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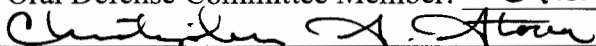
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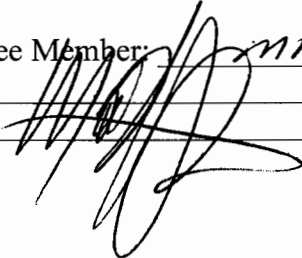
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Giving Women a Chance: Understanding the Impacts of Organizational Culture to the Integration of Women into Combat Units within the US Marine Corps

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**Thesis:** Although US Marine Corps (USMC) leaders have publically yielded to the decision to allow women to serve in all Military Operational Specialties (MOS) within the USMC, this MMS intends to show that this new policy will require a culture change within the USMC, a change it has not fully embraced, despite its public rhetoric; without this acceptance, the experiment of integrating women into all specialties throughout the USMC may be destined to fail before it has been given a chance.

**Discussion:** On January 24, 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced his decision to overturn the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR), the primary policy which restricted women from serving in combat units, and directed each military service to develop plans to implement the planned change to policy. Out of all the military services, the USMC was the only service that requested an exemption to this change in policy. After Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced that no exemption would be made, USMC leaders publically yielded to the new policy; however, the rhetoric and implementation of this policy are inconsistent with what organizational change theorists claim bring about successful organizational change. As not being able to officially serve in combat roles has been cited as a major barrier for women seeking leadership positions within the USMC, and as more and more women have served and died for the nation as a result of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is important that leaders both within and outside the USMC understand the underlying factors that could hinder the successful implementation of this policy. Using Edgar Schein's model as a base, this essay will review how the artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions that are prevalent with the USMC culture may be impacting the successful implementation of this policy. This study will also look at what organizational change theorists believe are required steps for the successful promotion of organizational change to better understand what is lacking thus far in the Marines' implementation of this change within their organization.

**Conclusion:** While organizational cultural barriers are preventing this new policy from being implemented effectively, USMC leaders can play an integral role in promoting this change through communicating a vision of why this proposed policy is crucial to the future of the USMC. While organization change can be difficult to achieve, USMC leaders can utilize the tools and research already available to them as well as look back at the USMC's history of reinventing itself as an example of how to successfully implement this change.

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## *Preface*

I became interested in the arguments surrounding the decision to rescind Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR) even before starting my academic year at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. As an individual who deeply supports women's advancement through all levels of the federal government, I personally felt this was an important issue and a historic decision. As I delved deeper into the literature surrounding the decision, I found that much had already been written on both the merits and disadvantages of allowing women into these elite units. It became clear to me that while there was no denying the physical differences between men and women, there was many layers behind this argument. Instead of focusing on the debate over allowing women into these units, I decided to look at the argument from the organizational level and how change was being applied. The USMC became an obvious choice to focus my research, not only because I was attending a USMC sponsored academic program but as the Marines were the one service that requested an exemption from this policy, and much had already been written about the Marines' unique culture, setting it apart from other branches of the US military. In addition, as a civilian outsider looking in, I found that looking at this issue from an organizational culture standpoint, it provided a framework that could be applied to other US government agencies on the aspects for successful organizational change that could be applied throughout the federal government, where each agency or service has their own unique organizational culture and biases.

I would like to thank my MMS advisor, Dr. Christopher Stowe for his assistance and guidance as I undertook this endeavor. His support and encouragement greatly assisted in helping me narrow down my research and stay focused on the task at hand. I would also like to thank Marine Corps University Librarian Christi Bayha for her support in this project. Ms.

Bayha went out of her way to help me track down research that was vital to this project. Finally, I would like to thank both the faculty and students at the Marine Corps CSC, especially those within my conference group. I appreciate both your willingness to allow me to participate in this unique program as well as your patience and openness when dealing with a civilian perspective. While there is still much that needs to be done with regards to intergovernmental and interagency cooperation, this program has left me encouraged and energized about the opportunities of working together in the future.

## **Introduction**

On January 24, 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced his decision to overturn the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR), the primary policy which restricted women from serving in combat units, and directed each military service to develop plans to implement the planned change to policy.<sup>1</sup> Out of the four military services, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) was the one service that requested an exemption to this change in policy. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter denied this request and announced on December 3, 2015, that beginning in January 2016, all Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) would be open to women throughout the military.<sup>2</sup> Since Carter's announcement, USMC leaders have publicly yielded to the fact that the decision was final and that the USMC intended to move forward with the full integration of women in to all MOS within their service. USMC Commandant General Robert Neller highlighted the USMC's plans to move forward following Carter's announcement, in a public video message stating that "we have a decision, it's time to move out" and that the USMC would immediately begin "full integration of the force."<sup>3</sup>

Despite the acceptance by USMC leaders of the new policy, what about the USMC made it different from other military services by requesting an exemption to the policy for certain MOS? Were the underlying causes for resistance based solely on unit effectiveness and capabilities of its forces or did this decision to change this policy threaten long-held customs and traditions that make the USMC what it is today? Now that USMC leaders have publicly accepted this change in policy, are they implementing this change in such a way that it can be successful? This MMS intends to show that the implementation of this policy will require a culture change within the USMC, a change it has not fully embraced, despite its public rhetoric; without this acceptance, the experiment of integrating women into all specialties throughout the

USMC may be destined to fail before it has been given a chance. A failure that would have negative effects on the future efforts of all Marines by potentially inhabiting the USMC from progressing as a 21<sup>st</sup> century warfighting organization.

