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**SURFACE WARFARE OFFICER SCHOOL 360-DEGREE
FEEDBACK PROGRAM: EVALUATION OF DIVISION
OFFICER ASSESSMENTS**

June 2021

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PROGRAM: EVALUATION OF DIVISION OFFICER ASSESSMENTS**

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ABSTRACT

The Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) 360-degree feedback program can be improved. Since the late 2000s, this program has assessed U.S. Navy Surface Warfare Officers (SWO) at two career milestones using commercial-off-the-shelf survey instruments. No program evaluation has been done since the initial pilot in 2005. A literature review is conducted to identify best practices that improve 360-degree feedback effectiveness in programs run by civilian organizations. Then, the SWOS 360 program is described, with focus on division officer assessments. History of the program's development and information on related 360 programs is included for context. Finally, a comparative analysis of the SWOS 360 program versus best practices is presented. The research identified several best practices and found the SWOS 360 program does not adhere to most of them. Key divergences include the program's lack of clear purpose, flawed design, lack of follow-up events, and no internalized evaluation. This project recommends developing a formal instruction to govern the program, tailoring survey instruments to better suit SWO community needs, centralizing all 360 programs that assess SWOs, incorporating follow-up events, and conducting routine program evaluations. These adjustments will improve SWOS 360 program effectiveness and create competitive advantages in SWO professional development.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADOC	Advanced Division Officer Course
AQD	Additional Qualification Designation
ASAT	Advanced Shiphandling and Tactics Training
BDOC	Basic Division Officer Course
BST	billet specialty training
CA	Command Assessment
CDS	Commander, Destroyer Squadron
CG	cruiser, guided missile
CIP	Career Intermission Program
CMD	command
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
CNSF	Commander, Naval Surface Forces
CPR	Commander, Amphibious Squadron
CO	Commanding Officer
COTS	commercial-off-the-shelf
CR	Comprehensive Review (of Surface Force Incidents)
DDG	destroyer, guided missile
DH	department head
DH PL	department head training pipeline
DIVO	division officer
EC	Early Command
ELO	Executive Learning Office
EVAL	Evaluation
FITREP	Fitness Report
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GS	Government Service employee
JOOD	Junior Officer of the Deck
LHD	landing helicopter dock
LPD	landing platform dock
MC	Major Command

MSAF	Multi-Source Assessment Feedback
NFLEX	Navy Flag Level Executive Seminar
NFOTS	Navy Flag Officer Training Symposium
NOBC	Naval Officer Billet Classification
NPC	Navy Personnel Command
OOD	Officer of the Deck
OPNAV	Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
PCC	Post-Commander Command
PCO	Prospective Commanding Officer
PDH	Post-Department Head
PDI	Personnel Development International
PII	personally identifiable information
PMC	Post-Major Command
PQS	personnel qualification standard
PXO	Prospective Executive Officer
SCC	Surface Commander's Course
SES	Senior Executive Service
SORM	Standard Organization and Regulations Manual
SWO	Surface Warfare Officer
SWORD	Surface Warfare Officer Requirements Document
SWOS	Surface Warfare Officer School
SWOSDOC	Surface Warfare Officer School Division Officer Course
TYCOM	Type Commander
WTI	Warfare Tactics Instructor
XO	Executive Officer
XO-SM	Executive Officer - Special Mission

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to examine the Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) 360-degree feedback program. The use of 360-degree feedback by the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) community dates to the mid-2000s; the pilot feedback program having previously been evaluated by Williams (2005). The program began operation in its current form in 2008 and no dedicated research on it has been conducted since that time. This research will review the literature on 360-degree feedback to identify best practices from programs implemented by civilian organizations. These best practices will then be compared against the SWOS 360 program with discrepancies noted. The research will conclude with recommendations for program improvement and suggestions for future research.

B. BACKGROUND

As outlined by Heathfield (2021), 360-degree feedback is a process that presents individuals feedback gathered from supervisors, peers, and subordinates with many implementations also including a self-assessment. The author explains that underlying idea is to leverage these different perspectives to identify an individual's strengths and weaknesses and foster personal and professional development that is rooted in the goals of their organization.

As reported by Maylett (2009), the use of 360-degree feedback increased "dramatically" during the 1990s and 2000s to the point that "estimates suggest that as many 90 percent of Fortune 500 firms use some type" (p. 53). According to Williams (2005), "the widespread popularity of 360-degree feedback...in corporate America led the Navy to institute a similar program for its most senior leaders, the flag officers" (p. 32).

Encouraged by this program's success, the Navy investigated implementing 360-degree feedback programs in leadership development of senior officers attending the Navy Flag Level Executive Seminar (NFLEX) and programs to develop Prospective Commanding Officers (PCO) and Prospective Executive Officers (PXO) (Williams, 2005;

F. Wood, personal communication, February 18, 2021). Around the same time these programs were stood up, a pilot program described by Williams was implemented by the SWO community as a three-year trial of 360-degree feedback to determine its effectiveness and the feasibility of Navy-wide implementation.

While there currently remains no institutionalized, Navy-wide 360-degree feedback program for leadership development, the SWO community continues to utilize 360-degree feedback in its professional development of officers.

C. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objectives are:

- To determine the current best practices for 360-degree feedback programs that improve program effectiveness.
- To describe the SWOS 360-degree feedback program and how it conducts assessments of SWO division officers.
- To evaluate how well the SWOS 360-degree feedback program encompasses the current best practices identified.

D. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the SWOS 360-degree feedback program and how the assessment process is currently used for SWO division officers (paygrades O1-O3). This is a continuation of previous research which evaluated the Surface Warfare Community's 360-degree feedback pilot program (Williams, 2005). That project performed a literature review of 360-degree best practices recognized up to that time and applied them to the conceptual SWOS pilot program to produce its recommendations. Using the previous work as a baseline, this research will conduct a new literature review to ensure current best practices are documented and used for evaluation of the SWOS program. Additional research, in the form of interviews and a review of SWO community instructions, will also be conducted as necessary to analyze the existing 360-degree feedback program.

E. EXPECTED BENEFITS

In the time since the initial roll out of the SWOS 360 program, best practices observed among civilian organizations that use 360-degree feedback have evolved but the SWOS program has not been subject to any substantive change. By identifying current best practices, this research will enable the SWOS 360 program to improve its effectiveness. A more effective 360-degree feedback program at SWOS will create competitive advantages for the SWO community, providing it with a better tool to develop and invest in its officers from junior paygrades through to senior leadership roles.

F. REPORT ORGANIZATION

This research is reported in five chapters: Chapter II presents a brief history of 360-degree feedback usage and presents research on best practices employed to improve effectiveness of 360-degree feedback programs in the civilian sector with examples of military programs provided for comparison. Chapter III presents a history of the adoption and usage of 360-degree feedback by the Navy, with focus on the Surface Warfare community, and describes the program currently in use at SWOS with focus on how Division Officer Assessments are conducted. Chapter IV presents a comparative analysis of the SWOS 360-degree feedback program against best practices identified and discusses additional program evaluation techniques for consideration. Chapter V presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for adjustment to the SWOS 360-degree feedback program.

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II. 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK: BACKGROUND AND BEST PRACTICES

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes 360-degree feedback and its origins and conducts a literature review of its application in civilian organizations. Best practices that enhance the effectiveness of such programs are identified as well as some contradictory findings. Notable 360-degree feedback programs implemented by the U.S. military are also presented for later comparison with the SWOS 360 program.

B. DESCRIPTION OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Church and Bracken (1997) describe 360-degree feedback as an assessment method where information is gathered about a person's behaviors from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and even customers for a variety of purposes ranging from leadership development to organizational-change initiatives. Another component common to 360-degree feedback is a self-assessment conducted by the recipient that can be compared with the feedback provided by others (Edwards & Ewen, 1996). This comparison allows the feedback recipient to gain a more realistic view of their own performance and will likely improve their performance and/or make greater effort to align their behavior with the needs of their work group or organization (Ghorpade, 2000). As described by this author, 360-degree feedback was designed to provide unbiased feedback to the recipient while maintaining the anonymity of those providing feedback. This rater anonymity is a difference from traditional methods of performance appraisal and research has demonstrated that it produces more honest and accurate feedback (Ghorpade, 2000). The author suggests an outline for the 360-degree feedback process as seen in Figure 1.

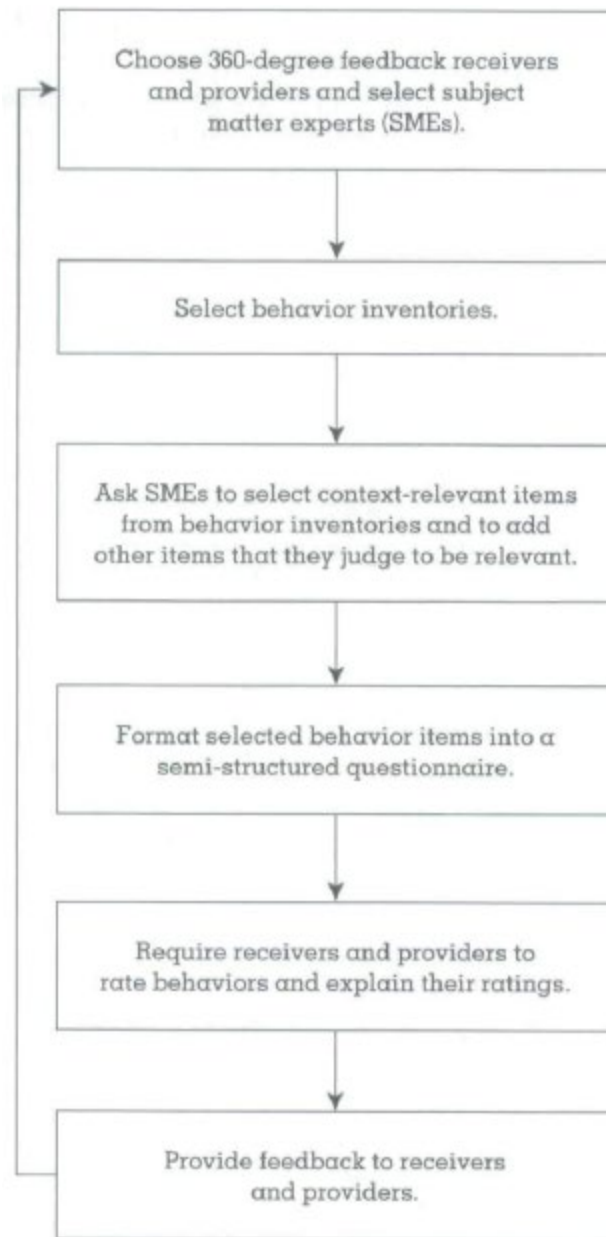


Figure 1. Procedure for Developing and Administering a Context-Relevant 360-Degree Feedback Method. Source: Ghorpade (2000).

Bracken and Rose (2011) reported that 360-degree feedback has great potential to create both behavior change and organization change. These authors suggest four characteristics are required for a 360-degree feedback program to be successful in enabling change: relevant content, credible data, accountability, and census participation. In layman’s terms, the design of an organization’s feedback program is as important as its

purpose. There has been debate over the years on what is the best usage for 360-degree feedback programs (Bracken & Church, 2013). The authors establish a continuum of uses for 360-degree feedback, seen in Figure 2, ranging between being used for personal development and being used to inform decision making such as selecting employees for promotion or downsizing.



