

Employee Performance Evaluations: A 360 Degree Perspective

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

The Prince William County Department of Fire has decided to implement a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors without adequately evaluating all of the potential impacts to the department. The purpose of this research project was to identify the items the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue should consider when implementing a 360 degree evaluation system, identify the disadvantages of utilizing a 360 degree evaluation system, and examine the benefits of utilizing a 360 degree evaluation system that will lead to the effective implementation of this program. The descriptive research methodology was used to answer questions regarding the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation, the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation, and identify the important aspects to consider when implementing a 360 degree evaluation system. The procedures included a questionnaire that was distributed to the cadre officers of the 2014 Fire Service Executive Development Institute, interviews with current members of the Prince William County Department Public Works, and an interview with the current Human Resources Director for Prince William County. The results of the research revealed the potential advantages and disadvantages of 360 degree feedback evaluation systems. Results of the research also revealed that the successful implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system is dependent on many factors. It is recommended that the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue clearly define the overall purpose of the proposed 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors prior to implementation of the system. With full organizational support, it is recommended that the department establish a cross-functional team that would be responsible for developing and communicating to the organization the overall purpose of the 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors.

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Employee Performance Evaluations: A 360 Degree Perspective

The problem is that the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue is in the process of implementing a 360 degree evaluation system for supervisors without adequately evaluating all of the potential impacts to the department. The purpose of this Applied Research Project (ARP) is to identify the items the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue should consider when implementing a 360 degree evaluation system, identify the disadvantages of utilizing a 360 degree evaluation system, and examine the benefits of utilizing a 360 degree evaluation system that will lead to the effective implementation of this program. The descriptive research methodology was used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?
2. What are the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?
3. What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree evaluation system?

Background and Significance

Prince William County is located in Northern Virginia, approximately 35 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. The County encompasses a total of 348 square miles and includes within its boundaries the independent cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. As of March 31, 2014, the current estimated population of Prince William County is 421,377 representing a growth rate of 4.82% since April 2010. Prince William County is projected to grow to 561,953 persons by 2030 according to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The 2010 Census reports that Prince William County is the third most populous jurisdiction in Virginia behind Fairfax County and Virginia Beach.

Prince William County's fire and rescue service is provided through a combination career and volunteer system. The career Department of Fire and Rescue (DFR) and eleven independent volunteer organizations jointly make up the Fire and Rescue Association (FRA). The member departments of the FRA work collectively to provide fire protection, emergency medical services, hazardous materials intervention, and technical and specialized rescue to the citizens of Prince William County. The mission of the DFR is to protect lives, property and the environment through timely, professional, humanitarian services essential to the health, safety and well-being of the community. The DFR adopted a new vision statement in March 2013 identifying the DFR as a trusted community leader comprised of dedicated professionals, upholding proud traditions of commitment and teamwork while pursuing innovation and providing exceptional customer service to the public and fire and rescue service members.

The DFR is comprised of 590 members, a combination of uniformed and non-uniformed employees. DFR employees are assigned to one of four sections in the department that include the Office of the Chief, the Community Safety Section, the Operations Section, and the Systems Support Section. These four sections of the organization work cooperatively to ensure the department achieves its mission in support of Prince William County's strategic plan. The fire and rescue service in Prince William County responded to 34,490 incidents in fiscal year 2013.

Prince William County's Personnel Policy provides the direction by which equitable employee performance evaluations shall be conducted. As a government organization, Prince William County has adopted an organizational vision, values, and leadership philosophy that serves as the basis for the Delivering Responsive Individual Value-based Evaluations (DRIVE) philosophy. The DRIVE philosophy is designed so that county employees understand their role in achieving the county's vision of making Prince William County a community of choice,

pledging to do the right thing for the customer and the community every time, and providing the necessary support and opportunities for each employee to honor this pledge. In addition to the county's vision, the DRIVE philosophy is designed to honor the county's values and leadership philosophy and recognize how employees use their knowledge and skills to achieve county, department, division, and unit/individual measures. The DRIVE philosophy also provides a means for rewarding employee performance that consistently surpasses expectations and to identify performance that consistently fails to meet job requirements and expectations.

Employee performance evaluation in Prince William County is designed as an on-going process to assist employees in developing their knowledge and skills and continually improving their performance by living the county's vision, values, and leadership philosophy and accomplishing goals and expectations. All Prince William County employees receive an annual performance evaluation. The performance evaluation is expected to be completed by the supervisor by the employee's performance review date. Prince William County Personnel Policy defines that performance evaluations will be used:

- To inform employees how well they are performing their job
- To communicate needed performance improvements and expectations
- To determine compensation adjustments for performance
- As a factor in determining order of lay-off set forth in a reduction-in-force, if necessary
- As a factor in determining training, transfer, demotion, termination, or other appropriate personnel actions
- As a factor for determining how well supervisors know their employees in terms of knowledge and skills related to their position

At the individual agency level, the DFR has clearly identified that employee performance evaluations are an integral component of the responsibilities of a supervisor. It is a process that all DFR supervisors must take full responsibility for to fully develop DFR personnel and our department in order to provide an ever increasing level of exceptional service to our community. Employee performance evaluations are not only a tool, but a positive and continual process for assessing an employee's performance and behaviors. Both supervisors and subordinates should look forward to being involved in the performance evaluation process.

