

# 2020 SURVEY TOPIC BRIEF

BY THE STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY COMMITTEE  
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATIONS

## PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

The 2020 SE3 Performance Feedback Brief explores the topic of performance review for structural engineers based on the responses to a nation-wide survey. The Committee used the survey to study how often structural engineers receive feedback on their performance, how satisfied individuals are with the feedback they receive, and how this relates to perceptions of performance both by the respondents themselves and by managers. This brief also examines whether responses vary with individual or firm characteristics.

In addition to questions directly related to performance feedback, the survey asked questions regarding satisfaction with professional development opportunities, training, and supervision.

Refer to the 2020 Demographics Brief for more information on responses to the 2020 NCSEA SE3 survey.

### BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS

1. White respondents were more likely to receive positive performance reviews.
2. Men and White respondents were most likely to rate themselves as having better performance than their peers.
3. Non-White respondents and respondents with less than 5 years of experience were less likely to be satisfied with the frequency of feedback they receive.
4. The majority of survey respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with professional development opportunities.

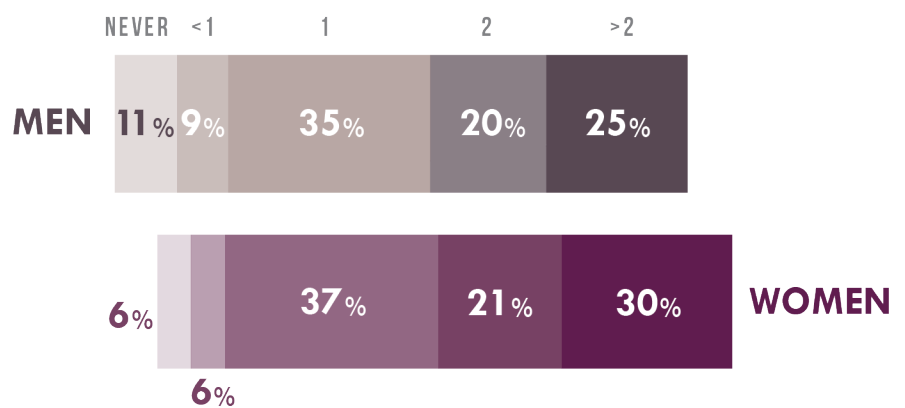
# FREQUENCY OF PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

The survey asked respondents how often they receive either formal or informal feedback on their performance. Of all respondents, 10% never receive feedback, 44% receive feedback once a year or less, and 46% receive feedback more often than once a year. Respondents who receive more frequent feedback are typically more satisfied with their overall career in structural engineering. 70% of respondents who receive feedback once a year or less reported satisfaction with their overall career while 74% of respondents who receive feedback twice a year and 81% of respondents who receive feedback more than twice a year reported satisfaction. However, respondents who indicated they never receive feedback had the highest level of overall career satisfaction at 84%. This group of respondents is largely composed of those in the Principal/Owner/Founder position level, which is associated with higher overall career satisfaction.

Frequency of feedback received varied by race and gender. Black respondents were significantly more likely than other racial groups to receive feedback once or less than once a year; 62% of Black respondents as compared to 53% of non-Black respondents. Multi-racial respondents were more likely to receive feedback more frequently than once per year; 56% of multi-racial respondents reported this frequency compared to just 46% of other respondents. Women were more likely to receive feedback more than once a year than men (51% vs. 45%).