Figure 2. Uses of 360-Degree Feedback. Source: Bracken and Church (2013).

While there is much research suggesting that 360-degree feedback should be used only for development, Bracken and Church (2013) make an argument that it can be used successfully for performance management and appraisal with the right design and clear communication of purpose. The authors do not make a case for 360-degree feedback being used for decision making i.e., as a tool for choosing who gets promoted within an organization. It is not enough for an organization just to have a 360-degree feedback program, design and integration into organizational culture are key. Zenger (2016) reminds us of two simple facts that could easily be obstacles to program success; first that not all 360-degree feedback instruments are created equal and second, that for many the word “feedback” carries a negative connotation.

C. HISTORY OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Performance appraisal has long been a routine part of the employer-employee relationship; however, this traditionally came in the form of a one-way superior to

subordinate conversation. The origins of 360-degree feedback can be traced back to the late 1960s however widespread application is a more recent occurrence (Brutus & Derayeh, 2002). Once considered cutting edge or alternatively as a passing fad, 360-degree feedback became a standard tool, a “core HR process,” for many organizations (Bracken et al., 2016).

360-degree feedback continued to gain popularity throughout the 1990s with companies such as AT&T, Amoco, Exxon, General Electric, IBM, Caterpillar, Levi Strauss, and Shell Oil all reporting they used some form of 360-degree feedback to assess their people (Ghorpade, 2000). That author reported how the attraction to the concept by captains of industry was easy to understand. In the preceding decades, the corporate world had seen massive programs of restructuring in response to the demands of an emerging global marketplace. While not specifically mentioned by Ghorpade, failures of companies like Kodak shocked the corporate system. The desire emerged to shift from traditional bureaucratic hierarchy towards a “flat” organization where active participation from rank and file could enable a more rapid response in an increasingly dynamic marketplace. Successful organizations are constantly looking for ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations; in the business world this equates to reducing costs and maximizing return on investment. Being able to do both with human resources is paramount to any organization. Maylett (2009) reported that 360-degree feedback has been implemented by many to achieve this dual purpose by investing in employees and evaluating their performance.

Ironically, this investment in people can be costly to an organization and providing 360-degree feedback has become an industry unto itself. As Ghorpade (2000) reported, companies that adopted the concept were spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually to support it. As a result, the monetary cost of 360-degree feedback programs, especially if improperly implemented, often become the victim of cost cutting for companies in economic bad times (Maylett, 2009). Alternatively, Maylett reported that companies striving to maximize the value of 360-degree feedback might be enticed to use it in ways it is not meant for, such as making promotion decisions. Regardless of these pitfalls, use of 360-degree feedback has increased dramatically over the past three decades with Maylett

(2009) estimating that 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies were using some form of it and Zenger (2016) estimating the number remains at more than 85 percent.

D. SUPPORTIVE REVIEWS OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

According to Luthans and Peterson (2003), there are three major advantages to using 360-degree feedback: (1) it provides recipients with information on how they are perceived by other members of their organization; (2) it brings to light the recipients' weaknesses compared to "norms" in their field, giving them the ability to make changes with the feedback provided; and (3) it provides a broad range of information from all levels of the recipients' organization. Edwards and Ewen (1996) suggested that potential outcomes of 360-degree feedback can include improved employee satisfaction, improved team performance, and behavior changes aligned with organizational goals. These authors caution, however, that there are significant challenges establishing 360-degree feedback as a sustainable system.

Brett and Atwater (2001) conducted a study of how discrepancies between self-assessments and feedback provided by other raters related to the reaction that recipients had to 360-degree feedback. According to these authors, executive coaching or 360-degree follow-up sessions may have an impact on the results of receiving negative feedback. Executive coaching became a popular management development tool on its own during the 1990s, has become seen as an ideal support system for 360-degree feedback (Thach, 2002). While not stated by Thach, specific coaching practices may have changed over time but the basic premise to support the change and/or improvement in the behavior and skills of our leaders has remained the same.

Examining changes made in management and leadership are difficult considering the data to be measured is a person's behavior. A study conducted by Seifert et al. (2003) attempted to examine the effects of receiving the results of 360-degree feedback as just a report on its own versus receiving the feedback report and having a feedback workshop. The study used one control group that received feedback reports only and two groups that also experienced workshops for comparison with the same number of managers in each group. The authors found there can be a potential benefit associated with 360-degree

feedback, but it may depend not the content but rather on the delivery of the results. They determined that without coaching, the feedback report must be presented in such a way that the recipient is open to receive both positive and negative responses from raters. Recipients interpreting results on their own may lose the potential for personal growth by choosing to overlook negative feedback (Seifert et al., 2003).

E. CONTRADICTIONARY REVIEWS OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

As with any system or process, there are also counterarguments to the use of 360-degree feedback. As discussed previously, 360-degree feedback was designed to be a development tool but as noted by Maylett (2009), its success may lead many organizations to see it as an ideal appraisal tool as well. Cost-constrained organizations may try to get the best bang for their buck and attempt to use the programs for promotion purposes (Maylett, 2009). This could prove to be a counterproductive implementation of 360-degree feedback and create a lack of trust in the process among the members of the organization (Mashihi, 2016).

Pfau and Kay (2002) cited Wyatt's 2001 Human Capital Index, stating "the linkages between specific HR practices and shareholder value at 750 publicly traded companies found that 360-degree feedback programs were associated with a 10.6 percent decrease in shareholder value" (p. 55). These authors continued that this "doesn't necessarily mean the 360-degree feedback should be abandoned. But it does mean organizations should take a look at their performance management programs to see if there are accomplishing what they are supposed to" (p. 56). While not stated by these authors, feedback used incorrectly, or implemented without clear communication on why it is useful might easily lead to the argument to get rid of it to save money.

Qureishi (2020) discussed how the success of an organization's 360-degree feedback program may also be linked to the emotional intelligence of its members. The author suggests those with high emotional intelligence are more likely to accept negative feedback and use it to change behavior and/or improve performance and those with low emotional intelligence are more likely to reject the feedback if it is negative, in turn rejecting the 360-degree program, and negatively affecting their organization. Qureishi

goes on to report that while some employers claim they see direct positive results in related behavior change and performance outcomes, these cannot truly be attributed to 360-degree feedback.

F. CIVILIAN BEST PRACTICES

1. Identifying the Purpose

Ainsworth (2016) writes that the first step to establishing an effective 360-degree feedback program is to identify the purpose for the program, to include clearly identifying at which point along the continuum between personal development and performance measurement the program falls. Once established, the purpose should be communicated to all members of the organization before they participate in the program (Maylett, 2009; Hosain 2016). Communicating how the 360-feedback will be collected, interpreted, and applied will make participants more comfortable with and prepared for the process (Baroda et al., 2012). The program and its purpose should also be aligned with the organization's strategic imperatives (Rogers et al., 2002). These authors suggest that regardless of their role—recipient, rater, coach, etc.—participants should know what their organization's expectations are for 360-degree feedback before they take part. All aspects of the feedback program, including the content of the feedback instrument and specific competencies being measured, should reinforce the alignment of individuals with organizational imperatives and enable those individuals to be successful (Bracken & Church, 2013).

2. Program Design

The design of every aspect of the feedback program should support the established purpose. Hosain (2016) recommended that “organizations should consider developing a customized, purpose-specific survey rather than utilizing a standard, general one” (p. 23). Bracken and Rose (2011) attributed credible data (or at least the perception of it) in 360-degree feedback to survey instruments that are professionally constructed with clear attributes and that do not confuse or trick raters with random elements or word games. Each survey question should be written to support the established purpose and be readily apparent to the participant in terms of what they are trying to measure; hard to quantify attributes should be handled cautiously to avoid generating meaningless information

(Johnson, 2004). The rating scale used by the survey to provide answers must also be considered; it should be relevant and clear so to reduce rating error (Bracken & Rose, 2011). A 7-point scale may provide greater differentiation than a 5-point scale, alternatively it may result in inflated average scores, but regardless of the scale used, guidance should be included showing raters how to use it (Maylett, 2009; Hosain, 2016).

Brevity should also be a consideration in the design of the survey instrument as the time required for raters to provide feedback could be a stumbling block for some (Chappelow, 2003). The ideal survey should be designed so it can be completed in 15 minutes or less (Hosain, 2016). A survey instrument with fewer questions, and with questions written as concisely as possible, tends to produce more accurate feedback.

Another consideration for program design that Rogers et al. (2002) present is how many survey instruments to implement. These authors reported how some programs may use one instrument for the entire organization while others may use multiple instruments to assess different levels of leadership within the organization. Regarding using the same survey for several levels within an organization, the authors discuss how competencies assessed at a lower level of responsibility may be less meaningful at a higher level or vice versa. The authors suggest using multiple targeted survey instruments may help individuals better align their development goals with their organization's strategic goals.

3. Organizational Integration

Once the 360-feedback program is selected, its purpose identified and design established, the next step is integration. 360-degree feedback should be integrated with an organization's existing training and development programs (Baroda et al., 2012). These authors discussed how providing feedback, without training or assistance to implement it and affect change, will reduce motivation on the part of participants. The 360-degree feedback program should also be integrated into the organization's culture (Hosain, 2016). He suggested institutionalizing 360-degree feedback as a regular and systematic process will build confidence in the program and remove confusion, resistance, and fear about it. Additionally, exerting a high degree of administrative control over the 360-feedback program from end-to-end can alleviate integration issues and improve the program

operation (Rogers et al., 2002). 360-degree feedback programs that are not correctly designed or implemented can be overly complex and costly in terms of both time and money (Maylett, 2009).

At a surface level, integration depends on raising awareness of the 360-degree feedback program among members of the organization. Newbold (2013) reported that poor awareness of a program and its importance is responsible for low completion rates of survey instruments, resulting in degraded quantity and quality of feedback. At a more foundational level, it is vital that a culture of trust and candor exists within an organization for 360-degree feedback to be successful (Johnson, 2004). Participants must believe that the purpose communicated to them is honest; that the feedback process is being undertaken with their development and improvement in mind (Ainsworth, 2012). For this reason, it is important to assess the degree of organizational cynicism that may exist among potential participants before implementing a 360-degree feedback program (Hosain, 2016). Organizational cynicism can be defined as a commonly held belief by members of an organization that potentially fixable problems cannot be fixed due to factors beyond their control (Baroda et al., 2012). While not stated by these authors, any belief among participants that 360-degree feedback is being used for a purpose other than stated, or that results will not be used as intended, will degrade program integration and the usefulness of the feedback.

One way of assessing the level of organizational cynicism (and attaining buy-in) is through a pilot program (Hosain, 2016). This author recommended implementing a pilot program on a small group within an organization allows members to experience the process and provide feedback on the design. Hosain suggested that this allows any hidden or unintended disadvantages of the survey instrument or other aspects of the program design to be identified and refined. While not discussed by Hosain, a pilot program also provides an opportunity to communicate the purpose of the program, what is expected from it, and how it would be done organization wide. This tests how effective the program is at communicating its desired purpose, therefore reducing the chance of resistance or confusion when the program is launched organization wide.