The chief of the DFR has communicated his expectations with DFR employees indicating that employee performance evaluations are communications tools that ensure supervisors and their personnel are clear about the requirements and expectations of each employee's job. The evaluation also communicates the desired outcomes needed from each DFR employee and defines how those efforts will be measured. The evaluation process helps employees see how their jobs and expected contributions fit within the bigger picture of the DFR. The process of administering comprehensive and timely employee performance evaluations is one of the basic and most important responsibilities of DFR supervisors.

The Department of Public Works is the only agency in the Prince William County that has currently implemented a 360 degree feedback evaluation or multi-rater assessment tool as part of the employee performance evaluation process. The Department of Public Works serves the citizens and the community of Prince William County by protecting and improving natural and historic resources; adopting and enforcing codes and regulations; and building and maintaining the infrastructure needed for county government employees to service the community. The Department of Public Works currently has 348 employees.

As a result of the 2010 Prince William County Employee Organizational Survey, the Department of Public Works formed a Process Action Team to review the results of the organizational survey and address such areas as impressions of upper management, performance evaluations, communications, work related stress, and employee recognition. As a result of the Process Action Teams efforts, the Department of Public Works Pledge to Employees was published in April 2011 identifying the following:

- Employee and supervisors can discuss and share feedback at any time
- Each employee will have an informal review every four months with their supervisor leading up to their annual evaluation
- Employees will be given the opportunity to share observations and comments for their supervisors' evaluations
- The Director of Public Works will invite employees to brown bag breakfasts and lunches
- Division Chiefs will invite employees to brown bag breakfasts and lunches
- The Director of Public Works and Division Chiefs will visit and meet with employees in the field and on the job site
- Employees and teams will be thanked and recognized for their efforts in a variety of ways, including articles in What's Going On
- Employees will receive frequent communications, feedback, recognition, employee development training and resources to reduce stress and increase opportunities for success
- Employees will have a mechanism to share concerns and request support with a timely response

- Employees will receive information about their divisions and the department in a timely fashion through meetings, What's Going On, and online sources

In January 2013, the Department of Public Works implemented a process for collecting and documenting supervisor performance feedback by creating an Employee Feedback of Direct Supervisor Form. This tool is a form of 360 degree feedback evaluation designed to provide feedback on immediate supervisors' performance by Department of Public Works staff. The evaluation is designed to acquire feedback on such items as leadership, program management, and personnel management. A copy of the Department of Public Works Employee Feedback of Direct Supervisor Form is included in Appendix A. Currently, the process of participating in the supervisor feedback evaluation is optional by employees of the Department of Public Works. This evaluation process has been well received by the employees who have utilized the evaluation tool and the supervisor feedback provided by staff to date has been constructive. Overall, it has been slow integrating the 360 degree feedback evaluation system into the culture of the Department of Public Works.

In September 2012, the DFR entered into a partnership with a graduate student class from George Mason University (GMU). The primary purpose of this participative process was to develop a new vision statement for the DFR. The GMU graduate students used a modified version of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model for the DFR vision statement project. Both a theory and a method of research, AI is a fundamental evolution of organizations that focuses on what is working favorably (Weldon et al., 2012). The final products of the AI project between the GMU graduate students and the DFR included a recommended vision statement that was adopted by the DFR in March 2013 and five actionable recommendations that serve as tethers to support the new DFR vision statement.

During the number of interviews conducted by the GMU graduate students with DFR employees, several themes began to unfold. From the analysis of the AI data, the GMU graduate students identified five actionable items, or possibility propositions, that the GMU graduate students recommended to the DFR for further consideration and implementation. These recommendations, presented in order of priority by DFR employees include:

- The transfer process is transparent and has input from employees throughout the organization. Employees are able to apply for certain positions and will be selected based on skill and experience necessary. The process and its selection components are communicated to the workforce both prior to the transfer as well as during the process as a reminder
- Our battalion chiefs and above are routinely seen in the stations and around headquarters engaging in professional and technical conversations to increase and individual's knowledge and understanding
- The DFR builds on the Rookie/Tech II relationship established during the rookie's probationary period by using formal mentoring programs. New recruits are assigned a Tech II, who is qualified as a mentor and understands the role and expectations of a mentor
- Management promotes/mandates training/drills with volunteer and career firefighter. While volunteer participation cannot be mandated, we encourage this as a campaign to create a united workforce
- Officers/supervisors have 360 reviews (input from supervisors, peers, and subordinates) conducted on an annual basis for professional development

The importance placed on employee performance evaluations by both Prince William County and the DFR is clearly significant. Based on the information and employee feedback provided through the AI process and the perceived success of the multi-rater assessment process utilized by the Department of Public Works, the chief of the DFR has indicated his interest in implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors in the DFR. It is anticipated that such a system would serve as a professional development tool for supervisors and have a positive overall impact on future organizational effectiveness. This ARP is further work on identifying the potential benefits, as well as exploring the risks, associated with developing and implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for the DFR.

