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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**LEADER MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY AS A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO
FACILITATE INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE ACROSS A MULTI-GENERATIONAL
MARINE CORPS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Leader Member Exchange theory as a communication strategy to facilitate intercultural exchange across a multi-generational Marine Corps

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Thesis: As the Marine Corps continues to recruit men and women who will one day execute the ideas proffered by the *Expeditionary Force 2025* and the *Marine Corps Operating Concept*, they must concurrently appreciate the difficulty of effectively creating a holistic communication strategy, that communicates the message and vision of the Corps, in a multi-generational construct, all while navigating a regimented military structure, in order to entice the most fully qualified to remain and execute the vision. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) coupled with the integrative communication theory can address leadership challenges surrounding communication throughout the Marine Corps in support of mission accomplishment and retention of the organizations most sought after resource - people.

Discussion: Leadership Member Exchange Theory is an applicable tool to use to improve the communication in the United States Marine Corps from the Commandant down to the newest Private First Class and all levels in between. All areas, from looking at the Marine Operating Concept, the Commandant's Message to the Force, and MCWP 6-11, must be analyzed to see if the communication vision and strategys are interlinked and designed to appeal and resonate with multiple generations.

Conclusion: When the primary qualities of LMX are in place, and effective communication tools are being utilized, the culture of values, ethics, standards, needs, and outlook with all members of the organization will be in synch and better able to replicate the conditions for the realistic wants and needs of the entire organization.

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Introduction

The planning and execution of the Marine Operating Concept (MOC) and Expeditionary Force 2025 requires increasingly specific skill sets and desires a force that “develops Marines for complexity” and a personnel management system that has a, “designed and implemented manpower system, policies and processes to attract, develop, retain, and support highly qualified Marines and civilians prepared for the 21st Century fight.”¹ The Marine Operating Concept is the seminal document that charts the course for the Corps and attempts to convey to the organization, writ large, what is possible and what is needed. To make this vision come to fruition, a number of initiatives set forth in the MOC must become reality. They all are in their own right important; however, the crucial component is, and always will be, the people. Attracting and retaining the right people will be by far the greatest challenge the Marine Corps faces over the next ten years as the service attempts to actualize the concepts put forth in the MOC. This process will require unique and effective communication methods to efficiently convey to both the newest, mid-level and senior Marines why it is essential that much must be done to communicate up and down the chain of command. Creating an environment and methods that nurture the retention of top talent that possess the varied capabilities and skill sets put forth as essential in the MOC is the first step to create the creations necessary for it’s execution.

The Marine Corps will be attempting to retain the right people just as the rest of the countries services and industry will be attempting to do the same. Barbuto and Gottfredon in *Human Capital, The Millennials Reign, The Need For Servant Leadership* stated that, “it is imperative that organizations improve their ability to attract and retain those with the highest human capital from the remaining workforce consisting of Generation Xers and Millennials.”² Though the Marine Corps has faced similar challenges in the past the premium placed on quality

and innovation within the force makes it imperative that the most highly qualified enlisted Marines and Officers are retained. Without an appreciation of the wants and desires of the generations that are being courted the institution could fall prey to confidence in previous success. A good example of what millennials look for long-term can be found in the following excerpt from *Human Capital, The Millennial's Reign, And The Need For Servant Leadership* that stated, "this is no easy task given that Generation Xers and Millennials place less emphasis on company loyalty, are ambitious to move up in their careers, and are more likely to seek better opportunities elsewhere compared with other generational cohorts."³ This may prove difficult to translate with past practices and the reality of a regimented promotion system that could appear incredibly cumbersome for a generation that looks for quick mobility and increased intellectual and leadership challenges.

Today the Marine Corps strives to maintain the balance between good order and discipline, adaptability and innovation with four unique generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Linksters) converging. The requirements for both resources and personnel to fight a peer-to-peer adversary are at a premium and the services continue to fight private industry for the most qualified employees. The previous generation of officers and enlisted Marines pushed and prodded for an inordinate amount of change in doctrine, uniforms, policy, weaponry, optics, and countless other initiatives to effectively fight the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. These innovative ideas have taken The Corps from the Cold War doctrine of the nineties to the current operating environments of Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces in Iraq, Europe, and Africa; counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan; and the creation and support of the Marine Raider community in Special Operations Command.

