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360 DEGREE FEEDBACK BEST PRACTICES AND THE ARMY'S MSAF PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

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Development of leaders in the U.S. Army is absolutely paramount to its future success. The Army must leverage every opportunity available to enhance leader development. The Army's Field Manual 6-22, <u>Leadership</u>, stresses part of leader development encompasses the ability of a leader to become self-aware. Self-aware leaders are open and seek feedback from a variety of sources. Self awareness is certainly relevant in the present and future operating environments. Numerous leaders have effectively utilized multisource assessment and feedback approaches to gain insight, which may not otherwise be apparent, on how they are perceived by their subordinates, peers and superiors. This paper examines if Army policy and the implementation of its current multisource feedback systems leverage and reflect the best practices found in corporate America. It compares Army policy with best practices and also examines if the Army should utilize multisource feedback for consideration in their centralized selection board process.

360 DEGREE FEEDBACK BEST PRACTICES AND THE U.S. ARMY'S MSAF PROGRAM

> Self-awareness is a component of preparing self. It is being prepared, being actively engaged in a situation and interacting with others. Self-awareness has the potential to help all leaders become better adjusted and more effective. Self-awareness is relevant for contemporary operations requiring cultural sensitivity and for a leader's adaptability to inevitable environmental change.
>
> —Field Manual 6-22, <u>Leadership</u>
> Headquarters, Department of the Army

Development of leaders in the U.S. Army is absolutely paramount to its future success. "In no other profession is the cost of being unprepared as unforgiving, often resulting in mission failure and unnecessary casualties."[1] Senior leaders have the crucial responsibility of developing a vision, policy and strategy to ensure resources are allocated and priority is given to developing our leaders for success in an uncertain future. Combat is not the time to discover the Army did not fully develop their leaders to achieve their maximum potential. The Army must leverage every opportunity available to enhance leader development. The Army's Field Manual 6-22, Leadership, stresses part of leader development encompasses the ability of a leader to become self-aware. Self-aware leaders are open to and seek feedback from a variety of sources. "A leader's goal in obtaining feedback is to develop an accurate self-perception by understanding other people's perceptions."[2] Self awareness is certainly relevant in the present and future operating environments. Numerous leaders have effectively utilized multisource assessment and feedback approaches to gain insight, which may not otherwise be apparent, on how they are perceived by their subordinates, peers and superiors.[3]

The private sector has also learned the importance of multisource feedback in development of their leaders. Numerous multinational corporations have implemented what is known as 360 degree feedback or multisource feedback to enhance a leader's development and/or assess a leader's performance. Taking the lead from industry, the U.S. Army has also implemented several of its own multisource feedback (MSF) programs. This paper will analyze if Army policy and the implementation of its MSF systems leverage and reflect the best practices found in corporate America. How does Army policy compare with best practices? In the future, should this feedback be utilized for consideration in the Army's centralized selection board process? If so, what are the key essential policy considerations and how would implementation potentially occur?

Background (What is 360 Degree Feedback?)

360-degree feedback, also known as multisource feedback, or multi-rater feedback, or multisource assessment is feedback that comes from all around an employee. The feedback data on a leader's performance can originate from superiors, subordinates, peers, self and in some cases customers. Participants are usually asked to respond to questions about a leader's performance, abilities and/or future potential. The premise of MSF is we all have our blind spots and only with the help of others can we get a complete view of ourselves, a 360-degree view.

While experts report that 360-degree feedback has been utilized by businesses in the United States since the early 1960s, it certainly exploded in its use during the 1990s.[4] Estimates of 90% of fortune 500 companies were utilizing a form of 360 degree feedback system as early as 2002.[5] A growing body of research shows that 360-degree feedback or multisource feedback is being widely utilized by organizations as part of their leadership development programs. There is enormous potential benefit in leaders

knowing how they are perceived by people who have different working relationships with them.[6]

Research indicates that effective development of leadership skills can be significantly enhanced by the utilization of quality performance feedback from one's subordinates, peers, and superiors. "However, without a formal and effective multisource feedback system, such feedback is not available to leaders for a variety of reasons, including fear of repercussion, time constraints, and inability to effectively define and communicate appropriate feedback messages."[7] Consequently, this has resulted in the popular growth of formally administered multisource feedback systems in both the civilian and military sector. Although, experts warn that many well intentioned multisource feedback programs are often implemented in a manner that can do more damage than benefit to the organization and their employees.[8] So, while the U.S. Army has been utilizing a form of multisource feedback for well over two decades, in fact it could be considered a pioneer in this regard, it can certainly leverage best business practices to ensure the success and sustainability of its programs.

