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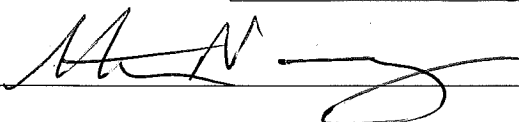
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Executive Summary

Title: Losing Good Wolves

Author: Major Richard W. Chapman, United States Marine Corps

Discussion: In order for the Marine Corps to survive as an organization, it must change. When the leaders of an organization require “compliance,” they limit the organization’s ability to grow, and require growth. The concept of employing a culture of compliance is necessary for the purpose of enforcing legal self-regulation, but when compliance becomes a common trait within organizations, it can impede the growth necessary for organizations to evolve and survive. The Marine Corps must reinforce the importance of growth to the members serving within the organization, while simultaneously inculcating the same discipline considered synonymous with the term “Marine.” For the Marine Corps to represent what it claims in MCDP-1, and refuse the “yes-man” mentality, then the organization must abandon any narrative associated with a culture of compliance.

Thesis: Enforcing a culture of compliance negates the foundational principles of the Marine Corps, because it limits opportunities for genuine growth and input from the members of the organization. The Marine Corps must embrace growth and input from the members of the organization in terms of implementing internal feedback, pursuing external feedback, and revising the current model for education and leadership development to reflect both sources.

Conclusion: It is difficult to predict how long an organization will last when the leaders of the organization publically contradict the character of the organization. Perhaps, leaders can grow the character of the organization, and develop more effective feedback mechanisms from within. As an effect, we can save more of the good wolves in the pack. The leaders of the organization must continue to serve the members of the organization, first and foremost, while simultaneously accounting for prevailing requirements identified by policy makers. In the Aristotelian sense, growing the character of the parts in the system grows the character of the entire system.

Preface

Building an organizational culture is an incredibly difficult undertaking. Historically, the Marine Corps is an organization that prospered when it refused compliance like when General Lejeune embraced a new role for the officers in the Marine Corps as teachers and coaches, not simply authoritarians. Recently, several senior officials in the Marine Corps, however, have selected a narrative that requires compliance with organizational standards. Cultures of compliance produce organizations where members submit to the enterprise-level standards, with limited availability for individual feedback. While compliance with legal standards remains essential for self-regulation, compliance with organizational standards is largely perceived as propaganda and quickly rejected by the majority of the Marine Corps' population today.¹

The Marine Corps must train, educate, and develop Marines differently if it intends to optimize every member, since history demonstrates that people only “perform at the level of their training.”² As an organization with a consistent narrative of community and cohesion throughout its history, the Marine Corps must reject compliance where it interferes with growth and sustainable, self-regulation.³ Without developing the individual character of every member, cultures of compliance yield organizations where members react in fear. Once organizations articulate the importance of individual growth and innovation as the expectation for the members, then cohesion enables maximum performance within the organization.

What kind of leaders is the Marine Corps producing if we are not inculcating the importance of character development, growth, and morality from the moment that the process of leadership development commences? Developing a sound moral character requires time, effort, humility, and guidance. For the efforts to leave a lasting impact, training must be consistent and genuine. While this occurs within the process involved in producing Marines at the entry level,

the transition from “boot camp” to the Fleet Marine Force is not achieving the desired effect. Offenses ranging from inappropriate civilian attire to involvement in criminal activity give cause for concern. Leadership models resembling micromanagement emerge as a result, where the response produces a strong focus on control in the face of chaos. Compliance resembles subjugation, and does not generate the creativity necessary for solving complex problems or maneuvering interdependently. In addition to rejecting the Marine Corps’ primary doctrinal publication, *Warfighting*, the current expectation of compliance promotes a “yes-man” culture.⁴

In a population that overwhelmingly values feedback and authenticity, the organization must evolve and accept that some revisions are required. Leaders must develop internal and external feedback mechanisms, authentically pursuing feedback from within and outside of their units. As an organization with an extensive history of innovation and originality, with leaders like “Pete” Ellis and “Brute” Krulak, it is difficult to predict how long the Marine Corps endures if it insists on a culture of compliance that only enforces historically accepted standards.

While the organization maintains a tremendous reputation as a result of those who served before, recent media coverage gives cause for concern. With the highest suicide rates of any service in the United States Armed Forces from 2017-2019,⁵ the Marine Corps is clearly not achieving the desired expectations of a cohesive culture. In fact, the Marine Corps nearly doubles suicide rates found within the general population of the United States. As recently as 2017, the Air Force added “inclusivity” as a shared trait among leaders. Representing how organizations can evolve to survive, through the past five years, the Air Force achieves the lowest suicide rate of all services. Although inclusivity does not link directly with the Air Force’s more successful approach to suicide awareness training, it can indicate that inclusive language may contribute to the “feeling of belongingness.”⁶ Refusing compliance with historical accepted standards, the Air

Force made changes to what it expects from its leaders, and in doing so, possibly saved lives. In effect, suicide prevention has nothing to do with our “individual duty to respond,” but is a result of an individual’s sense of belonging to a community.⁷

As a result of a close friend and colleague committing suicide in mid-2019, the central theme of this paper expresses the necessity for revision within the current annual training curriculum that the organization employs. Currently, annual training does not inculcate the need for character development within every member, nor express the importance of an inclusive, community-focused narrative. Now, more than ever, the psychology of how we lead Marines matters. The leaders currently developing the organizational culture for the Marine Corps must expand the aperture to other services. Following the example of organizational adaptation set by the Air Force, the Marine Corps must modify to achieve the effects of the annual training curriculum.