As the institution pushes even further into the actuality of likely peer state 21st century warfare more must be done by the Marine Corps writ large to create and sustain this cultural legacy of great people and historical innovation. Critical evaluation and assessments on what it takes in terms of leadership and communication traits to motivate and retain the next “Great Generation” are needed now more than ever. The Marine Corps must appreciate the challenges surrounding the recruitment, training, leadership, and most importantly the retention of both the Millennial (Gen Y) and Z generations (IGen, Linksters). This difficult task must be completed while overcoming the disparity in age and experience between the most senior leaders and those being recruited, the consistent turnover of personnel, and all the while maintaining its standing and relevance as one of the Department of Defense’s unique warfighting branches.

As the Marine Corps continues to recruit men and women who will one day execute the ideas proffered by the *Expeditionary Force 2025* and the *Marine Corps Operating Concept*, they must concurrently appreciate the difficulty of effectively creating a holistic communication strategy, that communicates the message and vision of the Corps, in a multi-generational construct, all while navigating a regimented military structure, in order to entice the most fully qualified to remain and execute the vision. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) coupled with the integrative communication theory can address leadership challenges surrounding communication throughout the Marine Corps in support of mission accomplishment and retention of the organizations most sought after resource - people.

Background

The success of the MOC and the future relevancy of the Corps is predicated on continued utilization of concepts that support innovation and clear communication of mission and vision. The difference today is that the Marine Corps is not adequately designed nor trained to

effectively execute the MOC as it is currently constructed. The right people are not staying after four years to actualize the ideas put forth in the MOC. The most significant problem that the Marine Corps faces is keeping and continuing to train those they originally recruited with an emphasis on intelligence, innovation and adaptability. Unfortunately, those traits often do not manifest themselves in the Marines that choose to stay past their first enlistment.

The Marine Corps runs the risk of believing that no change is required because of all the success they have had in the past keeping the right people. Without appreciating some of the uniqueness of these requirements vis-à-vis personnel retention and forcing all levels to take a deeper look at the unique characteristics of the current generation's choosing to serve past their first enlistment significant issues could arise in both the short and long-term. In addition, where in the past the innovation was focused on the officer Corps and what prescient ideas they could bring to the fight, now the innovation needs to be designed and executed at all levels. The characteristics that made a great Marine capable of storming a hill on Iwo Jima or a building in Fallujah are going to be slightly different than those needed to operate 120 nautical miles inland as a disaggregated squad in a foreign country.

Knowing this the Marine Corps must look at ways it communicates to the force. A long hard look at generational differences along with communication methods must be undertaken with an emphasis on adaptability, humility, and a singular desire to find out what works and not get caught up what has worked in the past. Additionally, Commanders at all levels should feel an obligation and responsibility to fight to retain the best and brightest based on quantifiable data. The idea that a Marine is being retained after his first four years because he can run fast and shoot the rifle is myopic towards what the institutions true needs are today. More analysis needs to be conducted to define what is needed to support retention and put objective data and criteria

on retention rates. Additionally, the operating forces should feel pressure, similar to what the recruiting force feels, regarding keeping the right number of Marines that meet some of the specific DOD intellectual criteria – specifically ASVAB scores that are above the 50 percent range. DOD standard for entry level personnel is 63%; however, no standard is set for first term Marines who chose to reenlist nor for the career enlisted force. If there is a wide intellectual disparity between first term Marines and those that lead them this intelligence gap could go a long way to explaining why some are not adequately challenged intellectually and creatively by their leaders.

The Marine Corps continues to exceed expectations concerning Department of Defense standards on both mental and physical requirements on all entry level officers and enlisted Marines. Additionally, the total transformation that takes place at both the Marine Corps Recruit Depot and Officer's Candidate School are truly the envy of all sister services. Despite this exceptional accomplishment the question remains whether the most talented of these individuals are continuing to serve past their initial enlistment to help form the nucleus of inventive and adaptive warfighters needed to actualize the tenets in the MOC. If they are not questions the Marine Corps must ask whether the commanders and senior enlisted leaders throughout the Corps are doing enough to incentivize and communicate the utility of a career in uniform and the unique future the Corps has before it. While sustaining the transformation is not objective in the way that initial entry level transformation is at intake is it is essential to continue to have the right people, doctrine and management/leadership skills present to motivate personnel to remain in service to help actualize the ideas put forth in the Marine Corps Operating Concept.