In order to better understand the background behind this policy change, this study will begin by looking at the historical role of female Marines in combat. A review of the reactions of USMC leaders, internal surveys, and the rhetoric within USMC publications to the proposed change will assist in demonstrating the resistance to this proposal change in policy throughout all ranks of the USMC. Next this study will review different types of organizational change in order to provide a better understanding of why this proposed change in policy requires a cultural change within the USMC. Using Edgar Schein's model as a base, this essay will review how the artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions that are prevalent within the USMC culture may be negatively impacting the successful implementation of this policy. This study will also look at what organizational theorists believe are required steps for the successful promotion of organizational change to better understand what is lacking thus far in the Marines' implementation of this policy. A review of the argument that the resistance to change is merely based on the physical differences between the sexes will demonstrate that said differences are not the underlying cause of organizational resistance and that opposition to cultural change within the USMC is what is driving the negative views toward this new policy. Finally, this study will look at concrete steps that USMC leaders can take if they want to ensure that this change in policy is being implemented in such a manner that it can be successful. These final steps are important as the improper implementation of this policy has the potential to negatively impact the recruitment and retention of female Marines, which could place the USMC at a disadvantage

to other military services, and even the enemy, especially as traditional warfare moves toward more complex urban environments.

The idea that this proposed change will require a cultural shift is not new, and even Secretary Carter acknowledged that “the integration of women may require a cultural shift in previously all male career fields.”<sup>4</sup> While acknowledging this cultural shift is one step, failing to embrace and prepare for this shift will impede the effectiveness of the new policy within the USMC. Not being able to officially serve in combat roles has been cited as a major barrier for women seeking leadership positions within the military.<sup>5</sup> As a wide body of research suggest that having a critical mass of women in leadership roles within an organization provides benefits such as diverse viewpoints, better understanding of policy, and an increased likelihood to work through differences and complete objectives, and as only six percent of the officers with the USMC are women, it can be argued that the USMC is missing out on these potential benefits.<sup>6</sup> In addition, as more and more women have served and died for the nation as a result of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is important that leaders both within and outside the USMC understand the underlying factors that could hinder the successful implementation of this policy

### **Methodology:**

This study provides a historical review of women serving in the USMC as a means to show their evolving role as a result of service needs. The research consulted doctorate dissertations on Marine Corps culture and books such as USMC LtGen Victor Krulak’s book *First to Fight* and Paula Holmes Eber’s book on USMC *Culture and Conflict* in order to provide an understanding of USMC culture and what sets the USMC apart from other US military services. Primary-source material from the Marine Corps University archives on the Marine Corps Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCEITF) study on integration of women

into combat units provided an overview of the recommendations based on the study. This information also provided background on the Marine Corps Force Integration Office's (MCFIO) research into the integration of women into the militaries of other countries. A review of newspaper articles, USMC memorandums and guidance documents, public-video messages and Congressional testimony provides an understanding of the formal guidance and rhetoric by senior leaders regarding the integration of women throughout the service. There is a wide body of research on organizational culture and change. This study utilized Edgar Schein's model, which looks at the underlying culture of an organization through its artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, as a frame of reference to analyze the USMC. Additionally, John Kotter's research on implementing organizational change provided an outline on what steps are needed to implement change effectively. Finally, scholarly articles on culture and gender in the USMC supplemented the above research. Much has been written already on whether or not females should be part of these highly specialized units, and this will likely continue to be a debated topic. While the merits and disadvantages will be addressed, this study intends to focus on the cultural factors that may be hampering the successful implementation of this policy and what can be done to ensure that it is done in a successful manner.