This ARP focuses on the problem that the DFR is in the process of implementing a 360 degree evaluation system for supervisors without adequately evaluating all of the potential impacts to the organization. This research problem has definitive correlation to the National Fire Academy's (NFA) *Executive Fire Officer Program* (EFOP), *Executive Leadership (EL)* R125 course. EL is the concluding course in the EFOP sequence. The primary goal of the EL course is to "provide a framework of executive-level competencies by focusing on personal effectiveness" (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2012, p. SM 1-7). The Executive Fire Officer will develop the ability to conceptualize and employ the key processes and interpersonal skills used by effective executive-level managers.

This ARP also has direct connection to achieve one of the goals of the United States Fire Administration (USFA). Specifically, the identified goal "improve the fire and emergency services' professional status" (FEMA, 2010, p. 18). As training and education standards evolve and demand greater academic rigor, the NFA in conjunction with state, local, and tribal partners, will promote a nationally-accepted competency based system of professional development. The

USFA's strategic initiative directly associated with this goal and impacting fire and emergency services include professional development, both internal to the organization and external to the American Fire Service. The specific objectives associated with this goal include:

- Enhance the professionalism of the nation's fire and emergency services leaders
- Advocate the acceptance of the Nation's fire and emergency services into multidiscipline policy development, planning, and preparedness
- Advocate a competency-based approach to professional development that includes training, higher education, and professional designations

It is also noteworthy to mention the definite connection between the research problem of this ARP and the relevance placed on 360 degree feedback evaluations as part of the EFOP. Students in the first year Executive Development and fourth year EL courses are required to participate in a 360 degree multi-rater assessment process. The evaluation process consists of two instruments; the Adaptive Leadership Instrument and the Executive Leadership Assessment. Both of these assessment instruments are multi-rater in nature and provide a self-evaluation component and an observer-evaluation component. The evaluation system is designed to protect the identity of those individuals selected as observers. The NFA has concluded that these 360 degree feedback evaluations provide valuable information to the participants of the EFOP.

Literature Review

Sandler and Keefe (2004) state that the "importance of employee evaluations is the establishment of a codified, consistent process to evaluate quantitative and qualitative performance of employees" (p. vi). Formally defined, "performance appraisal is a process of systematically evaluating performance and providing feedback on which performance adjustments can be made" (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2005, p. 168). Effective supervisors

treat the performance appraisal as both an evaluation and development tool. Robbins (1995) suggests that performance appraisals “review past performance - emphasizing positive accomplishments as well as deficiencies. In addition, supervisors are using the performance appraisal as a means for helping employees improve future performance” (p. 228). These findings are critical with respect to this ARP as they clearly indicate the basic importance of employee performance appraisals as they relate to both employee evaluation and employee development.

Employee performance evaluations are very important to an organization in general. Many of the personnel management functions of the organization are affected by the performance appraisal system. Edwards (2000) suggests that “performance appraisal if done properly can strengthen an organization as it prepares and develops the personnel for that organization” (p. 144). In addition, one of the primary means of maintaining a high-performance workforce is through the evaluation of employee performance. “the aim of the individual performance evaluation is to ensure personal accountability to the goals of the organization” (p. 60). Edwards (2000) advocates that “the process of performance appraisal has the potential to strongly affect how employees feel about their department and themselves” (p. 143). The AI project conducted for the DFR and resulting actionable recommendations clearly indicate the importance of employee performance evaluations to the members of the organization.

Any performance evaluation system is central to an organization’s human resource management activities. Hosea (2004) states that “a good evaluation process is possibly the most important tool an organization can have to ensure success” (p. 93). An important element of appraising performance is to establish employee goals, which should be tied to the organization’s strategic goals. If done correctly, “performance appraisal can provide several benefits to both

employees and the company” (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2006, p. 329). Appraisal systems must provide employees’ specific information about their performance. Noe (2008) elaborates that “appraisals should provide a clear understanding of the differences between current performance and expected performance, identify the causes of the performance discrepancy, and develop action plans to improve performance” (p. 328).

Carter and Rausch (2008) state that “performance reviews provide opportunities for officers and fire fighters to establish and maintain a supportive and professional relationship in which mutual trust can grow. The same applies to a chief and the officers and other staff members that report directly to the chief” (p. 281). Performance evaluations are clearly an important supervisory activity. Crawford (2003) elaborates that “there is perhaps no more important area of documentation and record keeping in fire service human resource management than performance evaluations or appraisals” (p. 100). Smoke (2005) identifies that the objectives of an employee evaluation system include:

- To provide feedback on the member’s performance
- To serve as a foundation for member guidance to continue development of the member
- To document the work of members with talent for positions of greater responsibility
- To justify adjustments in compensation and position classifications

One of the fundamental reasons for an employee evaluation system is to make decisions about employees. Edwards (2000) suggests that “fire departments need to be able to make these decisions in a fair and equitable manner in the best interests of the organization and the employee” (p. 143). The International Fire Service Training Association (2007) states that “as managers and supervisors, company officers must periodically evaluate the personnel who work

for them” (p. 616). The benefits of a well-organized employee evaluation system include the following:

- The strength and weaknesses of employees become part of a permanent record. This record is often used for awards, promotions, transfers, discipline, and termination
- The need for additional training is identified. Deficiencies can be addressed with specific existing training programs. If necessary, new programs can be developed to address the deficiency if it appears to be widespread
- The company officer conducting the evaluation becomes more familiar with the personnel being evaluated. This familiarity allows for more effective use of personnel and a better succession system
- The evaluation system is a motivation for improvement by the employee being evaluated
- Upper-level management becomes more aware of the abilities of lower-level managers and supervisors.
- Employee evaluations highlight the talents of employees who may be used in other areas of the organization
- Employee performance evaluation systems help to improve the efficiency of both employees and the organization as a whole