The Marine Corps has a number of unique organizational designs and characteristics regarding the overall construct that in some cases exasperates communication issues. The Marine

Corps, like most services, is a sprawling bureaucracy that spans the country and has personnel, families, gear, and units located literally around the globe. As of 2017 the current end strength of the United States Marine Corps is at approximately 184,000 active duty and 38,900 reserves according to Jane's Information Group⁴. What is unique is that according to the Demographics booklet from 2016, "Of this population 65% are 25 and younger, 23% are not old enough to consume alcohol, 39% are Lance Corporals and below, and there are approximately eight enlisted Marines for every one officer."⁵ Additionally, there is a large disparity between the senior leadership and the rank and file with regards to total years of service with the demographics survey showing that, "the average years of service is 5.2 years, but the percent that have less than 4 years of service sits at 59% while those with 20 plus years (your senior leadership) number less 4% of the total force."⁶

Throughout its storied history the institution has been able to overcome this age imbalance by focusing on their warfighting ethos and uniqueness in comparison to other services. As Aaron O'Connell states in *Underdogs*, "Marines were, and always have been, unique and superior to other military services."⁷ Though the propaganda has worked in the past some of this overconfidence was borne from the results of a different type of combat, during a different time, that required a Marine that either led or followed. It is time to look holistically at the way senior leadership on both the officer and enlisted side of the Corps communicates to all levels of the institution so that the right personnel are staying to execute the mission and not those that may be more prone to blindly follow than attempt to innovate.

The Marine Corps has always been viewed as an institution that demands and thrives on rigid and inflexible belief in discipline and leadership as cornerstones of its culture. Strict adherence to the organizational core values of Honor, Courage and Commitment were

considered essential to success at home and at war. Despite these rigid beliefs there has always been a necessity to create an environment for an adaptive and experimental thinking class of Marines that have the ability, freedom, desire and risk-taking initiative to still operate and adapt in a modern world.

Initial emphasis in training, communication, and leadership is rightly focused on instilling the understanding and belief in the organizations culture, ethos and doctrine. Once established it should be reinforced through repetition and adherence through all levels of command. After verification that the entry level transformation has been successful the Corps should now look at how to create an operating environment and open dialogue where innovation and adaptivity are championed by all levels of command.

The Marine Corps has successfully done this throughout its history. For example, in the interwar years leading up to WWI then Commandant General Lejeune supported Pete Ellis in his efforts to push amphibious doctrine by publishing the seminal document “Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia” that was designed to, “Guide and coordinate training and activities of the Marine Corps in peacetime so as to be ready to execute War Plans.”⁸ After World War II Lt. General (Retired) Brute Krulak and others created the “Chowder Society,” that spearheaded the initiative to not only keep the Marine Corps relevant in the eyes of the country, but more importantly to fight off attempts to minimize the future role of the Marine Corps in the Department of Defense. These innovators sat on the periphery of the institution writ large, but were supported once the ideas and concepts were assessed and proven worthy.

What are the Millennial Generation and Generation Net/Next looking for?

As the Marine Corps looks at how to adapt to the requirements of the future battlefield they must first learn about the men and women that will be doing the heavy lifting for them.

Millennials are unique. There are an inordinate amount of studies, books, and papers that have been undertaken to simply begin to understand who they are and what they want. Most of the research has been consistent in that it tells the story of a generation that expects and requires a lot. In his book *Not Everyone Gets A Trophy* the author Bruce Tolgan noted nine strategies that he believes will support the recruitment and retention of the millennial generation:

1. Bring them on board fast with the right message.
2. Get them up to speed quickly and turn them into knowledge workers.
3. Practice “I loco parentis” management. Take a strong hand.
4. Give them the gift of context. Help them understand their roles in your Company and where they fit in your picture.
5. Get them to care about great customer service.
6. Teach them how to manage themselves.
7. Teach them how to be managed by you.
8. Retain the best of the Millennial Generation one day at a time.
9. Build the next generation of leaders.⁹

This list is not all inclusive it is simply an insight into what researchers see as the generation’s wants and needs. Now the issue becomes how do these match and mirror previous generation’s wants and needs and what is required to facilitate the communication and happy meeting in the middle between the divergences.

The fear is that with multiple generations colliding and a unique and different requirement and learning set presented by the current generation hubris will win out and everyone will suffer. The worst-case scenario would have the institution remain static in their operating procedures. They would choose to use the fact that they have produced innovators in

the past with proven leadership training and techniques that there is no need to change to appease the country's youngest warfighters. That, when reading everything that is written about the current generation, would be a mistake. Without looking at the way communication takes place, and more importantly the right way to lead and motivate the Generation X cohort, time may run out and the Corps will be left with either those unable or unwilling to innovate or worse yet incapable.

In *Managing Millennials*, the authors wrote, "The test for companies will be to live up to their recruiting advertising. Marketing can get ahead of development and make the promise of overpromising and underdelivering. Organizations may have the savvy to sell themselves to attract millennials, BUT will they have a management team to keep them?"¹⁰ This is the question the Marine Corps must ask itself. The force that they recruit must be served by all levels of the organization and communication strategies to support the effective retention of the force must be synched and inline or credibility will be lost.