4. Best Practices for Raters

Bracken and Rose's (2011) discussion of what creates credible data (or at least the perception of it) in 360-degree feedback also includes factors tied to the raters used for the feedback process. Among these are the number of raters selected (and the number that contribute), selecting raters who have had sufficient opportunity to observe the ratee, the ratee's ability to choose their own raters, and having rater training for all potential raters (Bracken & Rose, 2011).

Maylett (2009) suggested it is often more realistic to let feedback recipients choose their own raters for developmental purposes, however this strategy is less effective for performance measurement. Hosain (2016) adds that "most of the weaknesses of 360 degree feedback technique can be solved by selecting raters on behalf of the employee rather than giving freedom to select their own" and that it is "important to ensure that the employees being rated are in regular interaction with the raters" to ensure accurate feedback (p. 23). Eichinger and Lombardo (2004) suggested a rater "knowing the person long enough to get past first impressions, but not so long as to begin to generalize favorably, seems to produce the most accurate ratings" (p. 24). Their research indicated that knowing a person for one to three years accomplished this.

Additionally, Baroda et al. (2012) stated that recipients of 360-degree feedback may have difficulty accepting ratings if they perceive that the rater doesn't have the familiarity or competence to assess them. These authors suggested that if this perception exists, recipients may treat feedback from such a rater as biased or inaccurate. This in turn can lead to what the authors call organizational cynicism.

Lack of rater accountability can be one barrier to effective 360-degree feedback (Bracken et al., 2016). Raters may be less likely to provide honest feedback especially if it is being used for performance measurement and it may affect the recipient's career (Maylett, 2009). Another reason for dishonest feedback, not suggested by this author, is that raters may be motivated by their own needs. For example, Baroda et al. (2012) suggested direct reports selected as raters may provide high scores for a supervisor who maintains the status quo, even though that individual or their organization could benefit

from change. Alternatively, while not mentioned by these authors, a rater could provide negative feedback for someone they harbor a grudge against.

Another aspect of rater accountability affects actual completion of feedback, Newbold (2013) attributed this to different personality types. This author reported that some raters would complete the survey instrument immediately and others, despite repeated reminders, would wait until the last minute to complete the survey in a flurry of activity. The issue may be the result of raters not seeing their input, or the time required to give it, as valuable to the recipient or their organization (Bracken et al., 2016). This behavior supports Maylett's (2009) assertion that the purpose of 360-degree feedback, its value and importance, must be communicated to everyone in the organization.

Providing training for raters before they give feedback is another measure that can improve program effectiveness (Rogers et al., 2002). These authors reported that training raters on how the survey instrument and rating scale are to be used, and clearly defining the competencies being assessed, can reduce errors, and produce more objective results. Not explicitly stated by these authors, but such training could also be used to re-state the organization's strategic goals to ensure that raters are giving feedback that is consistent with those goals.

5. Best Practices for Coaches

360-degree feedback can be more effective when followed up with development activities such as coaching (Ainsworth, 2012). This author related that some organizations bring in external coaches while others train their own members to serve in the role. This author also suggested that interactive online coaching resources can replicate, but not as effectively, a one-on-one coaching experience but as a more cost-effective option.

Research conducted by Rogers et al. (2002) indicated that 90 percent of organizations that reported receiving higher benefits from 360-degree feedback used coaching as part of their process. The authors reported these same organizations exhibited high administrative control over all aspects of the coaching process from selection of coaches based on criteria to giving coaches intensive training on the survey instrument and process. The authors continued that only 25 percent of these organizations reported using

external coaches, which may be because the expansive use of 360-degree feedback throughout the organization led to employment of external coaches becoming prohibitively expensive. The authors stated that a more frequent strategy for use of external coaches is bringing them in to train members of the organization to be internal coaches.

Another argument for the higher efficacy of internal coaches was offered by Williams (2005), namely “that internal coaches might have higher credibility with members of the organization than external coaches” (p. 35). While not mentioned by this author, the higher level of credibility may stem from internal coaches understanding the work done by their organization as well as its culture. Additionally, it could tie back to Johnson’s (2004) assertion that a culture of trust and candor within an organization is essential to an effective feedback program.

Regardless of the variety of coaching used, helping participants interpret their 360-degree feedback results is very important to the process (Ainsworth, 2012). Rogers et al. (2002) stated that “in a follow-up survey of 360 feedback participants, 70 percent reported that having a coach helped them make more effective use of their feedback results” (p. 52). Based on their research, the authors recommended the use of highly trained coaches able to not only help participants understand their feedback but also follow through on it with a plan of action.

6. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity, while not an issue for traditional top-down systems of appraisal where feedback is only coming from supervisor to subordinate, becomes an issue in 360-degree feedback when incorporating appraisals from raters who are direct reports of the ratee or from peers (Baroda et al., 2012). Anonymity has become associated as one reason for the popularity of 360-degree feedback (Wilkie, 2016). The author reasoned this is because anonymity makes it easier for raters to provide honest feedback, free from the concern that their comments will be taken as criticism.

Van Velsor (1998) defined *anonymity* as the protection of a rater’s identity and *confidentiality* as how the ratee’s feedback data is shared. This author wrote that “although ensuring that adequate safeguards are applied is critical...in most 360-degree processes

both confidentiality and anonymity have limits, and these need to be made clear to participants in the process” (p. 152). While not explicitly mentioned by Van Velsor, one example of such limits would be a coach needing to see the feedback report of the person they are coaching. Bracken et al. (2016) argued that anonymity and confidentiality being foundational to 360-degree feedback, especially if data has been collected online and coded to individual demographics and unique identifiers, is only an assumption. These authors would not commit to stating that they are required for a program to be considered 360-degree feedback.

There does seem to be consensus that some level of anonymity and confidentiality needs to exist for a successful feedback program. Eichinger and Lombardo (2003), citing Chappelow (1998), reported that if raters’ feedback isn’t anonymous or if the process doesn’t protect their anonymity; fear of retribution may affect the honesty and accuracy of feedback given. Bracken et al. (2016) suggested this risk can be more likely in the case of rater groups such as peers and direct reports. Specifically, the authors discussed how raters might provide inflated feedback so as not to anger peers or supervisors; alternatively, raters may provide no feedback to avoid the issue. Bracken et al. (2001) argued that giving raters anonymity (or at least the perception of anonymity) enhances honesty, accuracy, and completion rates; noting the perception of anonymity can be just as important as a guarantee of the genuine article. While not discussed by these authors, it is worth noting that the U.S. Government has specific requirements for the handling of personally identifiable information (PII), and they would apply to the data collection that takes place in a 360-degree assessment.

Rater anonymity must be balanced with accountability as fear of retribution *by raters* can also pose a risk in 360-degree programs that guarantee their anonymity; particularly if those are programs being used for performance appraisal towards career decision making. Wilkie (2016) reported examples of how Amazon employees could misuse anonymous feedback through the company’s Anytime Feedback Tool to negatively affect another employee’s career due to there being no accountability mechanism in place. This use of “feedback” is effectively just workplace bullying or harassment and degrades

not only trust in the process but the culture of trust in the organization that Johnson (2004) and others write is essential.

Lastly, the degree of anonymity an organization wants to have in its 360-degree program will not only have implications on how raters are selected but what information is shared with coaches being used for the process. Edwards and Ewen (1996) recommended that coaches should be allowed to use feedback data to inform their coaching. However, these authors also cautioned that supervisors should not be used as coaches due to concern that supervisors would use feedback meant for development purposes to make performance appraisal decisions.

7. Follow-Up

Bracken and Rose (2011) stated that discussing the results of 360-degree feedback with others is a powerful design factor that can override individual resistance to change. These authors defined follow-up as not limited to interaction with coaches, but also included interaction with the raters. The authors described benefits derived from such interaction to include demonstrating the value of the feedback and the participant's commitment to change, giving raters an opportunity to clarify their feedback, getting raters support in the personal development process, and making raters better observers of behavior in the future.

Another aspect of follow-up with a coach, especially if the interaction built into the 360-degree feedback process, is accountability (Bracken & Rose, 2011). Otherwise, as Chappelow (2003) related, participants may not follow-up after receiving feedback. One possible reason for this, not offered by Chappelow is negative feedback. Negative feedback, according to Baroda et al. (2012), should be followed up with encouragement and coaching which reinforces the importance of the proper training of coaches.

For Ainsworth (2016) support i.e., follow-up, is critical to the process. This author admitted that not everyone will want or need follow-up but cautioned that follow-up is hard to provide unless organized in the first place. Ainsworth discussed how 360-degree feedback can potentially be an emotional experience, and it is safest and most responsible for an organization to plan their feedback program assuming everyone might have a strong

reaction. This author suggested setting up additional coaching sessions should be standard practice as it is a good way to ensure support is received. Not mentioned by Ainsworth but it also reinforces the importance of the proper training of coaches. Nowack (2015) also stated that coaches providing encouragement and support is crucial to leveraging 360-degree feedback if participants are expected to undergo successful personal development. That author went further stating there is a need to track the progress of a participant and manage lapses in development as they occur.

8. Program Evaluation

Rogers et al. (2002) reported that “despite the time, cost, people, and resources involved, many organizations do not evaluate the effectiveness of the 360 feedback process. Any other aspect of a company’s functioning—from marketing to operations—would be under enormous scrutiny for results based on such an investment” (p. 52). They suggested that evaluation should not be limited to determining whether the organization is receiving a return on investment; it should also validate the effectiveness of the program’s purpose, design, and organizational integration. The authors’ research indicated that organizations who evaluate their programs builds the evaluation into a regular organizational health survey. They suggested this could provide feedback on how well the behaviors of the organization’s members are aligned with the organization’s goals. While not stated by Rogers et al., building the evaluation of the 360-degree feedback program into another regular mechanism for organizational feedback also demonstrates the kind of integration described earlier in this report.

G. MILITARY PROGRAMS

1. Navy Flag Officer / Senior Executive Service Program

Information on the Navy Flag Officer / Senior Executive Service (SES) Program was obtained from the thesis written on the Surface Warfare Community 360-degree pilot program by LT James M. Williams (2005) with additional information obtained through personal communication with Frank R. Wood, Ph.D., (Jan-Apr, 2021), Senior Lecturer in the Center for Executive Education and the Program Manager responsible for standing up 360-degree feedback and coaching for NFLEX and later for the SWOS 360 program.

As reported by Williams (2005), for many years, officers selected by the Navy for flag rank (i.e., rear admiral) and civilian employees chosen for SES attended the Navy Flag Officer Training Symposium (NFOTS) to prepare for their new roles. This author indicated that before arrival at NFOTS, participants received a 360-degree assessment and personality type indicator survey. The author suggested this combination provided participants with a well-rounded view of themselves to help understand how others assess their leadership. Additionally, the author wrote that each participant met one-on-one with a Certified Executive Coach to review their survey results and create a personal development plan. Not discussed by Williams but following NFOTS, participants were able to and usually did request additional follow-on coaching sessions.