Best Business Practices

The Army's mission and capabilities certainly differ from those of a private corporation; nevertheless, there are common threads found in both the private and public sectors, particularly in the need to develop their personnel. While the Army is not a business, nor can it ever be expected to operate like one, there are always opportunities for it to leverage lessons learned by the private sector and incorporate them, where applicable, into their operations to obtain optimal performance.[9] Consequently, prudently applying and adapting the best business practices found in the private sector can greatly facilitate the success of the U.S. Army's MSF programs.

"Most organizations using best practices anticipate potential mistakes and plan actively on how to avoid them."[10] Failures of 360-degree systems in the private sector can be linked to improper preparation of the organization prior to implementation. First and foremost the organization must know why it desires to implement a MSF system. It should not be because it is the latest trend or that other entities are utilizing this form of feedback. The organization must identify why and what it intends to accomplish with this program.[11] Knowing the desired outcome one hopes to achieve by introducing a MSF into an organization will drive the way one implements the program and the resources an organization is willing to commit to ensure success.

An organization wishing to implement MSF system should determine the effort and resources they are prepared to invest. While it may sound trite, what one puts into a multisource feedback program will determine what one gets out of it.[12] Collecting multisource feedback is just part of the process, obviously to have a successful program one cannot just provide leaders feedback and leave it at that. "You cannot make experienced managers change their behavior just by telling them that some other people do not see things the way they do. They have spent years practicing the same behavior, and they are quite adept at it –whatever its implications."[13] Gathering the feedback is relatively easy. The challenge comes in ensuring targeted leaders can make sense of and engage with the feedback, and then be willing to change their behavior is significantly tougher.[14] To ensure a positive outcome an organization must be willing to invest the appropriate level of resources and time.

Leveraging better business practices utilized by large corporations can gain one insight on how to effectively implement and sustain a 360-degree feedback. It can also

give an indication on the level of commitment and resources required to ensure its successful. "The goal of effective implementation of a 360-degree feedback system should be positive, measurable, long-term leadership growth and development."[15] The following are eight better business practices for effective implementation for organizational success:

  1. Many programs get off to a very tenuous start and can eventually fail if they are not introduced properly. The first and probably the most important factor influencing effective implementation of a 360-degree feedback system is clarity of purpose.[16] Clarity of purpose breaks down into at least two primary considerations: "(1) how clear the organization is in communicating intended use and (2) how visible to employees the alignment between message of intent and actual practice is."[17] Is the leaderships' word matching their deeds? Moreover, the feedback should focus on an organizational performance concern or strategic need.[18] Consequently, it is crucial to ensure feedback is centered around and implemented to tackle specific business and strategic needs. For example, an "organizational hierarchy may have become rigid and 360-degree feedback is a way to develop a different culture that emphasizes continuous feedback and improvement."[19] Whatever the purpose, it is important that employees clearly understand why the organization is implementing a 360-degree feedback system and the value it adds in achievement of the organization's goals.

  2. The MSF system needs to be thoughtfully and carefully introduced. Think through the potential problems in advance. "Most abuse occurs as a result of sloppiness or not knowing what to do when unexpected problems arise, not because people manipulate the process deliberately."[20] Research indicates that during initial

implementation 360-degree feedback should be utilized exclusively for development

purposes.[21] Introducing the system via a pilot program is highly encouraged. A

thorough evaluation of the pilot helps lessen the peril that lies in being overly ambitious

and too rapid in introducing any major change to an organization. "Most 360-degree

feedback systems represent a radical departure from the way people are traditionally

given feedback and managed. The concept of upward feedback to a supervisor or

manger and collecting information from peers, staff and customers may be considered

radical in top-down cultures."[22] It may take numerous iterations and modifications

before the pilot stage is complete. "It is imperative to define relevant, measurable

performance competencies and develop an administration process that ensures

confidentiality and ease of data collection before implementing the system."[23] However,

once the pilot is completed the organization and its leadership can move confidently

forward knowing that introducing a multisource feedback system will improve rather

than hamper leader development.