In results-based, high performance cultures, like the Marine Corps, the group is an aggregate of the parts. As Rudyard Kipling so brilliantly expressed in his poem in *The Law of the Jungle*, “...the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.”⁸ In the hierarchy of nature, when a malevolent leader enforces subjugation unnecessarily, several subordinate members of the group rebel, sacrificing themselves to achieve change within the pack. The part sacrifices itself for the good of the whole. In 2019, the Marine Corps continued to lose good wolves, but somehow, seems to retain wolves that survive as a result of compliance. As an organization, the Marine Corps must transform, planting the seeds of morality and character, cultivating resilient members that genuinely pursue cohesion.

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Key Terms

Culture of Compliance: Organizational culture where alignment occurs through the use of incentives, continuous vigilance, resources, and time in an attempt to reinforce behaviors that benefit the organization.⁹

Cohesion Culture: Organizational cultures where members develop a sense of belonging, values, and commitment as a result of personal and organizational goals.¹⁰

Organizational Culture: Enterprise-level values, attributes, assumptions, and characteristics that link entire organizations. (Note: Not Command Climate, as that varies between commands.)¹¹

Introduction

The preeminent focus of cultural indoctrination at entry level training in the Marine Corps expresses to every member the idea that only “Marines and non-Marines” occupy the world.¹² The collective community of “Marines,” in the indoctrinated sense, receives an enormous amount of training on culture and what it means to be a Marine. Marines fight and win battles, defeating “non-Marines” as a result of their indomitable will; the essence of every Marine. When Marines enter the “Fleet,” non-Marines can more easily influence their behaviors, reducing the will of the organization and its members. With almost 70% of the population between the ages of 19-24, the current population of Marines have always possessed immediate access to information through the internet. The Marine Corps is no longer as insulated from “non-Marines” as previous generations of Marines.

Regardless of the population, the Marine Corps has misplaced the organization’s essence with the requirement for efficient training, instead of effective leadership. Simply telling Marines not to “drink and drive” reduces the value of the organization to a micromanaged, transactional leadership model where Marines behave appropriately in order to avoid punishment. Incentivizing good or bad behaviors can only achieve temporary results, where Marines performing in a decentralized, operational environment require constant guidance in order to perform. Essentially, the current leadership methods employed negate the organizations’ capacity to perform the principles of maneuver warfare.

The concept of a culture of compliance presents an existential threat to the Marine Corps, as it neglects the foundational principles of maneuver warfare and the willpower of Marines. When leaders require compliance, in the authoritarian sense, it undermines the concept of effective subordinate leadership, both as an organization and for the members within the

organization. The entire culture of the Marine Corps depends on the development of critical thinkers, capable of employing their will and solving complex problems in a time-sensitive environment. Within the Marine Corps, the process for developing leaders exists, but retains limitations where compliance is supreme. It is difficult to predict how long an organization can endure when the leaders direct the organization in contradiction to organizational principles.

Enforcing a culture of compliance negates the foundational principles of the Marine Corps, because it limits opportunities for genuine growth and input from the members of the organization. The Marine Corps must embrace growth and input from the members of the organization in terms of implementing internal feedback, pursuing external feedback, and revising the current model for education and leadership development to reflect both sources.

It is imperative that the Marine Corps develops training that supports the production of innovative Marines, while simultaneously maintaining the tremendous reputation on which the Marine Corps was built. Since 1922, the prestige of the Marine Corps, according to General Lejeune, requires a sense of belonging inspired by the Officers of the organization. The requirement for inspiration from within has not changed. The most devastating criticism of any leader in any organization is inaction in the presence of a problem. Requiring compliance defeats inspiration, especially from organizational leaders.

Every Marine should consistently strive to maintain the tremendous reputation of those who have previously served. Not currently provided, the training curriculum of the Marine Corps must embrace that all people require time to genuinely develop, learn, and grow as individuals, before they can become effective members of a team. Genuine, lasting growth, in the words of General Lejeune, requires “coaching, teaching, and mentoring.”¹³ If every leader is first a

teacher, and every scholar, a student, and the desired effect of the lesson is not achieved, then the method selected for communicating the lesson requires revision.