### **Background**

In 1994, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin rescinded the "risk rule," which excluded women from noncombat units if there was a risk of direct combat, and enacted DGCAR, which excluded "women from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat."<sup>7</sup> Given the military's limited role in overseas combat during the nineties, it can be understood why not much was done during that decade to test this policy. This all changed after September 11, 2001, when the U.S. military was faced with fighting in two

distinct theaters of war. As a result of these conflicts, it became essential for women to play a much larger role in the fight. In Iraq, the USMC enlisted female Marines in the “Lioness” program to accompany their male counterparts in operations in order to search women for weapons.<sup>8</sup> When the USMC used female engagement teams in Afghanistan; outsiders, including the press, began to question the use of women in these units despite DGCAR. A 2011 *New York Times* article highlighted that the Pentagon created a loophole by attaching these Marines to units instead of formally assigning them to these roles.<sup>9</sup> Although attaching officers for a short duration assignment is common within the military, it was found that when there was a long-term need for a specialized assignment, “women were being temporarily attached where their male counterparts were being permanently assigned.”<sup>10</sup> Women not only were being asked to serve in these expanded roles but they were also experiencing the ultimate impact of these wars as they were being wounded or killed along with their male counterparts. By the time Secretary Panetta announced his decision to rescind the rule in January 2013, over 130 women had died and over 800 wounded as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> In a speech announcing his decision, Secretary Panetta reflected on this fact stating that women and men were “fighting and dying together. And the time has come for our policies to recognize that reality.”<sup>12</sup>

### **USMC Reaction**

In a January 24, 2013, letter to his generals, Marine Corps Commandant General James Amos wrote that he thought the decision to rescind DGCDAR was “the right thing to do” and that as the USMC can “identify MOSs that can be reasonably opened up to our female Marines we will do so.”<sup>13</sup> The Commandant highlighted that the most questions he had received on the policy change regarded the integration of women into the infantry, reconnaissance, and special operations and that none of these positions would be opened immediately to women, but that the

USMC would have three years to collect and analyze data so that the next commandant could make a final recommendation.<sup>14</sup> While General Amos made it clear in his statement that he stood by the Secretary of Defense's decision, he also highlighted a long-held concern by many Marines regarding infantry units, and in his assessment, the issue needed further study before moving forward with the policy. Following his initial remarks, in February 2013 General Amos went on to speculate that if there was "little interest or [if] few can pass the infantry officers school, then certain positions may be closed to women."<sup>15</sup> Based on these comments, General Amos demonstrated the initial reluctance to women entering these units, and forewarned the possibility that despite Secretary of Defense's announcement, the USMC may decide to keep units closed to women.

Moving forward, the USMC followed through with General Amos' plan to study how incorporating women into previously closed units would impact unit effectiveness. As part of this effort, the Corps established the Marine Corps Force Integration Plan (MCEIP). A key component of the MCEIP was the creation of GCEITF, which utilized male and female volunteers to operate as an integrated combat unit in part to "assess the effects of gender integration on various measures of readiness and mission success within closed Ground Combat Element units."<sup>16</sup> Following the release of the results of this survey, which concluded that "all male units outperformed the integrated units,"<sup>17</sup> Commandant Joseph Dunford submitted a recommendation to the Secretary of Defense which requested an exemption for 48,779 positions, to include specific military occupational specialties and units<sup>1</sup>, a request that was not approved

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<sup>1</sup> Specific Military Occupational Specialties include: Infantry Officer, Infantry Weapons Officer, Rifleman, Light Armored Vehicle Crewman, Reconnaissance Man, Machine Gunner, Mortarman, Infantry Assaultman, Antitank Missileman, Infantry Squad Leader, Infantry Unit Leader, Special Operations Officer, Critical Skills Operator, and Fire Support Man. Specific Units include: Infantry regiment and below, reconnaissance battalions, light armored reconnaissance battalions, force reconnaissance battalions, Marine Raider Companies, Combat Engineer/Assault companies.

by Secretary of Navy Ray Mabus and eventually denied by Secretary of Defense Carter on December 3, 2015.<sup>18</sup>

### **Resistance to Change**

Evidence of resistance by Marines to opening GCE assignments to women has been documented in internal surveys, voiced by senior and retired leaders of the USMC, and publicized in a series of articles. In a 2012 survey conducted by Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), “76.5 percent of men who had served in an infantry unit were opposed to opening ground combat jobs to women.”<sup>19</sup> Shortly following Secretary Panetta’s announcement in January 2013, then-USMC Commandant Amos responded to reporters’ questions on the announcement stating that “I think from the infantry side of the house, you know they’re more skeptical, it’s been an all-male organization throughout the history of the U.S. Marine Corps, so I don’t think it should be any surprise.”<sup>20</sup> Retired USMC leaders have also voiced their resistance to the change in policy. For example, during Senate testimony on January 27, 2015, retired USMC General James Mattis made reference to the changes in policy by stating that “the culture of our military and its rules are designed to bring about battlefield success...the committee needs to consider carefully any proposed changes to military rules, traditions and standards that bring non-combat emphasis to combat units.”<sup>21</sup> Articles against the USMC’s integration of women is also prevalent within the Marine Corps professional journal the *Gazette*, which published numerous articles that argued the effectiveness of allowing women to join the infantry following the announcement.<sup>22</sup>