 3. The organizational message must be consistent with its actions and use of the

360-degree feedback system. "Once you have decided why you are doing it, be certain

that all communications and steps in the process are entirely consistent with your

purpose."[24] If an organization desires multisource feedback to be used as a

developmental tool, then don't make it an assessment tool and vice versa.

Organizations must know the difference and implications of each intended purpose of

the tool they plan to utilize. If an organization wishes to use it for assessment purposes,

it will probably affect the reliability of the data collected, degrade its worth for

development, decrease employees' desire to actively engage with the feedback process

and increase the probability of litigation.[25] If an organization wants to utilize it solely for developmental purposes, "...this will probably limit the number of people who can have access to the data, require more effort to get people to take it seriously, demand extensive communications, require support processes and materials and slow down the time to gain a return on the investment."[26]

4. Key stakeholders of the organization must be thoroughly involved in the development and implementation of the system. Sears Corporation learned as part of their decade utilization of MSF feedback, that it is important to have a champion at a very senior level who can articulate the very issues that MSF solves.[27] All processes can certainly benefit from meaningful senior leader commitment and involvement, rather than just a general blessing. While having a senior champion is ideal at a minimum, one must identify the key stakeholders and get them involved and kept informed. "Stakeholders can be senior managers, the intended recipients of 360-degree feedback, their immediate supervisors or managers, and the potential providers of the feedback- such as staff peers, team members and customers."[28] To ensure success, it is critical that those affected by a MSF program be initially involved with the development and introduction of it into the organization.

5. Best practices indicate an organization should customize the instrument to the values and desires of an organization. Most corporations who utilize MSF programs successfully do not just take a prototype tool from another organization, without doing some refinement to the product prior to implementation. Additionally, many corporations find it prudent to hire consultants who are experts in MSF programs to assist in tailoring the MSF tool to their organizations values and desires. The expertise

these consultants bring to a corporation ensures the instrument selected garners the appropriate feedback. Care in development of the instrument is crucial to ensuring questions are focused and participants are not overload with questions. Obviously, if the instrument is too short one runs the risk of not collecting enough information to provide adequate feedback. If the instrument is too long, one runs the risk of tiring the participants out, so data collected from later questions is usually poor.[29] Most experts considered 45-50 rated questions to be reasonable along with 3-4 narrative questions. They also recommend including feedback from employees in developing the instrument. The feedback should be relevant and specific. "Therefore, organizations would do well to develop their own appraisal instrument or require that pre-developed commercial instruments be customized to fit the organization."[30]

      6. Organizations need to ensure participants in the 360 process understand the limits of confidentiality and anonymity and that appropriate safe guards are implemented. The terms confidentially and anonymity are frequently confused. Confidentiality "refers to the limitations placed on how a target manager's data are shared, whereas anonymity refers to the extent to which a rater's identity is revealed."[31] An organization must determine how they plan to handle confidentiality and be unambiguous on who owns and has access to the data once it is collected.[32] Even if an organization desires the process to be purely developmental, how data is shared can adversely impact the process.[33] "When raters' responses are not anonymous or when adequate safeguards have not been developed to protect anonymity of rater identity, fears of retribution may arise and may result in a lack of candor in their responses or, in fact, to complete non-response."[34] Most experts agree that a minimum of 3-5

respondents in each rating population is required to protect anonymity. Prior to providing feedback an organization must ensure all those participating in the 360 process know the level of confidentially and anonymity they can expect.