How does the Marine Corps Communicate today?

The Marine Corps uses multiple types of communication methods to effectively convey the institution message. Two of the most often referenced and quoted methods for leadership communication are historical writings of previous commandants and the Corps institutional publication on Leadership. The concern is that some of these writings do not adequately synch with the Leader Member Exchange dynamic nor the effective implementation of intercultural exchange. A determination should be made if these writings resonate with the millennials wants and desires and adequately convey what it is the Marine Corps is looking to achieve with the MOC.

General John A. Lejeune is a seminal figure in the Marine Corps. Not only was he a former Commandant, he was someone that personifies the ideals of the Corps in not only his actions and his writings the idea of what the Marine Corps should be as an organization and the correct way both enlisted Marines and Officers should act independently and as coworkers. His writings still fill Professional Military publications and his name stands in front of the services Leadership Institute. In a historical context it is difficult to debate the influence this incredible man has had on countless aspects of the institution. This is in no way meant to disparage the memory of this legend only an attempt to pragmatically and objectively look at his writings and determine the utility of these in a present-day context as the Marine Corps attempts to communicate with the Millennial Generation.

In his letter to officers of the Marine Corps in MCWP 6-11 Major General Lejeune wrote:

We should never forget the power of example. The young men take their cue from you. If you conduct yourselves at all times as officers and gentlemen should conduct themselves, the moral tone of the whole Corps will be raised.Let each one of us resolve to show in himself (herself) a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination and do all in our power, not only to maintain, but to increase the prestige, the efficiency, and the spirit of the grand old Corps.¹¹

The discussion about the relationship between leaders and Marines comes directly from Major General Lejeune's writings. When most of what has been discussed and written about how to lead Millennials differs not completely, but ever so slightly maybe some editing or rethinking is required. Though Major General Lejeune's writings often resonate with previous generations analysis must be conducted to assess the utility it provides to this generation. The question

should be asked if it is more beneficial to use retired Marine and current Secretary of Defense James Mattis or former Commandant Al Gray as the speakers for the Corps since they are more relevant and more innovative in a current sense than Major General Lejeune was specifically about how he viewed the senior/junior relationship. The susceptibility to becoming attached to what has worked before is real and incredibly dangerous. Vigilance must be consistent to look at the reality of the current situation and fight off the nostalgia for yesteryear.

When questioned as to whether the Marine Corps looked holistically at all of their methods of communication with the force they responded with the following on their feedback mechanisms:

The tools that Headquarters Marine Corps uses to communicate "writ large" is the various social media accounts, marines.mil, official messages (Message To The Force, MARADMINS, ALMARS, etc.), and the CMC traveling throughout the Corps.

We do not have any real feedback to operationalize/measure these modes of communication, besides the CMC's interpersonal communication with Marines, and we in OMCC are not made aware of those conversations. A Message To The Force survey was supposed to go out to all the Marines in the Corps, but they sent it in batches of 5,000, so we do not know what the bounce rate was. There were 785 respondents.

Without knowing the bounce, if you consider the total population of Marines (188,000) this gives a response rate of 0.4%. This is well below the 10-15% standard in academia.

With all of that being said, the real challenge is that it is very difficult to survey our Marines as the Human Subject research folks at M&RA are weary about surveying the force, because they believe that there is already a significant amount of survey fatigue. This could be true being that we had such a low response rate for the MTTF survey.

This shows that much must be done to assess the utility and appreciation of the various messaging mechanisms so that more can be gleaned as to the effectiveness or not of all methods and whether they are indeed hitting the intended audiences.

Doctrine

The Marine Corps must look at doctrine taking into consideration the differences between generations and then determine how the doctrine is being tailored to effectively use the talents that exist in the multiple generations and use their unique learning methodologies while appealing to their distinct wants and needs. It is not that they don't want to stay they simply have certain requirements, "But while Xers are focused on career security, that doesn't mean they can't find it in a single organization, if that organization is keeping a running dialogue with Xers about where they're going and what it takes to get them there."¹²

As a single example the Marine Corps should analyze Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-11 *Leading Marines*, to ensure that it is written to effectively communicate to and train leaders to retain the force required to actualize the Marine Corps Operational Concept 2025. *Leading Marines* attempts to address the significant issues surrounding leading and mentoring Marines. The question is does it address the requirements levied by the current generation or has it become stale and incapable of evolving?

