected through the background questionnaires noted above and included in Appendix A for reference. The participant background information is summarized in Table 1. To help preserve anonymity, we have stripped a few fields from the table as presented, yet we include mean and mode summaries where available and appropriate, which help to characterize the sample frame as a whole. We also refer to participants via anonymous symbols (e.g., P1701) instead of their names.

Table 1. Participant Background Information

Question	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Mean	Mode
1 Date of Commissioning	2011	2011	2012	2012	2010	2010	2011	2010	2011	2011	2010	2011	
2 Commissioning source	USNA	USNA	ROTC	USNA	OCS	OCS	USNA	ROTC	OCS	USNA	ROTC		USNA
3 Prior Enlisted	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y		N
4 Undergraduate College attended													USNA
5 Year of graduation from college	2011	2011	2012	2012		2009	2011	2010	2010	2011	2010	2011	
6 College Major													STEM
7 Undergraduate GPA													NR
8 Graduate degree													N
9 Rank at commissioning													O1
10 Designator at entry	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO	SWO		SWO
11 Married, at commissioning date													N
12 Dependent children, at commissioning date													N
13 Married, at current date													N
14 Dependent children, at current date													N
15 Current rank	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3	O3
16 Current designator	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110
17 NPS Degree (obtained or sought)	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS	MS		MS
18 NPS Curriculum													Various
19 Stay in or leave Navy	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay	Stay		Stay

This represents a very homogeneous sample. All participants are Navy officers. All were commissioned between 2010 and 2012. All have achieved the rank O3, have completed their SWO DivO tours, have been selected for Department Head tours, are pursuing graduate degrees at the NPS (spanning a variety of curricula), and intend to stay

in the Navy. These appear to be the kinds of people that the Navy values and would like to retain. Their thoughts, experiences, needs and considerations should thus be very relevant and insightful in the present study.

Looking at the mean (for quantitative data) and mode (for qualitative data) shown at the right of the table, we see that our average participant was commissioned in 2011, with most coming from the US Naval Academy (USNA). Only a few of these officers were prior enlisted, and although we do not reveal each participant's undergraduate institution or major (for privacy reasons), all were commissioned (as O1 SWOs) right after college. Nearly all were unmarried and without children when commissioned, and most remain single and childless.

B. FIRST ORDER ANALYSIS

In this section we summarize the key first order codes and interpretations applied to our interview data. We begin by elaborating further on the coding and analytic process.

1. Coding and Analytic Process Elaboration

As explained above, first order *in vivo* codes correspond to terms that are used directly by and that are meaningful to organization participants. They also reflect Investigator interpretations and highlight problems, issues, expectations, goals and like considerations that seem important in terms of illuminating the nature of SWO talent and participants' thoughts regarding whether to leave or stay in the Navy. They are important in their own right, grounding our interpretations in the data, but they also provide fodder for our direct interpretation and second order analysis.

As explained above also, we receive participants' background questionnaires and answers to common questions in advance of the interviews. This streamlines the interview process and provides a good basis for asking deeper and individualized questions through probing and homing in on different topics across the various participants. We read through each participant's inputs, highlighting all of the terms and statements that appear to have bearing on our research questions. Then we read through all participants' highlighted inputs, looking for common elements in addition to extreme responses. Common elements help to establish a basis of cross sample expectations, goals and like considerations, whereas extreme responses can signal problems, issues and like

concerns that may underlie a potential retention risk. Of course, anything related to *talent* is highlighted, but we pay attention in particular to the associated stories, terms, actions and characteristics.

As explained above further, we take notes during the interviews, which we formalize immediately afterward. These notes represent our focused conversations with participants—predicated upon the background information and common questions—through which we concentrate on topics associated with such first level codes. Our interview transcripts are then read, coded and analyzed similarly, and the corresponding codes are integrated in with those deriving from the documents.

2. SWO Community Raw Codes

Here we summarize data and findings for the SWO Community in terms of raw codes; that is, we list codes in terms of frequency across our interviewees in Table 2. This provides a rough summary of terms mentioned most often during interviews. We list roughly 80 such codes in total, but in order to provide focus, only the top 31 (i.e., those mentioned five times or more) are presented here. Notice that we include inputs for each participant in the table. This facilitates the task when we wish to refer back to a specific participant’s interview transcript in order to gain more context regarding a certain term, something we do extensively in second order analysis.

Note that this table excludes codes and frequencies derived from the written documents (i.e., background questionnaire and common interview questions). Instead, it includes only codes applied through interviews. In essence, a layer of filtering and focus has taken place already, as our analysis of written responses has primed us for asking more specific and informative questions during the interviews and for placing participants’ oral stories and responses in context with their backgrounds, issues, expectations and intentions. This enables us to concentrate on talent and retention, yet remain in the contexts and use the terms of our participants.

At this point, we’re trying to get an overall sense of the data, looking simply for codes that get repeated. For instance, the code *Chiefs* is recorded 21 times across all of the interviews, with *detailers* appearing 17 times, *fun* listed 16 times, along with *CO/XO quality* and *talent* each included on 15 occasions, 14 instances of *life at sea*, and so forth.

These are the terms mentioned most often during our interviews, which suggests that the corresponding topics are of greatest interest and concern to the participants.

Table 2. Most Frequent Codes from Interviews

Code			P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
chiefs					1	4				3	8	3	2	21
detailers				1	3		1		4		6	1	1	17
fun			2		1	1		1	1	1	4	4	1	16
CO/XO quality			1		1	1	2	1		1	2	1	5	15
talent			1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	15
life at sea				1	1	1	3	1	1		4		2	14
command			1	1	2		1		1	1	4		1	12
education				1	3	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	12
women issues on ships				1		5	1				5			12
family				1	1	1	2			1	4	1		11
do the job							1	1	1	1	2	3	1	10
FITREPs			2				1		3	4				10
NPS			1	1	1		2	1	1	1	1	1		10
mil relatives, background			1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	9
good CO			2				1				1		4	8
overseas travel					2	1	1	1		1	2			8
burn out people				1	1	1		1			3			7
DH bonus			1			1			1	1	2	1		7
good for me			1	1			3			1	1			7
money						1				3	1	2		7
SWO Community						2		1		1	1	2		7
camaraderie							1	2			1	1	1	6
CO/SO risks, job security										1	2		3	6
command climate					1			1			2		2	6
hard work							3	1			2			6
sea duty			1		1				1		2	1		6
stress			1			2		1			1	1		6
adaptable				1		1				1	2			5
administrivia, bureaucracy			1						1	1			2	5
driving ships					1	1		1			1			5
WTI				1	2				2					5

We return to analysis and interpretation below, but to summarize succinctly here, our SWO participants express considerable concern regarding their relationships and interactions with Chiefs (as JOs). As examples: P1704 asserts that “Chiefs can make or break a young JO,” insisting that a “good Chief will guide and train a JO,” and talking about having a “strong Chief,” which “made the job boring.” In contrast, P1708 recalls, “I never had a helpful Chief; they are supposed to train DivOs; I could never find him.”

Participants also express considerable concern regarding their relationships and interactions with detailers (as JOs). As examples: P1702 reflects passionately: “My detailer was an idiot.” P1705 expresses outrage with the memory: “the detailer laughed at me when I asked for Shore duty at the NPS.” P1707 laments that you “can’t trust detailers.”

Many participants list *fun* as a driving motivator to work hard and stay in the Navy. As examples: P1701 is “planning to stay in the Navy until ceases to be fun.” P1706 muses that “SWO life is stressful,” but it is “fun to navigate a ship.” They also indicate that CO and XO quality have major impacts on their enjoyment and professional development. As examples: P1709 remembers as a JO that the “first tour was rough,” with a “poor command climate ... and CO/XO. I didn’t like it.” Alternatively, P1701 remembers as a JO having “good and helpful CO/XOs.”

Participants further offer informed and grounded perspectives regarding what constitutes SWO talent. As examples: P1707 suggests talent is the “ability to lead and perform one’s job,” but explains that it varies across “two kinds of jobs. 1) Watchstanding: need quick reactions and reflexes, but need to also work within confines, to take timely and accurate actions; can’t just stand there like a deer in the headlights. 2) Job billet: ask questions; learn what you need to know to do your job.” P1708 agrees: “1) Watchstanding: driving and fighting the ship; experience and intuition; some people suck; one guy could drive only during daytime, because CO didn’t trust him; I drove at night: Ironical ‘reward’ for higher competency; sometimes the people get punished for being good. 2) DivO: keep up with paperwork; day to day work does not involve inspirational leadership.”

Our SWOs have much to say—both positive and negative—about life at sea as well. As examples: P1701 includes as something likable about being a SWO, “enjoy sea duty.” P1703 adds that “sea time is difficult but OK.” P1704 explains that it “can be challenging in general being at sea.” P1707 “didn’t mind sea duty,” but P1705 laments being “at sea and won’t be home.”

Having conducted many qualitative studies along these lines, we are struck by the relatively large number of codes appearing frequently. For instance, we notice that ten codes (i.e., *Chiefs* through *family* in the table) appear 11 or more times (i.e., once per participant on average), with an additional 20 codes (i.e., *do the job* through *WTI* in the table) appearing five or more times (i.e., roughly once per every other participant on average). This supports our earlier comment regarding homogeneity of the participants: Many of them make the same or similar comments, comments which become codes representing potentially important and insightful aspects of the SWO profession and

talent. In other words, many of the same thoughts and concerns are on the minds of most participants.

For instance, *command* is mentioned as an explicit career goal a dozen times. Apparently commanding a warship represents a powerful draw for these participants. As examples: P1705 notes, “[I’m not interested in] alternate paths to command other than on a ship. I want a ship.” P1707 adds a “fear of being disadvantaged in front of command boards.” As another instance, *education* is noted just as frequently as an important career step. All of these participants have elected—and been selected for—graduate education at the NPS, so this is no surprise. As examples: P1702 advises, “... if you can get training or schooling, then take it.” P1708 indicates that “free education” is a motivator to join and stay in the Navy.

As a third instance, *women issues on ships* is also noted equally often. It seems as though a gender mix aboard ship causes some issues—for men and women alike. As examples: P1702 states that “berthing on ships with women is a problem.” P1704 adds, “men and women working and living together is a challenge ... exacerbated aboard ship.” Further, we see *family* codes nearly as frequently. A SWO’s willingness to invest in and sustain the hardship associated with long sea tours may depend upon each officer’s individual family circumstances. As examples: P1702 emphasizes the “high optempo,” explaining that it leaves “no time for family.” P1705 remarks that “being away from family” is a major dissatisfier. P1709 adds that “Navy lifestyle is not conducive to family.”

Table 3 provides a complementary summary. Instead of ranking the codes by frequency (i.e., how many times each is mentioned by participants), here we tally how many different participants mention each code. In Table 2 above, for instance, the code *Chiefs* is noted 21 times throughout the interviews, with some participants (esp. P1704 and P1709) noting this same code multiple times. In Table 3 below, however, we see that only six of the 11 participants note the code, whereas all 11 discuss *talent*, which is listed at the top.

Clearly there is considerable overlap between these complementary views. For instance, *talent*, *fun*, *CO/XO quality*, *education*, *life at sea*, *command*, *detailers*, *family*, and *do the job* are included within the top ten codes in both views. However, this latter

view through Table 3 shows *NPS* and *mil relatives, background* in the top ten instead. These participants appear to feel that attending the NPS is positive. As examples: P1702 says “NPS is the next step,” and P1703 summarizes how a “prior Captain mentor was pushing me to get a masters degree at this stage of my career,” adding that such degree is “required to make O6.” Even though “more sea time is better overall,” this participant notes how getting a “masters degree is good motivator to stay in.” P1705 agrees, saying NPS is “atypical of SWOs,” but “would have resigned if not detailed to NPS.”

Table 3. Most Popular Codes from Interviews

Code			P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Number
talent			1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	11
fun			2		1	1		1	1	1	4	4	1	9
CO/XO quality			1		1	1	2	1		1	2	1	5	9
education				1	3	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	9
NPS			1	1	1		2	1	1	1	1	1		9
mil relatives, background			1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	9
life at sea				1	1	1	3	1	1		4		2	8
command			1	1	2		1		1	1	4		1	8
detailers				1	3		1		4		6	1	1	7
family				1	1	1	2			1	4	1		7
do the job							1	1	1	1	2	3	1	7
chiefs					1	4				3	8	3	2	6
overseas travel					2	1	1	1		1	2			6
DH bonus			1			1			1	1	2	1		6
burn out people				1	1	1		1			3			5
good for me			1	1			3			1	1			5
SWO Community						2		1		1	1	2		5
camaraderie							1	2			1	1	1	5
sea duty			1		1				1		2	1		5
stress			1			2		1			1	1		5
driving ships					1	1		1	1		1			5

Regarding military relatives and backgrounds, nine of our 11 participants were attracted to the Military because of close family members (esp. parents) and backgrounds in military communities (e.g., Seattle, San Diego). Hence current and former career military service men and women appear to represent powerful recruiters in terms of their children.

C. SECOND ORDER ANALYSIS

In this section we summarize the second order analysis of our qualitative data. In the secondary stage, we treat first order codes and interpretations as “data” for second order analysis, clustering such codes into coherent and meaningful categories. This

second order analysis augments its first order counterpart with theoretical insight and comparison, bringing in the investigator's perspective that is informed by the literature.

Because we are listening actively during our interviews with participants, their various statements and the corresponding codes do not occur in isolation. Rather, they cluster according to points being made, emotions being expressed, concerns being raised, expectations being articulated, and so forth. Reading iteratively and repeatedly through the interview transcripts and notes, and looking back through the codes summarized above, we group the participants' coded comments into sets cohering logically together. Indeed, using this analytic technique, the roughly 80 codes noted above can be grouped into nine clusters: 1) *motivation to join*, 2) *JO jobs*, 3) *JO experience*, 4) *life at sea*, 5) *career*, 6) *motivators*, 7) *dissatisfiers*, 8) *SWO Community*, and 9) *talent*. We address each in turn.