A less commercialized approach to education exists, and the Marine Corps should embrace modernizations. In a population that has always maintained immediate access to information, modern Marines proficiently recognize propaganda. Marines today desire meaning, which does not occur in large formations.¹⁴ Holding formations in order to quickly calculate attendance is an ineffective approach to learning. If the Marine Corps desires effective learning, then the entire model must evolve and only “instruct groups of no more than 50” personnel.¹⁵ Contradicting the foundational principles of maneuver, centralizing education isolates Marines from their commands, from one another, and undermines the organization’s identity.

The initial portions of this paper present the historical failings of compliance and how the component parts of the human psyche relate to identity development. Essentially, an individual’s or group identity only grows when it “sacrifices what it was to become what it could be.”¹⁶ The second portion presents how effective military organizations developed cohesion cultures as a result of evolution, pursuing interdependence, inclusivity, and growth. The third portion presents the current methods employed for education within the Marine Corps, and where the organization must change. While the Marine Corps performs adequately in many areas, as an organization, it has not maximized the use of available educational methods. The last portion of this work proposes mechanisms for organizational growth within the Marine Corps, more closely aligning the Marine Corps with successful military, education, and individual resilience models.

Presently, many of the components essential for change already exist in the Marine Corps, but have not been appropriately leveraged. The preeminent focus of this paper identifies areas where the organization can modernize in order to meet the needs of the population serving.

Losing Good Wolves

When Compliance Fails: The Vietnam War

“Now, this is the law of the Jungle, as old and as true as the sky.
And, the wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the wolf that shall break it must die.”

-*The Law of the Jungle*, Rudyard Kipling

Within every individual and group, according to clinical psychologist Carl Jung, “conflict is necessary for identity development and growth.”¹⁷ While some groups develop an inherent comfort with conflict, others develop structures that respond to conflict in the absence of authentic leadership, resources, and time. Rigidly driven by policies and incentives, conflict avoidant organizations desire obedience and expedience in comparison to growth and innovation. Organizations demanding compliance desire little from their members in terms of innovation or creativity, and link success with historically accepted standards. If compliance with historically accepted standards becomes the expectation within an organization, the organization may lack the necessary flexibility to thrive in unfamiliar territory.

Organizations leaning on historical achievements “fail as a result of poor communication, egotism, and an inability to self-regulate.”¹⁸ Essentially, a lack of flexibility and artificial leadership can cause organizations to neglect opportunities, or permanently damage an organization’s reputation. Following World War II, the US military fought in several conflicts where focusing on previous achievements limited the creativity necessary for victory. During the first four years of the Vietnam War, the commander of all US forces employed a historically accepted strategy that “may have won a large scale war of attrition, but failed to address the threat at hand.”¹⁹ From the perspective of author and historian Lewis Sorely, General Westmoreland “is the primary reason that the US military lost the war in Vietnam.”²⁰ His strategy needlessly expended thousands of lives, but worse than his strategy, General

Westmoreland's culture of compliance initiated an identity crisis for the American military establishment.

During the Vietnam War, America found itself in a challenging conflict against a flexible enemy force. From 1965 through 1968, General Westmoreland commanded all US military forces fighting in Vietnam in a manner that can only be described as ineffective. He enforced compliance within his ranks through micromanagement, where success against enemy forces was "limited to body count."²¹ When faced with a problem, he would simply "request more ground troops."²² While it was a failing strategy, General Westmoreland's reports to Washington contradicted many reports from his subordinate commanders, indicating "success against an inexperienced and unprepared enemy force."²³ In December of 1967, Westmoreland claimed that enemy forces were "unable to launch a major offensive."²⁴ Within a month, enemy forces launched the Tet Offensive, negating his strategic acumen, as it was the "largest operation by either side at that point in the war."²⁵ Recognizing the shortfalls of General Westmoreland's strategy, his replacement made several changes to the US strategy in Vietnam. Although America still lost the Vietnam War, General Creighton Abrams' efforts likely salvaged the reputation of the US military.

The strategy on the ground "changed 15 minutes after General Abrams took command in Vietnam."²⁶ Pursuing pacification and "denying the covert infrastructure" within the villages of Vietnam exemplifies what can occur when leaders willingly pursue feedback, from within and outside of the organization. General Abrams "made the villages of Vietnam the central focus of US strategy,"²⁷ refusing compliance with the previously accepted strategy. Had General Abrams merely complied with the accepted approach, then concerns leading to pacification, and an end to the war, may have never been addressed. Employing a strategy of "resilience, flexibility, and

teamwork,”²⁸ his vision provided the framework for “the great military that fought in Desert Storm.”²⁹

As a result of the identity crisis experienced after the Vietnam War, the US military grew into an organization that could “march a little further, carry a heavier load, and step into an uncertain darkness for the well-being of others.”³⁰ While the failures experienced as a result of General Westmoreland’s conduct should not be understated, his failure provided General Abrams, and his unbound focus on cohesion, with an opportunity to end the war. It was General Abrams’ ability to listen, seek feedback, and modify procedures that inspired trust from his subordinates. Maneuver warfare demands inspired trust. Echoing the wisdom of Carl Jung, the conflict experienced as a result of the Vietnam War influenced the identity of every US military service. Similar to the leadership demonstrated by General Abrams, the relevance of the Marine Corps depends on trust inspired by the organization.