Employee performance evaluations traditionally have been conducted by an employee's immediate superior, the presumption being that since the immediate superior is responsible for the employee's performance, the superior should do the evaluation (Schermerhorn et al., 2005). Multi-rater or 360 degree feedback is used by many organizations and utilizes performance input from all directions. Edwards (2000) indicates that “performance review data are received from

managers, subordinates, customers, peers, and others in the process” (p. 160). Jackson and Schuler (2006) indicate that “360-degree systems collect performance information from a set of colleagues and internal customers who form a circle around the employee” (p. 427). “This multisource feedback method provides a comprehensive perspective of employee performance by utilizing feedback from a full circle of people whom the employee interacts: supervisors, subordinates, and coworkers” (Bruegman, 2009, p. 368). Nowack (1993) identifies that the use of 360 degree feedback evaluations is increasing for the following reasons:

- Need for cost effective alternative to assessment centers
- Increasing availability of assessment software capable of summarizing data from multiple sources into customized feedback reports
- Need for continuous measurement in continuous-improvement efforts
- Need for job related feedback for employees affected by career plateauing
- Need to maximize employees’ potential in the face of technological changes, competitive challenges, and increased workforce diversity

Fire and emergency services personnel should be familiar with the concept of 360 degree feedback evaluations. The International Fire Service Training Association (2004) suggests that 360 degree evaluations are “similar to the type of size-up that occurs at an emergency incident when the incident commander requests situation reports from all sides of the incident” (p. 196). Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) state that 360 degree feedback evaluations involve “collecting perceptions about a person’s behaviors and the impact of that behavior from the person’s boss or bosses, direct reports, colleagues, fellow members of project teams, internal and external customers, and suppliers” (p. 6).

In developing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system, several factors are essential for the system to be effective. Noe (2008) indicates that “the system must provide reliable or consistent ratings; feedback must be job-related (valid); the system must be easy to use, understandable, and relevant; and the system must lead to managerial development” (p. 331).

Important issues to consider when developing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system include:

- Who will the raters be?
- How will you maintain confidentiality of the raters?
- What behaviors and skills are job-related?
- How will you ensure full participation and complete responses from every employee who is asked to be a rater?
- What will the feedback report include?
- How will you ensure that managers receive and act on the feedback?

“There’s no doubt that 360 degree rating provides a broader perspective on employees” (Taylor, 2011). The International City/County Management Association (2004) states that “through 360 degree feedback, employees are made aware of how essential they are to the organization and how they stand with their peers and customers” (p. 71). With 360 degree feedback, the employee is central to the evaluation process and the ultimate goal is to improve individual performance within the organization (Linman, n.d.). The popularity of 360 degree feedback evaluation in organizations has increased dramatically in recent years. Becton and Schraeder (2004) identify several reasons for this increased popularity:

- Dissatisfaction with traditional performance appraisal systems
- Increased focus on empowerment, participation, and customers
- Larger spans of control

- Attempts to improve organizational processes and communications
- Imitation of competitors
- Increased need to communicate critical organizational behaviors and values
- Increased need for managers to adjust to turbulent business practices

The 360 degree feedback evaluation system presents a way for organizations to elicit valuable feedback. Edwards (2000) states that “this system may reveal valuable insights regarding the management of the fire department” (p. 160). Often, the feedback one really needs as an officer in the fire department is from subordinates. When implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system, organizations need to give careful consideration to the design of the process, in order to ensure it serves the purpose for which it is intended. Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) identify the following key decisions regarding the implementation of 360 degree feedback evaluation system:

- The right approach for collecting and presenting feedback in your organization
- Generating enthusiasm and commitment among key decision makers in the organization
- Ensuring that the data collected are useful and of high quality
- Providing meaningful training, development, and follow-up activities

When implemented successfully, 360 degree feedback evaluation systems allow all employees to improve in key areas that might be limiting their upward career path. When implanted poorly, “360 degree programs create mistrust, anger, conflict, and can leave a team with lower morale than when you started the exercise” (Jackson, 2012). Wimer and Nowack (1998) identify the following mistakes organizations should avoid when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system:

- Having no clear purpose
- Using it as a substitute
- Not conducting a pilot test
- Not involving key stakeholders
- Having insufficient communication
- Compromising confidentiality
- Not making clear the feedback's use
- Not giving people sufficient resources
- Not clarifying who owns the feedback
- Having unfriendly administration and scoring
- Linking to existing systems without a pilot
- Making it an event rather than a process
- Not evaluating effectiveness

The findings and observations of others were influential to this ARP and related to the research problem that the DFR is in the process of implementing a 360 degree evaluation system for supervisors without adequately evaluating all of the potential impacts to the organization. “When done well, multi-rater feedback systems can lead to enormous positive changes and enhance effectiveness at the individual, team, and organizational levels” (Wimer & Nowack, 1998, p. 69).