1. Motivation to Join

Those codes comprising the first cluster *motivation to join* center on military relatives and backgrounds. As noted above, nine of our 11 participants were attracted to the Military because of close family members (esp. parents) and backgrounds in military communities (e.g., Seattle, San Diego). Hence current and former career military service men and women appear to represent powerful recruiters in terms of their children.

2. JO Jobs

Those codes comprising the second cluster *JO jobs* summarize some of the various jobs performed by participants during their JO tours. To begin quite atypically, two participants had Department Head (DH) or equivalent jobs as JOs. One became a DH while underway at sea when the more senior officer serving in that role was transferred off the ship. Another was assigned as Company Officer of a Coastal Riverines unit on deployment conducting mostly convoy missions. Additionally, a couple of participants served as Flag Aides during JO tours, and several others qualified for Engineering Officer of the Watch. Nearly all participants qualified as both Officer of the Deck and Tactical Action Officer, and all of our JOs served in at least one Division Officer (DivO) assignment.

3. JO Experience

Those codes comprising the third cluster *JO experience* are presented in Table 4. These represent codes pertaining to participants' experiences as JOs aboard ship. Notice that interaction with Chiefs represents the most cited experience expressed by our participants. For the JO aboard ship as a DivO, one's relationship and interaction with the division Chief appear to be very important and influential. More than half of participants make note of such relationship and interaction, and one participant (P1709) appears to give it great attention. Speaking generally, Chiefs have considerably greater experience—and are generally older—than the JOs who supervise them, and JOs must rely upon Chiefs extensively (esp. in terms of the work that must be done in the division). A positive relationship and interaction can be a plus in the JO's experience, with the opposite effect of a negative relationship and interaction.

Table 4. JO Experience Code Cluster

Code	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
chiefs			1	4				3	8	3	2	21
detailers		1	3		1		4		6	1	1	17
CO/XO quality	1		1	1	2	1		1	2	1	5	15
good CO	2				1				1		4	8
CO/XO risks, job security								1	2		3	6
command climate			1			1			2		2	6
JO experience									1	1		2
recruiter	1											1
CO attention	1											1

More specifically, in addition to the comments noted and quoted above, P1709 says further: "Chief's Mess is hit or miss. ... Some Chiefs are lazy and not held accountable. ... A JO has limited authority as DivO. ... One DivO who fired a Chief was reprimanded by the CO. ... Chiefs are untouchable (by regulation). The DivO must carry the entire weight of the Division." When pressed to elaborate, this officer continues: "There's a big issue with Chiefs. ... Who gets promoted and how soon they promote ... some with only 8 years. ... The quality of Chiefs is going down. ... I know Senior Chiefs. They saw it. ... People preach like Chiefs are the backbone of the Navy, but they just sit in the Chiefs' Mess drinking coffee."

P1710 concurs in some respects, describing the "drama of the Chiefs Mess: The Chief just disappeared," and stating that "some Chiefs despised JOs." However, this

participant has positive comments regarding the Chief associated with the first sea tour: “I had the same Chief through the whole first tour. ... He knew his stuff. ... I learned a lot from him. ... He understood junior enlisted well ... great overall.” This participant adds that “humility goes a long way: They respond well.”

Apparently the working relationship between DivOs and Chiefs is inconsistent, however, even for the same JO across different divisions, departments and ships. P1711, for instance, describes a “frustrating period ... with a bad CO, Department Head and Chief.” However, an “awesome Senior Chief came later, near the end of the tour, who ran the department well.” Then on another DivO tour this officer characterizes a different Senior Chief as “the best ever.”

Similarly with Detailers: Interaction with detailers represents the second most cited experience expressed by our participants. For the JO (and beyond), one’s relationship and interaction with the Detailers appear to be very important and influential also. More than half of participants make note of such relationship and interaction, and one participant (P1709) appears to give it great attention. Speaking generally, Detailers have huge influence over which jobs a JO is able to choose, hence each officer’s Navy exposure and experience appear to depend greatly upon the detailers who assign them to jobs. A positive relationship and interaction can be a plus in the JO’s experience, with the opposite effect of a negative relationship and interaction.

Most comments pertaining to interactions with Detailers are negative. In addition to the comments noted and quoted above, P1703 says that “the detailer lost my application for Flag Aide.” P1707 laments how his or her “year group is behind the curve. ... There’s no opportunity for me to attend WTI schools. ... I fear being disadvantaged in front of command boards. ... The detailers tell me not to worry. ... I don’t know if I believe you.” P1709 adds how a specific shore job arose through “an administrative error of the detailer,” even though it turned out to be “a cool job though ... I was lucky to get it.” This participant elaborates when pressed regarding detailing in general: “Detailing needs improvement ... the JO detailers especially. We need more of them. ... There’s very limited engagement with detailers. ... There’s not enough information about available jobs. ... Detailers make administrative mistakes. ... They do care but are overworked.”

P1710 adds that a Detailer assigned “the 21st job out 20 choices.” P1711 explains how “the detailer almost messed up the NPS opportunity: She didn’t keep up with what I should be doing ... didn’t reply to email. I spent too much time calling. ... There was only a short time to apply to NPS. ... I got the NPS quota, but two months later she says I don’t have a slot.” Apparently the working relationship between JOs and Detailers is inconsistent, however, even for the same officer across different job assignments. P1711 adds how “the next detailer was helpful,” for instance.

As with Detailers, Navy recruiters appear to affect the JO experience too. P1701, referring to how the SWO profession was explained initially, notes simply: “It’s a running joke: the recruiter lied.” Alternatively, P1705 explains that a recruiter “happened to call” and that such telephone call led to joining the Navy. Likewise, P1706 articulates how a Navy recruiter on campus influenced the decision to join.

The next row in Table 4 lists code counts for CO/XO quality: Interaction with COs and XOs represents the third most cited experience expressed by our participants. For the JO (and beyond), one’s relationship and interaction with the COs and XOs appear to be very important and influential as well. Nearly all participants make note of such relationship and interaction, and one participant (P1711) appears to give it great attention. Speaking generally, COs and XOs have tremendous influence over most aspects of work and life aboard ship, hence each JO’s CO/XO exposure and experience appear to affect their initial perceptions of Navy life greatly. As with the other aspects discussed above, a positive relationship and interaction can be a plus in the JO’s experience, with the opposite effect of a negative relationship and interaction.

Comments pertaining to interactions with COs and XOs are both positive and negative. In addition to the comments noted and quoted above, P1701 apparently encountered both during a JO tour: “I had a good CO, who followed a bad CO. ... I was inspired to stay in [the Navy] by the good one.” Elaborating when probed further on this topic, the participant adds: “CO quality is important. One CO had a bad leadership style; emotionally detached; arms length interactions; a downer for a fresh, energetic USNA JO. The new CO had more personality; Department Head was also helpful as a role model. ... It’s like the Ghost of Christmas Future: Want to see positive leaders as a vision of one’s future self.”

This officer goes further to clarify, elaborating how his or her perception has shifted with experience:

On further reflection, I realize that the way in which I characterized one of my previous CO's leadership style was perhaps a bit harsh. It wasn't that it was a bad leadership style. It was one which I didn't quite understand from my perspective as a JO. My dislike of it was more a function of my immaturity at the time than it was of his actual performance. Later, a different CO had shown me an example I felt more inspired to follow, but it was simply a style which resonated with me at the time. As I've been in longer, I've come to appreciate the more detached leadership style of some COs. It doesn't necessarily make him or her a bad leader. In fact, from what I've seen there can be less animosity, because some can perceive an "emotionally engaged" CO as showing favoritism or developing a clique. Keeping everyone at arms length is more even-handed sometimes than being too much like "just another member of the wardroom," if only because it's hard to apply attention equally to everyone. And, wherever there's a significantly uneven distribution of the CO's personal attention, animosity and jealousy are sure to follow. In short, it's a distinction that I didn't fully understand until my second tour as a division officer.

P1705 adds that the "chain of command makes a difference in how you like the Navy. ... Both the CO and XO on my first ship ... helped me see and learn." P1711 echoes how a particular CO eased the transition into the SWO Community, characterizing three different COs as "two good, one bad."

This participant also notes how much power the CO has aboard ship: "Instructions are followed at the leisure of the CO. If the CO wants something done that goes against a procedure, then you better listen. If you mess up following a procedure, you better hope all you get is a good yelling at." Elaborating further through probing, this officer appears to imply a SWO cultural dimension that induces stress: "The CRU-DES community self imposes stress. ... CG COs are less jerks. They made O6 already. ... The DDG COs are often jerks. ... The CO is afraid of making mistakes. Everyone's scared of getting fired. The Department Head wants to please the CO in every way, and hence is afraid to speak up." This speaks further to job security and command climate, both of which affect the JO experience, and which are listed in the table too.

4. Life at Sea

Those codes comprising the fourth cluster *life at sea* are presented in Table 5. These represent codes pertaining to participants' comments regarding life aboard ship.

Life at sea is a central part of the SWO profession, and every participant has something to say about it.

Table 5. Life at Sea Code Cluster

Code		P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
life at sea			1	1	1	3	1	1		4		2	14
sea duty		1		1				1		2	1		6
women issues on ships			1		5	1				5			12
burn out people			1	1	1		1			3			7
stress		1			2		1			1	1		6
not enough people			1				2			1			4
life at sea not hard									1				1

P1701, for instance, “enjoys sea duty.” P1703 stresses how “more sea time is better (professionally) overall,” and adds that “sea time is difficult but okay.” P1704 continues: “It can be challenging in general being at sea.” P1706 agrees, describing how “SWO life is stressful,” but this participant also notes that it’s “fun to navigate a ship” and describes how the “sea takes me away from stresses.” P1707 “didn’t mind sea duty,” but says that “it gets boring after quals.” All said, “the positive points outweigh the negatives.” P1708 adds that “life at sea is not hard.”

Not everyone agrees, however. One officer, for instance, states succinctly: “Working aboard ship sucks.” This seems to be the case particularly for those with or contemplating families. One parent participant, for instance, muses that his young children “need their dad. ... [but] I’m at sea and won’t be home. The optempo is too high. The Navy says it cares, but it doesn’t.” Nonetheless, this officer admits, “I knew what it meant to be a SWO.” One female participant adds: “The Navy lifestyle is not conducive to family. ... Being pregnant while on sea duty hurts. ... The Navy tells you when to have a family.” A male participant elaborates: “I’m single with no kids. Because of the high optempo, there’s no time for family. ... I would have gotten out if I had a family. ... Each person has priorities.” Another participant adds: “I have no kids or dogs, but that would be hard [to accommodate with sea duty].”

Several participants raise the issue of women aboard ships. One female participant, for instance, explains: “It’s a man’s world for the most part at sea,” elaborating, “some Captains tend to favor the men or be more willing to be mentor them at different level.” Another female participant adds how “men and women working and

living together is a challenge, which gets exacerbated aboard ship.” Nonetheless, she’s “tired of talking about it; all of the ‘period’ jokes; people thinking they’re better without saying (or proving) it; offensive on a personal level.”

Still another participant states simply: “There’s not much the Navy can do for women.” When pressed to elaborate, we learn, however, that “women SWOs are not a systematic issue.” Continuing, we discover how “some women Senior Officers were hard asses and mean ... a sign of when they started. It was harder then. ... There are no systematic problems, just isolated incidents.” She summarizes: “While there is some appearance of preferential treatment, there’s no overt discrimination. The Navy is good at eliminating personal bias on promotion boards.” When elaborating on working relationships with men versus women at sea, this officer continues, “everyone [male and female] is equally irritating.”

A male participant describes particular issues with berthing, however: “Berthing on ships with women is a problem. ... I was stuck in (small) overflow berthing for two deployments, the “JO Jungle.” A female participant describes the opposite perspective: “Women get staterooms. Men live in the JO Jungle. It was okay for me (as woman).”

Several people note the workload and culture aboard ship. P1702, for instance, summarizes a distaste for how ship crews will “train until you break people and equipment,” adding, “our own system causes problems. ... Sometimes it’s essential to burn someone out to accomplish a mission, but it’s bad to burn people out just as habit.” This officer describes further how there are “not enough people to do all of the necessary jobs well.” P1706 characterizes it as “always doing more with less” and describes “a manpower shortage.”

P1703 explains how SWO culture at sea “leads to pushing people harder.” P1705 adds, “I work very hard” and notes the “ridiculous hours we work.” P1704 describes how work aboard ship “can wear you down. ... It can be hard to accept criticism, especially if you take it personally.” P1709 describes further the “high stress level and ship life with no sleep. ... The days just blur together. It’s exhausting and leads to bad decision making. There’s a lot that can go wrong. It’s not that a person is an idiot; just hasn’t slept in a day. ... Too much work is a cultural issue. Sleep is almost discouraged. It’s a pride thing. You

get brownie points for working all day. There’s a lot of brown nosing. If the CO is on the ship, people will stay on too. ... There’s too much to do in a day.”

5. Career

Those codes comprising the fifth cluster *career* are presented in Table 6. These represent codes pertaining to participants’ comments regarding pursuing careers as SWOs. Foremost on SWO minds in this regard is command, and nearly every participant has something to say about it.

Table 6. Career Code Cluster

Code	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
command	1	1	2		1		1	1	4		1	12
early command			1		2							3
more command opportunities			1		1							2
FITREPs	2				1		3	4				10
career path limited										2		2
good for me	1	1			3			1	1			7
how far I can go						1			1			2
see if I can handle it				1								1
WTI		1	2				2					5
chance, destiny					1		1					2

P1701, for instance, says that “CO is an important opportunity. You learn to lead at the pinnacle. Some unprepared COs lack the temperament. They look good on paper but need practice being a small CO before becoming a big one. One could command an LCS or other, smaller ship as a trial.” P1703 seconds the idea of more opportunities for early command, saying they “would be strong incentives” for talented people to stay in the Navy. The officer also bemoans an apparent relative shortage of command billets, eager for additional career opportunities as CO. P1705 also agrees with the importance of early command, adding that the incentive system may be misaligned: “Is early command somehow inferior to playing a lesser role on a DDG? This seems stupid.” This officer is very focused on career and command: “I know my path. ... DDG OpsO. I need to get what I want. ... I want a ship. This is Chess, not Checkers. Need to look far ahead.”