The program was initially a joint effort between the Executive Learning Office (ELO) at the Naval Postgraduate School and the Center for Creative Leadership, who provided the survey instruments used. The program later began to collaborate with Personnel Decisions International (PDI) and used the Senior Executive model of their proprietary 360-degree instrument, known as “The Profilor,” for assessments during NFOTS. The Senior Executive model assessed four factors of leadership—Thought Leadership, People Leadership, Results Leadership, and Personal Leadership—with associated competencies. The decision to work with PDI and use the Profilor was made due to research suggesting the Profilor, which could be customized to an organization’s needs, was a better development tool than other instruments available. For example, in 2007–2008 a competency study was conducted to tailor the Profilor for Navy use with data compiled from twenty-five interviews with flag officers and SES personnel, seven focus groups, and a job task analysis. There was also a cost-effectiveness component to the decision as the Navy could license the customizable Profilor for less than its competitors. Table 1 presents the four assessment factors and 19 associated competencies used by the customized Profilor Senior Executive model.

Table 1. The Profilor: Customized Senior Executive Assessment Factors and Competencies for Navy Use. Adapted from Wood (2021).

Thought Leadership	Results Leadership	People Leadership	Personal Leadership
Use insightful analysis.	Align the organization.	Influence others.	Inspire trust and credibility.
Use astute judgment.	Lead change.	Motivate and inspire.	Demonstrate agility.
Think strategically.	Drive organizational success.	Develop leaders.	Learn continuously.
Run the business of the Navy.	Lead boldly.	Build coalitions.	
Foster innovation.		Build organizational relationships.	
Geopolitical fluency.		Foster open communication.	

The Flag Officer / SES program was discontinued in 2017; however, coaching support is still provided.

2. Army Multi-Source Assessment Feedback

The Army previously used a suite of web-based 360-degree feedback tools known as Multi-Source Assessment Feedback (MSAF). The MSAF was meant for developmental purposes only and offered optional coaching from a third party outside a soldier's chain of command (Lee, 2015). According to this author however, the system previously required an assessment to be started for completion of an Officer Evaluation Report and was proposed by some to be used as a performance measuring tool incorporated into career decision making milestones such as promotion boards. While not offering an in-depth evaluation of the program, Lee argued that the MSAF should be used only for development purposes; that using it directly for performance measurement at a promotion board could damage Army leadership development.

In June 2018, Secretary of Defense Esper eliminated the requirement for MSAF (McCoy, 2019). Supporting his decision, the Secretary cited “poor participation from the field, institutional resistance to future use as a potential promotion and/or retention tool, frustration with website access, and misinformed feedback from critics who associated the MSAF product with similar programs used in professional military education” (McCoy, 2019). This author related that the move was part of a broader initiative by the Secretary to reduce mandatory requirements across the Army assessed to detract from readiness in favor of creating more time for priority training that improved lethality.

3. Additional Research

The 2014 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Secretary of Defense to assess “the feasibility of including a 360-degree assessment approach...as part of performance evaluation reports” (Hardison et al., 2015, p. iii). The RAND Corporation was tasked with assessing this directive and the resulting report reached two conclusions. They determined that 360-degree feedback should not be used for evaluations, however they did recommend its use as a developmental tool (Hardison et al., 2015).

In addition to this RAND report, the Government Accountability Office (2015) released a report detailing the requirements for 360-degree feedback across all flag and general officer ranks in all military services. This report detailed that 360-degree feedback had been implemented or guidance had been developed to implement it for Navy one-star flag officers, Rear Admirals (lower half), noting the Navy delivered 360-degree feedback to “individuals selected, but not yet appointed” to this rank (p. 29). The GAO report also detailed that the Navy had not implemented additional assessments for flag officers with two-stars and above, nor developed guidance to implement such assessments, stating this was due to concerns with the cost of implementing 360-degree feedback to all flag ranks.

Finally, the GAO (2015) stated that a 360-degree feedback program could not only be important to the executive levels of an organization, but also to middle and first-level management and should be delivered earlier in the career of military officers to begin the developmental process sooner.

H. SUMMARY

In the three decades that 360-degree feedback has been implemented, trends in both research and practice have emerged that, if adopted, offer enhanced benefits to the organizations that use them. The research also provides arguments that are contradictory of 360-degree feedback's potential as a development tool. There may still be some debate over how to use 360-degree assessments; that is, whether purely for development or for performance appraisal. If an organization clearly communicates the purpose of the 360-degree program to its members, integrates the program with existing processes, trains raters how to provide proper feedback via the instrument (or instruments) selected, and selects coaches capable of helping participants interpret their results and form actionable development plans; the results of a 360-degree assessment can be highly beneficial.

Among the existing military programs, some have incorporated these best practices into their processes and others have not. It is worth noting that the programs that have lasted invest in coaching, tailor the process to the development side of the use continuum and integrate 360-degree feedback as a normal process into their respected organizations.

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III. SURFACE WARFARE OFFICER 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter first presents a brief history of Navy's adoption of 360-degree feedback including early usage by the SWO community. A description of the current SWOS 360-degree feedback program is then presented, with focus placed on Division Officer Assessments. Information on where 360-degree feedback fits into a nominal SWO career path and more information on the survey instrument used is also provided.

B. BEFORE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Prior to adopting 360-degree feedback, the only formal system of performance appraisal used by the Navy was the Fitness Report (FITREP) and Evaluation (EVAL) program. This program is still in use, with its most recent revision delineated by Naval Personnel Command instruction, BUPERSINST 1610.10E with Change 1 (2020). Fitness Reports (FITREP) are provided to officers (O-1 through O-6) and senior enlisted personnel (E-7 through E-9), and Evaluations (EVAL) are provided to junior enlisted personnel (E-1 through E-6). This program provides a service member with only top-down feedback from one person, their reporting senior, for example the Commanding Officer (CO) of a ship.

Bol (2011) wrote how managers are subjective, responding to their own incentives and preferences, when conducting performance evaluations of their employees. In the Navy context, read "managers" as the reporting senior and "employee" as the service member receiving their FITREP or EVAL.

When considering this kind of bias, the top-down method of assessment does not provide the developmental feedback needed to create a well-rounded leader. Rather it just results in superior officers shaping their subordinates in their own image rather than what the Navy needs. The Navy's desire to develop well rounded "strategic thinkers" at its executive level, its flag officers, led to interest in employing 360-degree feedback. This was only bolstered by 360-degree feedback's previously discussed popularity with corporate America.

C. NAVY ADOPTION OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Information on the Navy's adoption of 360-degree feedback was obtained through personal communication with Frank R. Wood, Ph.D., (Jan-Apr, 2021), the SWOS 360 Program Manager from 2007–2009, with additional references cited.

In 2002, then Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Vern Clark requested a study on strategic thinking and the training requirements needed to inculcate it in Navy flag officers; the RAND Corporation was selected to conduct this task. The resulting report sought to answer the question: “is there a gap in officer development that manifests itself in the flag officer ranks, and if so, what is the nature and size of it?” (Hanser et al., 2008, p. xiii). The report defined broad leadership competency requirements for the flag ranks, including areas of Naval expertise as well as skills standard among business executives.

Around the same time, CNO Clark tasked the ELO to begin implementing 360-degree feedback, which resulted in the Flag Officer / Senior Executive Service program utilizing the Profilor as a survey instrument. That program was previously discussed in Chapter II. The success of the Flag Officer program led to 360-degree feedback being incorporated into other senior officer's training, including PCO and PXO courses. It also generated interest in a Navy-wide 360-degree program. As recorded by Williams (2005), at the July 2004 Surface Warfare Commanders Conference, the SWO community was volunteered as a test group to assess the feasibility of Navy-wide implementation.

D. SURFACE WARFARE 360-DEGREE PILOT PROGRAM

The information on the Surface Warfare community's 360-degree pilot program contained in this section was obtained from the thesis written on the subject by LT James M. Williams (2005).

The pilot program ran from October 2004 to September 2007 in three phases. Phase 1 was designed to identify obstacles with the software being used as well as internet connectivity with six ships and one shore command participating; it was not meant for data collection and statistical analysis. Phase 2 was a full implementation with personnel from 16 ships and three shore commands (including SWOS) participating. Phase 3 was designed

to be like Phase 2, but informed by the results of Phase 2, and with approximately the same number of ships and shore commands participating (Williams, 2005).

The web-based survey instrument used was of Navy design and assessed five core competency areas using a five-point scale. Feedback reports were generated, and participants were able to access them via a website. Participants received no coaching, having to interpret the results on their own, however “individual development plans” were also generated which listed competencies identified as “development opportunities” and provided guidelines to address any deficiencies. Participants would then identify the competencies they felt were most in need of improvement and discuss their plan to address them with their CO during mid-term counseling (Williams, 2005).

E. SWOS 360-DEGREE PROGRAM

Following the conclusion of the pilot program in late 2007, it was decided to permanently adopt a 360-degree feedback program for the SWO community with SWOS in Newport, RI as the executive agent and central location for the management of the program. The intention was to incorporate 360-degree feedback throughout the SWO career path, from post-accession all the way up to the flag level. Instead of the survey instrument and feedback process used during the pilot program developed by the Center for Naval Leadership however, it was decided to adopt a commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) instrument to reduce research and development costs. Based on its successful use by the Flag Officer program, the COTS instrument chosen was the Profilor, however the SWOS program would utilize a different model meant for more junior leaders. Support from the ELO was requested to implement the Profilor at SWOS.

1. The SWO Career Path and Where 360 Fits In

Information on the SWOS 360-degree feedback program was obtained by personal communication with Frank R. Wood, Ph.D., (Jan-Apr, 2021), SWOS 360 Program Manager from 2007–2009, and Mrs. Shelley Stroup (Feb-Apr, 2021), the current SWOS 360 Program Manager. Additional information was provided by CDR Casey M. Mahon (Jan-Mar, 2021), Director of Shiphandling and Navigation Training (N72) at SWOS.

The SWO career path consists of months of training preceding milestone tours of duty at sea offset with opportunities for duty ashore between the milestones. SWO career milestones, with nominal tour lengths indicated are as follows:

- Division Officer (two tours; 30 months and 18 months respectively)
- Department Head (two 18-month tours)
- Executive Officer (one 18-month tour)
- Commander Command (one 18-month tour)
- Major Command (one two-year tour)

Figure 3 provides an illustration of the nominal SWO career path from commissioning through to a post Major Command shore duty tour in the twenty-sixth year of commissioned service, including the branching paths to Commander Command and Major Command. Figure 3 was taken from the SWO Community Brief, which can be found at the SWO community detailing page (PERS 41) on the Navy Personnel Command (NPC) website. Definitions of all acronyms used in Figure 3 can be found in the list preceding Chapter I. While the length of training prior to sea tours and the length of sea (and shore) tours themselves have contracted and expanded over the years; the SWO career path has not substantively changed since 2008 when the current 360-degree feedback program was initiated.