### **Understanding Revolutionary Change**

In order to better understand the resistance to the opening of all MOS to women throughout the USMC, it is first important to understand that there are different types of

organizational change and how such changes can impact members of an organization. Experts generally agree that organizations typically undergo two types of changes, evolutionary change and revolutionary, or transformational, change. Most organizational changes are evolutionary in nature, which is defined as a continuous process that consists of “improvements, incremental steps to fix a problem or change part of a larger system.”<sup>23</sup> In comparison, an organization that undergoes a revolutionary change requires a “jolt to the system” and occurs in “leaps and spurts.”<sup>24</sup> As such, a revolutionary change requires immediate attention to an issue. What is most important when analyzing the differences in the two types of organizational change is that a revolutionary change will completely alter the fabric and culture of an organization whereas an evolutionary change will impact only organizational structure while culture remains unchanged.<sup>25</sup>

It is important for USMC leaders to understand and embrace the difference between an evolutionary and revolutionary change within their organization so that they can best understand how to successfully implement the integration of women in a manner that can be successful, as different types of change require different techniques for implementation.<sup>26</sup> For example, an evolutionary change may require the attention of a small section of an organization, whereas a revolutionary change “requires the immediate attention of all organized members.”<sup>27</sup> Recognizing such differences can assist USMC leaders in successfully employing the change. In addition, by understanding the different types of change, it can also assist USMC leaders in preparing for and combating resistance to change, as “revolutionary change is often seen as an immediate threat to the deep structure of an organization and is likely to garner strong resistance from organization members.”<sup>28</sup> In preparing for change, it is also important to understand such differences so that

USMC leaders can understand the difficulty they have in front of them when implementing change – cultural change is usually one of the most difficult aspects of organizational change.<sup>29</sup>

When using these definitions to analyze the change in policy, the opening of specialized units to women can be best described as a revolutionary change. One factor is the immediate nature required to make the change, partially because of Secretary of Defense Carter's decision to provide the military with a fixed and an immediate timeline of April 1, 2016, to begin implementation.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the policy requires a jolt to how the USMC has historically handled the integration of women. While it may be argued that the other military services received a similar jolt to their identities, it does not compare to the same degree as the USMC, which is the only U.S. military service which still separates its women from the very beginning of recruit training.<sup>31</sup> Finally, one of the key differences is that the integration of women into these units requires a change in the culture of the USMC. This change in culture is why this can be considered a revolutionary change, impacting the USMC as a whole, and not just the previously closed units that are now opened to women. Secretary of Defense Carter acknowledged the possibility of revolutionary culture change in his memo outlining his decision to move forward with the policy as he noted that the integration of women requires a cultural shift.<sup>32</sup>

### **Using Schein's Model to Understand the USMC Culture**

In order to better understand the underlying factors that may impact the successful implementation of women into these core units within the USMC, it is necessary to first take a deeper look at the USMC's culture. Much has been written about culture and gender stereotypes in both the US military and the USMC in particular. Emerald Archer's research on this topic noted that there is a correlation between a historically male culture such as the USMC and an

effort to preserve that culture.<sup>33</sup> Terry Terriff's research on USMC culture notes that if a major change is introduced into the military, and this change counters its identity, it is highly likely that the change will have considerable resistance.<sup>34</sup> While this can help provide a better understanding of the resistance to change, one must dig deeper to understand the fundamentals of the USMC culture and identify what may be threatened by this change in policy and what aspects of the culture that may be impacting its implementation. One way to accomplish that would be to use Edgar Schein's model for organizational culture. Schein identified three levels of organizational culture as "artifacts (visible organizational structures and processes), espoused beliefs and values (strategies, goals, philosophies, espoused justification), and underlying assumption (unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts feelings)."<sup>35</sup> By breaking down each level of USMC culture and analyzing how each level is impacted by this new policy, one can better understand how the culture may be impacting the successful implementation of this policy within the USMC.

### **Artifacts**

Schein refers to artifacts as the surface observations of an organization.<sup>36</sup> When one thinks of the USMC and what it brings to the fight within the US military apparatus, it is its infantry that sets it apart from the other services. The focus on the infantry is key in some of the most prevalent symbols of the USMC with its mottos that "Every Marine is a Rifleman" and "First to Fight." While not all Marines are part of the infantry, the "grunt" is known as the "organizational, operational, and cultural foundation of the Marine Corps."<sup>37</sup> In Paula Holmes Eber's research on the USMC's culture, she noted that "the culture is very infantry centric...the commandant is always an infantryman."<sup>II</sup> The Marine Corps is primarily an infantry

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<sup>II</sup> In 2010, General James Amos became the first aviator to serve as Commandant of the USMC.

organization.”<sup>38</sup> Understanding the historical importance of the infantry to the USMC is important in understanding why it is so important for women to become part of this unit in order to be fully integrated into the USMC, even more so than other US military services. If the foundational organizational unit of the USMC is traditionally a male-only structure, it is understandable how changing the structure would be resisted and thus deny equal participation of women within the organization.