For this self-admitted high performer, who has worked very hard and done very well professionally, continued career success appears vital for retention: “I promise that I will excel. I’ve done all that I can do, but I may not get what I need. Why must I jump through hoops? My track record should speak for itself. I’ll do great and wonderful things. I’ve done a wonderful job.” This officer elaborates on the need for sacrifice and

endurance: “At some point it will be time for me to say good-bye. They can’t tell me ‘no’ after such sacrifice. They don’t help us to get there. It’s getting better ... impacting for better. I hope others don’t endure what I have.” P1709 expresses a similar thought: “Becoming the CO of a ship seems cool. I put in a lot of effort. I want to get as much as I can out of it.”

To attain command, one must earn or receive good fitness reports and fare well through promotion boards, both of which are a concern to most participants. P1701, for instance, appears to be doing well in the current system: “fitreps are important. The CO/XO must be good at writing them. ... It’s OK for me. I’ve had good and helpful CO/XOs.” This officer adds, “if the fitrep system changes to disfavor me and my performance,” then such change might impact the next decision to stay in the Navy. Other participants (e.g., P1702, P1705, P1708, P1709) also note that the current system appears to be working well for them.

Alternatively, P1710 notes that the career path appears to be limited, and P1707 reports that many “fitreps are not merit based. ... I had a three month eval ... and was ranked at the bottom. Other people [with more time in the command] got the best evals. ... The CO/XO said, ‘you’re still fodder’ [for others’ evaluations].” As noted above, this officer continues: “I fear being disadvantaged in front of command boards [due to detailer and career timing issues].” P1709 explains that timing is very important in what is described as a rigid promotion board process: “The promotion board process could be more flexible. The rules for O4 are very rigid: DH school by year 7; ship by year 8; competitive fitrep on sea duty. This scares people. There’s no flexibility.”

Hence, whereas most participants are highly focused on their careers, with command as a central objective, many appear to be realistic regarding opportunities even for “talented” officers like themselves. P1704, for instance, describes wanting to “see if I can handle it,” and both P1706 and P1709 talk about “seeing how far” they can go in the system. Moreover, SWO talent and interest need not necessarily be limited to command at sea. In the context of alternate career tracks, for instance, P1706 argues: “Command at sea is not the only career path. Let people go where they’re most talented ... appealing to what they’re interested in.” P1711, as another instance, is “not interested in being CO,” elaborating that the “CO is just a care taker.”

6. Motivators

Those codes comprising the sixth cluster *motivators* are presented in Table 7. By far, the greatest motivator appears to be the “fun” associated with the SWO life and profession. As summarized in the table, nine of our 11 participants use this word to describe in part what motivates them to stay in the Navy. P1701, for instance, remarks: “I’m planning to stay in the Navy until it ceases to be fun,” adding, “10% fun time makes the other 90% tolerable.” As noted above, for another instance, P1706 muses that although “SWO life is stressful,” it is “fun to navigate a ship.”

Table 7. Motivator Code Cluster

Code	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
fun	2		1	1		1	1	1	4	4	1	16
overseas travel			2	1	1	1		1	2			8
money				1				3	1	2		7
DH bonus	1			1			1	1	2	1		7
camaraderie					1	2			1	1	1	6
helping sailors		1				1				1	1	4
stability/security										1	2	3
leadership	1			1			1					3
service	1							1			1	3
leading sailors		1					1					2
challenging									2			2
important	1									1		2
teach						1	1					2
marketable					1							1
help JOs						1						1
adventure					1							1
Navy family		1										1
real job to do		1										1

Overseas travel and adventure are mentioned frequently as motivators also, as is the money earned as a SWO professional. Indeed, most participants mention the DH bonus specifically as a motivator to stay in—even though many express dissatisfaction with missing the recent increase in the bonus amount due to their year group and timing—and both professional stability and security are noted as well. Somewhat surprisingly for a SWO, P1705 describes being marketable outside the military, but many participants mention camaraderie and being part of the Navy family as strong motivators too.

Leadership—in terms of being led by superiors—emerges as a factor that can motivate as well as dissatisfy. As reported above, for instance, P1701 characterizes both sides of leadership: One CO had a bad leadership style. ... a downer for a fresh, energetic USNA JO. The new CO had more personality; Department Head was also helpful as a

role model. It's like the Ghost of Christmas Future: Want to see positive leaders as vision of one's future self." P1706 adds: "I haven't thought about leaving; maybe if the culture of leadership runs astray." Complementarily, leadership—in terms of leading others—emerges as a motivator only. Four participants mention helping sailors as a motivator, with service of an important organization, teaching and leading sailors mentioned positively also.

Finally, regarding a "real job" to perform, P1702 notes this as a motivator, but other participants characterize some of their JO jobs using terms such as "not a real position" (P1711), "not a real job," "made up job," "fake job" (P1708) and like monikers. One participant (P1701) elaborates on the phenomenon:

The made-up job is an unfortunate consequence of the current manning. We're over-manned with junior officers, so there are more SWOs-in-training than there are jobs. The XO then has to flex some creative muscle to find work for them. Additionally, there's only one bridge on any ship, so the demand signal for officer training increases on every ship, without an increase in capacity.

Such participants appear to bemoan the (too) large number of JOs aboard some ships. In contrast, however, many other participants (e.g., P1702, P1705, P1709) complain about having a shortage of officers and too much work to do.

7. Dissatisfiers

Those codes comprising the seventh cluster *dissatisfiers* are presented in Table 8. This summary makes it very clear that "family" represents the greatest source of dissatisfaction. We've included some related notes and quotes in various clusters such as *sea life* above, but we concentrate them here for emphasis. To begin, some participants are apparently single with no children. As noted above, for two instances, a male participant elaborates: "I'm single with no kids. Because of the high optempo, there's no time for family. ... I would have gotten out if I had a family. ... Each person has priorities." Another participant adds: "I have no kids or dogs, but that would be hard [to accommodate with sea duty]." Another male officer states simply, "I'm OK with the current system. I'm a single guy."

Table 8. Dissatisfier Code Cluster

Code	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
family		1	1	1	2			1	4	1		11
administrivia, bureaucracy	1						1	1			2	5
not a real job								2			1	3
peacetime	1	1									1	3
warrior		1									1	2

Other participants have families and appear to regret spending time away at sea. As noted above, for instance, one parent participant muses that his young children “need their dad. ... [but] I’m at sea and won’t be home. The optempo is too high. The Navy says it cares, but it doesn’t.” Nonetheless, this officer admits, “I knew what it meant to be a SWO.” One female participant adds: “The Navy lifestyle is not conducive to family. ... Being pregnant while on sea duty hurts. ... The Navy tells you when to have a family.” Alternatively, one participant is weaving family into the SWO career by attending the NPS, saying, “we wanted to have a child [here in Monterey].”

The other code conveying considerable dissatisfaction centers on bureaucracy. P1701, for instance, offers several problems stemming from “a peacetime Navy: administrivia; seeming like being ready; focus on inspection instead of being truly ready; like when a teenager cleans his room only when mom and dad come to inspect; overreadiness to accept all ideas, regardless of merit ... making the DoD more businesslike detracts from military organization.” P1711 echoes a similar dissatisfying sentiment: “Peacetime: administrative, secretarial jobs; need to shoot every weapon every week; but can’t necessarily get ammo, time and space to shoot; Navy is losing its warrior mentality; freezing up when shot at; drudgery: prepare for next inspection; pass; get ready; etc; so much administration: not war fighting.”

Moreover, both P1705 and P1707 use the word “bureaucracy” to denote a specific dislike with the Navy. P1708 agrees, adding: “I’m fairly satisfied, but bureaucracy is frustrating ... asinine tasks.” This officer elaborates with a short sea story: “Our ship was anchored, and the CO was being yelled at by some random guy on a power trip regarding an in-port report. We had no template. The report was not required. He rejected our first draft, because there was a section on how to do vehicle inspections. We were at sea!”

8. SWO Community

Those codes comprising the penultimate cluster *SWO Community* are presented in Table 9. These codes pertain to participants' comments regarding the SWO profession, about which several officers offer a number of observations, thoughts and perceptions. P1704, for instance, notes: "The SWO Community is extremely challenging and rewarding. You must gain the trust of your command. You can't find this kind of experience outside SWO Community. It can wear you down, however." This officer adds that the recently enacted career track changes make the SWO Community "more attractive." P1706 offers some similar comments, characterizing "a community of SWOs," emphasizing that "we're all together," and appreciating the "camaraderie." This officer also notes the SWO "culture and brotherhood bonds" as attractive aspects of the professional community.

Table 9. SWO Community Code Cluster

Code		P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
SWO Community					2		1		1	1	2		7
SWO not first choice											1	1	2
failures, laterals									1		2		3

Speaking less positively, P1708 describes "fallen angels," which represent "failures from other communities," and "people wanting to lateral into other communities," saying, "they're not committed." When asked to elaborate, a short story follows about an O1 fallen angel: "The CO couldn't trust him. He was not recommended for retention, but it took 18 months to 'fire' him. He was collecting a paycheck for doing nothing. It takes a long time and much documentation to get rid of someone. I wonder whether COs fear that nonretention will reflect poorly on them." When noting dislikes and dissatisfiers, this officer continues, "too many 'toxic ensigns' are permitted to continue." P1710 has similar observations: "There's not a lot of SWO pride. ... It's almost like a dumping ground for officers. ... There's a stigma. ... We should be more like aviation. We should be getting better."

Through further follow up, P1708 adds:

There are many officers which are useless on a ship but they take multiple years to get separated from the ship and then the Navy. Often times, these useless officers, when they

finally do leave the ship, get to spend the rest of their time on shore duty (i.e. 6 months to one year) while they ever so slowly get processed out. This creates a lot of frustration with the other officers that are working hard and doing their sea time when they see lazy people get rewarded essentially. The SWO Community also gets all of the rejects from other communities (failed pilots, failed submariners, etc...) who have a chip on their shoulder and consequently don't bother to work hard because they are just waiting to get out. Similarly, we have a lot of officers from other communities (INTEL, SIGNAL WARFARE) that only come on a ship for one division tour so they can get "sea experience" and similarly don't really care how they perform because they are only on a ship temporarily. This makes for a pretty sad wardroom."

Given the relatively recent, fatal accidents involving ships at sea, P1709 provides some timely insight: "SWO Senior Officers are vulnerable as they progress. They get fired if anything goes wrong. LCS COs were fired for engineering problems. There's low job security." As noted and quoted above, this officer continues with insight regarding SWO culture: "The days just blur together. It's exhausting and leads to bad decision making. There's a lot that can go wrong. It's not that a person is an idiot; just hasn't slept in a day. ... Too much work is a cultural issue. Sleep is almost discouraged. It's a pride thing. You get brownie points for working all day."

This participant also adds insight into JO life at sea as a Division Officer: "There's too much to do in a day. ... You have to do everything yourself. We're not taught to delegate. ... There's not a standard division in the Navy anymore. ... The Chief's Mess is hit or miss. Some Chiefs are lazy. They're not held accountable. You have limited authority as DivO. ... One DivO who fired a Chief was reprimanded by the CO. ... Chiefs are untouchable (by regulation): The DivO must carry the entire weight of the Division."

9. Talent

Those codes comprising the final cluster *talent* are presented in Table 10. These represent codes pertaining to participants' comments regarding SWO talent. Most of the codes listed beneath "talent" in the table represent attributes or characteristics of SWO talent. Notice that every participant has something to say about talent directly. P1701, for instance, characterizes SWO talent in terms of: "desire; assume responsibility; humility; want to learn; ask questions. ... Politics becomes important at some managerial level: Navigate politics, but don't take it too seriously and become cynical." Here we note some motivational aspects of talent (e.g., desire, want to learn, ask questions), and we learn that

some attributes of talent (e.g., politics) appear to shift as one increases rank in the organization.

Table 10. Talent Code Cluster

Code	P1701	P1702	P1703	P1704	P1705	P1706	P1707	P1708	P1709	P1710	P1711	Total
talent	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	15
education		1	3	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	12
NPS	1	1	1		2	1	1	1	1	1		10
do the job					1	1	1	1	2	3	1	10
hard work					3	1			2			6
adaptable		1		1				1	2			5
driving ships			1	1		1	1		1			5
management skills			1	2		1						4
learning	1		1				1					3
care about the job					1			1				2
personality									2			2
responsibility	1			1								2
sacrifice					1		1					2
watchstanding							1	1				2
cooperate						1						1
desire	1											1
general skills		1										1
innovation				1								1
politics	1											1
read instructions			1									1
technical skills					1							1
unusual jobs		1										1

P1704 expands, saying that it's important to "break out more talented and passionate people: Easier to retain them." Regarding talent, this participant includes the four elements "dynamic, adaptable, innovative, and good time management." P1705 expands further and tells a story about a talented officer that left the Navy: "[Talented] people have a spark, a fire about them; unique; take on a problem and produce a solution; 10 degrees right or left of center; pool solutions with others; they care; people care about the job and other people; work hard." This participant continues with a story about a talented junior officer: "A gal [name] was a second tour SWO: She came from a really good school, with a degree in Engineering. She had 'early command' in the recommendation block on her fitrep. But then she moved from a DDG to a carrier. She got tired of SWO life ... the ridiculous hours we work ... and submitted a lateral transfer package for HR. She knew someone in PERS. ... However, a SWO Captain on the selection board says, 'You can't have her.' She had talent. She left the Navy, embittered."

P1702 discusses talent in terms of flexibility and adaptability: "general skills; get put into any job and then adapt; adaptability is important; tackle out of the box activities; selected to do unusual jobs." P1703 expands the view by emphasizing the importance of

learning; “It’s important to read instructions, policies, and manuals; be good at learning; fast learners do well. ... One LDO was never willing to accept that he was wrong. ... Trust but verify. ... Important to visualize ships and tactics; people standing watch must do mental math quickly; the key is to find shortcuts.”