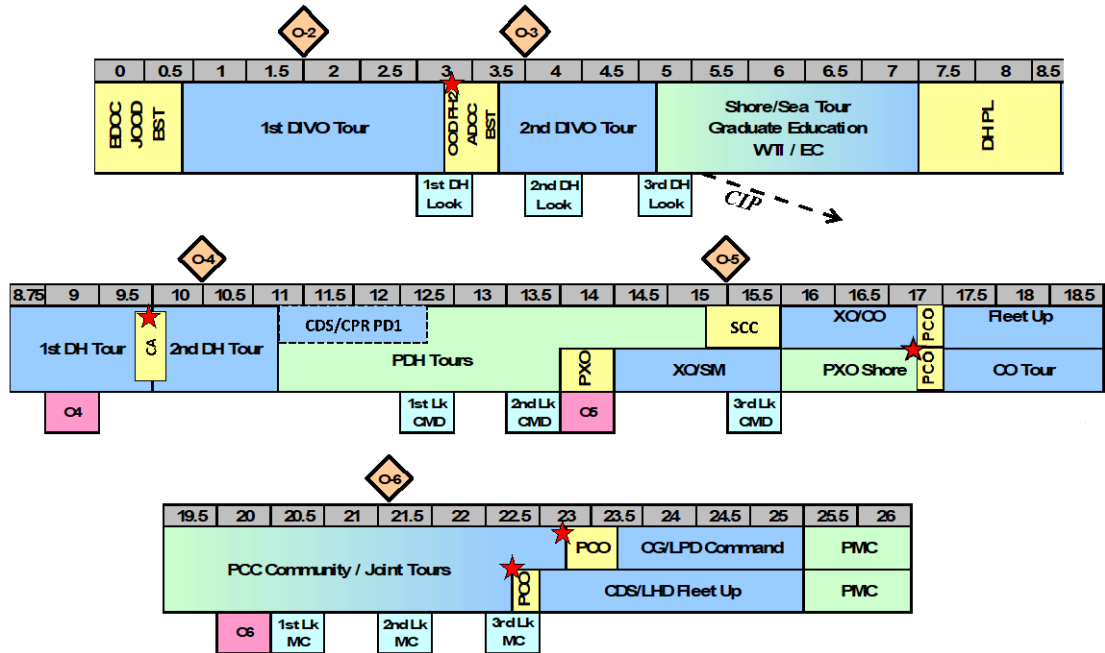


Figure 3. SWO Career Path.
Source: Navy Personnel Command (2020).

The original intention was for the SWOS 360 feedback program to provide opportunities for SWOs to experience 360-degree feedback at three career milestones. The first experience would occur during the SWOS Division Officer Course (also known as SWOSDOC), the course of instruction SWOs attended after commissioning and before reporting for their first division officer tour; the purpose of this experience would be primarily to introduce SWOs to the 360 process. Consideration was made to include another experience at the conclusion of the first division officer tour, with coaching to occur when attending SWOS for Advanced Shiphandling and Tactical Training (or ASAT) prior to the start of the second division officer tour. Next, SWOs would receive 360-degree feedback prior to the start of the second department head tour. Last, SWOs would receive 360-degree feedback at some point between the completion of their Executive Officer tour and the start of a Commander Command tour. At each level, a different instrument would be used to assess competencies appropriate for the scope of work done at that career milestone.

Since 2008, the SWO training continuum has changed with most changes focused on division officer training. SWOSDOC has been superseded by the Basic Division Officer Course (BDOC) which is taught at fleet concentration areas in Norfolk, VA and San Diego, CA vice being taught at SWOS. ASAT was replaced by the Advanced Division Officer Course (ADOC) which is still taught only at SWOS.

The SWOS program currently conducts assessments at only two career milestones. The first occurs between the two division officer tours with coaching received while attending ADOC at SWOS. The second occurs between the two department head tours as an ungraded component of the Command Assessment process. Opportunities exist for SWOs to receive additional assessments prior to Commander Command and prior to Major Command. Those assessments are not part of the SWOS program; however, they are managed by the Command Leadership School and use the Hogan Report which is not a 360-degree instrument like the Profilor.

Organizationally, the 360-degree feedback program falls under the Advanced Officer Training Directorate (N76) at SWOS which is also responsible for the management of ADOC, the core of the training pipeline between division officer tours. Prior to 2021, the N72 Directorate held responsibility.

2. Survey Instrument: The Profilor

Information on the Profilor was obtained by personal communications with Mr. Joseph Ognibene (Feb, 2021), former Director of Business Development for Leadership Products at PDI, and Mr. David Prin (Feb, 2021), Director of Business Development at Assessments International, Inc. Additional information was obtained from the websites for the Profilor (n.d.), Assessments International (n.d.), and Korn Ferry (n.d.).

The Profilor was initially fielded by PDI in the early 1990s as a tool for personnel development. In its original form, it consisted of two different assessment models for Individual Contributors and Executive Leaders within an organization using pen-and-paper based survey instruments. Notable clients during this time included McDonald's and McDonnell-Douglas; investments garnered from such clientele allowed PDI to employ over 200 PhD psychologists on its staff to further research and develop the Profilor. By the

2000s, the Profilor evolved to a family of nine different assessment models designed to provide feedback for leaders at various levels, including the Individual Contributor, First-Level Leader, Mid-Level Leader, Business Unit Leader, and as previously discussed the Senior Executive, as well as specialized roles such as Internal Consultant, Sales Manager, Key Account Manager, IT Manager. At this time, the Profilor also shifted to using web-based survey instruments for its assessment models.

The Navy licensed the Profilor through PDI until 2014, when that company was acquired by Korn Ferry, and then through Korn Ferry until 2019 when the rights to the Profilor were acquired by Assessments International, Inc. According to Assessments International, the Profilor models are the most widely used 360-degree assessments for individual and organization development today with more than 200 different organizations including military, government, non-government, and other civilian organizations currently using one or more models. It has been translated into 14 different languages and has been administered over 700,000 times.

The specific Profilor models licensed for use by SWOS are the First-Level Leader Model for Division Officer Assessments and the Mid-Level Leader Model for department heads going through the Command Assessment. Like the previously discussed Profilor for Senior Executives, both models look at four different factors of leadership—Thought Leadership, People Leadership, Results Leadership, and Personal Leadership—though the competencies associated with each factor are different in each model. As this report will focus on Division Officer Assessments, only the First-Level Leader Model will be discussed; Table 2 presents the four assessment factors and associated competencies used by this model.

Table 2. The Profilor: First-Level Leader Assessment Factors and Competencies. Source: The Profilor (n.d.).

Thought Leadership	Results Leadership	People Leadership	Personal Leadership
Analyze issues and solve problems. Understand strategies. Identify improvements.	Establish plans. Execute efficiently. Show initiative. Seek customer satisfaction.	Solicit support. Encourage commitment. Select and develop. Communicate effectively. Relate well to others.	Demonstrate credibility. Readily adapt.

The Profilor has several characteristics that make it stand out among other 360-degree feedback instruments, these include:

- Providing development suggestions for each of the questions used to measure the competencies.
- Providing normative comparisons for every competency i.e., showing the recipient's scores versus the average score for that competency out of everyone who has completed the assessment.
- Providing balanced feedback, assessing the recipient's strengths and not just their weaknesses.
- Including both domestic and international norms to assist individuals from different cultures with interpreting the feedback report.
- The Importance Summary - a comparative ranking of the seven most important competencies completed by each rater, including self.

- Customizability - organizations can tailor competencies and/or the questions that measure those competencies to create an instrument better suited to their needs.

Another tool available from the Profilor family of instruments is the Profilor Progress Check. The Progress Check is a 360-degree feedback instrument designed to follow on the initial Profilor 360-degree assessment (nominally six to eight months after) and measure an individual's effort and improvement towards their development goals. This tool was also originally developed by PDI, discontinued by Korn Ferry, and has been re-validated for use by Assessments International. The SWOS 360-degree feedback program does not utilize this tool as of 2021.

3. The Division Officer Assessment

Information on how the SWOS 360-degree feedback program conducts a Division Officer Assessment was obtained by personal communication with Mrs. Shelley Stroup (Feb-Apr, 2021) and Frank R. Wood, Ph.D., (Jan-Apr, 2021).

The Division Officer Assessment begins prior to the conclusion of the first division officer tour. At this point the junior SWO will receive an email from the 360 Program Manager at SWOS to initiate the process. The email contains instructions for completing the assessment online including login information and a web link to the SWOS Profilor survey instrument. Division officers must complete a demographics survey, as well as the self-assessment questionnaire, and select their other raters. Assuming good internet connectivity, this entire process should take about twenty minutes.

Raters must include at least one superior officer (who can be but does not have to be the division officer's CO), at least two peers (i.e., fellow division officers), and at least two direct reports (i.e., enlisted sailors the division officer is responsible for leading). Once selected, these raters will receive email notification to provide feedback for the division officer being assessed. Raters should be able to complete their questionnaires in about fifteen minutes, assuming good internet connectivity. Division officers can log back in to monitor the completion status of their selected raters; the 360 Program Manager also can

monitor the completion status for assessments. COs are responsible for ensuring that all raters complete the division officer's assessment.

Following the conclusion of the first division officer tour, junior SWOs will report to SWOS for approximately eight weeks of training comprised of the three-week long Officer of the Deck (OOD) Phase II course and five-week long ADOC. All ratings for the division officer's 360-degree assessment, including self-ratings, must be completed prior to their arrival at SWOS. This allows sufficient time for the 360 Program Manager to collect all ratings and generate the feedback report that division officers will later receive when being coached on their 360-degree assessment. If one or more ratings are not completed in a timely fashion, the 360 Program Manager reaches out to the division officer's CO. Additionally, as a part of their check-in when arriving at SWOS for training, division officers must report to the 360 Program Manager to verify all ratings have been completed. At some point during the fourth or fifth week of training at SWOS, during ADOC, division officers will sign up for a 90-minute time slot when they will be debriefed on their 360-degree assessment. The debrief is nominally conducted as a one-on-one coaching session between the division officer being assessed and a SWOS coach.

The selection and training of coaches is conducted by the 360 Program Manager. All officers assigned to SWOS as staff must meet with the 360 Program Manager as part of their check-in to the command. If the 360 Program Manager considers the new check-in to be suitable as a coach, a training session usually lasting one and a half hours is scheduled. Following this training, the new staff member then completes a "homework" assignment and attends a 360-degree coaching session as an observer. Once these steps are completed, the 360 Program Manager qualifies the new staff member as a coach.

This selection criteria results in the Division Officer Assessment coaches nominally being SWOs in paygrade O-3. These are officers who have recently completed their second division officer tour and are now stationed at SWOS awaiting the start of department head training. In other words, the coaches are barely one milestone ahead of the officers they are to be coaching. Further, Assessments International does not have a certification process for in-house coaches. It should be noted that the original intent was for *all* SWOs to receive indoctrination as a 360-degree coach during department head training and later receive

coaching certification as a part of PCO training. This would have resulted in a larger cadre of coaches in the SWO community and would have ensured the coach would be senior to the officer being coached.

At the beginning of the session, the coach presents the division officer with the feedback report produced by compiling all the ratings completed for them including their own self-rating. Note that the coach does have an opportunity to review the division officer's feedback report prior to the start of coaching. The feedback report begins with an explanation of what its purpose is and how to use it build personal development plans. The importance summary comes next, the comparison of which competencies were ranked as most important by the division officer versus the ranking assigned by all other raters. Then comes a breakdown of the competencies ranked from those the division officer scored highest in, to those they scored lowest on; all based on the average score of all raters other than themselves. Next, each competency is presented in order with the division officer's overall score on the competency, as well as scores on each question used to measure that competency, compared with the raters scores. The report also covers the behaviors related to the competencies, again comparing the division officer's scores with those of their raters. Lastly, the report presents to the division officer any comments that their raters provided in relation to specific competencies or behaviors.