Another important symbol of the USMC which is prevalent even among US popular culture is the image derived from its recruit training. The focus on recruit training has a historical significance in the USMC. During World War II the USMC used recruit training to separate Marines from other U.S. military services, emphasizing a break from civilian life and providing recruits with a new “culture, identity and symbolic universe that they would carry with them onto the battlefields of the Pacific theater.”<sup>39</sup> Former USMC General Victor Krulak highlighted the importance of recruit training in his book *First to Fight*, which stated that the Marines’ “sense of superiority has grown from the fact that every Marine, whether enlisted or officer goes through the same training experience.”<sup>40</sup> Krulak later identifies that “recruit training is the genesis of the enduring sense of brotherhood that characterizes the Corps.”<sup>41</sup> However, as noted previously, the USMC is the only US military service that still separates men and women from the very beginning during recruit training. Although male and female Marines may go through the same grueling regimen during training, since they are separated from the very beginning, even just the perception that women are receiving different treatment can explain how female Marines may never fully earn this confidence among their male counterparts since they remain separated during this key phase of their initiation into the corps.

The experience of Lt. Col Kate Germano<sup>III</sup>, a former female recruit commander at Parris Island, South Carolina, who claims she was removed from her post on account of her efforts to hold her female recruits to the same standards, sheds some light onto this argument.<sup>42</sup> According to Germano, “she was stunned by low expectations that undermined female recruits’ credibility.”<sup>43</sup> While the intentional separation of the sexes prevents the development of camaraderie and mutual respect which leads to integration, the insistence of what may be perceived as a different set of standards for women further undermines the potential for integration. In research on gender integration within the USMC by both Rand and the Center for Naval Analysis, both organizations highlighted how integrating aspects earlier on during recruit training could play an important role into the full integration of women into the USMC.<sup>44</sup> As this important symbol of the USMC remains segregated, and as women continue to receive separate treatment than their male counterparts, it is understandable that there will be continued resistance from within the Corps on the ability of women to join its most prestigious ranks.

### **Espoused Values**

An organization’s espoused values reflect the group’s strategies, goals, and philosophies.<sup>45</sup> Some of the USMC’s espoused values have become prevalent throughout the discourse of allowing women to join GCE units. One of the key themes that has been frequent throughout the discourse by senior leaders is the value that the USMC puts on its standards, and the idea that the USMC will not compromise its standards by allowing women to join these units. The value of standards has been reflected by USMC leaders since the decision was first announced in January 2013. In his letter to his generals following the announcement, former

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<sup>III</sup> Much has been written regarding the decision to relieve Lt. Col Germano. Please see the following New York Times article for more information on the debate: [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/us/marine-commanders-firing-stirs-debate-on-integration-of-women-in-corps.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/us/marine-commanders-firing-stirs-debate-on-integration-of-women-in-corps.html?_r=1)

USMC Commandant Amos highlighted the attention to standards by stating that “what we owe them [female Marines] is an equal opportunity for fulfilling careers as Marines, consistent with the high standards of our Corps.”<sup>46</sup> The idea of standards was again highlighted by General Amos in an article in the *Gazette* which he stated that the USMC will never “lower or apologize for our very high and very necessary Marine Corps standards.”<sup>47</sup> Espousing these high standards as a core value of the USMC was again referenced by USMC Neller in his December 4, 2015, video message to Marines following the decision by Secretary of Defense Carter to deny the request for an exemption when he stated “as we move forward, we will our maintain standards.”<sup>48</sup> While the USMC adherence to strict standards is an important aspect to maintaining the capabilities of the Corps, the continued rhetoric by senior leaders that the USMC will stick to these standards creates a message that may be counterproductive to the integration of women into these units. By repeatedly referencing standards, it creates a message that allowing a relatively small percentage of women to enter these units threatens these units’ standards. By doing so, it creates a mixed message to both men and women throughout the USMC regarding women’s abilities to meet such high standards.

Another espoused value that has been prevalent throughout the discourse on allowing women to join GCE has been the idea that “Marines follow orders.” General Neller highlighted this value in that same December 4, 2015, video following Secretary of Defense’s decision through his statement that “we have a decision, it’s time to move out.”<sup>49</sup> The idea that “Marines follow orders” was repeated by General Neller during testimony in February 2016 before the Senate Armed Services Committee.<sup>50</sup> The continued repetition of the idea that the USMC follows orders may actually be counterproductive to the successful integration of women, as it may reinforce the idea that the USMC is enacting this policy because it follows orders, and not

