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14. ABSTRACT
Marine Corps command selection boards convene annually to choose the next generation of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel commanders. Despite the board members' talent, experience, and attention to detail, there is room for improvement. The significant number of commander reliefs each year due to misconduct and command climate provides the evidence. Currently, the only tool available for board members to assess a Marine is the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF), which only contains evaluations from supervisors. These evaluations should continue to be the primary tool used to screen and select commanders; however, they are one-dimensional. The views of peers and subordinates currently have no weight or voice in the process. The Marine Corps can improve the command selection process by incorporating multi-source feedback from peers and subordinates, which will provide a more holistic view of officers prior to command selection.

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FILLING THE BLIND SPOT – ANALYSIS OF A MULTI-SOURCE FEEDBACK
MECHANISM'S POTENTIAL TO AID IN THE SELECTION OF BETTER O-5 AND O-6
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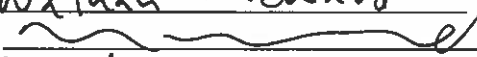
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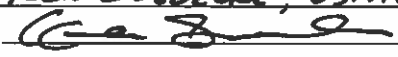
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Executive Summary

Title: Filling the Blind Spot – Analysis of a Multi-Source Feedback Mechanism’s Potential to Aid in the Selection of Better O-5 and O-6 United States Marine Corps Commanders

Author: Major Patrick A. Skehan, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Implementing the use of a multi-source feedback mechanism in the United States Marine Corps Command Screening Program will aid in the selection of better O-5 and O-6 commanders by providing a more well-rounded look at individuals than current tools provide.

Discussion: Selection boards convene annually to choose the next generation of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel commanders. Despite the board members’ talent, experience, and attention to detail, there is still room for improvement; the significant number of reliefs each year due to misconduct and command climate is the evidence. Currently, the only tool available for board members to assess a Marine is the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF), which only contains evaluations from supervisors. These evaluations should continue to be the primary tool used to screen and select commanders; however, they are one-dimensional. The views of peers and subordinates, who may know a great deal more about the individual than their supervisors, have no weight or voice in the process.

Conclusion: The Marine Corps Command Screening Program does an extremely thorough and impressive job of selecting commanders. However, the organization can improve the process by adding a tool. Implementing the use of a multi-source feedback mechanism will provide board members with a more well-rounded look at Marines by providing valuable feedback from peers and subordinates. Additionally, the Marine Corps should continue to use multi-source feedback tools for development purposes at its resident professional military education school, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and expand use to the Marine Corps Command and Staff College Distance Learning Course so all Marine Corps Majors have the opportunity to benefit from use of these tools.

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Preface

There are many colleagues, friends, and mentors whom I would like to thank for their assistance in this process. In particular, I would like to thank my wife Leigh and our two boys, JP and Andrew, for their patience and support. I would also like to thank my friends and mentors at Manpower Management Officer Assignments (MMOA), my peers at Command and Staff College, and my mentor, Dr. Nathan Packard, as well as my second reader and Military Faculty Advisor, LtCol Ken Goedecke.

During a three-year assignment as a monitor at MMOA, I worked with some of the most highly-talented officers in the organization, and was granted the privilege of a firsthand glimpse at how the organization identifies and selects its future leaders through participation in three O-5 and O-6 command screening boards. The command screening boards are one of the key events for MMOA, and they afford monitors the opportunity to see the board process and establish a framework for the career path and performance metrics of a commander. This, in turn, provides monitors with a strong base for making assignments to keep Marines competitive for command.

During a fall 2020 Command and Staff College class delivered by the Command and Staff Director, Colonel Thomas Gordon, a point of discussion was the high amount of O-5 and O-6 commander reliefs due to leadership-related issues. The class led me to reflect upon my experiences on the command boards, and how I left all three boards very humbled and impressed with the professionalism and talent within the organization, both from board members and Marines who were screened. Seeing the high relief rates of commanders after witnessing the talent of the boardroom highlighted an area for organizational improvement which I was previously unaware existed. Additionally, students at Command and Staff College, including myself, had just finished 360-degree assessments facilitated by the school. I found great value in the 360-degree experience, which led me to investigate their use in both the military and civilian

sectors. I discovered that the military and civilian sectors both utilize multi-source feedback for varying purposes and with varying results. These factors led me to identify and research a “blind spot” that currently exists in command-selection: the absence of peer and subordinate feedback. The goal of my research is to facilitate a realistic way to provide command screening board members with a more holistic view of a Marine. This, in turn, could enable the Marine Corps to select better commanders, perhaps improving the organization as a whole.

Introduction

Annually, select Marine Corps Colonels and General Officers convene in Quantico, Virginia, the “Crossroads of the Marine Corps,” to select the next generation of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel commanders. The best and brightest officers in the Marine Corps skillfully and painstakingly select who they believe to be the most fully qualified to command. Despite the board members’ vast amount of institutional experience, skill, and intuition, commanders they select are often relieved for “flawed” or “toxic” leadership. Between 2000 and 2020, 117 Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel commanders were relieved, averaging 5-6 per year.¹ When surveyed, people who worked with and for them are not surprised.² The board members cannot be blamed, as they utilize all available information to make the most well-informed decisions possible.