In addition to “performance,” P1706 also mentions the importance of teamwork in terms of talent attributes: “Teach others; LaBron James must play with others; management; teaching subordinates and peers; it matters to me and ships. ... Work on performance and skill sets; strengthen others.” P1711 agrees, offering succinctly: “Working with people and getting the job done.” P1710 focuses on performance too: “People accomplish what they need to aboard ship; make a decision; get stuff done; not screaming; not yelling; decision making under stress.”

P1707 agrees with respect to performance, saying that talent centers on one’s “ability to lead and perform the job.” This participant then notes that SWO talent differs across “two kinds of jobs. 1) Watchstanding: you need quick reactions and reflexes, but need to also work within confines, to take timely and accurate actions; can’t just stand there like a deer in the headlights. 2) Job billet: ask questions; learn what you need to know to do your job.” As noted above, P1708 characterizes SWO talent in terms of two areas also. “1) Watchstanding: driving and fighting the ship; experience and intuition; some people suck; one guy could drive only during daytime, because the CO didn’t trust him; I drove at night: Ironic ‘reward’ for higher competency; sometimes the people get punished for being good. 2) DivO: keep up with paperwork; day to day work does not involve inspirational leadership.”

For P1709, talent takes on these characteristics: “Individual experiences; performance; I did my job; I’m a good ship driver; ship driving performance meant more than DivO.” This participant also mentions rewards (e.g., fitreps) vs. intrinsic abilities: “Some people are unwilling to do their jobs; it’s not hard to figure out; not rocket science; there’s an answer for everything we do; you can find answers; but not everyone seeks them out. ... Personality is important too; some officers are not good with people: they don’t do so well. ... Talent involves figuring out a new job.” Here we see elements that share commonality with many of those noted and quoted above (e.g., performance,

doing one's job, ship driving, figuring out a new job), but we also gain insight into how personality and interacting well with people is important.

D. SUMMARY DISCUSSION

In this section we summarize, synthesize and integrate our findings from above. We begin by building upon the qualitative data analysis pertaining to talent in the SWO Community, for this informs the first part of our research question directly: What constitutes talent in the SWO Community? We build then upon analysis pertaining to motivators and dissatisfiers, for this informs the second part of our research question: Why do some talented people choose to leave the Navy while others choose to stay in?

We address in turn the third part of our research question: How can we retain talent in the Navy? The short answer is to a) identify and reward talented people; and b) emphasize motivators and mitigate dissatisfiers. This first part of this answer is more challenging than the second, for it remains difficult to identify talented SWOs *systematically*, especially during their first sea tours as JOs. After reviewing a draft of this report, our Strategic Contact summarizes:

My Chief concern is that ... you seem to gloss over the true difficulty of recognizing talent, both at a unit level and at a Navywide level. As much as the young folks don't want to admit it, for their first 2-4 years, they all kind of "look alike." To be sure, there are a few true superstars whose innate potential is immediately recognizable, and there are a few duds who never should have been commissioned in the first place. But the great mass of JOs – and I would put myself in this category – take time to learn and develop. Some officers bloom a little more quickly, but some later bloomers show remarkable performance once "the light switch turns on."

We revisit this in our set of recommendations to address each significant retention risk identified through this analysis, and we incorporate some brief discussion of insights with respect to the ongoing performance evaluation transformation process.

1. Talent

What constitutes talent in the SWO Community? We find a combination of personal attributes and evidence of performance, especially aboard ships at sea. Toward the former, for several instances, recall comments from above such as, "desire; assume responsibility; humility; want to learn; ask questions" (P1701); "dynamic; adaptable; innovative" (P1704); and "people have a spark, a fire about them; unique ... they care;

people care about the job and other people” (P1705). From this we see that a talented SWO appears to be highly motivated, humble, caring and adaptable.

Confirmingly, we see some of these same attributes noted as important by senior Navy leaders. In terms of high motivation, for instance, the CNO writes this regarding attributes of Navy leaders (Richardson, 2017, p. 2):

In the US Navy, at this point in our history, we need leaders with this drive. It’s an important question to ask yourself: are you driven to pursue the theoretical limits of performance? If so, you could be a Navy leader. If you can’t find the relentless drive to inspire others and be the best in the world, then leadership in the U.S. Navy is not for you. The security of the nation is too important.

In this same document, we find other references to motivation, humility, caring and adaptability also:

Effective Navy leaders demonstrate a deliberate commitment to grow throughout their careers. They work from a foundation of humility, embracing our core values of honor, courage, and commitment. They behave with integrity, accountability, initiative and toughness. Navy leaders commit to improving the competence and character of themselves and their teams. They inspire their teams to learn so as to achieve their best possible performance. In our Navy, leaders can take full advantage of a rich combination of formal schools, structured on-the-job training and experience, and self-guided education (p. 1). ... When they win, [great leaders] are grateful, humble, and spent from their effort (p. 2).

First and foremost, Navy leaders must have a burning drive to develop their teams to consistently and sustainably deliver maximum performance. Competence and character are so tightly intertwined that they must be strengthened together. The Navy has a robust program of schools, on-the-job training, and self-guided learning. By executing this framework, our Navy will produce leaders and teams who learn and adapt to achieve maximum possible performance, and who set and maintain high standards, to be ready for decisive operations and combat (p. 8).

Toward the latter, we note some skills such as “good time management” (P1704), “pool solutions with others” (P1705), “learning” (P1703), and “flexibility and adaptability” (P1702), but (job) “performance” (aboard ships at sea) appears to be the central aspect of SWO talent. For several instances, recall comments from above such as, “performance and teamwork” (P1706), “working with people and getting the job done” (P1711), “people accomplish what they need to aboard ship” (P1710), “lead and perform

the job” (P1707), and “I did my job; I’m a good ship driver” (P1709). We learn further that SWO JO job performance at sea involves both Watchstander and Division Officer roles (P1707 & P1708), which require different skills and reflect different aspects of talent. Nonetheless, “ship driving performance meant more than DivO” (P1709), and as noted by many participants, “hard work” is very important too.

Hence a talented SWO is highly motivated, humble, caring and adaptable, and he or she is able to work hard, cooperate with others, and do the job aboard ship, living and working at sea for extended periods of time.

Particularly for this sample frame of relatively junior officers (O3), such view of talent seems highly appropriate. Early in their careers, professional skills are key (Strategic Contact, 2018), and they are judged in large part based on their ability to absorb large volumes of professional information. Such ability is rated as highly important by Flag Officers as well (Naval War College, 2017), and their ability to learn reflects the kind of high velocity learning exhorted by the CNO (Richardson, 2016).

Returning to the comments made by our Strategic Contact, this emergent characterization of talent is somewhat retrospective, however, and it reflects the junior perspective of our participants. We say “retrospective,” because it seems difficult to identify talent along the lines of this characterization until a JO has worked aboard ship for some time. This makes it difficult to identify SWO talent *before* JOs start working aboard ship, hence the challenge of giving the most talented people the best assignments persists. We address this in part through our recommendations below.

As such, being observed and evaluated by ship CO/XOs—who presumably know talent when they see and work with it—appears to represent a very appropriate way to identify talent, and we would hope to see such identification reflected on FITREPs. As noted below, however, such hope may not be fulfilled to the extent necessary, and our recommendations address the evaluation process in part below as well.

Further, because all of our study participants represent talented JOs, it remains unclear which if any of them will continue to progress and demonstrate talent at more senior ranks. As our Strategic Contact admits and emphasizes above, “Some officers bloom a little more quickly, but some later bloomers show remarkable performance once ‘the light switch turns on.’”

2. Motivators and Dissatisfiers

Why do some talented people choose to leave the Navy while others choose to stay in? Since this study focuses on relatively junior officers, most of which are moving now toward serving as Department Heads, our inferences pertain principally to JOs, but they may apply to more senior SWOs also. As noted above, nearly all of our participants are motivated by the “fun” associated with the SWO life and profession. Driving and fighting a ship, for instance, is apparently highly motivational for many SWOs. Other factors such as overseas travel and adventure, stability, security and money appear to motivate also, and we see camaraderie, service and leadership as motivational too, but fun appears to dominate this discussion. SWOs appear to be highly motivated by career advancement as well, which requires high performance levels over extended periods of time.

Despite such motivators, however, many talented SWOs decide not to stay in the Navy. Much of the decision appears to center on the kinds of jobs they get assigned, their early experiences aboard ship, and life at sea. Regarding JO jobs, those participants who were able to serve in a DH or equivalent capacity report considerable satisfaction with the corresponding challenge and opportunity, as do those serving as Flag Aide or otherwise able to interact with high level officers. In contrast, those who are not assigned to “real jobs” report dissatisfaction.

As a note, such assignment to “made up jobs” stems from a relative surplus of JOs aboard ship. Under the current system (esp. given current retention rates), in order for the Navy to have a sufficient number of qualified officers to serve in Department Head billets, a comparatively large number of Ensigns must be recruited and assigned to sea tours, which means that some ships have more JOs than necessary working aboard them. This relative surplus contributes to perceived berthing disparities also: ships are not designed with enough staterooms to accommodate all of their current officers. We address these issues in our recommendations below, but briefly, if retention rates can be increased, then some of these issues will abate on their own.

In terms of JO experience, interactions with Chiefs can be either a motivator or dissatisfier, depending largely upon how well the JO feels supported by each Chief, which apparently can vary widely across divisions, departments, ships and commands.

Interactions with Detailers can be either a motivator or dissatisfier also, depending similarly upon how well the JO feels supported, and which apparently can vary widely too. Likewise with CO/XO interaction: this can motivate or dissatisfy as well, depending in part upon guidance and mentoring, but centering largely on the command climate.

Finally, life at sea has some motivational aspects, for this is where the “fun” takes place, but sea time aboard ship appears to be a relatively strong dissatisfier. As noted above, life at sea is a central part of the SWO profession, and “more sea time is better (professionally) overall” (P1703). However, several aspects of such life appear problematic, particularly for SWOs with or contemplating families, and it appears that many SWOs must choose between career and family, especially the women (due to pregnancy). Even for single officers not contemplating families (at this time), we note the high stress, long hours and perceived disparity between male and female berthing opportunities as driving much dissatisfaction.

Table 11. Significant Retention Risks

Retention Risk	Underlying Issues
Not assigned to challenging jobs	Level of interaction Feeling of value to the organization
Unfavorable interaction with Chiefs	Lack of support & training Perceived inequality
Unfavorable interaction with Detailers	Lack of support & opportunity Mistrust
Unfavorable CO/XO interaction	Lack of guidance & mentoring Inhospitable command climate
Lack of command opportunities	Early command Perceived FITREP inequality
Family planning	Rigid career timeline Pregnancy
Dissatisfaction with sea life	High stress, long hours & “fallen angels” Perceived berthing disparity

To summarize, we identify the seven significant retention risks⁴ and underlying issues listed in Table 11. Briefly, JOs seek assignments to challenging jobs, especially those that entail interaction at relatively higher levels (e.g., DH and Flag Aide roles), and

⁴ In contrast with our prior investigation into the Information Warfare Community (IWC), the allure of jobs, salaries and benefits in the civilian sector does not arise as a notable retention risk in the present study. This could stem in part from how IWC jobs translate *directly* to civilian counterparts, both of which are in great demand and grossly understaffed. It could stem also from the relative novelty and current importance of Cyberspace and corresponding jobs with respect to seamanship.

they thrive on feeling that they are providing value to the organization. This is the opposite of working “made up jobs.” They also seek Chiefs who are willing to support and train them, and they want to see consistency across the diversity of Chiefs assigned to them in different divisions, departments, ships and commands. Similar goals and wants apply to Detailers, whom JOs expect to support and provide them with opportunities in terms of job assignments, and they look for greater transparency as a step toward increasing trust.

CO/XO interaction is critically important too, as JOs seek guidance and mentoring from their senior officers, and whereas these relatively young officers can thrive in positive command climates, toxic leadership and inhospitable climates can drive even the most talented people away. Careers are very important to JOs, who are willing to make big sacrifices in terms of hard work and long hours away from friends and families while at sea. However, a perceived lack of command opportunities troubles many of our participants—with several even seeking *early* command—many of whom are troubled by perceived FITREP inequalities also.

Even so, family planning and dissatisfaction with sea life present two, dominant retention risks. Many JOs seek greater flexibility in their career timelines—which is addressed in part through the multiple career track options that have become available recently—but they don’t want to sacrifice their promotion and command opportunities to do so, and many JOs wish to start families at some points in their careers. The high stress and long hours associated with life at sea can “burn people out.”

3. Talent Retention

How can we retain talent in the Navy? The short answer is to a) identify and reward talented people; and b) emphasize motivators and mitigate dissatisfiers. Far from a glib response, we offer this sincerely and as a direct outcome of the preceding discussion. Through this study, we understand better now what constitutes talent in the SWO Community. In some sense, this should enable us to identify talented SWO officers more easily, and hence to assess the relative retention risks associated with these talented people.

However, as noted above, identifying talent remains a challenge, particularly prospectively for JOs. We have several indicators that CO/XOs recognize talent at sea,

but it remains difficult to identify talented JOs in advance of their sea tours. Moreover, we note also how the FITREP may not be recording *talent* well. Indeed, the current performance evaluation process is highly rewarding to some but distressing to others, even in our sample frame of talented officers.

Further, we also understand better the most important motivators and dissatisfiers for SWOs, which we can interrelate to significant retention risks. Indeed, several important factors (e.g., interaction with Chiefs, interaction with Detailers, interaction with CO/XOs) can be either motivational or dissatisfactory. Hence we need to understand which aspects of such factors are motivational and how to accentuate them. We need to also understand which aspects of such factors are dissatisfactory and how to mitigate them. However, as noted above also, not every officer blooms metaphorically at the same time, and the late bloomers may turn out to be our most talented mid and senior level leaders, hence we should move forward judiciously in terms of preferential treatment. Nonetheless, where we find talent and retention risk, we should act.

4. Recommendations

The question remains: What should we do? Our recommendations address each retention risk in turn. First, regarding the risk stemming from SWOs assigned to jobs that are not challenging, not every SWO is equally capable and motivated, so one approach is for the most important and challenging jobs to be assigned prudently to the most capable and motivated people.