because it will be beneficial to the Corps. In his research on leading organizational change, John Kotter notes that in order for transformational change to be successful, members of the organization must have a sense of the potential benefits of the change.<sup>51</sup> As the USMC was the only service to ask for an exemption to this policy, it implies that, from the beginning, USMC leaders were not convinced that this policy was in the best interest of the forces: otherwise they would have embraced readily. Now that the decision has been made final by the Secretary of Defense, this continued espousing of the idea by senior leaders that the USMC “follows orders” potentially fails to create a message that this policy will be beneficial to the USMC as a whole. As a result, there is little incentive by members to work toward the successful implementation of the policy besides its adherence to the espoused values of following orders. This becomes problematic; as Schein notes that although espoused values may predict what organization members say in certain situations, it may not actually fall in line with what members will actually do if these espoused values are not firmly rooted within the underlying assumptions of the organization.<sup>52</sup> Even if there is the call by leaders to follow orders, without a sense of why it is important to follow these orders, or how these orders will be beneficial to them and the organization, it does not necessarily mean that this will be adopted or, more importantly, embraced by members of the organization.

### **Underlying Assumptions**

The final level to Schein’s understanding of organizational culture are the underlying assumptions held by an organization. These underlying assumptions are usually harder to identify and are often taken for granted within the organization.<sup>53</sup> Underlying assumptions are also usually considered undebatable and the hardest to change within the organization.<sup>54</sup> When analyzing the culture of the USMC, one common theme appears to be consistent as an

underlying assumption or undebatable value: the idea that as a Marine, the needs of the individual fall behind that of the service as a whole. Like cultural artifacts, this idea of getting rid of one's individuality and becoming part of the team also has its historical roots. The Commandant's training directive to the Recruit Depots in 1942 stated that at the end of training the recruit "should have completed his transition from civilian to Marine and be ready to begin his training as a member of a team at the training center."<sup>55</sup> Retired USMCR Lt. Col Frank Hoffman touched on this idea in an article for the *Gazette*, stating that "to the Marines, it is teamwork and the subordination of the individual to the common good of the unit."<sup>56</sup> In her research on the culture of Marines, Holmes Eber also recognized this idea that membership of a team as an undebatable aspect of the USMC culture, noting that "being a Marine is about being a member of a team, about being a member of a loose group that cares about you and is willing to protect and die for you."<sup>57</sup>

Recognizing the idea that as a Marine, that an individual's needs falls behind that of the group, may be a key factor in understanding resistance to allowing women to join GCE units. One of the main concerns that has been continually posed against putting women into these positions is that the overall effectiveness of the force may be impacted. This has manifested itself in the rhetoric by USMC leaders regarding standards and was the focus of the GCEITF study which looked at gender integration on unit-level performance.<sup>58</sup> In General Neller's Force Integration Plan, the first Critical Combat Information Requirement requested information on "indications of decreased combat readiness and/or effectiveness" as a result of integrating women into GCE.<sup>59</sup> One can view that by allowing women to enter these units, it takes away the focus on the team by promoting the individual and her needs, which in turn goes against some of the underlying assumptions of the USMC. Without any focus on why the implementation of this

policy will be good for the Corps as a whole, such as demonstrating the operational need to have females attached to these units or highlighting how diversity in leadership makes the USMC a better organization, allowing women to enter these units will continue to go against this underlying assumption of what is best for the USMC as a whole and will likely continue to draw resistance.

### **Promoting Organizational Change**

After reviewing some of the underlying cultural aspects within the USMC that may impact the successful implementation of this policy, it is also important to analyze the errors and difficulties of promoting change within organizations to review what the USMC has done and what it could do better. As the change in policy will require a change in culture within the organization, leaders should expect some difficulty and resistance especially as members will likely have to unlearn routines that are part of their identity.<sup>60</sup> John Kotter's research on successful organizational change, identified eight errors that organizations usually experience when implementing change and, conversely, eight steps that organizations can take in order to promote successful change.<sup>61</sup> While the change in policy is too new to review across the entirety of Kotter's model, by going through several of the model's initial steps, one can provide a baseline understanding for what has been done thus far in the implementation of the policy.

According to Kotter, one of the key initial errors in implementing change within an organization is failing to create a "sufficiently powerful guiding coalition."<sup>62</sup> Kotter explains that "major change is often said to be impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter."<sup>63</sup> The importance of leadership in implementing organizational change was also noted in research by Rand on its USMC-sponsored research on the implications of integrating

women into the Marine Corps Infantry. The Rand study notes that “leadership (at all levels of the chain of command) is also key to setting the tone for the integration process.”<sup>64</sup> The problem lies that from the very beginning of this process, USMC leadership has been at odds with the decision by Secretary of Defense’s decision to move forward with the policy. As demonstrated earlier, this is evident by the USMC’s request for an exemption to the policy which played out in a very public disagreement between then-Commandant Joseph Dunford and Secretary of Navy Mabus.<sup>65</sup> Since the decision was finalized in December 2015, current Commandant Neller has made it clear his intentions to move forward; however continued rhetoric that fails to emphasize *why* it is important for the USMC to embrace this change does not bring about a guiding coalition that change theorists state is necessary to successful organizational change.<sup>66</sup>