7. Another best business practice is to ensure feedback is delivered with care, from a skilled and qualified coach and support is given. Undergoing a 360-degree review can be a rather intense experience. "Indeed, the scope and depth of scrutiny imposed by a 360 are available through no other workplace experience."[35] It is reckless and potentially harmful to deliver the results without providing any supportive follow-up to the recipient. An appropriately trained coach/consultant should review the information with the individual and right away schedule a time for a follow-on meeting. "Future coaching sessions focus on facilitating the development of and monitoring the progress of meaningful action plans targeted at improving prioritized scores."[36] According to Clinton Wingrove, an expert in successful implementation of 360-degree feedback programs, organizations should ensure coaches or facilitators are people who can:

- Challenge the feedback recipient to recognize and face up to any tough messages,
- Help senior people work with feedback without threatening them,
- Remain independent and assist the individual to come to her or his own conclusions,
- Handle a range of unpredictable responses (e.g., laughter, anger, tears, disbelief) and

- Be discreet and not allow what they learn in confidence to become public or to affect their judgment inappropriately.[37]

Without the proper coaching, support, and follow-up it is unlikely any meaningful change will occur in the leader. A skilled and supportive coach can be a valuable ally in a leader's development. Especially, if the coach's only agenda is to help people succeed.[38] While a professional coach may be desirable, if not available, one's boss or peer can fill that coaching role given the proper training and altruistic desire.[39]

8. The value of the feedback received hinges upon the responsiveness of key stakeholders. Obviously, if one does not get the appropriate number of participants to respond, at all levels, the validity and reliability of the resulting feedback is jeopardized. Therefore, an organization must have mechanisms in place to chase late responders to ensure they comply and provide input.[40]

<u>Sustainability of a Multisource Feedback (MSF) Program</u>

If an organization has made a commitment to a 360 degree feedback system it is important to ascertain, along with utilizing best business practices, if their process is sustainable. Obviously, an organization and its people will not support a system in the long-term that shows no worthwhile benefits. Experts agree that sustaining a multisource feedback process plays a key role in promoting improved organizational effectiveness.[41] Even when the feedback needs of employees may ebb and flow over time. This section summarizes the key indicators that an organization has a sustainable MSF system and threats to that sustainability.

Many of the key signs that MSF is sustainable are tied closely to how well an organization leverages the aforementioned best business practices. Consequently, along with devoting sufficient resources, the MSF process should be viewed as

ongoing, with repeated administration scheduled. Senior leaders should support, participate, and espouse the importance of MSF in their actions and communications. Furthermore, they should recognizing and reward individuals and groups "… for positive outcomes associated with MSF (such as participation rates or behavior change)."[42] Conversely, those who do not comply with multisource policies should experience consequences.[43]

Sustainability of the MSF process may be threatened for many reasons beyond an organization not leveraging best business practices. A lack of senior leader support and participation can doom the process, along with an only short-term commitment to the process by those leaders. Additionally, "approaching MSF as a mechanical data-collection event rather than a process of feedback, engagement, and leveraging data for improved effectiveness can impact its sustainability."[44] Participants and the organization must overcome their resistance to change if the MSF process is to be accepted and sustainable over the long-term.

The benefits of a sustained MSF process to an organization are many. It ensures "a workforce aligned with organizational direction and valued behaviors as communicated and reinforced by repeated cycles."[45] Additionally, MSF provides a method for an organization to quickly implement changes in priorities by adapting the content in the MSF to identify and reinforce valued behaviors.[46] 360 degree feedback also allows for the reinforcement of team focused behaviors. Finally, sustaining the MSF process allows for a method to create and maintain common expectations that are widespread and understood throughout the organization.

While the benefits of a successful and sustainable MSF program are many, there is a downside to an organization if the program is not sustainable. A MSF process that is not sustained implies that content (values, competences) of the MSF process is not of high importance to the organization.[47] It wastes the time and money of an organization and lessens the likelihood an individual will desire to change given that the culture does not support the process.[48] In the end, any future attempts to introduce a MSF program will be met with reluctance from participants and negatively impact the successful implementation of those programs.