Procedures

The procedures utilized for this ARP included the use of a questionnaire distributed to the twenty-one officers attending the 2014 session of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) Fire Service Executive Development Institute (FSEDI), interviews with seven staff

members of the Prince William County Department of Public Works who were instrumental in developing the supervisory feedback form for their organization, and an interview with the Human Resources Director for Prince William County. The desired outcome of the questionnaire and the interviews was to obtain a better understanding of the potential advantages and disadvantages of 360 degree feedback evaluations and to identify the important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system within an organization.

IAFC Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed and disseminated on August 1, 2014 to the cadre of twenty-one officers accepted into the 2014 session of the FSEDI. The FSEDI is a year-long leadership development program developed by the IAFC to provide new and aspiring fire chiefs with the tools they need to have successful and productive tenures. A total of 16 responses were received from the cadre of officers in the FSEDI. A copy of the IAFC questionnaire is included in Appendix B. Data gathered from the questionnaire is included in the Results section of this ARP and in Appendix C.

Department of Public Works Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted on July 29, 2014 through August 1, 2014 with seven staff members of the Prince William County Department of Public works who were directly involved in that organizations development of a supervisory feedback form for their department. This also included an interview with the Director of Public Works. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain additional information and insight with respect to 360 degree feedback evaluations and their use within Prince William County. The following questions were asked during the interviews and the responses are referenced in the Results section of this ARP.

- What are the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?

- What are the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?
- What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system?

Human Resources Director Interview

A personal interview was conducted on July 29, 2014 with the current Human Resources Director for Prince William County. The Human Resources Director manages and provides executive leadership to thirty-two county agencies within Prince William County that vary in size and are typically organized into multiple divisions and provide a wide variety of programs and services to the citizens of Prince William County. The purpose of this interview was to obtain additional information and insight with respect to 360 degree feedback evaluations in Prince William County. The following questions were asked during the interview and the responses are referenced in the Results section of this ARP.

- What are the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?
- What are the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation?
- What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system?

Assumptions and Limitations

The IAFC questionnaire utilized in this ARP made several assumptions and also had limitations. The first assumption was that the respondents answered the questions in a factual manner. An additional assumption was that the respondents had a detailed knowledge of their respective fire department's employee performance evaluation system. In addition, the limited number of participants in the IAFC questionnaire was also viewed as a limitation. While the information received from the cadre officers of the 2014 session of the FSEDI was informative,

the author believes that a broader sample of participants would have yielded additional results beneficial to the ARP.

The personal interviews utilized in this ARP also made several assumptions and also had limitations. As with the questionnaire, the first assumption with the interviews was that respondents answered the questions in a factual manner. The author selected the interview participants because they had either participated in a project directly related to 360 degree feedback evaluations within their own agency in Prince William County or were considered an expert based on their current position within county government. The assumption was that the respondents had a detailed knowledge of 360 degree feedback evaluation systems based on either their past or current experiences. While the information gathered from the interviews was informative, the author believes that a broader sample of interviewees regionally would have yielded additional results beneficial to the ARP.

Results

Research question number one: What are the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation? The interviews conducted with staff members from the Department of Public Works and the Human Resources Director for Prince William County provided a variety of similar type responses. A 360 degree feedback evaluation gives the employee a path to share strengths and weaknesses in a professional avenue about their supervisor, which to some enforces their worth to the team (K. Downen, personal communication, July 29, 2014). The feedback employees receive helps them gain insight into how others perceive them and provides an opportunity to adjust behaviors and develop skills (L. Satlin, personal communication, July 29, 2014).

A 360 degree feedback evaluation also gives employees a sense that they can actively impact the professional development of their supervisor and the quality of supervision (T. Bruun, personal communication, July 31, 2014). Most employees are not empowered to provide feedback to their supervisors and allowing this alternative lets them know that their input is important and valued. When employees feel they have a voice and can influence their environment, they are more likely to be engaged (K. Qadri, personal communication, July 30, 2014). If a 360 degree feedback evaluation is used properly, it is a great tool (G. O'Keefe, personal communication, July 29, 2014). The cadre of officers who responded to the IAFC questionnaire ranked the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation. As shown in Table 1, the cadre of officers of the 2014 session of the FSEDI believed that the greatest advantage of a 360 degree feedback evaluation was that it identifies employees' strengths and weaknesses.

Table 1

Advantages of 360 Degree Feedback Evaluations – IAFC

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Average Ranking</u>
Identifies Employees Strengths and Weaknesses	3.50
Empowers Employees	1.63
Identifies Potential Training Needs	2.38
Multiple Perspectives of Employee Performance	2.50

Research question number two: What are the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation? Information obtained during the literature review highlighted the fact that performance appraisal systems should be used as a means for assisting employees improve future performance. Employees may become demoralized by results if the focus is on people who give negative feedback (L. Satlin, personal communication, July 29, 2014). The responses provided during a 360 degree feedback evaluation will need to be constructive and not an opportunity to attack an individual (S. Mathews, personal communication, July 29, 2014).

If the evaluation tool is offered, employees need to know their feedback is valued and considered. If a chronic problem is reported by many and ignored, employees will stop providing this valuable feedback (D. Oliver, personal communication, July 29, 2014). If the feedback is not acted on, then the whole exercise becomes pointless and can do more harm to employee morale and engagement (K. Qadri, personal communication, July 30, 2014). The biggest disadvantage is if all parties are not on the same page of the spirit of the exercise. If there is fear of retaliation then the person expected to give the comments might not be honest. At that point, it becomes a worthless exercise (K. Downen, personal communication, July 29, 2014). As shown in Table 2, the IAFC questionnaire results identified that feedback being used inappropriately was the greatest potential disadvantage of 360 degree feedback evaluations.