The coach assists the division officer with interpreting the information being presented to them in the feedback report, including how to understand discrepancies that may exist between self-ratings and others' ratings. Note that a discrepancy is not always indicative of negative feedback; sometimes the division officer's self-ratings are more critical than the ratings of others. Once the division officer and their coach have finished going over the feedback report, there is then an opportunity to discuss career development and plan personal and professional development goals for the division officer as informed by the results of their assessment.

Upon conclusion of the debrief, the Division Officer Assessment is over. The feedback report that division officers are given is theirs to keep, however there is no formal requirement to do so. There is also no formal requirement to follow-up on the debrief, either while still at SWOS for training or during the second division officer tour that will

follow. Division officers will receive no further 360-degree feedback until approximately four to six months prior to the conclusion of their first *department head* tour when their next assessment begins. This means approximately *six and a half years* will pass between 360-degree feedback events. While the Department Head Assessment is conducted under the same SWOS 360 program and also uses the Profilor, a different model designed for slightly more senior leaders is used; so strictly speaking it is a separate assessment and not a follow-up on the Division Officer Assessment.

F. SUMMARY

As of 2021, there still is no Navy-wide 360-degree feedback program, the Surface Warfare pilot program did not prove the feasibility of an institutional, Navy-wide implementation. Indeed, the trend at the executive level of Navy leadership now seems to be moving away from the use of 360-degree feedback. However, the SWOS 360-degree feedback program has now been in operation for over a decade, with an estimated 900 division officers assessed every year since 2008. Utilizing a proven and highly successful survey instrument in the form of the Profilor and appropriately integrating it with professional training courses to deliver needed feedback at SWO career milestones seems to produce a highly effective program overall. However, while some aspects of this program may appear to be in line with research evidence and identified best practices, others are not. This report will now conduct an evaluation of this program to identify potential areas for improvement.

IV. SWOS 360 PROGRAM EVALUATION

A. INTRODUCTION

Having identified the current best practices for 360-degree feedback programs used by civilian organizations and presented a description of the current SWOS 360-degree feedback program; this chapter will now evaluate how well the SWOS 360 program encompasses those best practices by means of a comparative analysis. While program evaluation in and of itself has been identified as a best practice, this chapter will introduce additional concepts that could be applied for future evaluations.

B. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SWOS 360 PROGRAM AGAINST IDENTIFIED CIVILIAN BEST PRACTICES

1. The Purpose

According to Ainsworth (2016), the first step to establishing an effective 360-degree feedback program is to identify a purpose for the program. The SWOS 360 Program Manager has stated that the purpose of the SWOS program is to “make every leader better” (S. Stroup, personal communication, March 16, 2021). When considering even basic descriptions of what 360-degree feedback programs are, this stated purpose is generic at best, not even including the term “SWO.”

It is worth noting that there is no formal documentation of this stated purpose. The primary Navy document that discusses the SWOS 360 program is Commander, Naval Surface Forces Instruction 1412.7, the SWO Career Manual (2019). A copy of this instruction was obtained through NPC, PERS 41. Only the Department Head Assessment is mentioned in this instruction. Discussed in Chapter 5 of the SWO Career Manual, which covers Surface Force Command Requirements, the Department Head Assessment is described as an “ungraded portion of the SWOS Command Assessment (CA)” (p. 5–3). This requirement in turn is mandated by the Chief of Naval Operations under OPNAV Instruction 1412.14, which established guidance for a Navy-wide Command Qualification Program (2012).

Curiously, OPNAVINST 1412.14 specifically directs the SWO community to “implement a pilot program to administer a leadership 360-degree assessment” to department heads to include “a debrief by a certified counselor” (CNO, 2012, p. 3). At the time this instruction was signed in 2012, by then-CNO Admiral Jonathan Greenert, the SWOS 360 program (including Department Head Assessments) should have already been in operation for over three years.

The result is that the SWOS 360 program is tied to Command Qualification. Exclusively tying the SWOS 360 program to the CA creates confusion of the program’s true purpose. It ignores the recommendation made by both Maylett (2009) and Hosain (2016) that the purpose of the program should be communicated to all members of the organization before they participate. Also, the only formal reference to the SWOS program establishes it as part of the CA, so division officers may read it and think the program won’t apply to them until much later in their career.

It is *possible* that a division officer may become aware of the SWOS 360 Division Officer Assessment earlier on by observing their peers starting the process or through wardroom training, but the first *formal* communication a division officer receives about it may be the email from the 360 Program Manager initiating their assessment. In other words, it is possible that a division officer spends almost two and a half years on active duty before they discover that the SWOS 360 program even exists. At this point, the stated purpose of the program as a whole and how the Division Officer Assessment contributes to it should be communicated, but there is no indication that this is being accomplished.

2. Program Design

The program is based at SWOS, which is physically located onboard Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island. SWOS delivers 360-degree assessments to SWO division officers and SWO department heads. These assessments are conducted using the Profilor, a web-based COTS survey instrument currently licensed through Assessments International, to generate feedback reports. The program then employs coaches selected from SWOs serving on-site and trained in-house to help their fellow SWOs interpret associated feedback reports. There is currently only one program manager who is responsible for the

administration of the survey instrument to SWOs being assessed and for the data collection to generate the feedback reports. The 360 Program Manager is also responsible for the selection, training, and qualification of the internal coaches. All of these are large, complex administrative tasks.

As discussed in Chapter III, two versions of the Profilor are used for Division Officers and Department Heads respectively. This seemingly adheres to the suggestion by Rogers et al. (2002) that multiple targeted instruments could prove more effective to an organization. Additionally, both versions of the Profilor being used have been tailored for the SWOS program, which adheres to Hosain's (2016) recommendation that organizations should consider a customized instrument versus a general one. It must be noted that further customization to create more SWO-specific questions might be more effective.

The Profilor also satisfies Hosain's (2016) recommendation for brevity. However, the 360 Program Manager's assertion that a rater can complete the survey instrument within 15 minutes—20 minutes for self-assessments when including demographic questions—is notional at best (S. Stroup, personal communication, March 16, 2021). Because the Profilor is web-based, internet connectivity must be available onboard Navy ships. This becomes an important issue for completion. If a ship is underway, operational requirements and equipment casualties can limit or completely restrict the bandwidth required to connect to the Profilor and complete the survey instrument.

This creates a significant barrier to the completion of individual surveys and complicates the collection of the data required to generate the feedback report. As a result, the administrative burden of the 360 Program Manager, who as the individual responsible for collecting surveys to generate the feedback report, increases because they must follow-up with the chain of command of those who have not completed their survey.

One significant problem with the design of the SWOS program is lack of any formal instruction that governs the program. When asked if SWOS had such an instruction, the 360 Program Manager referred only to the Surface Warfare Command Requirements that now comprise Chapter 5 of the SWO Career Manual (S. Stroup, personal communication, March, 16 2021; CNSF, 2019). As discussed previously, only the Department Head

Assessment is covered by this instruction so requirements for the division officer program are not clear.

Multiple aspects of the Department Head Assessment differ from the Division Officer Assessment. These include the timeline required for initiating the assessment and collecting all surveys in a timely fashion to generate the feedback report, identifying who the raters are and the way they are selected, and the requirement to retain the feedback report. There is no formal documentation of how any of these aspects differ in the Division Officer Assessment. Indeed, as stated earlier, there is no formal documentation that the Division Officer Assessment even exists. Finally, there is no formal documentation of any standard operating procedure for *any* aspect of the SWOS program to include the selection and training of coaches, data collection and the handling of PII that must be considered along with it, or any technical requirements for the use of the Profilor that could be of assistance to ships underway.

3. Program Integration into the SWO Community

Despite the lack of a dedicated formal instruction governing it, the SWOS program seemingly adheres to the statement by Baroda et al. (2012) that an effective 360-degree feedback program must be integrated with the existing training and development programs of an organization. Having SWOS as the executive agent for the management of a 360-feedback program as well as the central physical location where coaching is conducted helps that integration. This is due to the SWOS 360 program synching up assessments with other training and development courses that occur at SWOS throughout the SWO career path: specifically, ADOC for division officers and the CA for department heads. This was always the program's intent, and it is worth remembering that originally a third assessment for SWOs would be delivered at the PXO/PCO level (F. Wood, personal communication, February 18, 2021).

These planned 360-degree assessments coincide not only with two of ten Mariner Skills Assessment that a SWO is now required to undergo during their career, but also, they coincide with two of the Go/No Go assessments that could preclude a SWO from progressing. This is by coincidence however, not by program design. These assessments

are part of changes the Navy has implemented to enhance the ship handling training SWOs receive because of several incidents that occurred in 2017, specifically the collisions of USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62) and USS John S. McCain (DDG 56) with merchant ships (GAO, 2019). Another noteworthy change was consolidation of five different SWO community instructions, including the Surface Force Command Requirements and their reference of the Department Head Assessment, into the SWO Career Manual (CNSF, 2019).

The origins of these changes were in findings and recommendations reported in the Comprehensive Review of Recent Surface Force Incidents (U.S. Fleet Forces Command, 2017). The 2017 Comprehensive Review (CR) made observations on communications, teamwork, and aspects of organizational culture that contributed to the collisions. These recommendations could be applied to inform an expanded implementation of the SWOS 360 program. With further tailoring of the Profilor models SWOS uses for assessments, it could be possible to identify traits associated with the root cause of the collisions.

There are other suggested best practices that the lack of a formal instruction governing the SWOS 360 program inhibits. First, the lack of a formal instruction prevents successful integration into organizational culture, as discussed by Hosain (2016). It degrades the ability of the 360 Program Manager to exert the high level of administrative control that Rogers et al. (2002) recommend as there is no formal mechanism that grants that control in the first place. Finally, the lack of a formally stated purpose—at least for the Division Officer Assessment—likely results in lower awareness of the importance of the program that Newbold (2013) suggests can cause lower completion rates of survey instruments as well as lower quality feedback.

These issues might also create the organizational cynicism that Hosain (2016) highlights. While the program has existed for well over a decade, it may now be perceived as a relatively unimportant “check in the box.” This is more concerning considering the lack of uniformity between assessments delivered to division officers and department heads versus PCOs and flag officers, who are currently assessed by different organizations and use different survey instruments.

4. Raters

The selection of raters is one of several differences between how the Division Officer and Department Head Assessments are conducted. While division officers can choose their own raters, department heads have raters chosen for them by their CO (CNSF, 2019). Having two different approaches for the two assessments is not a problem for SWOS 360 program *per se*, as research identifies both as best practices and specifies things to be cautious of in both approaches.

Allowing division officers to choose their own raters is supported by Maylett's (2009) assertion that it is a more realistic approach, especially if the intention is purely for personal development. Department heads having raters chosen for them is supported by Hosain (2016) who suggests that this approach may strengthen the process, assuming the raters have interacted with the individual being assessed regularly enough to provide accurate feedback.

Alternatively, allowing division officers to choose their own raters may result in inaccurate and possibly artificially inflated feedback due to fear of retribution (Bracken et al., 2016). Choosing a department head's raters for them does not necessarily relieve this problem, however, and in fact may facilitate it if a peer or subordinate who remains anonymous harbors a grudge (Baroda et al., 2012).