Army Multisource Feedback Programs

The United States Army has incorporated multisource feedback in their leader development programs for many years. Most recently, the Army codified the importance of multisource feedback and its implication to leader development in Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, dated 18 December 2009. Senior Army officials continually emphasize the importance of leader development and to that end have leveraged a MSF process to assist in the leader development process. The Army defines leader development as "...the deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process grounded in Army values that grow Soldiers and Army civilians, into competent and confident leaders capable of decisive action."[49] "The purpose of the leader development system is to produce tactically and technically competent, confident, and agile leaders who act with boldness and initiative in dynamic, complex situations to execute missions according to present and future doctrine."[50] With the goal of developing "leaders who clearly provide purpose, direction, motivation, and vision to their subordinates while executing operational missions in support of their commander's intent."[51]

According to the Army, leader development is a lifelong process combining knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through formal education, institutional training, job assignments and self development.[52] Self-development provides the linkage between the operational and institutional domains and establishes an environment of constant learning and growth.[53] "Self-development focuses on maximizing strengths, overcoming weaknesses, and achieving individual development goals."[54] Per Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, part of one's self development is conducting a self assessment and utilizing the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program to seek feedback on a periodic basis. Appendix K, of AR 350-1, provides the purpose and scope on the MSAF program and its implication toward leader development. The program is designed to provide feedback to targeted leaders related to the core leader competencies and supporting leadership behavior found in Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership.

The intent of the Army's MSAF program is to assist leaders to become more self-aware and to gain knowledge in how to best develop themselves for future leader responsibilities. There is currently no connection between the Army's MSAF program and its formal performance evaluations and personnel management processes.[55] The MSAF is designed solely for leader development purposes only.

The MSAF products, training, and assessment tools are found through web-based access. The MSAF program is available to all leaders in the Army from Sergeant to Colonel. It can be initiated on a unit cyclic basis or when an individual is selected to attend certain professional education courses. Individual leaders also have the option of initiating a limited number of MSAF assessments on their own. Coaches are

available to assist leaders in interpreting the feedback received and in developing an action plan. The regulation also directs subordinates, peers and superiors of leaders who are participating in the program to provide assessments when notified by the MSAF program.[56] Confidentiality of targeted leaders' assessment is reportedly maintained throughout the process with only the targeted leader allowed to see and control the results of the feedback.

How does Army Policy Compare with Best Practices?

One can determine, just by reading the previous synopsis of the Army's MSAF program, it appears the Army has incorporated and utilized many of the before mentioned best business practice. One of those best practices is the use of a pilot program prior to fully implementing a 360 degree feedback system. For example, a 360-degree feedback process, known as Azimuth, was developed by the ARI (Army Research Institute) "...in order to improve feedback and enhance self-awareness of Army officer leadership competence."[57] The AZMIUTH has been utilized for over a decade, prior to its implementation it started with a pilot survey in 1996 with a resulting database of nearly 6,000 ratings.[58] The current Army interest in multi-source assessments had its genesis from the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) studies of 2000-2003.[59] Prior to full implementation of the Army's MSAF program the Combined Arms Center (CAC) Commander, in February 2004, directed the Center for Army Leadership (CAL) to conduct a test at the Army's Combat Training Centers (CTCs). CTCs are designed to provide realistic military training for units rotating through the centers by providing them the opportunity to conduct joint operations which emphasize scenarios on contingency force missions. The training scenarios are based on each participating organization's mission essential tasks list and

many of the exercises are mission rehearsals for actual operations the organization is scheduled to conduct.[60] The pilot was conducted during 14 CTC rotations, from 2004 to 2006, and involved 2,034 leaders and 23,169 participants.[61] Ninety-eight percent of the individuals participating in the pilot found the program to be valuable and worthwhile.[62] The apparent success of the Army's pilot program allowed them to move confidently forward in their implementation of a complete multisource feedback program for all leaders within their ranks.

The Army is consistent in defining and communicating what the purpose of the MSAF program is in their regulations, web pages, and brochures. The alignment between the intent and actual practice also appears to be consistent as the feedback data collected is utilized for development of the targeted leader. No evidence exists that the Army plans to or is currently utilizing the feedback collected to evaluate one's performance or input it into one's performance evaluation. It is apparent the use of the tool is matching the actual implementation and application espoused by the Army. It appears to be centered on the specific business and strategic needs of the Army given the importance it places on human capital and leader development.