Kotter also notes that two other major errors made by organizations when implementing change is underestimating the power of vision and under communicating that vision.<sup>67</sup> According to Kotter, “major change is usually impossible unless most employees are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices. But people will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they think the potential benefits of the change are attractive and unless they really believe that transformation is possible.”<sup>68</sup> The failure to create and communicate a message of why this change will be beneficial may be one of the biggest errors in the implementation of this policy. One of the key lines of communication has been that the USMC will adhere to maintaining standards, not that integrating women into these units can benefit all Marines. Ellen Haring’s research on the implementation of the policy throughout all US military services notes since 2014, the USMC held a series of town halls designed to emphasize that standards would not be impacted by the inclusion of women into these units.<sup>69</sup> This over-reliance on the emphasis on standards at the expense of painting a

compelling vision of a better future fails to show how this policy can be positive for Marines as a whole. In his research on military change and organizational culture within the USMC, Terriff compared General Charles Krulak's unsuccessful efforts to establish a constant mindset of innovation to General Alfred Gray's successful introduction of maneuver warfare into the USMC doctrine.<sup>70</sup> Terriff found that while both plans provided a consistent narrative and implementation of a range of initiatives, what was largely absent from Krulak's plan was a failure to instill the potential benefits of his plan to the Marines involved in the experimentation.<sup>71</sup> Both organizational change theory and past failures have shown that creating a message that change will benefit the organization as a whole is a critical factor in whether or not it will be embraced within the organization.

Kotter notes the importance of the sequencing of these steps, and that another error commonly made by organizations is skipping steps or moving too far ahead with planned change without creating a solid base.<sup>72</sup> While this essay just touched on three out of the eight steps that Kotter identified as necessary for organizational change, one can understand why the implementation of this policy may fail even before considering the impact of the human factor of finding female Marines that are both qualified and willing to try out for GCE units. Given the impact of this policy on the future of female Marines, it is important to address these shortcomings before moving forward with its implementation.

### **Acknowledging the Physical Barriers**

While addressing the cultural barriers that may prevent the successful integration of women into these units, one must address the obvious physical barriers that set men and women apart. It is because of these physical barriers that the argument can be made that it is for the

health and safety of female Marines, and the security of those with whom they serve, where the true resistance lies from allowing women from joining GCE units. General Amos highlighted these physical differences in his August 2014 article in the *Gazette*, highlighting that “while women exhibit somewhat superior endurance in extremely long distance athletic events, men possess significant advantages in physical strength – especially upper body capacity and power.”<sup>73</sup> In fact, the results of the GCEITF did conclude a measurable difference in the performance of the integrated units in comparison to the all-male units.<sup>74</sup> And while female enlisted Marines have been able to successfully pass infantry training, no women to date have been able to successfully complete the Infantry Officer Course (IOC).<sup>75</sup>

While this essay does not intend to debate the physical differences between men and women, it can address the counterargument that the resistance is merely in reference to the physical barriers. One way to address this counterargument is that while there is no denying that the all-male groups outperformed the integrated groups during the GCEITF study, women within the integrated group were still able to perform the “physically demanding tasks, but not necessarily at the same level as their male counterparts.”<sup>76</sup> While physical abilities are key, physicality is not the only desired trait of a successful infantry officer; and women’s participation in the Lioness program and female engagement teams have already proved that there is a specialized requirement to have females on the ground in combat zones attached to these units. While it is important to note that since the USMC began allowing women to participate in IOC in 2012, none of the thirty female participants have passed; however, during that same period, approximately 28% of men who took the course also failed.<sup>77</sup> One unsuccessful female participant argued that double standards from the beginning with regards to training and the Physical Fitness Test (PFT) put female Marines at a disadvantage when entering the course as

they less prepared as they train for lesser standards.<sup>78</sup> Another argument can be made that females only make up 7.7% of the total force of the Marines,<sup>79</sup> and when one factors in how many women are both willing and qualified to enter this course, one can expect that the percentage of those who can pass to be very low. Another factor hindering the debate over physical different is the argument that technology has the potential to make physical differences irrelevant in the future. For example, efforts are already underway to develop technology that would “reduce the weight of combat gear and improve soldiers’ physical abilities and load-carrying abilities.”<sup>80</sup> Again, this essay does not intend to argue the validity of the physical differences, only to demonstrate that this aspect of the debate can be effectively argued from both sides, and physical differences are often use to mask the underlying resistance toward women from entering these roles. Additionally, the debate is hindered as there continue to be other barriers, such as differing standards and the segregation of women during training, and if one accounts for the fact that physical performance in a training environment does not necessarily translate to field requirements.