Every Marine learns the Marine Corps Leadership Traits whether they attend Boot Camp or Officer Candidate School. They have been around for a very long time and have served as a simple learning mnemonic (JJ DID TIE BUCKLE) to get the memorization process started. However, is it time to look at the current wants and needs of the institution and see if it addresses those leadership traits described and required by the MOC.

When looking at the MOC and what is required to execute the concept some words came out that weren't addressed in the leadership traits; Dynamic, austere, expeditionary, adaptable, intuitive, analytical, complex, critical thinker, problem solver, resilient (replace endurance), decision maker, communicator (probably the most important of all), accountable, competent, mature.

So instead of the 14 leadership traits maybe the Marine Corps should look at twenty in this increasingly complex world (DID CLUTCH CREAP IPAC AC):

1. **Dependability**
2. **Loyalty**
3. Innovative (**Initiative**)
4. Decisionmaker (replace **Decisiveness**)
5. Honesty (**replace Integrity**)
6. **Tact**
7. **Courage**
8. **Unselfishness**
9. Commitment (**replace enthusiasm**)
10. Competency (**replace Knowledge**)
11. Professionalism (**replace Bearing**)
12. Resiliency (**replace Endurance**)
13. Expeditionary
14. Adaptable
15. Intuitive
16. Analytical

17. Accountable
18. Communicator (probably the most important of all)
19. Critical thinker (**replace Judgement**)
20. Problem solver (**replace Justice** – that is for commanders not all leaders)

This is a simple way to mature the idea of leadership by making the traits match the desires put forth by the MOC. Instead of being beholden to previous leadership tenets thought should be put into what is needed for the next generation of Marine Leaders so that there is synchronization at all levels regarding doctrine, messaging, and end state.

Leadership Member Exchange – the right person with the right message

When looking at how the varied generations that make up the majority of the junior enlisted, junior officers, and mid-grade enlisted and officers want their leaders to communicate one word seems to connect all of their thoughts – personal. Millennials want to feel that their leaders at all levels care and are personally invested in their growth and future. In the article *Leader-Member Exchange: A Social Exchange Perspective* the authors wrote that, “Leader-Member Exchange Theory suggests that a social relationship evolves between supervisors and subordinates against the background of a formal organization.”¹³

Though the size of the Marine Corps and the challenges they faced in 1987 were slightly different the difficulties surrounding communicating to the masses were the same. A great example of someone who seemed to intuitively grasp the importance of Leader-Member Exchange was General Alfred M. Gray, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps. He served as the senior leader of the Marine Corps from June 30th, 1987 until his retirement on July 1st, 1991. Though each of his predecessors, and those that followed him, had varying impacts on the institution throughout their tenures one can argue that General Gray, with his vision and unique

communication style and leadership, was the most influential Commandant over the proceeding fifty years up until today.

His list of accomplishments is long and still growing well into his retirement. However, the two most lasting impacts are his drive to develop and support, “initiatives to improve the professional education programs for all Marines (the library in Quantico bears his name and the Marine Corps University was initiated under his commandancy)”¹⁴, and the proponenty and direction of *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, Warfighting (FMFM-1)*, that helped, “formalize his warrior philosophy... and had an immediate and significant impact inside and outside the Marine Corps... and was to actually change the way Marines would think about warfare.”¹⁵ What is most relevant to this class is the reality of his approach to communicating his vision for the future and the challenges he overcame.

General Gray was an unlikely choice to be the Commandant of the Marine Corps. He was considered too old, seemingly did not look the part, did not have the requisite time at Headquarters Marine Corps, and many senior and retired Marines didn't consider this, “short, rough-cut, hard as nails” field Marine capable to be an effective Commandant.”¹⁶ However, the people who made the ultimate decision thought differently. What others didn't appreciate was that despite his many shortcomings General Gray was an incredible leader and communicator who would be able to connect with all levels of the Marine Corps.

In looking at General Gray's tenure as Commandant it seems to be a case study in the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory of Leadership. LMX is, “concerned with the interaction between leaders and followers.”¹⁷ When observing an institution as large as the Marine Corps it is interesting to see a case where a single individual, through force of personality, accomplished so much. Not only was the General not the first choice for the job, he

had a very truncated time-line after notification to prepare, consolidate, and decide on the method of conveyance he would chose to push his vision for the future of the Corps. In breaking tradition, he chose to not publish a Commandant's guide as all but one of his predecessors had done. Instead he began a three-pronged approach starting with, "craft(ing) a series of informal papers addressing special topics. These were not widely distributed but were cited innumerable times as his position on deliberated issues. Gray's basic culture and his long-known warrior philosophy helped him affect his first mandate: that every Marine would be trained first as a rifleman." ¹⁸

This seemed to be the beginnings of the acculturation of the General's chosen "in group", which is described as the group who shared, "mutual trust, respect, liking, and reciprocal influence."¹⁹ Once the information was disseminated General Gray made a conscientious decision that he would personally deliver the message to the "out group." In a typical bureaucracy communication would typically take place via written memo's or in the case of the Marine Corps the Commandants message or doctrine. This was not General Gray's way and he chose to once again break with tradition and take his message to the masses.