Table 2

Disadvantages of 360 Degree Feedback Evaluations – IAFC

<u>Disadvantages</u>	<u>Average Ranking</u>
Time Required to Complete	2.13
Training Required	2.19
Focus on Negative Feedback	2.69
Feedback Used Inappropriately	3.00

Research question number three: What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system? Information obtained during the literature review highlighted the importance of proper implementation. The implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system requires extensive planning. It's important to determine what competencies and skills should be reviewed and they should be aligned with organizational goals and values (L. Satlin, personal communication, July 29, 2014). It is also important to communicate the purpose of the feedback process and encourage, or require, employees to provide it in an honest and timely manner (K. Qadri, personal communication, July 30, 2014).

It is critical to train employees and supervisors on the purpose, intent, and value of the feedback system. Explain how it will be used by supervisors and that it is a tool to help each supervisor improve (D. Oliver, personal communication, July 29, 2014). It becomes managements challenge to relay that feedback to the supervisor (J. Holley, personal communication, August 1, 2014). There will naturally be some angst in an organization before implementing a 360 degree feedback system. Therefore, it is important to stress with the entire

organization that the process is meant to be used positively and constructively (T. Bruun, personal communication, July 31, 2014). As shown in Table 3, the IAFC questionnaire results ranked defining the purpose as the most important item to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system.

Table 3

Items to Consider During 360 Degree Feedback Evaluation Implementation – IAFC

<u>Items to Consider</u>	<u>Average Ranking</u>
Define Purpose	6.50
Planning	4.56
Organizational Support	5.25
Confidentiality	3.94
Aligned with Organizational Vision and Values	5.13
Communications	3.81
Define Feedback Use	3.69
Employee Training	3.13

Discussion

The relationship between the study results and the specific findings of others in the literature review provide significant insight in regard to both the prospective advantages and disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation. The most significant findings are with respect to the multitude of items the DFR needs to consider prior to implementing a 360 degree evaluation system for supervisory personnel. The research questions asked as part of the ARP

were: What are the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation? What are the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation? What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree evaluation system?

The study results and the specific findings of others clearly indicate a variety of possible advantages of implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation. Bruegman (2009) indicates that 360 degree feedback is “effective for career coaching and identifying strengths and weaknesses” (p. 368). The results of the IAFC questionnaire support this finding and identify that the greatest advantage of a 360 degree feedback evaluation was that it identifies employees’ strengths and weaknesses. “The benefits of 360 degree feedback include collecting multiple perspectives of manager’s performance, allowing employees to compare their own personal evaluations with the views of others, and formalizing communications about behaviors and skills ratings between employees and their internal and external customers” (Noe et al., 2006, p. 395).

Edwards (2000) suggests that “360 degree feedback appears to be a good system, especially for upper-level positions within the fire department” (p. 160). Often the higher one is in the organization the more difficult it is to get valid feedback on performance, and even more so in paramilitary organizations like fire departments. A 360 degree feedback evaluation system provides additional information directly from employees to use in both the evaluation process and to better target training and development opportunities (T. Bruun, personal communication, July 31, 2014). Identifying potential training needs was listed as a potential advantage of a 360 degree feedback evaluation in the IAFC questionnaire with an average ranking of 2.38. Jackson and Schuler (2006) indicate that “feedback is most effective when it is accompanied by specific suggestions about how to improve” (p. 427). A 360 degree feedback evaluation facilitates

implementing decisions relating to planning for and gaining commitment to continued training and personal development of subordinates (Schermerhorn et al., 2005).

Noe (2008) suggests that the potential disadvantages of 360 degree feedback evaluations include “the time demands placed on the raters to complete the evaluation, managers seeking to identify and punish raters who provided negative information, the need to have a facilitator to help interpret results, and companies’ failure to provide ways that managers can act on the feedback they receive” (p. 331). The International City/County Management Association (2004) indicates that “360 degree feedback is time consuming and administratively burdensome” (p. 71). Interestingly, the results of the IAFC questionnaire did not indicate that the time associated with completing a 360 degree feedback evaluation was a significant drawback when compared to other disadvantages.

Hidden motives of evaluators can negatively impact results and collaborations between employees can skew results (L. Satlin, personal communication, July 29, 2014). The results of the IAFC questionnaire support that evaluation feedback being used inappropriately is the most significant disadvantage of a 360 degree feedback evaluation. Jackson and Schuler (2006) indicate that “subordinates don’t always evaluate performance objectively or honestly, especially if their ratings are not anonymous” (p. 426). A potential drawback of 360 degree feedback evaluations would be if supervisors use the feedback punitively, or if employees choose to use the process unconstructively (T. Bruun, personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Interpretation of the study results and the specific findings of others clearly support that the successful implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system within an organization is dependent on many factors. “Some organizations that use 360 degree feedback fail at the planning and implementation stages” (Taylor, 2011). Carter and Rausch (2008) add

that “many systems fail to rely primarily on relatively lean procedures and the thorough development of management/leadership skills for implementing fair, meaningful performance assessments” (p. 282). The results of the IAFC questionnaire support this finding and identify that the most important items to consider during the implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system is to define the purpose. Before implementing a system, the goals of the process, such as better targeted training and development opportunities, should be clearly articulated and communicated (T. Bruun, personal communication, July 31, 2014).