Rater accountability could be of concern to the SWOS program. Newbold's (2013) discussion of personality types causing variance in completion rates should be considered. Add to that consideration the previously discussed issue of internet connectivity problems that SWOs may experience when their ship is underway. The inability to access the web-based survey instrument during whatever free time they have is doubly frustrating to even the most motivated individual. Lastly, if the raters do not see their participation as important to the person being assessed—which might be the case when formal instruction does not communicate the importance of the assessment—low completion rates can be expected (Maylett, 2009; Bracken et al., 2016).

5. Coaches

The SWOS 360 program provides division officers with coaching in addition to the feedback report. Ainsworth (2012), Rogers et al. (2002), and Seifert et al. (2003) all contend that coaching improves the feedback received. Additionally, the coaches used by the SWOS 360 program are exclusively selected from within the organization i.e., SWOs are being used to coach other SWOs. The nature of the in-house training that the coaches receive, however, raises questions about quality.

Coach training consists of viewing a PowerPoint presentation, completing a “homework” assignment, and attending one coaching session as an observer. This training and subsequent qualification as a coach is conducted by one person, the 360 Program Manager, who has been the same person since 2011 (S. Stroup, personal communication, March 16, 2021). The 360 Program Manager did receive training from PDI when joining the program and has incorporated lessons learned over the years to the selection and training of coaches, but it might be worth considering bringing in external trainers to observe the process and help. Korn Ferry discontinued the training and certification of coaches when they acquired the rights to the Profilor and Assessments International, who currently holds the rights, still does not require certification for coaches. However, Assessments International may be able to provide external training if SWOS were to further invest in leadership development.

The coaching sessions themselves also raise questions as to their effectiveness. Sessions are blocked out for 90 minutes each and play out in the manner described in Chapter III; however, there are no data to indicate how long sessions run on average. Several variables may affect the length and quality of the coaching. For example, one coach may spend more time and go into greater detail interpreting a given section of the feedback report than another coach. The length of the discussion—about creating a personal and professional development plan using the feedback received—that occurs between a division officer and a coach after they have finished covering the report likely also varies in length.

It is worth asking the question, who is driving that discussion? The coach or the division officer being coached? If it is the latter, that person may want to end the session as soon as possible especially if they don't like what they are hearing, or don't think the program is credible, or don't feel comfortable with their assigned coach. The interpersonal dynamic between coaches and division officers should be considered a developmental imperative. As discussed in Chapter III, the selection of coaches from officers assigned to SWOS results in coaches that are SWOs who have recently completed their division officer tours and are awaiting department head training. This makes the nominal difference in experience between the coach and the division officer being coached one 18-month sea tour plus whatever shore duty the coach has experienced. A greater difference in experience between coaches and division officers being coached might increase the credibility of the coach. The coach's comfort level and/or proficiency with their role might also be an issue.

The experience of being a coach may provide an opportunity to practice a skill required to be a good department head. Specifically, the ability to have uncomfortable discussions with division officers, when necessary, to develop them personally and professionally is a leadership skill that enhances *department head* effectiveness. A coach who has not developed this skill is not likely to be effective developing division officers on the job as a department head. Not knowing what questions to ask when coaching might be a barrier inhibiting coaching on the job. If that is the case, using a standardized set of questions or script for coaches while coaching division officers, might facilitate effective coaching at SWOS *and* as a department head. That said, coaches need to have the confidence to ask even standardized questions.

One last consideration about the SWOS program's use of coaches is whether the coaches are receiving feedback on how they are doing. According to the original 360 Program Manager, at the program's inception, division officers had the opportunity to complete a survey to provide feedback about their experience throughout the 360-degree assessment process including their 90-minute feedback and coaching session (F. Wood, personal communication, April 7, 2021). He explained how division officer ratings and comments about coaching session were provided to each coach and in aggregate to him, as the 360 Program Manager, within a week. For sessions receiving an overall rating of 3 or

lower, he (the 360 Program Manager) would contact the division officer to offer another session with another coach.

This post-assessment survey has evidently gone away over the years. It would be worthwhile for coaches to receive feedback on how they are doing; this would improve coaching in program and provide incentive for the coaches to develop their own interpersonal skills in preparation for becoming an XO and eventually a CO.

6. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity is defined by Van Velsor (1998) as protection of a rater's identity. Unfortunately, anonymity defined this way doesn't exist in Division Officer Assessments conducted by the SWOS 360 program. Division officers can choose their own raters, so they know generally who might be responding. This means that the fear of retribution that Eichinger and Lombardo (2003) and Bracken et al. (2016) discussed could come into play, especially among the peers and direct reports chosen to be raters by the division officer. This fear of retribution could affect the honesty and accuracy of feedback given. Alternatively, there may be no fear of retribution present, but raters chosen may still provide inflated or selective feedback on behalf of the division officer who chose them for the purpose of making that division officer look better.

It is worth noting that the Department Head Assessments operate differently in this respect. Department heads are not allowed to choose their own rater, rather the raters are chosen for them by their CO. This is directed by Chapter 5 of the SWO Career Manual where it is stated as being critical to providing meaningful feedback (CNSF, 2019). It must be said that this doesn't guarantee that all raters will remain anonymous. For example, an astute department head will arguably be able to identify which of their peers, i.e., their fellow department heads, provided feedback.

The SWOS program also doesn't offer 100% confidentiality as it is defined by Van Velsor (1998). Coaches can see the feedback reports of the division officers they are to coach prior to the 90-minute session. Based on the suggestions of Edwards and Ewen (1996), this could enhance the effectiveness of the coaching if the coach is not a direct supervisor for the division officer. The disclosure of data collected for a Division Officer

Assessment is not limited to just the division officer and their coach; however, it is also available to the 360 Program Manager who is the focal point for collecting the data. The 360 Program Manager has stated that, as of 2019, the Profilor software provides the capability for SWOS to download the feedback data from any assessment going back to the inception of the Program and some has been downloaded for retention at SWOS (S. Stroup, personal communication, April 12, 2021). Prior to 2019, feedback data was only available for one year after an assessment had been initiated. Like the re-validation of the Profilor Progress Check tool discussed in Chapter III, this upgraded capability appears to be the result of Assessments International acquiring the rights to the Profilor family of instruments and actively working to improve it. In any event, it is not clear if division officers being assessed are made aware of the disposition of their feedback data.

7. Follow-Up

As with anonymity, there is essentially no follow-up component in the SWOS 360 Program beyond the initial coaching session. While not utilized by the SWOS program, Assessments International offers the Profilor Progress Check for follow-up. The Progress Check is a separate 360-degree feedback instrument designed to be delivered roughly six to eight months after the initial assessment to measure an individual's effort and improvement towards development goals (The Profilor, n.d.). If utilized this would occur roughly one-third of the way through the 18-month second division officer tour.

In theory, the Division Officer Assessment is followed up by the Department Head Assessment. However, the Division Officer Assessment uses the Profilor First-Level Leader model, and the Department Head Assessment uses the Profilor Mid-Level Leader model. Both use the same four assessment factors discussed previously—Thought Leadership, People Leadership, Results Leadership, and Personal Leadership—but different competencies are assessed in each model (The Profilor, n.d.). While many of the department head competencies are like the division officer competencies; the scope of work is usually different. It must be said that being successful in each competency as a division officer does not equate to success in the version of that competency at the Department Head Level. It is also worth noting that there is no formal comparison of the

results of the Division Officer Assessment and the Department Head Assessment. For these reasons, this report does not consider the Department Head Assessment as a direct follow on to the Division Officer Assessment.

At present there is also no formal process designed to brief SWO community leadership of developmental trends identified by the SWOS 360 program in officer groups and inform follow-up on a community level.

8. Future Program Evaluation

Rogers et al. (2002) also reported that many organizations running 360-degree feedback programs do not evaluate the effectiveness of their programs despite the monetary and other costs involved. This unfortunately does seem to be the case with the SWOS 360-degree feedback program, with all information available currently suggesting that this report is conducting the first evaluation of the program since its inception in 2008. The following are concepts that could be considered for use in evaluating the SWOS 360 program in the future.

a. Efficiency Analysis

Efficiency analyses provide frameworks to evaluate a program's outcomes against its costs (Rossi et al., 2004). These authors discuss two types that are worth consideration for evaluating the SWOS 360 program. First, cost-benefit analysis which determines "economic efficiency of a program, expressed as the relationship between costs and outcomes, usually measured in monetary terms" and second, cost-effectiveness analysis which determines "the efficacy of a program in achieving given intervention outcomes in relation to program costs" (p. 63).

The monetary cost of the Profilor is \$225 per assessment according to the instrument's webpage (The Profilor, n.d.). This price is the same for the models used for both Division Officer and Department Head Assessments. The total monetary cost per year of the program was not obtained by this research but the question must still be asked: is the SWO community receiving value for the money being spent on this program? At present, there is no specific measure of performance (i.e., benefit) to determine if SWOs are

receiving useful feedback. Revising the program with a specific and formal purpose would be a logical first step to establishing such a measure that monetary costs could then be compared against.

There are at least two non-monetary costs that should be considered when evaluating the SWOS 360 program. First, manpower committed by all participants including, the SWOs being assessed, their raters, coaches, and those who bear administrative burdens such as COs and (of course) the 360 Program Manager. Second, equipment usage, in terms of information technology required for the operation of the program. This considers the internet connectivity required to complete the survey instrument—already identified as a potential bottleneck to successful completion—as well as server space to maintain the feedback data now that Assessments International allows it to be retained indefinitely.

This latter item ties back to monetary costs; how much of what we are paying Assessments International is tied to maintaining those records? Would it be more cost effective to download the feedback data and store it at servers owned and maintained by SWOS? This in turn would lead back to equipment usage considerations for the SWOS program. In any event, the SWOS 360 program does not follow all best practices indicated by research of civilian 360-degree feedback programs. As such, it is likely not effective in its use of resources when compared with the monetary cost of operation.

It must be stated that the possibility of an increase in return on investment, i.e., positive cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness ratios, exists for the SWOS program. More resources, monetary and otherwise, however, may need to be committed at least in the short term to produce a long-term leadership benefit.

b. Competency Trend Analysis

Again, there is currently no measure for the SWOS program's success. It may be difficult to measure true success in a program that is designed to be developmental in nature. Additionally, it may be difficult to measure success in terms applicable to the SWO community with a COTS survey instrument that is not specifically tailored for it.

Once measures of success are established, for example, specific normative scores in SWO-specific competencies, then we can analyze trends in those scores over time. These scores could be cross referenced against operational tempo among ship classes or homeports or numbered fleets, to give a few examples, to further analyze what is driving the scores. Such trend analysis could be used to show SWO community leadership where the current developmental short falls are at each career milestone. This could then inform training and/or development initiatives targeted to respond to identified short falls in specific groups.

As previously discussed, the Profilor now retains feedback data indefinitely, the 360 Program Manager has indicated that SWOS has retained some of the data locally as available server space permits (S. Stroup, personal communication, April 12, 2021). It should be noted that retention of this data creates confidentiality issues that need to be addressed. Additionally, there will be costs to implementing trend analysis. Assessments International can provide analytics, however SWOS is not paying for that service presently.