Identity

“The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, and where he has made him his home.
Not even the Head Wolf may enter, not even the Council may come.”

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

According to the psychological research of Doctor Carl Jung, the human psyche has an active and a passive participation mechanism, assisting the brain with establishing an understanding of “the self,” a term used to define an individual’s identity.³¹ Dr. Jung argues that there are three, interactive parts to the human psyche: the personal unconscious, collective unconscious, and the ego.³² Within the personal unconscious, people collect events for later use, developing a kind of “experience” for recognizing suffering.³³ The collective unconscious is a collection of ancestral memories, crucial for survival.³⁴ The unconscious parts of an individual’s identity represent the portions of “the self” that cannot be influenced.³⁵

The ego, however, can be manipulated.³⁶ An individual's ego is responsible for every behavior emulated, good or bad, even if it is imitation.³⁷ The ego, according to Jung, is an aggregate of a person's "experiences, thoughts, and emotions," and represents where experiences in the personal unconscious can influence human behavior.³⁸ Past experiences and future aspirations combine to organize human behavior.³⁹ Essentially, every action defines what a person aspires to be and represents their identity. Aspirations represent the primary reasoning behind human behavior.⁴⁰ Entry level training in the Marine Corps masterfully subjugates the ego and the requirement for immediate commitment to the hierarchy.

Among many other aspirations, President Lincoln once wrote that "patriotism, ambition, love of adventure, and personal courage" provide insight into the decision to join the military.⁴¹ Absent from President Lincoln's explanations for the joining the military, the entire population of the Marine Corps joined in order to become Marines. As a transaction, someone succeeds at entry level training in the Marine Corps through "instant willingness and obedience to orders."⁴² As a behavior, developing obedience is the goal while making Marines. The organization simultaneously and equally seeks to develop within every member an unrelenting determination in the pursuit of a task.

Within the process of developing Marines, compliance at the entry level implies that the individual possesses the capacity to follow orders while in a stressful environment, even under physical duress. The philosophy behind entry level training in the Marine Corps is simple: Marines achieve victory in battle because they follow orders and never quit.⁴³

Following the industrial production of Marines at "boot camp," they have additional experiences to leverage in the development of "the self." In testament to their "Honor, Courage, and Commitment,"⁴⁴ new Marines receive their first Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. It is an incredible

experience to witness. Every Marine graduates from entry level training with a revised set of behaviors, experiences, and identity. Alignment with the group identity sets Marines apart from others. Marines belong to the organization's elite history, and receive a physical representation of their initiation as members. Undoubtedly, when Marines graduate "boot camp," a feeling of self-actualization must be common. New Marines belong because of their commitment to one another and to the Marine Corps. "When someone belongs, they feel most protected," most optimized, and most valuable.⁴⁵

Based on several unacceptable statistics, in comparison to the other services, once Marines depart basic training, they struggle to maintain that sense of belonging and group identity.⁴⁶ Following graduation, it is not their obedience, but their proficiency and conduct that makes Marines valuable.⁴⁷ If the Marine Corps, as an organization, does not possess proficient members, the organization will not "be ready when the nation is least ready."⁴⁸ Marines are supposed to learn how to think independently and solve problems from their leaders in the operational forces. Although history displays that the process of making Marines is effective, centralized problem solving, and a recent narrative expressing the continued need for compliance, undermines the identity of the Marine Corps. Members of every organization require a consistent message, especially in organizations that emphasizes integrity as a trait inherent with every leader. If the enforced narrative impedes the doctrinal culture of the organization, members can develop a lack of trust.

Awareness of individual identity, also known self-consciousness, can present an interesting dilemma for many Marines. According to clinical psychologist, Dr. Jordan Peterson, when "someone becomes conscious of the self, the person is capable of experiencing, and developing an understanding of, suffering within the world."⁴⁹ As the world continues to move

toward individuality, it is more difficult to sustain an identity as part of a group. “Where inconsistencies are made evident in an undeveloped, yet self-conscious, person, the individual can become more willing to act on impulse, taking little note of the effect that compulsion can have on the group.”⁵⁰ In an organization where the majority of members are between 19-24 years old, an age that modern science considers as incompletely developed, the Marine Corps is developing a culture of compliance, generating an inconsistent message for a relatively educated populace.

The most recent Department of Defense survey conducted, analyzing the members who serve in the ranks of the Marine Corps, 100% of those who enlist possess a high school diploma, equivalent, or higher.⁵¹ So, it is reasonable to assume that all members serving in the ranks of the Marine Corps had other options prior to enlisting in the Marine Corps. A special organization with an elite history of victory in battle, the ranks of the Marines are filled with people who “sacrifice who they were in order to grow into what they may become.”⁵² Essentially, people join the Marines to establish an identity as a Marine, but a narrative of compliance defeats the culture that many of the members joined to find.