What resonated with General Gray was the idea that buy in was crucial for the success of the message. General Gray wanted to facilitate *leadership making* so that the senior officers and non-commissioned officers of the Marine Corps would, "form high-quality, or in-group, exchanges with nearly all of their subordinates."²⁰ As stated in the book *Journey of a Warrior* General Gray had, "no time...instead, he elected to be his own messenger. He sought to share his "warrior philosophy" and spread his thoughts and guidance through a whirlwind of personal visits."²¹ Therefore, he was able to communicate his nascent philosophy to his in-group originally through his writings that he published in informal papers and then follow-up with the

more challenging discussions with the out-groups in person. General Gray put together a barnstorming tour that included, “a flurry of trips... up to three or four sessions with different commands each day... immediately connecting with roaring crowds of Marines and sailors.”²² He was described as, “energized as he imparted his warrior philosophy, reminding everyone that they must recommit themselves to serving his or her Corps above personal wants.”²³

What General Gray was doing was tapping into the, “dyadic relationship that both leaders and followers see as special and unique.”²⁴ Instead of sitting behind a desk and trumpeting from up high what the course of the institution should be, he took the vision to the institution. Not only did he take it to the institution he pushed for openness and innovation through questioning and testing. In changing the culture in support of the innovations he made it a habit of literally walking the walk to solicit input and feedback from any and all that were willing to offer advice or suggestions. Another anecdote from the *Journey of a Warrior*, was a story that typified this philosophy in that, “his aggressive holistic approach to revise or replace the prevailing business as usual attitude....It was not uncommon for Gray to pick up a staffing paper, note the action officer’s name and room location, and then walk down to his office to answer some question.”²⁵ This showed to the individual Marine General Gray was taking into his own hands the recommendations and conclusions pushed by most research into effective Leadership-Member Exchange in that the following are crucial for long-term success:

1. Human Resource managers and developmental specialists should conduct leadership training at all levels.
2. Group interaction is a practical area in which to encourage high-quality exchange relationships.

3. Building a corporate culture in which open two-way communication occurs at all levels is highly encouraged.
4. Literature indicates that organizational commitment is defined as a subordinate's identification with the mission, goals, and vision of the organization.
5. SUPERVISORS are the agents for change and act as role models and positive influences on their subordinates.
6. Supervisors should actively encourage subordinates to provide feedback and vice-versa.²⁶

As General Gray said in his *The Commandants Report to the Officer Corps*, "The young Marine today wants to understand his Corps. He wants to know where we are heading and he wants to know why."²⁷ He knew that to succeed he must reach all levels of the organization and create a holistic approach to attempt to mitigate or diminish the diminishment of his philosophy between the various levels. His approach strove for the Marine Corps to eventually have more of the organization to consider themselves as, "In group" subordinates perform their jobs in accordance with the employment contracts and can be counted on by the supervisor to perform unstructured tasks, to volunteer for extra work, and to take on additional responsibilities."²⁸ Any organization that wants wholesale change across the organization and a shift of the culture to sustain itself over the long run must have the ability to create the "in group" that manifest in the following description of the end state, "As a result, research shows mutual trust, positive support, informal interdependencies, greater job latitude, common bonds, open communication, and high degree of autonomy."²⁹

Conversely, if not handled properly there will be limited sustainability and the likelihood of success would have been minimal. No organization, especially one as large and influential as

the Marine Corps wants the preponderance of their force to exhibit the following characteristics, “In contrast, subordinates who perform only in accordance with prescribed employment contract are characterized as “out-group” with limited reciprocal trust and support.”³⁰