Step one—albeit arguably problematic—is to assess talent in advance of JOs’ sea tours. We need to know whom our talented JOs are, and it could be helpful to gain additional insight into talent before their first shipboard assignments. As noted above, it is unclear how to gain such advance insight, however, for SWO talent is situated in the shipboard environment. Perhaps some kind of shipboard exercise, simulation or other assessment—producing validated indicators of SWO talent aboard ship—can be accomplished during BDOC (Basic Division Officer Course), for instance, or we might be able to identify some other performance markers stemming from SWO testing, commissioning sources or like venues. This could help to mitigate the issue of talented officers being assigned to unfulfilling jobs in the first place. We leave this for future

research, however, for identifying or developing such exercises, simulations, assessments and markers is beyond the scope of this study.

Additionally, early identification of talent aboard ship may find value. COs, XOs and DHs can identify early—say after three months at sea—talented JOs who are stuck in unfulfilling jobs, and likewise, they can identify untalented SWOs who are performing challenging jobs. Hence these ship leaders can effect some early job reassignments if they choose to. Navy leaders are empowered to do this now, and in practice, many of them probably do, but the question of consistency across various ships, commands and organizations remains. This may represent a promising venue for examining and promulgating policy, perhaps even Navy-wide.

However, such early identification and preferential treatment may have negative repercussions. In addition to resentment from shipmates who are excluded from the “early talent club,” which seems highly likely to emerge, our Strategic Contact identifies another potential issue: “We need to be very careful that ‘Talent Management’ doesn’t turn into a popularity contest where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is how I perceive the Air Force system – they pick their potential Generals very early and give them preferential treatment throughout their careers. I don’t think that is healthy for their organization, though.”

Indeed, talent in the SWO Community today appears to have a strong dimension that focuses on past and current performance, which is rewarded strongly and directly. However, talent appears also to have a complementary dimension pertaining to future potential: an officer who performs well on his or her JO tours may not necessarily perform well at higher ranks on later tours (e.g., DH, XO, CO). Moreover, different skills, dispositions and backgrounds may contribute more to performance as a JO than in more senior ranks. Thus, even JOs who may not be exhibiting high performance levels in their early sea tours should probably be given comparable exposure to challenging jobs and not culled or separated too early in their careers. This would acknowledge their future potential and promote equity, which would likely be highly prudent given our systematic focus on past and current performance instead of future potential.

Further, we could implement more consistently a policy of reassigning JOs to different jobs periodically during their sea tours. This could be accomplished informally

or via formal rotation program, and it could be accomplished via assignments to different ships or even aboard the same ship throughout an entire JO tour. In either case, in addition to giving CO/XO/DHs the opportunity to observe junior officers across a variety of roles, demands and requirements, it may benefit also by exposing JOs to multiple shipboard jobs—thereby limiting the length of time, if any, that talented people remain stuck in unfulfilling jobs.

This “DivO shuffle” (P1701) is apparently common on some ships but unpracticed on others. Perhaps guidance can be circulated among Commodores that rotation of talented JOs could be deemed as “best practice” for their first sea tours. This would require some additional planning by the CO/XO, who would need to help mitigate and correct any adverse mission impacts stemming from the increased internal turnover caused by such job rotation, but it may help to mitigate the retention risk stemming from unfulfilling job assignments.

As hinted above, another approach would be to keep officers on the same ships throughout their entire JO tours. Although they would serve only on a single ship, which they would come to understand very well, they could rotate systematically through different, increasingly challenging jobs as they gain experience and increase in rank. Newly reporting Ensigns, for instance, could be allowed—even encouraged—to have no formal responsibilities aside from earning their qualifications during the first part of their initial tours, or perhaps they could be given some collateral duties that would otherwise distract others with “real jobs.” This could potentially help alleviate the need to assign so many JOs to “made up jobs,” and it would likely accelerate qualification and increase both readiness and safety aboard ship. An approach along these lines would require considerable advance thinking and planning, which is beyond the scope of our study to accomplish, but it may offer potential.

Second, regarding the risk stemming from unfavorable interaction with Chiefs, perhaps we could set and enforce expectations of mutual cooperation and respect between JOs and Chiefs. Effective JO-Chief interaction is important to successful operations in every division aboard ship. However, not all Chiefs appear to be equally supportive of the Division Officers (DivOs) for whom they work. Some inherent personality mismatches are likely to be inevitable, and some JOs and Chiefs may be comparably more or less

motivated to learn from and teach one another, respectively. Nonetheless, JOs could be taught and motivated to humble themselves and seek to learn from Chiefs, who in turn could be taught and motivated to make themselves available and strive to support DivOs. To the extent that such teaching and motivation fall short, and talented JOs continue to feel unsupported by their Chiefs, this appears to reflect a command shortcoming, which could be addressed at a different level (e.g., the Commodores).

Further, as above, if COs and XOs are evaluated in part on the basis of how well they accomplish and lead mutually supportive relations between DivOs and Chiefs, then their incentives will likely align well with our objective of identifying and retaining talent. This appears to represent a matter of culture and policy. Perhaps “surviving” one’s raw encounter with unhelpful Chiefs represents a part of JO initiation—which COs, XOs, DHs and others likely endured during their JO tours, and which they may be likely to condone as a perpetuation of hazing—but to the extent that it’s unproductive and contributes to losing talent in the organization, such cultural practice may have outlived its utility. As a matter of policy, ship commanders must have the authority to ensure that Chiefs support their DivOs, and we recommend that they be encouraged to use it.

Third, regarding the risk stemming from unfavorable interaction with Detailers, the two prominent issues noted above require different approaches. The first, lack of support and opportunity, appears to center on some combination of inadequate resources and insufficient incentive to support SWOs to the level expected. Although budgetary constraints may obviate opportunities to increase Detailer staffing, it may be possible to increase the motivation for Detailers to support and communicate with SWOs.

For instance, perhaps we could set and enforce expectations of responsive interaction between JOs and Detailers. Many JOs express dissatisfaction with Detailer support and mistrust of the detailing process. A key manifestation of inadequate support appears to stem from unresponsive communication. If Detailers were instructed to interact more responsively, then at least the SWOs may not feel as though they are being ignored. This could be as simple as business rules, stating, for instance, that every SWO email will be responded to within two business days. A similar rule could state that an email will be sent to a SWO within two business days of receiving a telephone call, with

such email suggesting at least three possible days and times within the same week to schedule a telephone conversation.

Failure on the part of Detailers to adhere to such business rules would be grounds for the offended SWO to escalate his or her communication to the offending Detailer's superior officer, who in turn would be bound by the same business rules. This all assumes, of course, that the SWOs in question have begun their Detailer interactions at the appropriate timepoints and are not experiencing difficulties due to their own procrastination and inadequate planning or action. This assumes also, clearly, that adequate resources can be made available to support the likely increase in Detailer manning that would be required.

The second, mistrust, appears to center on an absence of process transparency and possible goal misalignment. Were SWOs able to understand the detailing process better, and were they able to attain greater visibility into the larger view of jobs needing to be filled, then they may feel more trusting toward the detailing process and people. Although a SWO can have faith that the Detailer is doing his or her best to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the Navy, some increased transparency may help to reduce his or her level of anxiety (P1701). This could potentially complicate the Detailers' jobs, however, and it would likely increase the level of communication required of the already beleaguered detailing staff, but if such change could decrease SWOs' dissatisfaction with the process, then it may contribute toward their retention.

Fourth, regarding the risk stemming from unfavorable CO/XO interaction, perhaps we could set and enforce expectations of increased mentoring and coaching by COs and XOs. Many JOs perceive that their leaders only give orders and provide evaluations of recent performance, reflecting negligible motivation for sharing highly valued guidance and experience. This represents a challenging issue, however. COs and XOs are military commanders, with serious missions to accomplish in an inherently hazardous work environment. They require considerable latitude to do so in ways that make sense and that fit their leadership styles and experience bases. Nonetheless, a lack of guidance and mentoring, combined with toxic leadership and inhospitable command climate, is a strong dissatisfier for talented SWOs, and even one toxic CO/XO could potentially drive dozens of talented subordinates out of the Navy. Of course, COs and

XOs are busy people, and burdening them with additional tasks and expectations could become counterproductive and undermine their primary objective: effective command at sea.

An alternate and possibly complementary recommendation centers on metaphoric “crosspollination and mentorship” for young JOs (P1704). This could be as simple as inviting the CO from a different ship in the DESRON to host a leadership question and answer session for an hour, or inviting one or more Department Heads from other ships to offer training or simply expand the range of social interaction with wardrooms of different ships. The idea is that young JOs could gain exposure to a wider variety of leaders—and leadership styles—from different ships, and hence benefit from the indirect, cross-command insight, mentoring and coaching that could emerge.

Another recommendation centers on identifying talented JOs and providing them with extended access. CO/XOs, for instance, could be encouraged (e.g., by their bosses) to treat the most talented JOs to greater guidance and mentoring. As noted above, however, such preferential treatment could risk upsetting other officers who do not benefit accordingly, a problem that could be exacerbated through inaccurate identification of talent. Indeed, some of our study participants feel as though CO favoritism represents an issue already. We leave to future research the task of examining this issue and the associated recommendations more closely.

Fifth, regarding the risk stemming from lack of early command opportunities, this represents a challenging issue also, for there are only so many command billets available, and they are probably exceeded greatly by the number of officers seeking them. There are likely more opportunities for early command ashore, but they would take SWOs away from their essential time at sea.

One participant suggests, short of buying a bunch of tiny ships, seeking to instill a “culture of command” early in the wardroom:

One of my COs on my first ship had what he called the ‘100% responsibility rule,’ meaning that he expected everyone to take total responsibility for everything that was going on around them. It had a way of inspiring initiative in everyone. Leading petty officers felt energized to lead their Sailors. Junior officers felt like they could take charge of their divisions, instead of just being administrators. It was a semantic shift, but it had a huge impact on command climate.

Alternatively the other aspect of dissatisfaction with command opportunities centers on perceived FITREP inequality, for poor evaluations are likely to limit a SWO's promotion and (eventually) command opportunities. As noted above, the current system appears to be working well for many of the talented participants in our study, and a substantive change to this system (esp. that stopped favoring these participants) may drive such officers away from the Navy. Nonetheless, to the extent that officer evaluations are not based on merit, there appears to be a problem, and to the extent that the current evaluation process is failing to identify, promote and retain our most talented people, such process is likely to be ready for reexamination.

Indeed, at the time of this writing, formal efforts to transform the performance evaluation process have been underway for over two years (PET Committee, 2017; NPC PERS3, 2016). In this present study, we are informed by the Navy Leader Development Framework (Richardson, 2017), which outlines a set of Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs). In a section below, we consider, independently, how our study participants' responses compare with the NDLAs. Such attributes are intended to contribute to the growth of Navy leaders by describing the character qualities, behaviors and skills expected at different stages of their careers. By recognizing and incorporating this temporal dimension into the evaluation process, we can begin to focus on JOs' future potential in addition to their past and current performance. This could also serve to lessen the perceived inequity stemming from evaluation bias favoring tenure over merit (e.g., people having spent more time in a command receiving higher evaluations than their newer shipmates, regardless of performance), and it could help to identify and retain talent better.

As noted by a research colleague involved with the effort (McAnallen, 2017), "the PET (performance evaluation transformation) process should build a FITREP that is both actually and really more transparent and fair AND earns the reputation (perception) that it is so. And this could/may result in bringing a new (different) group of officers into view/out of the middle of the pack, and yes, they may thrive more. Performance evaluation could also morph a bit in terms of timing. Instead of all officers being evaluated together—regardless of the length of time working in the evaluating command,

which is implicated in terms of emphasizing tenure in the command over performance—each officer could receive periodic evaluation(s) at the same time(s) every year, and such evaluation(s) could morph further to emphasize career mentoring and coaching—in addition to performance evaluation—to a greater extent.” The PET process continues to emerge and remains somewhat inchoate at the time of this study, but it offers considerable potential to address a significant source of dissatisfaction among talented officers.

Sixth, regarding the risk stemming from the rigid career timelines and family planning difficulties, the recently expanded number of career tracks appears likely to help mitigate some dissatisfying effects, and the SWO Community should be congratulated for devising and implementing it. Such expansion offers much greater latitude, flexibility and timing to officers, who can take greater control over their career paths. Nonetheless, life at sea—and away from family—is hard, yet it is central to the SWO profession and will likely persist as a source of talent loss.

Perhaps we can think of ways to lessen the loss of time with friends and families while at sea. In our fathers’ and grandfathers’ Navy, people may have been content with reading books, writing letters, and exchanging sea stories with shipmates. In this age of ever increasing network bandwidth and computer connectivity, however, many JOs seek current, online and synchronous social interaction. Toward this end, even the smaller ships could be equipped with higher capacity networking capability, for instance, which would enable people aboard ship to have richer and more frequent communications with friends and families back home.

Rich video conference, chat and social network capabilities are relatively common and inexpensive today, and life aboard ship could become less onerous and burdensome if people could stay up to date and interact with friends and loved ones using such capabilities. Streaming current music, games, movies and television shows could enhance people’s experience at sea also. Of course, this would require a budgetary commitment to equip ships as such, and people aboard ship would need to have sufficient time away from job responsibilities to enjoy activities along these lines, but enriching people’s off-duty time could serve us well in terms of retaining talent.

Perhaps we can think also of ways to increase the number and quality of activities that are available aboard ship. The author has spent some time living and working aboard warships, both in port and underway. The author has also spent some time living and vacationing aboard cruise ships, both in port and underway. Aside from occurring aboard ships, the two experiences have very little in common. Living and working aboard a warship had a cold, Spartan, industrial feel to it, without a wide range of activities outside of working, eating, exercising and sleeping. Living and vacationing aboard a cruise ship had a warm, luxurious, welcoming feel to it, and the wide range of activities enabled extensive diversion, enjoyment and entertainment.