If supervisors and employees are to take an evaluation system seriously, top-level management and the political leadership must give the system clear, consistent support. The International City/County Management Association (2004) states that “the failure to present the evaluation system as a priority management issue will lead to lax implementation, and the organization will not attain the full benefit that such a system is designed to produce” (p. 61). The IAFC questionnaire also identified the significance of organizational support when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system with an average ranking of 5.25. If you can get staff at all levels to buy into the program, it can be a really good thing and a positive learning tool for supervisors, management, and employees (J. Holley, personal communication, August 1, 2014).

Implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system within an organization requires senior management support and a strong culture of communication and trust. A communications plan must be developed to clearly identify the purpose of the review and how feedback will be used (L. Satlin, personal communication, July 29, 2014). Edwards (2000) adds that “effective appraisal requires a system that is properly designed and well communicated to the members of the department” (p. 144). Thus, it is very important both to select a performance

evaluation technique that supports achievement of the organization's goals and to connect the expectations for employee performance to the mission of the organization (International City/County Management Association, 2004). Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) suggest the following to ensure a 360 degree feedback evaluation system achieves its intended objectives:

- Link the effort to a strategic initiative or a business need
- Get senior management to participate in and drive the efforts
- Emphasize clear and frequent communication about the initiative's purpose and implications for each member of the organization
- Ensure that people see the behaviors that will be measured as important and relevant to their jobs
- Provide ongoing support and follow-up

The author was encouraged by the study results and the findings of others with respect to the various aspects the DFR will need to consider as it moves forward with implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system in the organization. It is apparent, as with any form of employee evaluation system, that a 360 degree feedback evaluation system has both inherent advantages and disadvantages. Although there was an abundance of information related to the importance of more traditional employee performance evaluation systems being utilized by fire and rescue departments; there were limited findings specifically related to 360 degree feedback evaluations being utilized within the fire and rescue service. The study results support this finding as only 7.14% of those cadre officers who responded to the IAFC questionnaire indicated that their departments currently utilize some form of 360 degree feedback evaluation for supervisory employees. Based on the author's analysis of the results, it is evident that the

utilization of 360 degree feedback evaluations is a relatively new concept for the fire and rescue service.

The study results clearly indicate that there are potential organizational implications to the DFR. Both the findings of others and the study results reinforce the need for strong organizational support and effective communication when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system. The DFR will need to clearly outline the purpose and intent of the 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors. In addition, the DFR will need to define how the feedback will be used in order to have a positive impact not only for the individual supervisor, but with respect to improving overall organizational effectiveness of the DFR.

Recommendations

The recommendations offered are made based on the research findings of this ARP. As a public safety agency, the importance of an effective and efficient employee performance evaluation system is absolutely essential to the DFR for overall organizational effectiveness and continued sustainability. In addition, any recommendations made regarding the implementation of 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors must support both the mission and vision of the DFR.

Research findings from this ARP identified the potential advantages and disadvantage of 360 degree feedback evaluation systems. More specifically, the study results and the specific findings of others clearly identified that the successful implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system within an organization is dependent on many factors. Although the DFR is positioned to move forward with the implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors, further discussion and investigation into these relevant factors needs to occur prior to implementing any change to the current employee performance evaluation system of the

DFR. The process of implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system is a relatively new concept to the fire and rescue service. It is recommended that the DFR proceed cautiously with implementation in order to ensure sustained success.

Research findings from this ARP strongly support the need to clearly define the purpose of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system. In addition to defining the purpose of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system, the IAFC questionnaire identified that such an evaluation system should be aligned with the vision and values of the organization. Although the AI project for the DFR identified 360 degree reviews for officers/supervisors as an actionable item for the DFR to consider implementing, the AI project was not specific with respect to the overall purpose of the proposed evaluation system. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the DFR clearly define the purpose of the proposed 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors prior to implementation.

Research findings from this ARP also identified the importance of organizational support with respect to implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system. Although the DFR currently places significant value on employee performance evaluations, the implementation of a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors raises that level of support to an entirely different level. As reinforced by the research findings, the DFR will need to organizationally support all aspects of the proposed 360 degree feedback evaluation system. This includes planning, training, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring feedback is used appropriately.

Prior to implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors, the DFR should establish a cross-functional team to develop an implementation plan. This team should have full organizational support and would be responsible for developing and communicating the

overall purpose of the 360 degree feedback evaluation system for supervisors to the DFR. The purpose should be aligned with the vision and values of the DFR.

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APPENDIX A

Department of Public Works Employee Feedback of Direct Supervisor Form

Public Works Employee Feedback of Direct Supervisor	
Date:	Public Works Division:
Immediate Supervisor:	
Supervisor's Supervisor (person receiving this form):	

Please Note: Feedback on immediate supervisors by staff is meant as a positive means to assist your direct supervisor in improving his/her job performance. Supervisor performance evaluations are **OPTIONAL** and should be conducted at least annually. Feedback should not reflect personal prejudice, dislike, bias, or favoritism on the part of the staff member; supervisor performance is being measured, not the supervisor's value as a person. This form is intended to be anonymous, when completed it should be placed in an interoffice envelope and mailed to the **next higher supervisor (your supervisor's supervisor)**.