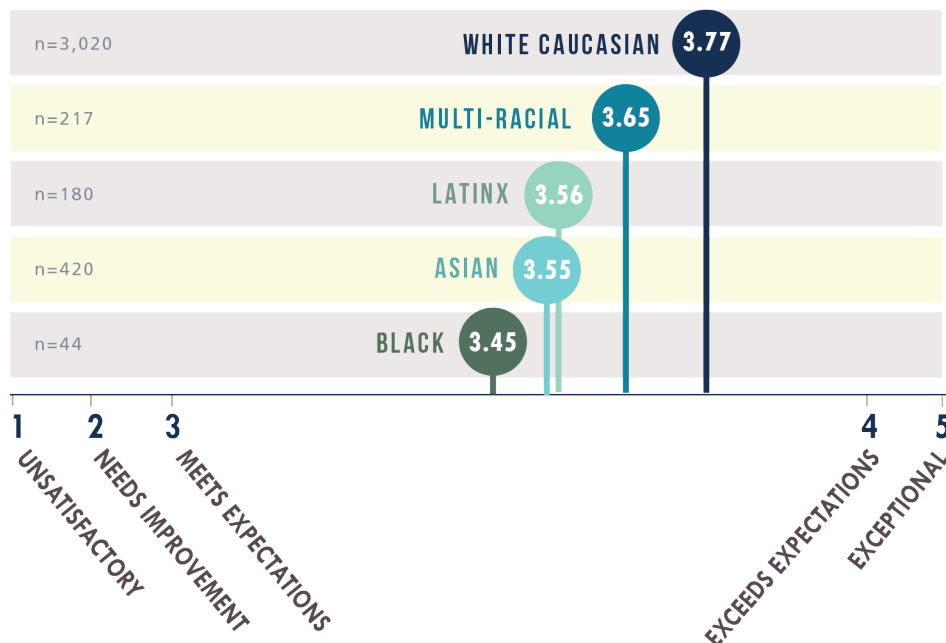
## FREQUENCY OF FEEDBACK

### NUMBER OF TIMES PER YEAR RESPONDENTS RECEIVE FEEDBACK



# PERFORMANCE RATING

## PERFORMANCE RATING BY OTHERS



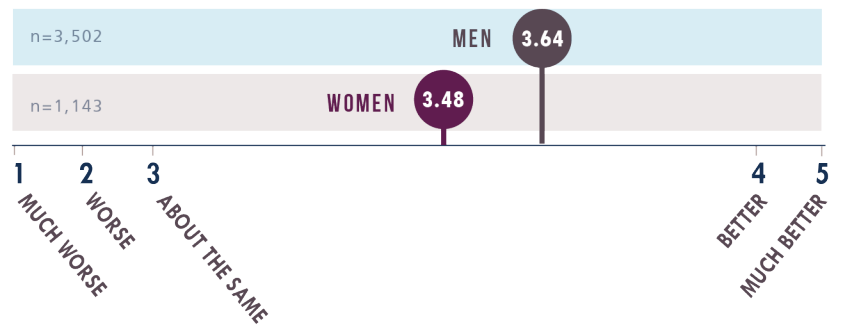
The survey asked respondents to characterize their most recent performance feedback rating based on a five point scale of 'exceptional', 'exceeds expectations', 'meets expectations', 'needs improvement', or 'unsatisfactory'. 62% of all respondents received a rating of exceptional or exceeds expectations. Compared to White respondents, Black, LatinX, Asian, and multi-racial respondents were 1.5 to over 2 times more likely to receive a rating of meets expectations or needs improvement.

# SELF PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE

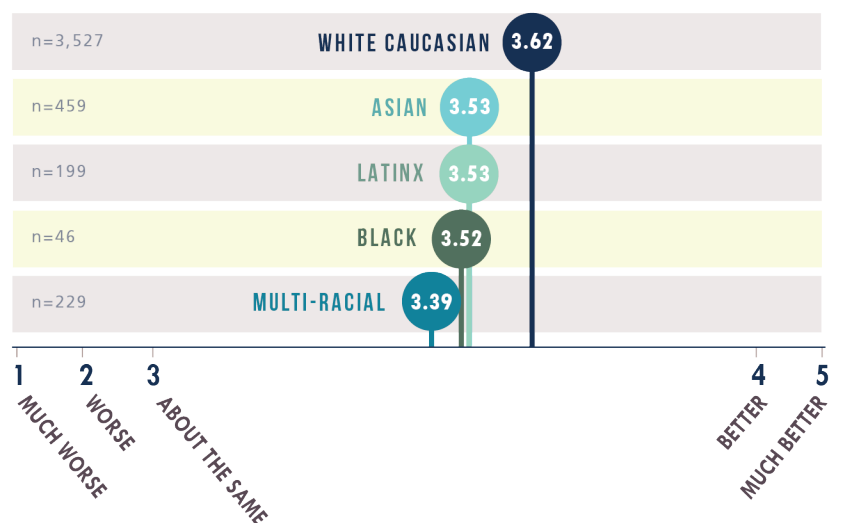
The survey also asked respondents to rate their performance compared to their peers on a five point scale ranging from 'much better' to 'much worse'. 41% of respondents rated themselves 'better' than and 45% of respondents rated themselves 'about the same' as their peers. Significant differences existed between demographic groups in self-perceived performance. White men were more likely to rate themselves as better or much better than their peers while women and other respondents were more likely to rate themselves as about the same or worse. 53% of Black, LatinX and multi-racial respondents rated themselves about the same as their peers compared to 45% of White respondents. Similarly, 54% of women rated themselves about the same as their peers compared to 43% of men.

Demographic factors associated with worse self-perceived performance include younger age, lower position level, working fewer hours, and lower levels of education or certification. Other groups who were more likely to report a better self-perceived performance include respondents aged 65 or older, and respondents who worked 60 hours per week or more.

## SELF PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE BY GENDER



## SELF PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE BY RACE



# SATISFACTION WITH PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

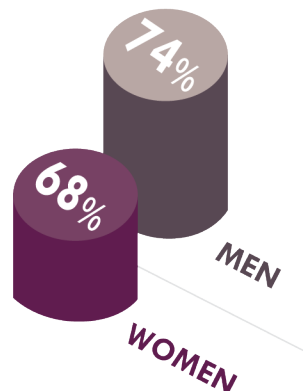
Survey respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the frequency of performance feedback they received and the areas of development discussed within that feedback. Of all respondents surveyed, 56% were satisfied with the frequency of performance feedback they received while 24% were not satisfied and 20% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Though they receive feedback more often than men, women were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their frequency of performance feedback. 28% of women reported dissatisfaction with the frequency of performance feedback compared to 23% of men.