Warships and cruise ships clearly have different missions and are designed accordingly, but even small efforts to make life at sea more enjoyable and accommodating aboard warships could go a long way. Consider, for instance, the availability of more diverse, healthier meal options (Dare we use the word “cuisine”?) or drinking a glass or two of wine or beer at the end of the day (Such practice is permitted in some navies.). Either could represent a welcome ritual, and a commitment to adequate downtime and sleep aboard ship could pay dividends—in terms of talent retention and safety alike—too.

Pregnancy is raised as a retention risk too. Perhaps we can work to support pregnant officers better. The risk of losing talented people to pregnancy is specific to women, who may become unable to finish their sea tours, and who may fear becoming uncompetitive relative to their peers. Some women are able to plan children around the pockets of shore duty that are sprinkled into their career timelines, but such pockets may or may not coincide with the women’s family plans or their metaphoric biological clocks, and some talented female officers may fear jeopardizing their careers or simply leave the Navy out of frustration.

The Career Intermission Program represents one approach to addressing this retention risk, for it affords service members time to start families. However, apparently it also requires a transfer out of active duty and a pay cut, both of which can be viewed negatively by talented officers. An alternate approach (suggested by one of our participants) would propose a “yeargroup rollback system” for female officers looking to have children earlier than the pockets of shore duty noted above: “If a female JO were to

get pregnant during or before a sea tour, she could be sent to shore duty and rolled back a YG to stay competitive. It would be a case by case detailing process but might offer more flexibility to service women.”

A related approach (suggested by another of our participants) would involve an effort to expand Tricare coverage to include fertility treatments for those who delay having kids for family planning: “This would increase the perception that the Navy takes care of its own, especially those who do their due diligence to balance Navy service and career with family planning.” Aside from these suggestions, we do not have further recommendations for such a challenging issue, which we leave to future research to address more directly and deeply.

Finally, regarding the risk stemming from dissatisfaction with sea life, which we address in part above, the high stress and long hours associated with life and work aboard ship appear to have both functional and cultural antecedents, and we note the issue centering on “fallen angels” above. Functionally, much time, energy, knowledge, learning, coordination and attention are required to navigate, maintain and fight a ship at sea, and staffing limitations may center on several causes (e.g., limited berthing, budgets, qualified officers available for assignments). Such limitations and causes are difficult to address in the short term, but with some focused attention—at relatively high leadership levels—now may offer promise to help alleviate the corresponding retention risks in the future.

Future ships could be designed to require fewer people and less time to operate and maintain, for instance, or their designs could emphasize additional berthing space. This may also contribute toward mitigating the perceived berthing disparity between men and women, or policy could be modified to allow greater gender cohabitation aboard ship. Future ship designs could also provide for greater network connectivity and entertainment options, perhaps integrating the raw, industrial characteristics of naval fleets with some amenities of cruise lines. This may contribute toward mitigating the perceived burden of life at sea.

Manpower budgets could see some increases, as another instance, if this retention risk is deemed to be sufficiently important, and both recruiting and training pipelines could be expanded, as a third instance, to increase the supply of qualified officers

available for assignment. Alternatively, as mentioned above, if we can mitigate some of the dissatisfiers and increase retention rates, then we may not need to recruit so many Ensigns in order to hit our DH targets, and we may be able to train them more thoroughly before their sea tours.

This training point merits some elaboration. JOs entering the Fleet are assigned to their first ships without much formal training. As characterized by one participant (Anonymous, 2017):

As it is today, the SWO training pipeline does a poor job of preparing junior officers to assume the watch. After a brief two-month introduction at the Basic Division Officer Course (BDOC), they go to their ships for their first tours at sea. Ships, whose necessary focus is meeting operational demands, are saddled with initial training of new SWOs. Consequently, new junior officers are unable to concentrate their efforts on learning seamanship and navigation because their mental efforts are divided among administrative and collateral duties.

Elaborating further, this officer opines:

The root cause of the SWO community's problems is that operational commands carry the greatest share of the burden for initial training. Ships, whose mission is to deploy in harm's way, must take newly commissioned junior officers from a two-month indoctrination school and turn them into qualified mariners. Further, shiphandling, seamanship, and navigation occupy just two weeks of the ... BDOC. As a result, there is no single SWO training pipeline. In practice, there are 203 individual pipelines – one for each surface ship. Warships have become *de facto* school ships, resulting in wide variations in training quality and added risk during real-world operations.

One need to look no further than the 2017 accidents involving the cruiser *Antietam* and destroyers *Fitzgerald* and *McCain* for at least anecdotal support for this opinion. The study participant continues with a corresponding recommendation:

No pilot goes to their first operational squadrons having never flown a plane. Likewise, no SWO should report to his or her first ship having never taken one to sea. SWOs need more classroom instruction in the fundamentals of seamanship and navigation, reinforced by underway training on yard patrol craft (YPs). With their initial training broadened in length and scope, their time on the bridges of warships will be spent refining already existing skills, instead of learning entirely new ones. This would make junior officers more confident, more competent, and better prepared to take the watch.

Perhaps we can work to train JOs more thoroughly in advance of their sea tours. The relative lack of training represents an important dissatisfier. Other Navy communities (esp. Aviation, Nuclear) have considerable training pipelines that officers must complete

before their first operational assignments and before being entrusted with expensive Navy assets (e.g., aircraft, reactors). In its effort to get JOs out to sea quickly, the SWO Community may be sacrificing an opportunity to increase SWO competency levels aboard ship and contribute toward talent retention.

We could consider (re)instituting a lengthy formal training program prior to the first sea tour, for instance, or a substantial extension of BDOC may be more efficient, as another instance. We could even consider affording JOs a measure of independent self-study time to begin preparing for shipboard qualifications before the beginning of their sea tours. In any case, the JOs are sending a demand signal for increased training in advance of their first sea tours, and addressing such signal may provide manifold benefits in terms of retention, safety and efficacy.

We may also have some opportunities to help address both the “fallen angels” issue associated with unmotivated officers at sea and the challenges of sleep at sea. In terms of the former, P1708, for instance, suggests that it takes far too much time and energy to fire such officers and separate them from the Navy. Through further follow up, this participant speculates that “CO's are reluctant to fire officers because it makes their record look worse, i.e., they can't manage their own ship and just chose to get rid of them. ... Some officers, if they are not performing, need to be cut.” When pressed for recommendations, this officer suggests, “Commodores not consider [COs firing officers as a negative action] when rating the Captains of the ships in their squadrons.” Continuing, “it would have to be a gradual culture change which would be difficult to implement.”

Regarding the latter, shipboard culture is likely very resistant to change, but even somewhat subtle shifts may help to mitigate the associated retention risks. One participant notes how important sleep is to both health and performance: “The SWO community has had a stigma about sleeping, with phrases like ‘You look well rested’ becoming an insult underway.” This participant comments further on fitness and nutrition also: “Nutrition is severely in need of review on board ship. ... basically reheat and serve these days with a lot more brown food than green food. If we keep saying sailors are our most valuable asset, we should probably treat them that way.” We leave to future research the task of investigating sleep, nutrition, health and performance aboard ship,

but anyone who has driven an automobile while tired will likely attest, sleep and safety appear to be connected—probably particularly so on a billion dollar warship.

Of course, much work would be required to implement recommendations along these lines, and it is unclear what impact they would have upon the detailing process, morale, perceived fairness, recruiting, chain of command, retention and other areas. Moreover, some of these recommendations are clearly controversial, and others would increase pressure on already strained budgets. Nonetheless, they offer potential to help to keep talented SWOs from leaving the Navy. We leave the answers to Navy leaders and policy makers, in addition to topics for future research.

5. Performance Evaluation Transformation

As noted above, formal efforts to transform the performance evaluation process have been underway for over two years. In this section we consider, independently, how our study participants' responses compare with the Navy Leader Development Framework, which outlines a set of Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs). Such attributes are intended to contribute to the growth of Navy leaders by describing the character qualities, behaviors and skills expected at different stages of their careers. As noted above, we find that many NDLAs are mentioned—independently—as important character qualities, behaviors and skills by our study participants, and we find that such NDLAs apply at their intended target in terms of JO career progression. Here we elaborate on several areas of correspondence and congruence between the NDLAs and our interview responses.

As a short overview of the NDLAs: They are organized according to three cadres (i.e., Enlisted, Warrant, Officer); and they progress from the lowest to highest ranks in each (e.g., E1 to E9), articulating different, cumulative, outcome expectations of service members as they grow, mature and progress organizationally. This captures an important dynamic: people change; jobs change; roles change; hence expectations should change also over time in an organization. For instance from the Officer Cadre, we find four career stages (and respective ranks): 1) Trusted Leader (O1-O2), 2) Motivational Leader (O3-O4), 3) Inspirational Leader (O5-O6), and 4) Visionary Leader (Flag). As summarized in Table 12, foundational elements are binned in four categories: 1) Core Values, 2) Moral Character, 3) Judgment, and 4) Leadership.

Table 12 NDLA Outcomes for the Officer Cadre (Adapted from Richardson, 2017)

Outcomes Officer					
		O-1 to O-2 Trusted Leader	O-3 to O-4 Motivational Leader	O-5 to O-6 Inspirational Leader	Flag Visionary Leader
Foundational Elements	Core Values	Understands and lives relationship of Oath to Navy Core Values	Instills Navy Core Values in others	Infuses Navy Core Values in command culture	Guardian of Navy Core Values
	Moral Character	Personal values consistent with Navy Core Values	Fosters ethical behavior in others	Moral arbiter for the command	Exemplar for the Navy
	Judgment	Practices sound judgment; enforces rules, regulations, and procedures	Anticipates requirements and acts independently	Exercises discernment and acts both boldly and prudently	Embraces forward-thinking, strategic perspective
	Leadership	Valued team leader Fosters loyalty up and down chain of command	Adaptive leader and team builder Exercises morally responsible, credible leadership	Command leader Embraces authority, responsibility, and accountability of command	Steward of the naval profession of arms Conveys highest standards of the Service with strength, determination, and dignity

For a sense of how expected outcomes shift across career stages, follow the progression of the core values element in the first row of the table. A Trusted Leader is expected to understand and live the values and sentiments articulated in the Oath of Office and Navy Core Values. Then a Motivational Leader is *also* expected to instill such core values in others. In turn the Navy desires an Inspirational Leader to further infuse core values in command culture, and the goal is for Visionary Leaders to become guardians of Navy core values. The other foundational elements progress, cumulatively, in a similar manner as summarized in the table.

Of course this table reflects only a summary, and considerable additional detail is articulated in the source document (Richardson, 2017). For instance, the first column (i.e., Trusted Leader) can be expanded to include 20 attribute statements (p. 5) as summarized in Table 13. The other columns include comparable additional detail as well.

Table 13 Expanded Attributes for Trusted Leader

1. Understands the relationship and lives the values and sentiments articulated in the Oath of Office and Navy Core Values
2. Personal values are consistent with Navy Core Values
3. Sets a positive personal example by exhibiting truthful, ethical, and principled behavior on and off duty
4. Impeccable military bearing
5. Exhibits an enthusiastic approach to leadership with good time management and planning skills
6. Achieves technical/tactical qualification
7. Understands the value of taking care of Sailors, exhibiting a strong sense of duty to subordinates
8. Invests considerable time in their Sailors' well-being, earning their trust, respect, and confidence
9. Promotes respect for every Sailor and values the diversity of all team members
10. Displays commitment to the naval profession by proactively taking responsibility for the welfare and character development of others
11. Inspires commitment in others by developing a sense of ownership in subordinates for the command's mission and its successful accomplishment
12. Fosters loyalty up and down the chain of command
13. A results-oriented and valued team leader who can make good decisions due to their skills in hazard awareness and risk assessment/management
14. Displays coolness and courage in stressful situations
15. Places the needs of the team and the Navy above their own needs
16. Behaves with integrity, accountability, initiative and toughness
17. Practices sound judgment, imagination, and analytical ability in leading a division, enforcing rules, regulations and procedures, and managing equipment, personnel, and programs
18. Sharpens written and oral communication skills and actively takes steps to strengthen the chain of command by fostering effective two-way communications
19. A good listener
20. Understands the nature and purpose of war

Because our sample frame is comprised solely of participants from the Officer Cadre, and because all such participants are well on their way to the rank of O4 at the time of this study, we focus our attention to the Officer NDLA's articulated for the Trusted Leader (O1-O2) and Motivational Leader (O3-O4). To address correspondence and congruence, we focus on the participants' interview codes analyzed above, and we compare such codes directly with the NDLA's applicable to participants in our sample frame (i.e., Trusted Leader and Motivational Leader). Wherever participants' interview codes match one or more NDLA's, we make note and look for both patterns and omissions: attributes with considerable correspondence to participants' comments can be considered to have penetrated the officer cadre at this level, whereas attributes that are omitted from such comments may require additional effort before they reach their

intended audience. For reference and comparison, we include the 11 expanded attribute statements for the second column (i.e., Motivational Leader) in Table 14.

Table 14 Expanded Attributes for Motivational Leader

21. Effectively translates commanding officer's vision, intent and policies into action that enhances mission readiness and accomplishment
22. Forward-looking, innovative, and judicious approach to administration and management of personnel, equipment, and programs
23. Displays critical reasoning skills in problem solving, decision-making, and risk management
24. Anticipates requirements and acts independently
25. Exhibits a high degree of technical/tactical competence
26. Influential communicator, team builder and major contributor to unit cohesion and esprit de corps
27. Fosters ethical behavior in others by exercising morally responsible, credible leadership that is consistent with the Navy Core Values
28. Develops the full potential of his/her people through effective delegation of authority commensurate with the development level of the Sailor
29. An effective coach, counselor and mentor
30. Models high standards of performance through personal example, self-discipline and a commitment to self-improvement
31. Understands the science and art of war at the tactical level, and building a foundation for operational level knowledge

Further, because some interview codes align with NDLA's for the Inspirational Leader too, we include the nine expanded attributes for the third column in Table 15. (No interview codes align with NDLA's for Visionary Leader.)