Understanding the Audience

“The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, but where he has dug it too plain,
the Council shall send him a message, and so he shall change it again.”

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

Once Marines graduate “boot camp,” and assume an identity as a Marine, many of their interests shift away from the advertised Core Values.⁵³ When Marines depart the constant indoctrination and supervision experienced during entry-level training, and enter the operational forces, that sense of belonging can taper.⁵⁴ A large percentage of the current demographic serving in the Marine Corps are no longer seeking to only behave as “good Marines should

behave.”⁵⁵ As a result of their experience in the interconnected world, Marines currently serving aspire to develop identities “as good people, not good Marines.”⁵⁶ Discounting feedback generates mistrust, prolonging an ineffective strategy and undermining the principles of maneuver warfare.

Marines today possess skills in sensing when they are being sold an agenda, especially propaganda. As a result, Marines quickly dismiss information dispatched in large formations.⁵⁷ Marines today consciously prioritize character development and authenticity, in comparison to the Core Values. Trends in the behaviors of groups assist in establishing patterns for the group as whole, and as a group, some of the patterns exhibited by Marines are alarming. Within the realm of suicide, the Marine Corps has achieved the highest percentages per 100,000 members than any other service through the past three years. A warning exists within the internal feedback mechanisms employed by the leaders within the Marine Corps, and like several of the failed internal feedback mechanisms during Vietnam, the leaders are not adapting quickly enough.

The desire “to develop as good people” is common among today’s population as Marines. If the methods chosen to educate the population are perceived as propaganda, then the organization should make changes based on the patterns and feedback.⁵⁸ Seeking “control through fear,”⁵⁹ and prioritizing efficiency to effectiveness, many of the behaviors observed within the general population of the Marine Corps reveal a population resisting the culture of compliance. When Marines show up for annual training through mass briefing, evidence of leadership through compliance exists, where the minimum expectations appear to be the standard expectation. How the organization currently educates the general population does not inspire trust, and like any relationship, above all else, maneuver warfare requires trust.

Introspection

“The jackal may follow the Tiger, but Cub, when thy whiskers are grown,
Remember the Wolf is hunter – go forth and get food of thine own.”

-*The Law of the Jungle*, Rudyard Kipling

Command and Control, or MCDP-6, is one of the many doctrinal publications employed to educate Marines on “successful practices for decentralized execution in combat.”⁶⁰ Effective Command and Control requires unity of command. Unity of command “achieves combat effectiveness through mutual trust, understanding, and professional respect,” and “is not a product of compliance enforced from above.” As an organization that “thrives when subordinates are free to operate within the commander’s intent,”⁶¹ the Marine Corps currently employs a model for annual training that centralizes information, education, and self-regulation. There is not trust, and without trust, maneuver warfare cannot occur.

If “people fall to their level of training” and the organization is not in compliance with its own doctrine of decentralized execution, then it becomes easier to understand how the current population serving in the Marine Corps has evolved to reject the propaganda. While it is difficult to speculate how many Marines have read MCDP-6, the Marine Corps developed doctrine that, as an organization, it does not enforce in every aspect of training. While it may be perceived by higher ranking members as disrespectful or self-centered, requiring compliance “does not allow for self-regulation and disrupts cohesion from within the organization.”⁶² The behavior emulated by the younger population within the Marine Corps today is actually predicted by one of the Marine Corps’ foundational publications, and holistically, it is ignored.

According to distinguished psychologist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, the “process of self-regulation requires the rejection of all things self-centered,” and movement toward “something greater than the self.”³⁹ Reducing important messages to advertising, the

current generation has a difficult time accepting that some advertising is relevant, important, and applicable.⁶³ As Brene Brown so brilliantly captures in her book *Dare to Lead*, “leaders take responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and must those with the courage to optimize that potential.”⁶⁴ As the current process isolates Marines from their leaders, and does not meet the organization’s publicized standards. The process requires revision, and if not from within, then externally. The lives of Marines could depend on it.

A Proxy for Loneliness⁶⁵

“If ye kill before midnight, be silent, and wake not the woods with your bay.
Lest ye frighten the deer from the crop, and your brothers go empty away.”

-*The Law of the Jungle*, Rudyard Kipling

Between 2006 and 2016, the suicide rate between the ages of 10 and 17 increased nearly 70% from the preceding decade.⁶⁶ From 2008-2018, the aggregate suicide rates in America rose 30% since the previous decade measured.⁶⁷ Today, in America, nearly 45,000 people kill themselves annually,⁶⁸ which is about 0.015% of the population in the United States (currently around 328 million people).⁶⁹ While analyzing these statistics in his book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, author David Brooks asserts that people commit suicide as a “proxy for loneliness.”⁷⁰ As a result of that loneliness, or isolation, the world struggles with suicide. Although the world is more interconnected through technology than ever in history, the data on suicides in America represent a more disconnected society.