General Gray may not have intuitively known that he was efficiently and effectively incorporating the LMX Theory; however, through his actions it is evident that his innate style and approach replicated the tenets put forth by the theory. As the Marine Corps moves into the actualization of the Marine Operating Concept and Force 2025 it would behoove the senior leadership to take a page out of the 29th Commandant’s leadership book and study the implementation and actualization of these seminal events in the institution’s maturation process that got them to where they are today. Not only did it work then, research has shown it can work in all organizations, “Two hundred thirty-two manager–subordinate dyads provided data on the effort expended toward the development of leader–member exchange (LMX) relationships... For both managers and subordinates, higher quality LMX relationships were reported and expectations were met when the other member of the dyad put forth effort into relationship development.”³¹

Intercultural Communication – know who you are talking to at all levels

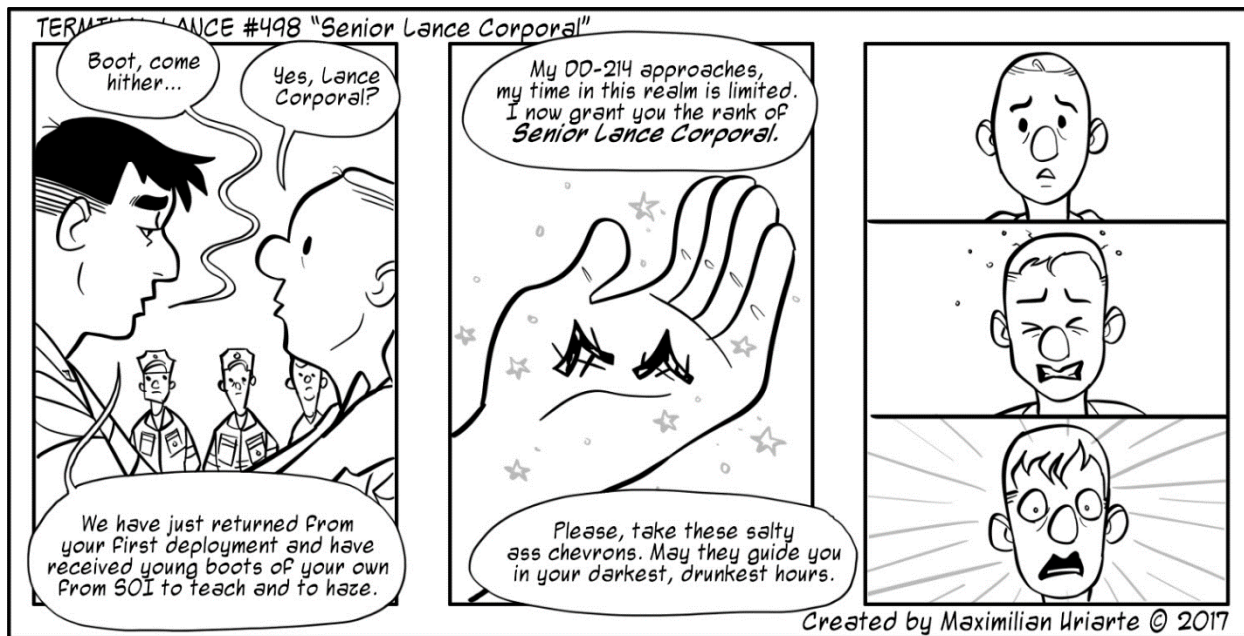
The MOC, along with the *Commandants Message to the Force 2018*, are both thought provoking documents; however, the assumption that they connect with the totality of the Marine Corps is not validated as previous comments from Headquarters Marine Corps has shown. Without validation then there is no ability to assess the effectiveness. However, over the last thirty years there have been a number of “messages” that resonated across the service. The first was the Commandant’s Reading List from General Gray, next came the “Honor, Courage, Commitment” cards from General Krulak, and finally it was the 1st Marine Division message

from General Mattis along with his 5 3 5 rule, “No Better Friend and No Worse Enemy”, and the “Guardian Angel Concept.” The reason these were remembered were that they were simple and spoke to the masses. Though the senior levels of the institution probably thought them benign, and the middle management maybe a little too straight forward, the 39% of Lance Corporals and below remembered every word and they connected with them on a personal and understandable level. These simple messages looked at what Milton Bennett in his book *Basic Concepts in Intercultural Communication*³² referred to as the 3 levels of analysis with different foci:

1. A more micro level where individual behavior and traits are primary
2. A mid-range where group behavior and world view are primary
3. A more macro level where institutional products and systems are primary

More attention must be placed on communication if the institution wants to connect at all of these levels while attempting to retain the right people, innovate, and execute the vision of MOC 2025.

