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## Assessment of Navy Performance Evaluation

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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**NPS NRP Executive Summary**  
Performance Evaluation Needs Assessment  
Period of Performance: 10/24/2021 – 10/22/2022  
Report Date: 10/12/2022 | Project Number: NPS-22-N100-A  
Naval Postgraduate School, Department of Defense Management (DDM)



NAVAL RESEARCH PROGRAM  
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Principal Investigator (PI):** Dr. Sae Young Ahn, Defense Management and Dr. Latika Hartmann, Defense Management

**Additional Researcher(s):** No additional researchers participated in this research project

**Student Participation:** LT Matthew Faber, USN, Defense Management

**Prepared for:**

Topic Sponsor Lead Organization: N1 - Manpower, Personnel, Training & Education

Topic Sponsor Name(s): CAPT Ben Baran USN, Performance Evaluation Transformation Coordinator, Navy Personnel Command.

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## **Project Summary**

This study takes a three-pronged approach to assessing the Navy performance evaluation system using an across-service comparison, focus groups of Navy subject matter experts, and a survey of a representative group of Navy enlisted sailors and officers. Our across-service comparison finds the Navy is unique in offering fewer narrative blocks to raters, not formally using multiple raters, and using an average of the individual evaluation traits as a summary measure of both comparative assessment and potential. The focus group respondents recommend a rating/community specific evaluation, replacing the current forced distribution ranking with reporting seniors writing a letter to the promotion board, more centralized training on writing honest evaluations and a fully electronic system for submitting evaluations. Finally, survey respondents also recommend better training of reporting seniors like the focus group respondents. They also recommend changing the evaluation timing such that reporting seniors evaluate sailors/officers under them that have served for the same length of time.

Based on our assessment, we recommend the Navy (1) consider separating the individual evaluation of traits from the comparative assessment and potential piece of the evaluation, (2) offer better training led by experienced reporting seniors on writing clear, honest, and informative evaluations, (3) change the timing of evaluations such that summary groups do not include individuals that have served for widely different lengths of time under the same reporting senior, (4) formally incorporate more reviewers or raters in the evaluation process, and (5) reduce the administrative burden of the evaluation process.

**Keywords:** *Navy performance evaluation, officer fitness reports, enlisted evaluations*

## **Background**

Identifying and promoting talent is key to increasing efficiency and productivity in any organization. This is particularly important for the Navy and U.S. military because individuals are promoted from within the system, and there is less scope to hire individuals into higher level positions. To that end, Navy talent management has received considerable attention in recent years with growing calls for modernizing the evaluation system, which went through its last major overhaul in the 1990s. As the Navy moves forward with the Navy Performance Evaluation Transformation and a new Performance Evaluation System, this project is a valuable and timely assessment of the present system.

This study uses a three-pronged approach to assess the Navy Evaluation system. First, we compare the Navy evaluation instruments, namely Fitness Reports (FITREPs) and evaluations (EVALs) to forms used by the other services. This exercise identifies common across-service themes in the evaluation instruments and highlights areas where the Navy differs from the other services. Second, we solicit feedback from Navy subject matter experts (SMEs) and stakeholders in small focus groups on (1) the current system, namely what works and what does not work, and (2) their top recommendations to reform problems with the current system. Third, we use feedback from the focus groups as inputs in a survey to solicit feedback on proposed reforms from a larger and more representative group of Navy enlisted sailor and officer respondents. This research supports current Performance Evaluation Transformation efforts being led by Navy Personnel Command and Task Force One Navy #2 on Talent Management.



## **Findings and Conclusions**

Our across-service comparison finds that the Navy FITREPs/EVALs share common features with the other services in documenting background information on the ratee, their rater(s), and some traits. Yet, the Navy is unique in offering fewer narrative blocks to raters, not formally using multiple raters, and using an average of the individual evaluation traits as a summary measure of both comparative assessment and potential, which diminishes the quality of the feedback received by a sailor/officer.

In the focus groups, Navy SMEs recommended solutions in four major areas. First, respondents recommend a rating/community specific evaluation with each rating/community defining their “best and fully qualified.” Second, respondents recommend replacing the forced distribution ranking of promote (P), must promote (MP), and early promote (EP) with reporting seniors writing a letter to the board with their promotion recommendation. Third, respondents recommend more training of reporting seniors to guard against inflated evaluations and instill more honesty and accuracy in the evaluation. Finally, respondents recommend a fully electronic system with more space for the narrative block.

Drawing on a larger and more representative group of Navy personnel, our survey finds no dominant popular or unpopular reforms in the dimensions to increase either “feedback to sailors” or “honest and accurate assessments.” Under the domain of “clarity for personnel decisions,” the winning reform is changing the timing of evaluations such that sailors/officers are evaluated after having served a minimum length of time under a reporting senior. Under the same category of “clarity for personnel decisions,” the least popular proposed reform is to reduce the number of competitive categories for officers to unrestricted line, restricted line, and staff corps. For increased “ease of use,” most respondents dislike the idea of allowing promotion board members to review records before arriving at the selection boards. For increased “alignment with Navy expectations,” respondents are nearly unanimous in rejecting the proposal to periodically change the evaluation forms to include priorities of the Chief of Naval Operations, while the most popular reform by far is to provide consistent and centralized training to reporting seniors in writing evaluations. Finally, while we find significant differences in the views expressed by enlisted and officer ranks, we find no significant differences in views about the system and the proposed reforms by gender or race.

Based on our assessment, we recommend the Navy (1) consider separating the individual evaluation of traits from the comparative assessment and potential piece of the evaluation, (2) offer better training led by experienced reporting seniors on writing clear, honest, and informative evaluations, (3) change the timing of evaluations such that summary groups do not include individuals that have served for widely different lengths of time under the same reporting senior, (4) formally incorporate more reviewers or raters in the evaluation process, and (5) reduce the administrative burden of the evaluation process.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

If our proposed recommendations to reform the current Navy Evaluation system are implemented, we recommend further research to ensure sailors/officers, reporting seniors, and promotion board members have a clear and unambiguous understanding of each piece of the reform and its implication for the evaluation process. If more training is required for reporting seniors to write effective evaluations, we recommend further research on the appropriate form of such training, namely the timing in the career pipeline of sailors/officers, training method (i.e., in person or



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online), and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the training. The Navy should also investigate methods to identify experienced, fair, and accurate reporting seniors to serve as trainers. If the Navy changes the timing of evaluations as recommended such that summary groups do not include individuals that have served for widely different lengths of time under the same reporting senior, this will require significant administrative changes involving many steps that will affect both the evaluations and their interpretation by promotion boards. We recommend further research as this reform is implemented allowing the Navy to course correct if necessary. Finally, we recommend the Navy consider continuously evaluating the system as reforms are enacted, which would allow for changes and updates to correct issues as they are discovered, as opposed to major overhauls every 20 years or so.

### **Acronyms**

EP	early promote
EVAL	evaluation
FITREP	Fitness Report
MP	must promote
P	promote
SME	subject matter expert