C. SUMMARY

Program evaluation is critical to program success. The SWOS program has the capability to deliver effective 360-degree feedback to SWOs, creating opportunities for personal and professional development through multiple career milestones. However, the SWOS program currently doesn't adhere to all the identified best practices that improve 360-degree feedback effectiveness. The stated purpose is generic at best and has other weaknesses in its design; principally the lack of a formal instruction governing the program. 360-degree feedback has proven it can be resource intensive and time-consuming, even in successful implementations. 360-degree feedback is not meant to improve an organization's bottom line, but to foster growth in its members. Evaluating the effectiveness of the program can only be quantified by the users of the assessment tool. The true benefits and return on investment in the SWOS program are presently unknown. These can only be calculated once formal measures of success are established and then tracked and routinely evaluated.

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V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. REPORT SUMMARY

The Surface Navy continues to invest in state-of-the-art hardware to improve warfighting capabilities; the investment in human capital to execute these capabilities is a paltry sum in comparison. The SWO community should create value through the development of its officers, starting early in their careers. 360-degree feedback offers a competitive advantage in such development; it is imperative that if the SWO community employs it that it does so effectively.

This research had three objectives. The first objective was to determine best practices for 360-degree feedback programs that improves program effectiveness. Chapter II presented practices observed in civilian organizations; these included identifying the program's purpose, careful program design, integration into existing organizational processes, considerations for raters and coaches, considerations about anonymity and confidentiality, need for follow-up, and need for program evaluation. The second objective was to describe the SWOS 360 program and how a Division Officer Assessment is conducted. Chapter III presented information about the SWOS 360 program, including where it fits into the SWO career path, and outlined the Division Officer Assessment process. The third objective was to evaluate how well the SWOS 360 program encompasses the best practices. Chapter IV conducted an evaluation by way of comparative analysis between best practices and the current SWOS 360 program. This chapter presents conclusions and makes recommendations for follow-on action.

B. CONCLUSIONS

1. Clarity about Purpose

360-degree feedback is best used for the purpose of development; fostering positive change in individuals to ultimately change an organization. When establishing a 360 program, the purpose and process must be clearly established. These must be communicated to members at all levels of the organization, to include establishing clear roles and responsibilities for *all* participants in a 360 program. Everyone in the

organization—recipients, raters, coaches, 360 program managers, and executive leadership—all must support the program. Once established, if the purpose or process are ever contradicted, the program will lose support within the organization.

Every aspect of the program’s design must reinforce the purpose and a tight administrative control should be used to regulate operations. The program must be integrated with existing training and developmental processes; and it must become organic to the organization.

Everyone must understand that this is an ongoing process not a one-time event. A coach supports individual development by interpreting their feedback report, but a follow-up component must exist to enable them to execute it. Lastly, individual confidentiality must be balanced with program goals. An individual’s assessment data must be safeguarded but aggregate data from multiple assessments should be readily available to program management and organizational leadership for program evaluation.

2. SWOS 360 Program Design

The SWOS 360 program, though not clearly defined as such, is used for personal development. This offers a good complement to the existing performance appraisal system used for a SWOs professional development (i.e., FITREPs). The program must continue to be well integrated into the SWO community. The program is based out of SWOS—the main learning center for SWOs—and assessments run concurrent with career milestone training courses like as ADOC.

The COTS survey instrument used, however, is not tailored for SWOs as the competencies assessed are not specific to the SWO community. Without appropriate competencies, ones identified as measuring SWO success, there is no way to determine if a division officer is on the right course and provide a means to correct them if they are not.

The program employs coaches, selected from SWOs serving at SWOS and trained in-house, to help division officers interpret their feedback reports. This selection process may produce the numbers of coaches needed, but it may lead to coaches who have no desire to perform the role or who do not have the adequate skills or confidence to succeed in the

role. The limited training provided may not ensure that all coaches are well versed in how to explain to a division officer how the 360-degree assessment works and how to interpret their feedback report.

3. Follow-Up and Program Evaluation

Our comparative analysis found that the current SWOS 360 program does not adhere to best practices for program effectiveness; that is, the program lacks a clear purpose, and its COTS design does not assess relevant SWO competencies. These disconnects with the SWO community are compounded by the fact that the program also falls short in the critical areas of follow-up and program evaluation.

Division officers receive no follow-up after completing an assessment. A mentor at the division officer's next command could provide this and continue the division officer's development. There is an important distinction that must be made here, coaches help interpret 360-feedback; mentors help *act* on it. Without follow-up, division officers may not act on feedback from their assessment. With a mentor to monitor progress and offer support, they could address specific developmental leadership needs identified during the 360-assessment. As mentors would need to see some (or all) of a division officers feedback report, however, the report could not remain 100% confidential. There would need to be clear administrative control to ensure that mentoring remains developmental. There would also need to be training and certification to ensure that mentors are effective and suitable for the role.

It was found that the program does not conduct any kind of internal evaluation to determine its effectiveness, at either the individual or organizational levels. At the individual level, there is no mechanism for division officers to evaluate the quality and usefulness of the assessment they received. Such a review would allow division officers to provide information to the 360 Program Manager regarding things like: access to the survey instrument, relevance of survey questions, quality of coaching, and overall usefulness. This would give the 360 Program Manager immediate data regarding program status and enable troubleshooting and would provide a way to give immediate feedback to coaches about their effectiveness.

At the organizational level, there is no analysis of aggregated data compiled from *all* Division Officer Assessments over time. While confidentiality is critical for an individual's data, this is no longer a concern when aggregated and reported as a group. This data could be used for several purposes. It could be used to validate competencies identified as important for SWO success and adjust the program to meet the needs of the SWO community. It could also be used by SWO leadership to identify strengths and developmental needs of SWO division officers and make course corrections. For example, the CNSF Training Department (N7) could use the data to make changes in division officer training to that address negative trends. Using the aggregated data this way assists the developmental principal critical to the success of the program.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institute a Formal Instruction

The CNO, CNSF (as lead Surface Warfare TYCOM), or their designated representative should write a formal instruction that establishes a clear purpose for the SWOS 360 program, roles and responsibilities for program execution, and standard operating procedures. This instruction must cover *all* 360-degree assessments that are conducted by SWOS. An instruction would establish the role of 360 Program Manager as an official in the execution of the SWOS mission. The instruction should specify the expectations to all who participate in the program—from division officers to flag officers, whether recipient or rater or coach—what the expectations are of them. The instruction should identify the roles and responsibilities of the organizational and administrative chains of command involved from the CNO down to the unit level.

Existing instructions would require review to ensure integration with the SWOS 360 program and its role in the SWO career path will also require revision. For example, the Standard Organization and Regulations Manual (SORM) would be one such instruction requiring review. Additionally, the personnel qualification standard (PQS) for Division Officer Afloat (NAVEDTRA 43463-1B) should be revised to incorporate a line item concerning 360-degree feedback programs. As this PQS is required for SWO qualification, it provides an opportunity to educate division officers about the SWOS 360 program prior

to their first assessment. Thus, the process becomes an expected part of their career development as a SWO.

2. Develop SWO-specific Survey Instruments

For the SWOS 360 program to be truly effective at developing officers throughout their careers—from accession to selection as a flag officer—a customized survey instrument must be developed for the task. This instrument, or set of instruments, must assess SWO-specific competencies, and be treated as Navy intellectual property. As Navy property, it would be easier to control the development of the instrument in the long term. The instrument(s) should be employed to conduct assessments at *all* SWO career milestones to properly track an officer’s development. Each 360-degree assessment should be designed to build on the last to ensure uniformity, as opposed to disconnect that could result from using different instruments.

3. Centralize All Assessments Under One Program

All assessments used for SWO career development should be developed and managed under the SWOS 360 program. This centralization offers several benefits. More assessments throughout a SWO’s career provides more data points to identify developmental issues and respond to them. Centralization also means only one command would be responsible for collecting assessment data for SWO career development. This makes program evaluation and trend analysis easier, whether conducted for program management or by CNSF N7 to implement changes to SWO training. Centralization reduces administrative burden as only one command would be responsible for program management. Training and certification of coaches and mentors could be standardized. Lastly, centralizing the program under one command may also reduce operating costs compared to using multiple vendors at multiple commands.

4. Incorporate Follow-up Processes

The SWOS 360 program requires formal actionable feedback to promote positive change. SWOs participating in an assessment should be required to retain their feedback report until their next full assessment. This way the competency scores from one 360-

degree assessment can be compared by a coach giving feedback during the next assessment. This also enables mentors to review assessment data with a SWO between assessments, focus on the competencies most in need of improvement, and reinforce the SWO's personal and professional development.

A designated mentor should be assigned to each wardroom. As the XO is already involved in the midterm review of officers, as part of the FITREP process, the XO might be the ideal person to serve in the mentor role. It would add additional depth to a standard midterm review (by adding a development focus) with little added administrative burden. Formal training and certification in mentoring or coaching could occur during PXO training, or initial training could be built into the department head pipeline with certification to occur during the PXO course later. Coaching skills enhance leadership and would be appropriate development for department heads or PXOs. Tying back to the recommendation for formal instruction governing the SWOS 360 program, the SORM should be revised to reflect this new role for the XO.

5. Incorporate Program Evaluation

Finally, the SWOS 360 program must incorporate routine program evaluation into its standard operations to ensure that individual and organizational needs are met.

At the individual level, SWOs should be able to evaluate their 360-degree assessment experience upon its completion. This review would be provided to the 360 Program Manager and should cover aspects of the program such as usefulness of the survey instrument, relevance of instrument questions, satisfaction with coaching, and effectiveness of the coach. These reviews should be kept confidential to the maximum extent but should be used by the 360 Program Manager to continually evaluate their program and by coaches to adjust their coaching as necessary.

At the organizational level, a periodic review of training effectiveness should be conducted utilizing the aggregated assessment data. This would provide the CNSF N7 with hard data aggregated from all completed 360-degree assessments. Study of this data over time could provide true measures of success for the SWOS program and help adjust developmental efforts as needed over time to align with SWO community goals. It also

allows community leadership to identify negative trends in officer training development and initiate the necessary changes to correct them.

D. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research evaluated the SWOS 360-degree feedback program using best practices identified from among civilian organizations. The following areas are suggested for future research that will further ensure the success of the SWOS 360 program:

- An efficiency analysis of SWOS 360 program.
- A cost-benefit analysis of combining all 360-degree assessments for SWOs under one command with one survey instrument or an integrated suite of instruments.
- A cost-benefit analysis of developing a Navy-owned, SWO-specific 360-degree survey instrument.
- A cost-effectiveness analysis of incorporating formal 360 coaching training and certification into the SWO career path to include developing a new Additional Qualification Designation (AQD) to denote the completion of certification.
- A comprehensive review of sanitized or aggregated empirical data available from completed assessments to determine what are the current positive and negative competency trends in the SWO community and assessing what are the potential impacts of those trends.
- A manpower analysis study to determine the competencies that better measure success as a SWO using skills derived from the SWO Requirements Document (SWORD) or Naval Officer Billet Classification (NOBC) codes associated with typical SWO jobs as a baseline.

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