It is revealing to compare the MOC to this cartoon published by Terminal Lance and see if the two merge via a similar communication method and focus, or diverge on all accounts and one better represents the true feelings and concerns of the masses while the other is seemingly in complete opposition with regards to communicating the reality of the situation:



Though an oversimplification it stands to reason that the institution must converge on a happy medium between the overarching ideas and verbosity of the MOC and the simplicity and day to day reality of Terminal Lance. To create buy in from the organization that has 59% of its personnel with less than four years of service, and in some cases a myriad of choices outside of the military, much research into effective and efficient communication methods to sway them to serve past their original enlistment. Those that possess the requisite skill sets that the Corps is looking for will have options. Among many other tangible and intangible items, they will be looking at will be whether the institution talks to them with sincerity and honesty and does it reflect their long term wants and desires. If not, they may lose those they most need to survive.

Another step to take would be to reflect on the culture that the institution has, not the one it wants. The Marine Corps has, in certain corners of the institution, supported openly the desire to continue to adapt to a constantly changing operational environment. The challenge has been to ensure that the risk taking and innovation is focused, and not something that manifests itself in off-duty incidents and a breakdown of the military leadership, discipline, and culture. An

adherence to discipline is a requirement to maintain good order while an open-minded culture that looks for improvements and innovation on the edges of approved doctrine is essential to actualize the ideas in the MOC and incentivize those to stay in and continue to push the edges of thought regarding modern warfare. Once again Bennett explains the importance of exploring the idea of, “emerging consensus around what constitutes intercultural competence, which is most often viewed as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction and a variety of cultural contexts.”³³

Conclusion and recommendations

The Marine Corps faces a number of challenges over the coming years. First among them is talent acquisition and retention. As to acquisition the Marine Corps continues to exceed expectations. The concern is the retention of the largest number of the young men and women that choose to serve the Corps. The difficulty surrounding intercultural communication can help explain leadership challenges surrounding communication throughout the service in support of mission accomplishment and retention of the organization’s most sought-after resource: people. Limited flexibility and rigid beliefs in prior generation’s communication techniques will lead to failure. Furthermore, not appreciating the uniqueness of the cross generational communication challenges will continue to stymie any efforts to keep those needed informed and committed to the long-term success of the institution.

Delving deeper into what the mass majority of the institution connects with when attempting to disseminate information is essential in the ever-disparate nature of communication in the 21st Century. More emphasis should be put on understanding and applying the Communication Accommodation Theory across all messaging that is attempting to attract a wider audience. When looking at the MOC and other documents it seems to personify the idea of

divergence with regards to communication. As described by Howard Giles the Corps must refrain from creating the divergent (outgroup) of senior leadership pontificating down with verbose and somewhat theoretical and difficult to understand concepts and attempt to create convergence (in group) when communicating via adaptation to the preponderance of your audiences.

Finally, in conjunction with the cultural analysis it would be extremely beneficial to attempt to create a “Culture Map” as described by Erin Meyers in her eight steps shown below, differentiating between the Senior Leadership (O5 and above and E8, E9s), Middle Management (O3 – O4s and E5 – E7s) and the working class (O1 – O2’s, E1 – E4). This could provide the basis for a holistic approach to communication and serve as a baseline for future messaging attempts to the disparate parts of the organization:

- Communicating – Are they low-context (simple, verbose and clear), or high-context (rich deep meaning in interactions)?
- Evaluating – When giving negative feedback does one give it directly, or prefer being indirect and discreet?
- Leading – Are people in groups egalitarian, or do they prefer hierarchy?
- Deciding – Are decisions made in consensus, or made top-down?
- Trusting – Do people base trust on how well they know each other, or how well they do work together?
- Disagreeing – Are disagreements tackled directly, or do people prefer to avoid confrontations?
- Scheduling – Do they perceive time as absolute linear points, or consider it a flexible range?

- Persuading – Do they like to hear specific cases and examples, or prefer holistic detailed explanations?³⁴

With this map the Marine Corps could look at the culture it has at all levels and effectively create a communication strategy that can resonate and support the appreciation and understanding of where the service is going along with the utility and importance of remaining a part of this illustrious fighting force as it attempts to attack the myriad of issues and enemies that threaten both the service and the country.

The difficulty of leading and communicating to multiple generations in a regimented military structure is well documented. Without detailed analysis of how the Marine Corps communicates, and what it communicates, the institution will continue to fight to retain the most qualified individuals and minimize the effects and long-term consequences of toxic leadership and failed messaging brought on by failing to effectively communicate. The Marine Corps must leverage the tenets of the Leader Member Exchange (LMX), in a multi-generational construct, and the intercultural communication theory to better prepare their leaders, at all levels, to appropriately communicate with the entire force as it prepares to execute the Marine Corps Operating Concept 2025.

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