The Army unmistakably stated the current assessment tool will be utilized exclusively for developmental purposes. Best business practices require the organization to provide a consistent and credible message on how it will utilize multisource feedback to ensure all participants' expectations are properly managed. Again, this is reinforced by Army regulation, the actual site where MSAF resides, and the messages the Army communicates to its participants in the program.

Clearly, the Army made a decision to keep MSAF in the development side by making the proponent for the program their Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). Conversely, if the desire had been to make it an assessment tool for determination of promotion, the Army would have logically selected the Human Resource Command as proponent for the program. Best business practices support the current implementation method the Army is utilizing; particularly, given its hierarchal structure and long-term utilization of a top down assessment model of evaluation. At this point, one can only conclude from best business practices that at the very least a cultural change would have to occur within the organization prior to implementing a multisource program for performance assessment decisions. Again, the Army appears to be clearly communicating their MSAF program is a leader development tool and not an assessment tool in human resourcing type decisions.

By utilizing a pilot program, the Army was able to leverage another best business practice of getting key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the system. This involvement was exemplified by the 2,000 leaders and over 23,000 participants in the pilot. The pilot program helped get input from key stakeholders. Consequently, key stakeholders were involved and were supportive of the MSAF program.

Additionally, in line with best business practices, the Army has had quite a few senior leader champions of MSAF. First was General William S. Wallace, who was the CAC Commander during the pilot development and test. Later was then Lieutenant General David Petraeus, as the CAC Commander, who approved the Army-wide implementation of the MSAF program along with General Wallace, who was now

serving as the TRADOC Commander.[63] General Martin E. Dempsey, the current

TRADOC Commander and future Army Chief of Staff is an advocate of MSAF, along

with General George Casey who is the current Chief of Staff.[64] Active senior leadership

endorsement, resourcing, and commitment to the MSAF program are key elements in

its sustainability and success.

The instrument utilized was tailored to the Army's needs. "It was developed from

the validation of the Army Leadership Requirements model."[65] This model, found in FM

6-22, outlines the attributes and competencies Army leaders develop to meet the three

basic goals of leadership: leading others, developing the organization and its individual

members, and accomplishing the mission. It is in line with the overall Army strategic

goal of "…remaining relevant and ready through effective leadership."[66] The instrument

attempts to garner feedback on the eight core leader competencies and supporting

behaviors found in FM 6-22 that are relevant to all leaders at every level and rank. The

Army's tailoring of their multisource feedback instrument to their organization is another

example of a best practice.

The quantity of questions asked by the MSAF instrument is nearly double of

those reflected in the best practices of between 45-50 rated questions. It does have two

narrative responses, close to the 3-4 narrative questions most experts would

recommend. However, given that a respondent could complete the instrument in

approximately 10-12 minutes, one can conclude the intent of not taking too much time,

but ensuring relevant and useful feedback was achieved. [67] The partial validation of this

conjecture can be found in the 95% satisfaction rate from participants on the overall

MSAF process.[68]

Due to the developmental purpose of the MASF the Army is keen to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of those participating in the process. They handle this by being forthright on who owns the information and how it is controlled. "Only the person who initiated the assessment will have access to the feedback it provides."[69] Unit Commanders do have access to a cumulative report of their organization subordinate leaders' information; however, the report contains no information identifying individuals.[70] To maintain anonymity and to effectively complete an Individual Feedback Report (IFR), the targeted leaders must have at least 3 respondents from superiors and 5 respondents from peer and subordinates. "Narrative comments are screened to remove names and other identifiers before a feedback report is generated."[71] The MSAF program is practicing what most experts agree is required to maintain anonymity by having 3-5 respondents in each rating population.[72] As a result of leveraging best business practices of confidentially and anonymity, the MSAF program will expectantly garner insightful and meaningful feedback for a targeted individual's leader development.

The Army MSAF program does not require targeted leaders to review their results with a coach; however, it is highly encouraged in order to help achieve a deeper and fuller understanding of the results of MSAF feedback and the individual development program (IDP) process.[73] MSAF program provides coaches virtually (e.g. telephonic) that one can schedule an appointment with through the MSAF web portal webpage. Additionally, when an individual is attending certain selected professional military schooling a trained coach is made available from institutional school faculty and staff.[74] The Army's MSAF coaching program is another example of a best business

practice and key to an individual analyzing his or her multisource feedback and developing an appropriate action plan.