For the past three years, the Marine Corps has the highest suicide rates of any active military service in the United States, with almost 60 Marines that died by suicide in 2019 (0.0316% of the 184,000 members).⁷¹ As an independent population, the Marine Corps doubles the annual suicide rates when compared to the aggregate within the population of the United States.⁷² The Marine Corps maintains a higher suicide rate in 2019 than it did in 2013, and it is

the smallest service branch.⁷³ The overall suicide rate for the entire military increased from 18.5 per 100,000 (2013) to 24.8 per 100,000 (2018), but almost 31 Marines per 100,000 that died by suicide, the highest suicide rate of all services.⁷⁴ Within the arena of suicide, the organization has not improved, and that is not acceptable.

Isolation, as mentioned earlier, may be a cause for the suicides in the Marine Corps. With nearly 500,000 total personnel in the Army, how does the suicide rate in the Army produce a rate depicting nearly 7 fewer suicides per year than the Marine Corps?⁷⁵ As an organization, the Air Force, with 100,000 more members than the Marine Corps, had nearly half the suicide rate when compared to the Marine Corps in 2018.⁷⁶ Both of these services have a different annual training curricula than the Marine Corps for suicide prevention and awareness, but what are the differences?

Major William R. Norcott, Command and Staff Graduate and member of the British Royal Marines, compiled data from 2017 on military suicides in the United States, providing insight into psychologist Thomas Joyner's Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide.⁷⁷ Joyner expressed the cause of suicide as an equation. In the equation, the capacity for suicide arrives when three factors meet. First, someone's isolation from a community simultaneously meets with the second, the need for care from the community. Once the capacity to "enact lethal self-harm"⁷⁸ is realized, the equation is complete. Essentially, someone combatting suicide should either pursue belonging or genuine care. Either way, a feeling of isolation cannot develop.

In addition to the Joyner equation, Major Norcott provides insight into the different suicide prevention programs throughout the Department of Defense, citing that the Air Force's model for suicide prevention produces the best results of all of the programs.⁷⁹ That statistic continues, even through 2019, as the Air Force continues to meet the lowest suicide rate of the

services. Even the Air Force, however, expresses that the organization still wants “to get this thing turned around” in reference to the number of people lost.⁸⁰

Since 2013, the Air Force achieves nearly the same suicide rates as the general population of the United States, 16.2 per 100,000 compared to 15.1 per 100,000.^{81,82} The Air Force is the only service in the US Military that consistently generates suicide rates below 20.⁸³ The organization’s annual training curriculum starts at the organizational level, defining the group as a whole, and eventually, shifts to the individual importance of each member.⁸⁴ The Air Force’s model for education with respect to suicide prevention, which is viewed as “best practice”⁸⁵ in the Department of Defense, inculcates the importance of inclusion. It must be the inclusive nature of the curriculum that achieves the desired results, and the Marine Corps could benefit from developing curricula that aims toward inclusivity. While the Air Force training model for suicide promotes an inclusive approach with members at risk of suicide, it is the consistency between the training and the organization’s approach with its members that likely defeats feelings of isolation.

The Marine Corps’ model for suicide prevention identifies that “helping ‘others’ is the duty of every Marine.”⁸⁶ The problem exists in the language chosen for suicide training. As made evident within Joyner’s equation for suicide, isolation is dangerous when preventing suicide is the goal. The Marine Corps’ model requires separation and escorting the “other” to a mental health professional. Nowhere in the Air Force’s 11-step process for suicide prevention does the individual “depart” from the community.⁸⁷ As the leading expert within the field of suicide, and the effects of suicide, Joyner imparts the importance of “continued belonging.”⁸⁸ Renowned sociologist Robert Nesbit claims that isolation “occurs when the mind deems the social order as fraudulent.”⁸⁹

When Marines develop suicidal ideations, and become one of the “others” identified within the curricula, does that cost them their identity as a Marine? If entry level training delineates the world into “Marines and non-Marines,” the Marine Corps’ training for suicide prevention closely resembles steps for “handling an Enemy Prisoners of War.”⁹⁰ The feeling of isolation, as it is described, is almost certain.

To maintain a sense of belonging and inclusion, Marines should never depart the group or consider their identity to be fraudulent. As a result of the language used for the training, the Marine Corps fails to reach an entire population of Marines developing feelings of isolation. If the problem with suicide exists as a result of isolation, or someone’s identity leading them to feel isolated, then the Marine Corps must educate Marines through genuine care or inculcating a sense of genuine belonging. As an organization, the Marine Corps must generate an educational model for instruction that more comprehensively rehabilitates from within.

How People Learn

“When ye fight with a Wolf of the Pack, ye must fight him alone and afar,
Lest others take part in the quarrel, and the Pack be diminished by war.”