Table 15 Expanded Attributes for Inspirational Leader

32. A gifted communicator who inspires a shared vision within the command, by providing purpose, direction and motivation
33. Embraces the authority, responsibility, and accountability of command with enthusiasm, selfless devotion, and total commitment to mission readiness and accomplishment
34. Instills in their Sailors the warrior's spirit and will to win
35. Develops a positive command climate based on mutual trust, loyalty, and respect, resulting in unity of purpose and unparalleled esprit de corps
36. Exercises discernment and acts boldly yet prudently in making sound decisions with due consideration of attendant risks
37. Virtuous in habit, infusing Navy Core Values into the command culture
38. The moral arbiter for the command
39. Self-aware, innovative critical thinker, and skilled joint warfighter
40. Effective in leading up tactfully, confidently and with cooperative abilities

Table 16 summarizes the result of comparing NDLAAs with interview codes for the Trusted Leader. Looking at the first entry in this table (i.e., NDLA 5), five interview codes correspond best to the first part (i.e., Exhibits an enthusiastic approach to leadership): *care about the job*, *desire*, *leadership*, *service*, and *leading sailors*. The one interview code that corresponds best with the second part (i.e., with good time management and planning skills) is *management skills*. The other entries in this table can be viewed and interpreted similarly. Although some correspondences between NDLAAs and interview codes are comparatively clearer and more straightforward than others, given their contexts within the interview transcripts, they all map logically and sensibly, hence we do not include detailed discussion for each.

Table 16 Code to NDLA Comparison for Trusted Leader

NDLAAs Mentioned	Interview Codes
5. Exhibits an enthusiastic approach to leadership with good time management and planning skills	Management skills; care about the job; desire; leadership; service; leading sailors
6. Achieves technical/tactical qualification	Driving ships; learning; technical skills; sea duty
7. Understands the value of taking care of Sailors, exhibiting a strong sense of duty to subordinates	Helping sailors; leading sailors
8. Invests considerable time in their Sailors' well-being, earning their trust, respect, and confidence	Helping sailors
10. Displays commitment to the naval profession by proactively taking responsibility for the welfare and character development of others	Helping sailors; Navy family; cooperate
14. Displays coolness and courage in stressful situations	Personality
15. Places the needs of the team and the Navy above their own needs	Detailers; recruiter; hard work; sacrifice; life at sea; stress; family
16. Behaves with integrity, accountability, initiative and toughness	Responsibility
18. Sharpens written and oral communication skills and actively takes steps to strengthen the chain of command by fostering effective two-way communications	Read instructions; NPS; learning
20. Understands the nature and purpose of war	Watchstanding; WTI; warrior

Interestingly, of the 20 NDLAAs outlined for the Trusted Leader, we find interview code correspondences for exactly half of them (i.e., 10 of the 20). Referring back to Table

13 for reference, we see that NDAs 1-4, 9, 11-13, 17 and 19 do not have corresponding interview codes. As noted above, attributes that are omitted from participants' comments may require additional effort before they reach their intended audience.

Table 17 summarizes the result of comparing NDAs with interview codes for the Motivational and Inspirational Leader. Here we find correspondences with seven of the 11 Motivational attributes and two Inspirational attributes. The same caveat noted above applies here (i.e., attributes that are omitted from participants' comments may require additional effort before they reach their intended audience).

Table 17 Code to NDA Comparison for Motivational & Inspirational Leader

NDAs Mentioned	Interview Codes
21. Effectively translates commanding officer's vision, intent and policies into action that enhances mission readiness and accomplishment	Innovation
25. Exhibits a high degree of technical/tactical competence	Do the job; driving ships; watchstanding; technical skills; sea duty; fun; challenging; real job to do
26. Influential communicator, team builder and major contributor to unit cohesion and esprit de corps	Management skills; cooperate
28. Develops the full potential of his/her people through effective delegation of authority commensurate with the development level of the Sailor	Chiefs; JO experience; not enough people; leading sailors
29. An effective coach, counselor and mentor	Helping sailors; teach
30. Models high standards of performance through personal example, self-discipline and a commitment to self-improvement	Education; NPS; adaptable; learning; care about the job
31. Understands the science and art of war at the tactical level, and building a foundation for operational level knowledge	Do the job; driving ships; watchstanding; technical skills; WTI; important
35. Develops a positive command climate based on mutual trust, loyalty, and respect, resulting in unity of purpose and unparalleled esprit de corps	Command climate
39. Self-aware, innovative critical thinker, and skilled joint warfighter	Adaptable; innovation

We should remind the reader that participants in our sample frame are not expected to exhibit characteristics of the Inspirational Leader at this stage of their careers, but two such NDAs do have corresponding interview codes: 35 (i.e., Develops a positive command climate based on mutual trust, loyalty, and respect, resulting in unity of purpose and unparalleled esprit de corps) and 39 (i.e., Self-aware, innovative critical

thinker, and skilled joint warfighter). The first merits some elaboration, for it is unlikely that any of our study participants has been in a position to *develop* a positive command climate, for instance. Nonetheless, many of them note its importance and comment on the effects of both positive and negative examples.

In all, we find considerable correspondence between NDLAs and participants' interview responses, suggesting that SWOs at the O3 level accept and exhibit many desired attributes of Navy leaders at their career phase. This is encouraging, and it reflects visionary leadership of the Flag Officers developing the NDLAs. Navy Leadership should be encouraged to find such good correspondence with its desired attributes. In a sense, our results provide independent evidence that the NDLAs are considered important and being exhibited at the appropriate time in a SWO's career.

Further investigation could help to elucidate why a number of NDLAs do not correspond with interview codes, for as noted repeatedly above, attributes that are omitted from participants' comments may require additional effort before they reach their intended audience. We leave this for future research.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section we conclude the technical report with summary recapitulation of the key points discussed in the body above, which we follow with suggestions for future research along the lines of this investigation.

A. CONCLUSION

The Navy Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Community provides a vital, sophisticated capability to address increasingly dynamic and unpredictable threats around the world. Effective performance in the SWO Community requires a somewhat unique set of skills and capabilities, which center on life and work aboard ships at sea. Many SWOs find life at sea to be fun and exciting, filled with challenging jobs and camaraderie, and a balance that makes the hard work and long hours worthwhile and rewarding. Alternatively, for others the sacrifice seems unsustainable, and the SWO Community has battled mid- and junior-level officer attrition for many years.

To help combat such attrition, Community leaders have devised and implemented a number of progressive changes to enhance the SWO profession and to help retain talent. For several instances, it has recently increased its Department Head Retention Bonus, increased compensation to officers selected early for Department Head, and organized a number of alternate, parallel career tracks to expand flexibility and options regarding sea-shore rotation, education, specialization and other decisions affecting retention.

The goal is to retain, develop and promote the most talented SWOs. The construct *talent* remains somewhat ambiguous, however, and the most “talented” officers appear to be those receiving the highest rankings and strongest endorsements on their fitness reports (FITREPs). A key problem is, FITREPs are subject to increasing criticism regarding bias, subjectivity and foci on tenure over merit and current performance over future potential. Indeed, the Navy is in the process of reevaluating its performance evaluation process now. Moreover, results from our previous research suggest strongly that *talent* is a highly situated and nuanced concept, with key characteristics likely to differ with rank, role, job and other factors that vary over time. Hence it remains

uncertain whether the talent we retain currently is the best to meet our present, much less our future, needs.

This qualitative study addresses the issue directly through three research questions: 1) What constitutes talent in the SWO Community? 2) Why do some talented people choose to leave the Navy while others choose to stay in? 3) How can we retain talent in the Navy?

Eschewing the idea of using deduction and quantitative analysis through one or more top-down theoretic models of talent—approaches that presume a detailed understanding of what talent is and how to measure it—we choose instead to employ qualitative methods inductively and to build up a grounded understanding of *SWO talent*. Indeed, given the situated and nuanced nature of talent likely to exist, we look to develop and articulate an understanding by talking to talented people in the SWO Community directly. We all know the saying, “I know talent when I see it,” so we’re looking to understand what it is that talented SWOs see when it comes to talent.

Likewise, instead of speculating about why some people are leaving the SWO Community and why others are deciding to stay in the Navy, we ask talented SWOs why they’re choosing or considering one path or another, and we ask them also about friends and colleagues of theirs, building up similarly a grounded understanding of what they are looking for or missing. Far from informal wardroom conversations, broad focus groups or like approaches, however, we employ very well-established, grounded theory building methods, which provide a systematic, scientific process to develop an understanding inductively, from the data themselves.

Moreover, we focus specifically on people who have completed their junior officer (JO) tours, who have been identified as “talented” beyond the current FITREP process, and who have made the commitment (i.e., as O3s) to their Department Head (DH) tours. This represents a career decision point at which much SWO talent is lost historically, hence the perspective of talented officers at this point is highly informative.

Through independent analysis, we find considerable correspondence between participants’ interview responses and the set of Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs), suggesting that SWOs at the O3 level accept and exhibit many desired attributes of Navy leaders at their career phase. This is encouraging, and it reflects

visionary leadership of the Flag Officers developing the NDLAs. Navy Leadership should be encouraged to find such good correspondence with its desired attributes. In a sense, our results provide independent evidence that the NDLAs are considered important and being exhibited at the appropriate time in a SWO's career.

Additional results suggest that the SWO Community is working very well overall, that its recently implemented changes are serving their intended purposes, and that many talented people are being identified, recognized, promoted and retained as desired. Nonetheless, this community is no exception to having room for improvement, and through our grounded, independent study, we identify seven significant retention risks: 1) talented people not being assigned to challenging jobs; 2) unfavorable interaction with Chiefs; 3) unfavorable interaction with Detailers; 4) unfavorable CO/XO interaction; 5) lack of command opportunities; 6) difficult family planning; and 7) dissatisfaction with sea life.

Each of these retention risks offers potential for mitigation, and through our grounded understanding of the SWOs participating in the study—in addition to sage comment and guidance from the experienced SWO Captain serving as our Strategic Contact—we offer a set of eight recommendations to help address such risks and to retain talent.

1. Work to assess talent in advance of JOs' sea tours. We need to know whom our talented JOs are, and it could be helpful to gain additional insight into talent before their first shipboard assignments. Perhaps some kind of shipboard exercise, simulation or other assessment—producing validated indicators of SWO talent aboard ship—can be accomplished during BDOC (Basic Division Officer Course), for instance, or we might be able to identify some other performance markers stemming from SWO testing, commissioning sources or like venues. This could help to mitigate the issue of talented officers being assigned to unfulfilling jobs in the first place.

Additionally, we could implement more consistently a policy of reassigning JOs to different jobs periodically during their sea tours. This could be accomplished informally or via formal rotation program, and it could be accomplished via assignments to different ships or even aboard the same ship throughout an entire JO tour. In either case, in addition to giving CO/XO/DHs the opportunity to observe junior officers across a

variety of roles, demands and requirements, it may benefit also by exposing JOs to multiple shipboard jobs—thereby limiting the length of time, if any, that talented people remain stuck in unfulfilling jobs.

2. Set and enforce expectations of mutual cooperation and respect between JOs and Chiefs. Effective JO-Chief interaction is important to successful operations in every division aboard ship. However, not all Chiefs appear to be equally supportive of the Division Officers (DivOs) for whom they work. Some inherent personality mismatches are likely to be inevitable, and some JOs and Chiefs may be comparably more or less motivated to learn from and teach one another, respectively. Nonetheless, JOs could be taught and motivated to humble themselves and seek to learn from Chiefs, who in turn could be taught and motivated to make themselves available and strive to support DivOs. To the extent that such teaching and motivation fall short, and talented JOs continue to feel unsupported by their Chiefs, this appears to reflect a command shortcoming, which could be addressed at a different level (e.g., the Commodores).

3. Set and enforce expectations of responsive interaction between JOs and Detailers. Many JOs express dissatisfaction with Detailer support and mistrust of the detailing process. A key manifestation of inadequate support appears to stem from unresponsive communication. If Detailers were instructed to interact more responsively, then at least the SWOs may not feel as though they are being ignored. This could be as simple as business rules (e.g., “every SWO email will be responded to within two business days”; “an email will be sent to a SWO within two business days of receiving a telephone call”). This all assumes, of course, that the SWOs in question have begun their Detailer interactions at the appropriate timepoints and are not experiencing difficulties due to their own procrastination and inadequate planning or action. This assumes also, clearly, that adequate resources can be made available to support the likely increase in Detailer manning that would be required.

Further, SWO mistrust of the detailing process appears to center on an absence of process transparency and possible goal misalignment. Were SWOs able to understand the detailing process better, and were they able to attain greater visibility into the larger view of jobs needing to be filled, then they may feel more trusting toward the detailing process and people. Although a SWO can have faith that the Detailer is doing his or her best to

balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the Navy, some increased transparency may help to reduce his or her level of anxiety.

4. Set and enforce expectations of increased mentoring and coaching by COs and XOs. Many JOs perceive that their leaders only give orders and provide evaluations of recent performance, reflecting negligible motivation for sharing highly valued guidance and experience. This represents a challenging issue, however. COs and XOs are military commanders, with serious missions to accomplish in an inherently hazardous work environment. They require considerable latitude to do so in ways that make sense and that fit their leadership styles and experience bases. Nonetheless, a lack of guidance and mentoring, combined with toxic leadership and inhospitable command climate, is a strong dissatisfier for talented SWOs, and even one toxic CO/XO could potentially drive dozens of talented subordinates out of the Navy. Of course, COs and XOs are busy people, and burdening them with additional tasks and expectations could become counterproductive and undermine their primary objective: effective command at sea.

An alternate and possibly complementary recommendation centers on metaphoric crosspollination. This could be as simple as inviting the CO from a different ship in the DESRON to host a leadership question and answer session for an hour, or inviting one or more Department Heads from other ships to offer training or simply expand the range of social interaction with wardrooms of different ships. The idea is that young JOs could gain exposure to a wider variety of leaders—and leadership styles—from different ships, and hence benefit from the indirect, cross-command insight, mentoring and coaching that could emerge.