Form Instructions: Use one of the following ratings to describe the performance of your supervisor in each of the categories.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| (3) Performs Very Well: | Performance <u>often exceeds expectations</u> for the job |
| (2) Performs Well: | Performance <u>consistently meets expectations</u> for the job |
| (1) Needs Improvement: | Performance <u>sometimes meets expectations</u> for the job |

Factor Ratings:

3 = Performs very well; 2 = Performs well; 1 = Needs improvement

I. LEADERSHIP	1	2	3
a) Able to direct others in accomplishing work			
b) Demonstrates the professional, supervisory and/or specialized knowledge required for the job			
c) Provides opportunities for others to develop skills			
d) Advocates and supports for his/her employees to upper management and other departments			
e) Responds appropriately to constructive criticism and to suggestions for work improvement			

Comments			
II. PROGRAM / PROJECT MANAGEMENT	1	2	3
a) Defines expectations and tasks clearly			
b) Plans and organizes work and establishes appropriate priorities			
c) Accessible to answer questions			
d) Delegates authority when appropriate			
e) Is well organized and uses time productively			
Comments			
III. PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT	1	2	3
a) Models an enthusiastic and optimistic attitude			
b) Rewards and recognizes individual and teams appropriately			
c) Provides timely performance evaluations and frequent feedback			
d) Deals with all staff in a fair manner, no favorites			
e) Deals with unacceptable behavior or performance in a timely and professional manner			
Comments			

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

What specific strengths has your supervisor demonstrated in the past year?

What specific improvements could your supervisor make in the upcoming year?

Have you ever mentioned these issues to your supervisor?

PROVIDE A COPY OF THIS FORM TO YOUR SUPERVISOR'S SUPERVISOR IN AN

UNMARKED INTEROFFICE ENVELOPE

APPENDIX B**IAFC Questionnaire**

1. Does your fire department currently utilize some form of an employee performance evaluation system for employees?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Does your fire department currently utilize some form of 360 degree feedback evaluation for supervisory employees?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Please rank the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation (please rank the advantages with 1 being the greatest advantage and 4 being the least advantage).

Identifies employees strengths and weaknesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Empowers employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identifies potential training needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multiple perspectives of employee performance	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Please rank the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation (please rank the disadvantages with 1 being the greatest disadvantage and 4 being the least disadvantage).

Time required to complete	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus on negative feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback used inappropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system? (please rank the items with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important).

Define purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organizational support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confidentiality	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aligned with organizational vision and values	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Define feedback use	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee training	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX C**IAFC Questionnaire Results**

1. Does your fire department currently utilize some form of an employee performance evaluation system for employees?

Yes	86.67%
No	13.33%

2. Does your fire department currently utilize some form of 360 degree feedback evaluation for supervisory employees?

Yes	7.14%
No	92.86%

3. Please rank the potential advantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation (please rank the advantages with 1 being the greatest advantage and 4 being the least advantage).

	Ranking:	1	2	3	4	Average Ranking
Identifies employees strengths and weaknesses		68.75%	18.75%	6.25%	6.25%	3.50
Empowers employees		12.50%	6.25%	12.50%	68.75%	1.63
Identifies potential training needs		0.00%	56.25%	25.00%	18.75%	2.38
Multiple perspectives of employee performance		18.75%	18.75%	56.25%	6.25%	2.50

4. Please rank the potential disadvantages of a 360 degree feedback evaluation (please rank the disadvantages with 1 being the greatest disadvantage and 4 being the least disadvantage).

	Ranking:	1	2	3	4	Average Ranking
Time required to complete		25.00%	6.25%	25.00%	43.75%	2.13
Training required		12.50%	25.00%	31.25%	31.25%	2.19
Focus on negative feedback		12.50%	50.00%	31.25%	6.25%	2.69
Feedback used inappropriately		50.00%	18.75%	12.50%	18.75%	3.00

5. What are important items to consider when implementing a 360 degree feedback evaluation system? (please rank the items with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important).

Ranking:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average Ranking
Define purpose	31.25%	25.00%	25.00%	6.25%	6.25%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%	6.50
Planning	6.25%	6.25%	18.75%	12.50%	31.25%	12.50%	12.50%	0.00%	4.56
Organizational support	12.50%	18.75%	18.75%	12.50%	12.50%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%	5.25
Confidentiality	12.50%	0.00%	6.25%	25.00%	12.50%	12.50%	12.50%	18.75%	3.94
Aligned with organizational vision and values	18.75%	18.75%	12.50%	6.25%	12.50%	12.50%	18.75%	0.00%	5.13
Communication	0.00%	18.75%	6.25%	12.50%	12.50%	18.75%	12.50%	18.75%	3.81
Define feedback use	6.25%	6.25%	12.50%	12.50%	12.50%	6.25%	25.00%	18.75%	3.69
Employee training	12.50%	6.25%	0.00%	12.50%	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%	43.75%	3.13