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

While the inclusive language of the training is necessary to negate feelings of isolation, the high suicide rate in the Marine Corps could also represent a failure in the design for message transferal to the general population. In 2014, a group of researchers conducted an analysis of the effects of “lecture learning” compared to “active learning.”⁹¹ To provide some context, there was no discernable increase in scores between groups who received conventional “lectures” versus “lectures driven by power point.”⁹² Active learning requires “preparatory material before a class, like homework or reading,” transforming the “function” of the lecture into a mechanism for feedback on the material.⁹³ While analyzing 225 students, active learning displayed a “marginal

increase” in the exam scores of the population, but achieved a “big increase” in the overall pass rates.⁹⁴

The class size also played a significant role in determining the retention of material. Active Learning, when compared to larger lecture groups, achieved the “best effect in student class sizes of less than 50 students.”⁹⁵ Imagine a classroom for annual training where a platoon commander, a leader in charge of just under 50 Marines, instructed the material and optimized every minute with the members of their platoon. If size dictates the effectiveness of the material taught, according to this study, then why do we have Battalion and Squadron safety briefs and annual training stand-downs? According to the Freeman study, lecture groups with more than 50 students revealed “a 55% increase D’s, F’s, and withdrawals”⁹⁶ when compared to classrooms of 50 or fewer that spent “10% of the time in class solving problems relevant to the material.”⁹⁷

Based on the information provided, the Marine Corps should require active learning for all annual training, and develop platoon commands that can instruct the material. When compared to large lectures, where the entire population of a Marine company or battalion congregates, 55% of the population is statistically less likely to retain the material presented.⁹⁸ The Marine Corps allows a model that, based on the statistics identified within Freeman’s research, leads to failure. Refusing compliance with the requirement for efficient training in large lecture settings, or the “historically accepted standard,” may increase that likelihood of remembering the material. Considering the Marine Corps is already structured to achieve the model for a more successful educational method, it should be a simple transition.

Ductus Exemplo

“...For the Strength of the pack is the wolf. And, the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

If the maximum potential for growth occurs in “groups of 50 or less,”⁹⁹ then the Marine Corps as an organization must return to a community that trusts and empowers platoon commanders to reach Marines. When the organization continues to default to the battalion, or company, sized platform, then it clearly displays a value of control and efficiency over feedback and results. Though the use of the current model, the Marine Corps neglects several, foundational principles of maneuver warfare and potentially interrupts cohesion.

Without maneuver warfare, and the foundational principles identified within MCDP-1, the Marine Corps does not have a relevant group identity. If a common Marine identity is lost, then as an organization, the Marine Corps is lost as well. According to the late General “Brute” Krulak, the Marine Corps only endures because the “high, almost spiritual, standards remain the preeminent focus for every Marine.”¹⁰⁰ All “peacetime training should focus on achieving combat readiness.”¹⁰¹ More than an aggregate of “special skills and intense training,” the Marine Corps must continually infuse the organization’s “singular identity,”¹⁰² and observe every training opportunity as an opportunity to preserve maneuver warfare.

Course Corrections

“When Pack meets with Pack in the Jungle, and neither will go from the trail,
Lie down till the leaders have spoken—it may be fair words shall prevail.”

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

As a military organization, the Marine Corps is well known for, and potentially preserved by, its history. From the battle of Iwo Jima to achieving the impossible at Inchon, Marines achieved victory through the individual Marine’s indomitable will. In testament to the quality of entry-level training is for Marines, the past two decades of war shifted the entire organization’s focus from expeditionary operations within the naval campaign to a ground based, counterinsurgency fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rarely was there an office in an infantry

regiment without a copy of Kilcullen's *21 Principles of Counterinsurgency* or *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*. The flexibility of the Marine Corps became an identifiable strength. For more than a decade, Marines based their identity on ground-centric, combat experiences. As a result, Marines working within the operational forces drifted away from their historical roles as "warriors of the sea." The Marines, while departing from historical norms, performed very well in the face of unfamiliar, uncertain, and relatively uncharted territory, proving that Marines thrive in any environment.

As with any organization, the culture of the Marine Corps is determined "at the enterprise-level, linking the identity of every member to the organizations' expectations."¹⁰³ If "culture changes in response to internal and external pressures,"¹⁰⁴ then the Marine Corps is either not receiving, or ignoring, the pressures from within. Though effective at preparing for combat, in peacetime, the Marine Corps misses opportunities to train toward trust. In order to grow the trust for the organization, the organization must inspire trust from its population. Embracing the recommended changes for educating Marines is only the first step.

As organizations, every military service imparts expectations on its members, or "principles of conduct that provide a moral framework for accepted activities."¹⁰⁵ The mission statement of the Air Force requires "excellence in everything we do,"¹⁰⁶ a trait inherent to every Airmen. In 1961, the United States Army published the "key traits of a leader," including the "principles of a leader" in FM 22-100, also known as *Military Leadership*.¹⁰⁷ The Marine Corps has not developed new expectations for its leaders since 1961, when the organization merely adopted them from the Army.

In an organization filled with Marines who seek, respect, and admire authenticity, the Marine Corps must consider additional revisions in what it expects from its leaders.¹⁰⁸

Authenticity enables genuine understanding, and actually defines, at least in the eyes of today's population of Marines, credibility. Moreover, Marines today do not respect leaders who enthusiastically proselytize, or blindly comply with the organization, as they do not take the rank at face value.¹⁰⁹ If "successful maneuver warfare only occurs at the speed of trust,"¹¹⁰ then the Marine Corps must develop leaders that inspire trust in every Marine. The organization must inspire feedback through an active pursuit of a dialogue, and recognize the identity of every individual serving in the ranks of the Marines.