5. Reevaluate the performance evaluation process. Many junior officers seek to distinguish themselves through early command, in large part because they do not feel well represented by their evaluations, yet they seek to “practice” command in smaller, less stressful settings (e.g., something less demanding than as CO of a DDG) also. There are two issues here: 1) early command and 2) the performance evaluation process.

Addressing early command first, since there is only a fixed number of command billets, it’s unclear how many smaller or “practice” commands could be established. It’s unclear also whether serving as CO of such smaller or “practice” command would represent a better experience than serving as a key Department Head or XO under a more

experienced CO. We leave this question to Navy leaders and policy makers, in addition to a topic of future research.

In terms of FITREP reevaluation, at the time of this writing, formal efforts to transform the performance evaluation process have been underway for over two years. In a section above, we consider, independently, how our study participants' responses compare with the Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs). Such attributes are intended to contribute to the growth of Navy leaders by describing the character qualities, behaviors and skills expected at different stages of their careers. By recognizing and incorporating this temporal dimension into the evaluation process, we can begin to focus on JOs' future potential in addition to their past and current performance. This could also serve to lessen the perceived inequity stemming from evaluation bias favoring tenure over merit (e.g., people having spent more time in a command receiving higher evaluations than their newer shipmates, regardless of performance), and it could help to identify and retain talent better. This represents an area of ongoing research.

As noted above, we find that many NDLAs are mentioned—independently—as important character qualities, behaviors and skills by our study participants, and we find that such NDLAs apply at their intended target in terms of JO career progression. Navy Leadership should be encouraged to find such good correspondence with its desired attributes. In a sense, our results provide independent evidence that the NDLAs are considered important and being exhibited at the appropriate time in a SWO's career.

6. Continue to offer the recently expanded number of career tracks. This appears to help address some risk stemming from rigid career timelines and family planning difficulties, and the SWO Community should be congratulated for devising and implementing it. Nonetheless, life at sea—and away from family—is hard, yet it is central to the SWO profession and will likely persist as a driver of talent loss. This recommendation blends with Number 8 below but merits mention here first.

Perhaps we can think of ways to lessen the loss of time with friends and families while at sea. In our fathers' and grandfathers' Navy, people may have been content with reading books, writing letters, and exchanging sea stories with shipmates. In this age of ever increasing network bandwidth and computer connectivity, however, many JOs seek current, online and synchronous social interaction. Toward this end, even the smaller

ships could be equipped with higher capacity networking capability, for instance, which would enable people aboard ship to have richer and more frequent communications with friends and families back home.

Rich video conference, chat and social network capabilities are relatively common and inexpensive today, and life aboard ship could become less onerous and burdensome if people could stay up to date and interact with friends and loved ones using such capabilities. Streaming current music, games, movies and television shows could enhance people's experience at sea also. Of course, this would require a budgetary commitment to equip ships as such, and people aboard ship would need to have sufficient time away from job responsibilities to enjoy activities along these lines, but enriching people's off-duty time could serve us well in terms of retaining talent.

Perhaps we can also expand our vision in terms of ways to increase the number and quality of activities that are available aboard ship. One need spend only a short amount of time on a cruise ship, for instance, to appreciate the dramatic difference between it and a cruiser or destroyer. Cruise ships and warships clearly have different missions and are designed accordingly, but even small efforts to make life at sea more enjoyable and accommodating aboard warships could go a long way. Consider, for instance, the availability of more diverse, healthier meal options (Dare we use the word "cuisine"?) or drinking a glass or two of wine or beer at the end of the day (Such practice is permitted in some navies.). Either could represent a welcome ritual, and a commitment to adequate downtime and sleep aboard ship could pay dividends—in terms of talent retention and safety alike—too.

7. Work to support pregnant officers. The risk of losing talented people to pregnancy is specific to women, who may become unable to finish their sea tours, and who may fear becoming uncompetitive relative to their peers. Some women are able to plan children around the pockets of shore duty that are sprinkled into their career timelines, but such pockets may or may not coincide with the women's family plans or their metaphoric biological clocks, and some talented female officers may fear jeopardizing their careers or simply leave the Navy out of frustration.

Although the Career Intermission Program represents one approach to addressing pregnancy as a retention risk, it has limitations and consequences (e.g., transfer out of

active duty). An alternate approach (suggested by one of our participants) could involve a “year group rollback system” for female officers looking to have children earlier than the pockets of shore duty noted above. If a female JO were to get pregnant before or during a sea tour, for instance, then perhaps she could be sent to shore duty and rolled back a year group to stay competitive. It would likely require consideration of circumstance and merit for each individual case, but an approach along these lines might offer more flexibility to service women.

A related approach (suggested by another of our participants) would involve an effort to expand Tricare coverage to include fertility treatments for those who delay having kids for family planning. This represents emerging best practice to retain talent in tight labor markets (WSJ, 2018), and it could increase the perception that the Navy takes care of its own, especially those who do their due diligence to balance Navy service and career with family planning.

8. Finally, train JOs more thoroughly in advance of their sea tours. The relative lack of training represents an important dissatisfier. Many JOs perceive that the formal (ashore) training received before their sea tours is inadequate, and several participants in this study mention the 2017 accidents involving the cruiser *Antietam* and destroyers *Fitzgerald* and *McCain* for at least anecdotal support for this perception. After only a brief BDOC experience, new JOs go directly to their ships for their first operational tours at sea. Other Navy communities (esp. Aviation, Nuclear) have considerable training pipelines that officers must complete before their first operational assignments and before being entrusted with expensive Navy assets (e.g., aircraft, reactors). In its effort to get JOs out to sea quickly, the SWO Community may be sacrificing an opportunity to increase SWO competency levels aboard ship and contribute toward talent retention.

We could consider (re)instituting a lengthy formal training program prior to the first sea tour, for instance, or a substantial extension of BDOC may be more efficient, as another instance. We could even consider affording JOs a measure of independent self-study time to begin preparing for shipboard qualifications before the beginning of their sea tours. In any case, the JOs are sending a demand signal for increased training in advance of their first sea tours, and addressing such signal may provide manifold benefits in terms of retention, safety and efficacy.

Of course, much work would be required to implement the recommendations outlined above, and it is unclear what impact they would have upon the detailing process, morale, perceived fairness, recruiting, chain of command, retention and other areas. Moreover, some of these recommendations are clearly controversial, and others would increase pressure on already strained budgets. Nonetheless, they offer potential to help to keep talented SWOs from leaving the Navy. We leave the answers to Navy leaders and policy makers, in addition to topics for future research.

B. FUTURE RESEARCH

Indeed, through this study we have already identified several promising future research topics. More specifically, each of the recommendations proposed above can benefit from research to consider alternate approaches and to outline key decisions and implementation steps. For one, recall from above how we consider ways to assess talent in advance of JOs' sea tours, and we note how some kind of shipboard exercise, simulation or other assessment—producing validated indicators of SWO talent aboard ship—can be accomplished during BDOC, or how we might be able to identify some other performance markers stemming from SWO testing, commissioning sources or like venues. A study to address the corresponding research questions could be enlightening.

For another, recall from above also how we consider ways to implement more consistently a policy for reassigning JOs to different jobs periodically during their sea tours (e.g., informally, formal rotation program, assignments to different ships, aboard the same ship throughout an entire JO tour). Likewise, examining how to rotate JOs systematically through different, increasingly challenging jobs as they gain experience and increase in rank (e.g., allowing newly reporting Ensigns to have no formal responsibilities aside from earning their qualifications during the first part of their initial tours, giving them some collateral duties that would otherwise distract others with “real jobs”).

For a third, addressing how to improve JO-Chief interaction represents a question that could be addressed through further research, as could examining how to improve JO-Detailer interaction. Likewise, investigating ways to set and enforce expectations of increased mentoring and coaching by COs and XO's could be highly illuminating, as

could understand better how to identify and address toxic leaders in the Fleet—especially in advance of them becoming COs and XOs. Even alternate approaches such as metaphoric “crosspollination and mentorship” for young JOs, in addition to the controversial idea of providing them with extended access to CO/XOs, could be informed by follow on study.

As a fifth, recall the question from above regarding the extent to which serving as CO of a smaller or “practice” command would represent a better experience than serving as a key Department Head or XO under a more experienced CO. Addressing this question could produce valuable insight in terms of officer development, promotion, reward and retention.

Additionally, we mention above how we are aware of formal efforts to transform the performance evaluation process (esp. via the Navy Leader Development Framework and constituent NDLAs). Through this study we are in a good position already to examine performance evaluation, and we could likely contribute very well through additional qualitative and quantitative research. Other important topics (e.g., rigid career timelines, family planning difficulties, challenges of life at sea, being away from friends and family, pregnancy, training, health and sleep) merit further investigation as well.

Finally, we also have opportunities to expand this study in three directions: 1) other communities, 2) other groups, and 3) longitudinally. Toward the first, to date we have studied the Information Warfare Community and Surface Warfare Community, both with insightful and impactful results. A very promising opportunity for future work could apply these same qualitative research methods to other warfare communities (e.g., Aviation, Submarine, Special Warfare) and even to other Navy communities beyond warfare (e.g., Supply, Legal, Medical). Further, this study focuses on the Officer Community, but the enlisted ranks offer great promise for examination too. The search for talent knows no bounds, so every community stands to benefit from the kind of insights that can be elucidated through research along these lines.

Toward the second, we focus this study on a specific group of JOs (e.g., O3, completed their JO tours, selected for and agreed to DH tours, attending the NPS). The study of other, complementary and contrasting groups could provide additional insight. For instance, all of the participants in this study elected to complete graduate education at

the NPS for their shore assignment. There are other officers—ostensibly with equal or even superior talent—who elected different shore assignments (e.g., supporting Fleet shore commands) that may illuminate the study with both similar and different characteristics and considerations. For another instance, all of the participants in this study have been identified as “talented.” There are other officers—potentially with different talents—who were not identified as such that may help to inform the study through comparison and contrast. For a third instance, all of the participants in this study have elected to stay in the Navy. There are other officers—ostensibly with equal or even superior talent—who elected to leave the Navy that may likewise help to inform the study through additional comparison and contrast. For a final instance, all of the participants in this study have attained the same rank (O3). Talent seems highly likely to vary across rank among other factors. It may be further illuminating to study how the nature of talent shifts with rank, particularly in comparison with the NDLAs, which shift with rank also. Likewise with year group: even among JOs, we may find some variation in what constitutes talent across JOs from different year groups.

Toward the third, we study talent at one point in time. It could be highly informative to examine how talent, motivators, dissatisfiers and like factors change over time for these same participants. This could help to elucidate which aspects are relatively stable longitudinally versus those that are more ephemeral. Perhaps Navy Leadership can safely ignore ephemeral factors that will be mitigated on their own, while paying particular attention to their stable counterparts. This same longitudinal direction of future research can also be applied to all of those above (e.g., other communities, enlisted ranks, other groups). There is so much additional knowledge required. Let’s keep going.

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APPENDIX A – RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

This is the script used to recruit volunteers to participate in the study.

Hello, [Senior SWO] referred me to you and other 11XX officers here at NPS regarding a qualitative study that I'm leading to gain insight into how to treat and retain talented officers in the Surface Warfare Community. Through consultation with OPNAV N1, we have identified this community as particularly important and dynamic at present, and our conversations with surface warfare experts suggest that it could benefit from improvements in how it assigns, promotes and retains talented officers. When you have a convenient opportunity, kindly let me know if we could set up a time to chat—either in person or by telephone, Skype or like means—for a half hour or so. Your input will be anonymous, and nothing in our report will identify you in any way. Indeed, I will shred the participant list when the study is complete, so you are welcomed and encouraged to be candid. We're looking for information and insight from within the community, and the timing looks good in terms of interest at N1.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

-- Prof. Mark Nissen

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APPENDIX B – BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is used to collect background information prior to interviews.

Background Data

Please fill in as many fields as you are able. Your information will remain confidential.

1. Date of Commissioning (YYMM): _____
2. Commissioning source (check field that applies):
USNA ___ ROTC ___ OCS_OTS ___ Direct ___ Other Commissioning Source _____
3. Prior Enlisted (check field that applies): Yes ___ No ___
4. Undergraduate College attended: _____
5. Year of graduation from college (YYMM): _____
6. College Major: _____
7. Undergraduate GPA: _____
8. Do you hold a graduate degree? (check field that applies):
Yes ___ No ___ . If Yes, in what major (specialty) ? _____
9. Rate at commissioning: _____
10. Designator at entry (check the field that applies): SWO ___ Submarine ___ Special Warfare/EOD ___ Aviator ___ RL ___ Staff ___ ; If RL, what designator code? _____
11. Married, at commissioning date (check field that applies): Yes ___ No ___
12. Dependent children, at commissioning date (check field that applies): Yes ___ No ___
13. Married, at current date (check field that applies): Yes ___ No ___
14. Dependent children, at current date (check field that applies): Yes ___ No ___
15. Current rate: _____
16. Current designator: _____

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APPENDIX C – COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

All participants are asked these 10 questions to provide a common basis.

Research Interview Questions

Introduction

“Thank you again for participating in the study on retaining talent in the Surface Warfare Community. You were identified among a pool of NPS surface warfare students, and I selected you along with several others for your potential to inform our study well. As a note, your comments will be kept anonymous, no personal details about you will appear in the study report or briefings, and only you and I will know that you participated in the study. Once you sign the consent form, I’ll ask you a few relatively open ended questions, which I hope that you’ll answer candidly. The interview should take 30 to 45 minutes, but we can go longer if you wish. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?”

General Questions (presuming all subjects are Navy service members still)

1. What led you to join the Navy?
2. Can you tell me about how your career has progressed to this point?
3. What was your last assignment, and where do you hope to be assigned next?
4. What do you like most about your work in the Navy? What do you like least?
5. When is your next decision point regarding whether to stay in the Navy or not?
6. What factors are pulling you to stay in the Navy, and what are pulling you away?
7. At this point, do you anticipate staying in or leaving the Navy? Why?
8. What if anything would have to be different for you to change your mind?
9. Is there anything else that you can tell me to help understand your motivation?
10. Is there anything else that the Navy should know or do?

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