Finally, utilizing best business practices, an organization must implement effective measures to ensure participants respond and provide feedback in a timely manner. AR 350-1 directs the subordinates, peers and superiors of targeted leaders to participate in the program and provide assessments when notified by the MSAF program.[75] If this was not enough, there are indications the Army will require "mandatory box check for participation on an officers support form and evaluation report starting in 2012."[76]

AR 350-1 does mention that the Commandant of the United States Army War College (USAWC) is responsible for conducting and maintaining an individual leadership assessment program for senior leaders attending senior service college.[77] Additionally, other examples of multisource feedback tools are currently being utilized for senior leaders. For example, the Senior Leader Development Office, who controls the career management for U.S. Army Colonels, instituted peer evaluations in 2006 amongst Colonels to support their continued leader development.[78] The peer feedback is meant to complement the existing Army 360 degree assessment feedback a Colonel may have done in the past. Similarly to the MSAF, these programs are for self-development purposes only. While beyond the scope of this paper, these and other multisource programs the Army wishes to implement can be assessed utilizing the aforementioned best business practices.

Employing 360 Assessment in a Limited Number of Selection Boards

If the Army is leveraging best business practices in implementing 360-degree feedback systems for leader development purposes, when should they utilize it for

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assessment purposes? Some might argue the time is now while others would argue for a more conservative approach. Lieutenant General (Retired) Barno would probably fall in the former category of implementers. This was made apparent in the article he recently authored on the top ten tasks the new Army Chief of Staff, General Dempsey, must accomplish. Number four on the list, right behind reforming the Army's personnel system, was find the best senior leadership. General Barno argued that "...the most important job of the Chief is to grow and select the Army's next cadre of Generals."[79] Barno goes on to write, "The Chief must know his leaders -- from a 360 degree viewpoint, not just from all their shiny mirrors pointed upward. Find and eliminate the Toxic Leaders -- your junior leaders know who they are."[80]

If finding the best senior leadership is important, then at a minimum should 360 degree feedback be utilized in the selection process of senior officers? Arguably, one might offer that the multisource feedback process could be utilized in selection of Colonels or brigade commanders, since obviously these are the potential future general officers. Or, one might consider utilizing it as selection criteria for brigadier generals. Regardless, this should not be the first time senior leaders have exposure to 360 degree feedback if the Army is practicing best business practices. With the implementation of the Army's MSAF program, one should have experienced multisource feedback in various stages throughout ones career. So, use of the 360 degree feedback in the Army's centralized selection process would not appear radical, but rather another source of consideration to employ in the selection process of senior leaders. While following best practices may not necessarily guarantee success, it certainly reduces the chance of failure. More than ever pertinent, given that 50 percent

of organizations abandon MSF as a decision making tool within the first year of its

implementation "… because of poor acceptance by users and ration inflation."[81]

Conclusion

Analysis of the Army's MSAF system demonstrates it effective use and

adaptation of best business practices found in both the private and public sectors. The

effective use of policy and doctrine development has allowed 360 degree feedback's

integration into the Army's leader development program. In the future, by utilizing the

Army's vast experience in MSAF and leveraging best business practices, the potential

exists for incorporating multisource feedback in selecting the best senior officers to lead

the Army. At a minimum, it should weed out those toxic leaders referenced in LTG

Barno's article to General Dempsey. There are risks and pitfalls to implementing a

multisource feedback system as an assessment tool; regardless, of when and how it is

utilized in an organization's human resourcing process. One must be aware of these

risks and plan accordingly. It is important to get its implementation right, like the Army

did for its MSAF program, or one runs the risk of quite possibly destroying its use and

acceptance for a generation of officers. It could certainly take that long before the

concept of multisource feedback as an evaluation tool could be reintroduced into the

Army culture. Leveraging best practices, gleaned from public and private organizations,

will aid the Army in determining the future policy considerations and strategy of

multisource feedback.

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