As recently as 2017, the Air Force added "inclusion," to their leadership traits.¹¹¹ In 1983 the Army augmented "respect" as foundational character trait of every soldier, identifying the requirement to treat all people with dignity.¹¹² With improved principles, the organization promotes "discipline, social development, and psychological maturity."¹¹³ Some changes to the organization's leadership traits are necessary to improve cohesion and prevent disciplinary failures within the current generation of Marines. Change, in the case of the leadership traits, only stands to improve the organization's reputation.

Words Inspire, Actions Lead

"Because of his age and his cunning, because of his gripe and his paw,
in all that the law leaveth open, the Rule of Head Wolf is Law."

-The Law of the Jungle, Rudyard Kipling

In *Dare to Lead*, Brene Brown proposes that "if the reputation of an organization is defined by control, then the leaders use fear to generate actions within the organization."¹¹⁴ Since, the Marine Corps is not an organization that leads by fear, then it must remove the control focus. General James Mattis claimed feedback to be superior to control.¹¹⁵ That was an unexpected, and necessary, shift in the organizational narrative. Universally embracing feedback, and decentralizing control, is another area that the organization must improve.

Individuals, according to author Dan Pink, thrive most when “self directed toward something that has meaning and is more important than themselves. In addition to refining existing skills, the most successful leaders optimize their members through inspiring autonomy, mastery, and purpose.”¹¹⁶ Generally speaking, micromanagement, or an overemphasis on control, appears when “chaos occurs where order belongs,” refusing individual mastery. Managers accomplish tasks, while leaders “maximize the potential of every individual in their charge.”¹¹⁷ Leaders empathize with the led, “not simply through shared experiences, but through the connection of the emotion associated with experiences.”¹¹⁸ No matter where the Marine Corps goes as an organization, it must embrace the concept of developing genuine leaders.

Cultures of cohesion are not limited by the walls established in the organization, but through feedback mechanisms enabling leaders to determine necessary actions. External feedback mechanisms, although not always beneficial, can provide insight into the public perception of the organization. Internally, the leaders of the organization, in every aspect, must embrace a more cohesive approach to training Marines. If the Marine Corps is going to survive as an organization, it must dissociate itself from the concept of compliance. The Marine Corps must embrace a more modern approach to education, training, and development. Embracing a relentless pursuit of cohesion, and rejecting the historically accepted standard, the Marine Corps can grow into the organization was always meant to be.

Implications and Conclusion

Recognizing the impact of instruction in smaller groups, modern solutions exist that remedy the identified shortfalls within the Marine Corps. If leaders are teachers and coaches, first, then the led must be more than a number in formation receiving a brief. While classes will consumer more time for subordinate leaders, it will also provide Lieutenants with an opportunity

to succeed, or fail, earlier on in their careers. Trusting junior leaders to teach courses does not mean employing a “fire and forget” model, because leaders must still supervise. The Marine Corps must empower junior leaders, in groups of no more than 50, to educate their Marines and record the data. Within each unit, smaller class size enables subordinate leaders with a better understanding of the individuals in their charge, and understanding promotes, or reduces, trust.¹¹⁹ Trust, according to James Mattis, determines speed in maneuver warfare.¹²⁰ “Speed, relative to the adversary, is an advantage in combat.”¹²¹

Enabling trust and speed are not new concepts in leadership and maneuver warfare. After receiving the Marine Corps’ Leftwich Award in 2012 for outstanding combat arms leadership, then Captain Benjamin Middendorf claimed that “leadership is trust.” He believed that “trust, like leadership development, requires tough training, time together, and competence.” An outstanding mentor, coach, and teacher, his consistent narrative for trust inspired cohesion throughout a company of Marines, yielding a company of “smart, tough, disciplined professionals.”¹²² The reciprocal trust throughout his company translated to speed on the ground in combat, enabling decentralized execution during operations in Afghanistan. The legacy of the Marine Corps depends on the kind of cohesion that only trust achieves, and leaders with the will and competence to create that environment.

It is not blind kindness that produces trust, but developing an understanding of the importance of trust “from the first moment a leader steps on the rungs of the leadership ladder.”¹²³ Trust takes time and effort, and it cannot be forced. Trust recognizes the need for feedback. The Marine Corps must implement a strategy that generates trust from within, through a sustained, authentic approach to education and leadership development in the Fleet Marine Forces.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, “the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate in the stormy present.”¹²⁴ While generating a more inclusive, yet decentralized, approach to education, the Marine Corps preserves the principles of maneuver warfare and recognizes the impact that every Marine has on the organization. Sacrificing the previously accepted approach, the Marine Corps can heal as a community and stop losing good wolves.

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