### **How Can the Marines Move Forward?**

If the USMC is serious about integrating women into these units, what steps can leaders take in order to ensure that this policy is being implemented in a successful manner? The Marine Corps-sponsored Rand study on implications of integrating women into Marine Corps infantry and the MCFIO visits to Canada and Israel both stressed how important the leadership role would play in the process.<sup>81</sup> The role of leadership is reinforced by organizational change experts such as Kotter and Warner Burke, who have both noted that organizational change is rarely achieved without the buy-in from leadership who demonstrates that they are active supporters of the proposed change.<sup>82</sup> Leadership’s role is key in creating and communicating a

vision of why this proposed policy is crucial to the future of the USMC. Looking at Canada's integration of women into its armed forces, it found it very valuable to explain the "business imperative" and potential operational gains of the wider employment of women throughout the military workforce.<sup>83</sup> While Canada's decision in 1989 to integrate women into all military occupations was initially based on equal rights, they found that the inclusion of women was essential as they faced falling recruitment and efforts to attract the best talent into the Canadian Forces.<sup>84</sup> If this message is not continually communicated throughout all ranks, it will be difficult for Marines at all levels to embrace the idea.<sup>85</sup> Shifting the message away from following orders and maintaining standards and to one that embraces the change as something that will benefit the force as a whole would be a first step into achieving this goal.

Research by the Rand corporation also provides insight on some practical steps the USMC can make in order to better integrate women into its forces as a whole. In addition to the role that leadership plays, the USMC's sponsored study noted that both gender-neutral standards and integrated training would be useful both in unit cohesion and in better preparing the physical readiness of women.<sup>86</sup> As of January 2017, the USMC continues to separate by gender during recruit training as well as maintains separate standards for men and women in the PFT. While there has been debate regarding maintaining the status quo, especially with regards to the retention of women, these are recommendations that deserve further consideration if the USMC is serious about the integration of women.

While changing the culture of the USMC in order to implement this policy will not be easy, it is important that USMC leaders embrace this fundamental understanding if they want this policy to be successful. To take this argument a step further, it is also important to note that the inclusion of women into the infantry is just one step into a bigger issue of better integrating

women into the Marines as a whole. Once this is understood, USMC leaders will have the tools available to achieve these goals. Kotter’s research on the eight steps to successful organizational change is both taught in the USMC Command and Staff College and Kotter’s book on *Leading Change* is included on the Commandant’s reading list.<sup>87</sup> As such, USMC leaders should have the foundational base and support to enact Kotter’s recommendations in their relation to the implementation of this policy. More importantly, the USMC has a history of reinventing itself and making the seemingly impossible a reality. Immediately following World War I, military theorists assessed that conducting an amphibious landing against a defended beachhead was an unattainable goal.<sup>88</sup> But the USMC was able to successfully adapt itself as an organization to make this “impossible” feat a reality in the Pacific theater of World War II.<sup>89</sup> Using this model as an example, the USMC has the ability to learn from its historical successes and adapt it to a twenty-first century challenge. Marine Corps leaders owe it to all Marines, both past and present, to enact this policy in such a way that it can be successful by eliminating the culture and organizational barriers that stand in the way of the future of the Corps.

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<sup>81</sup> Schaefer et. al., *Implications of Integrating Women into the Marine Corps Infantry*, xx; *Marine Corps Force Innovation Office Visit to Canadian Armed Forces*, 2014, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Studies and Reports Collection in Achieves and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, VA, Coll. RF2016-7; *Marine Corps Force Innovation Office Visit to Israeli Defense Force Ground Forces International Talks and the United Kingdom Ground Close Combat Review Team*, September 2014, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Studies and Reports Collection in Achieves and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, VA, Coll. RF2016-7.

<sup>82</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*, 6; W. Warner Burke, *Organization Change Theory and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 247.

<sup>83</sup> Schaefer et. al., *Implications of Integrating Women into the Marine Corps Infantry*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Canada's Chief Review Services, *Evaluation Gender Integration in the CF* (Canada, 1998), 13, [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2015/mdn-dnd/D58-67-1998-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/mdn-dnd/D58-67-1998-eng.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Burke, *Organization Change Theory and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 277-282.

<sup>86</sup> Schaefer et. al., *Implications of Integrating Women into the Marine Corps Infantry*, xvi.

<sup>87</sup> Library of the Marine Corps Research Portal, "Commandant's Professional Reading List – Official Site," last modified November 7, 2016, <http://guides.grc.usmcu.edu/content.php?pid=408059&sid=5775660>; Lauren Ulrich, "United States Marine Corps Command Staff College Lesson Card, Lesson Title: Organizational Change 2103 A," (unpublished manuscript, July 11, 2016), Microsoft Word File.

<sup>88</sup> Gunther E. Rothenberg, "From Gallipoli to Guadalcanal," in *Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare*, ed. Merrill L. Bartlett (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 185.

<sup>89</sup> Alicia Andrews, "Innovate or Die: How the USMC Shaped Amphibious Warfare" (unpublished manuscript, December 15, 2016), Microsoft Word file, 1.

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