Satisfaction with performance feedback also varied by race. Compared to 24% of all respondents, 38% of Black respondents, 36% of Middle Eastern respondents, and 30% of LatinX respondents replied that they were not satisfied with the frequency of performance feedback they receive. Respondents with less than 5 years of experience were least likely to be satisfied with the frequency of feedback they receive (49% vs. 56% for all respondents). However, the same respondents were the most likely to be satisfied with the areas of development discussed (62% vs. 59% of all respondents).

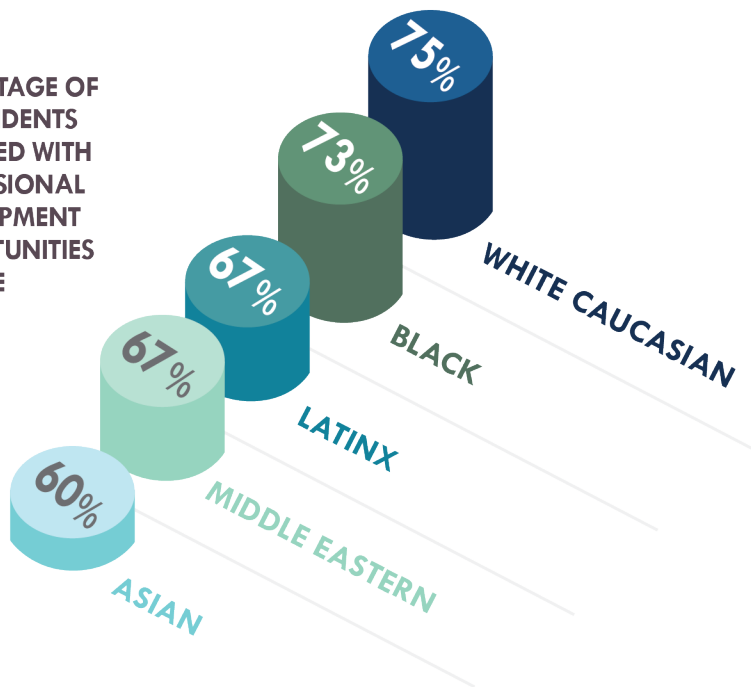
# SATISFACTION WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with professional development opportunities based on a five point scale - 'very dissatisfied', 'dissatisfied', 'neutral', 'satisfied', or 'very satisfied'. Of all respondents, 72% reported they were satisfied or very satisfied, 20% were neutral, and 8% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Women reported less satisfaction than men (68% vs. 74%).



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SATISFIED WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES BY GENDER

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SATISFIED WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES BY RACE



By race, 60% of Asian respondents, 67% of LatinX, and 67% Middle Eastern respondents reported the least satisfaction with professional development opportunities compared to 72% of all respondents. Respondents who have earned a PhD reported less satisfaction than those who have earned bachelors or masters degrees (66% vs. 72%).

The survey also shows that satisfaction with professional development opportunities varies by gender and race composition of firm leadership. Firms that are all female-led, or all non-White led have significantly higher levels of satisfaction, 88% and 82% respectively, compared with 72% of all respondents.

The 2020 SE3 Performance Feedback Brief studied the prevalence of performance review and how it is perceived in our profession. The Committee found that structural engineers who receive feedback more frequently are generally more satisfied with their careers. Performance ratings by others, and self-perceived performance ratings varied by race and gender. Black, LatinX, Asian, and multi-racial respondents were more likely than White respondents to receive lower performance ratings. Women and under-represented racial groups were less likely than White men to rate their performance as better than their peers. Gender and racial differences also existed in reported satisfaction with professional development opportunities.

## WHAT CHANGED?

81% of respondents to the 2016 SE3 survey, and 80% of respondents to the 2018 SE3 survey reported satisfaction with professional development opportunities.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What feedback or review content and questions would be most helpful and impactful to you? Have you discussed these with peers/managers?
2. How can firms address inconsistencies in performance feedback?
3. Why do you think men and White respondents are more likely to have a better perceived self performance than women and under-represented racial groups?



The information contained in this report was gathered from an NCSEA sponsored survey administered online by the SE3 Committee in early 2020. The survey is an on-going effort to identify trends, to understand the underlying factors, and to initiate conversations on engagement and equity within the profession. The 2020 SE3 Survey was developed with a focus on key study topics; including career development, compensation, work flexibility, and overall retention, among others. While we believe the information presented in this document is an accurate, unbiased representation of the data received in the survey, the matters discussed are sometimes subject to differences in opinion or approach. As such, neither NCSEA nor its Board, committees, writers, editors, firms, or individuals who have contributed to this report make any warranty, expressed or implied, or assume any legal liability or responsibility for the use or reference to findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein.

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