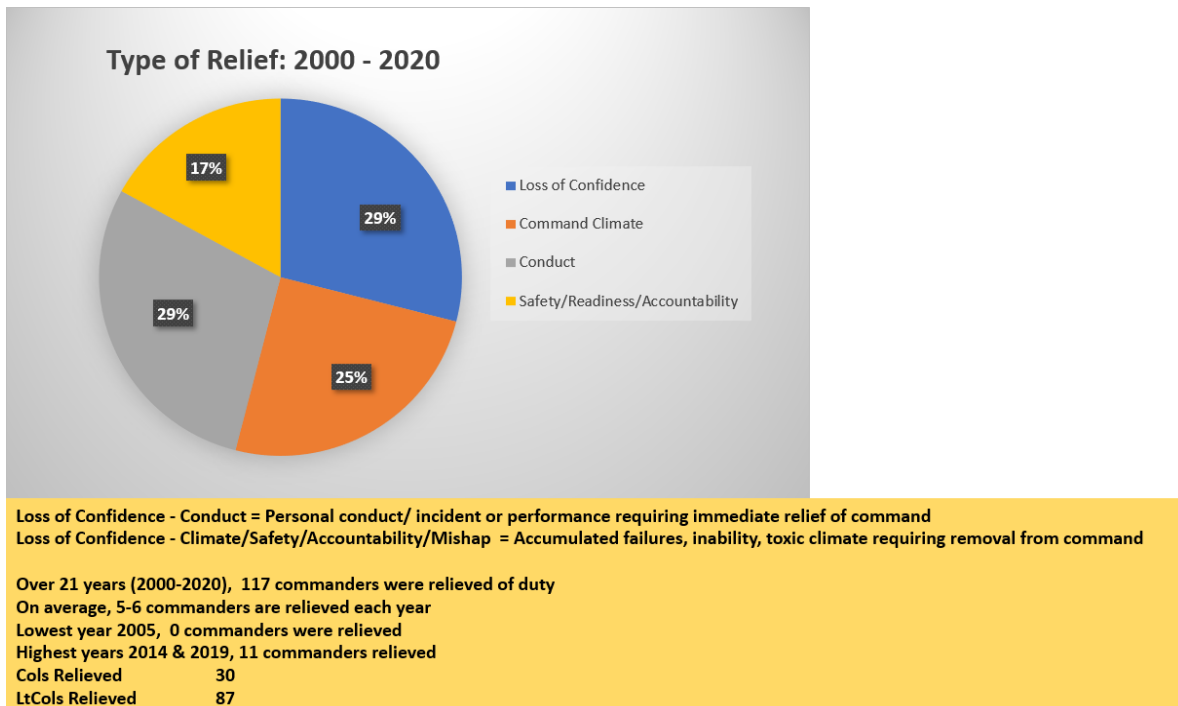


Figure 1. USMC Commander Reliefs (2000-2020)³

Most, if not all, who have witnessed or been a member of a command screening board would agree that the boards do a very thorough job of selecting commanders. The swath of talent in the screening population is humbling, and serves as a testament to the Marine Corps' steadfast reputation as an elite warfighting organization. However, because the process is not perfect and flawed leaders are still selected as evidenced by the statistics concerning reliefs, the organization must seek to improve the process. The high number of reliefs indicate the organization can do better. The command screening boards can use other tools to help select the best and most fit to command.

The primary tool board members have at their fingertips when briefing and selecting officers for command positions is the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). The OMPF consists of officer evaluations (fitness reports), contract history, individual training statistics, awards, certificates, and diplomas. The primary supporting material board members use to determine the best and most fit to command are fitness reports. A fitness report is a formal evaluation from a Marine's supervisors, one and two levels up. Board members have access to all the fitness reports from a Marine's career, and each report has a "relative value" based upon the supervisors' average markings for that specific rank and grade. The relative value provides a snapshot of where a Marine ranks compared to all Marines of the same rank and grade the supervisors have evaluated over the course of their careers.⁴ The relative value is a major factor in command selection. Simply put, officers with the most competitive fitness reports relative to their peers are selected for command.

Because fitness reports only contain information from supervisors, a blind spot exists which fails to illuminate a truly holistic view of a leader. That blind spot is caused by an absence of feedback from peers and subordinates. Currently, there is no information from peers or

subordinates available to command screening board members. In the process to select individuals with the best characteristics to command, information from peers and subordinates has potential to be both beneficial and revealing. Individuals with negative leadership traits may have the ability to “shine up,” meaning they craft an impressive appearance in front of their supervisors. Without any information from peers and subordinates, they may be selected for key leadership positions ahead of more qualified peers. The implementation of a multi-source feedback mechanism incorporating the perspectives of peers and subordinates would provide a means to fill this blind spot. Multi-source feedback equips board members with additional information not only to decrease the likelihood that flawed leaders are selected, but also to aid in selecting individuals with the right qualities for success in command.

This concept is not new. In 2014, the RAND Corporation, contracted by the Secretary of Defense as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, conducted a detailed study on the feasibility of including a multi-source assessment approach as part of performance evaluation reports.⁵ Ultimately, the study recommends against using 360-degree assessments as part of the performance evaluation system in the Department of Defense. However, the study does recommend that the services expand their use and tailor them to specific service needs.⁶ The Marine Corps Command Screening Program (CSP) fits the tailored niche the RAND study recommends because the boards are non-statutory, meaning they are controlled and shaped by Marine Corps priorities, not bound by law via Title X like promotion boards. Multi-source feedback from peers and subordinates would serve as a valuable additive in identifying the right leaders for command positions.

Flawed Leadership Defined

To illustrate the demand for multi-source feedback, an analysis of flawed leadership is necessary. Flawed leadership encompasses any personal behavior that does not positively influence a unit. Flawed leadership frequently accompanies a poor command climate, low morale, behavioral issues, and low retention. An April 2004 Ivey Business Journal article titled, *“The Tyranny of Toxic Managers: An Emotional Intelligence Approach to Dealing with Difficult Personalities,”* characterizes flawed, or toxic leadership in the following manner:

Toxic managers divert people’s energy from the real work of the organization, destroy morale, impair retention, and interfere with cooperation and information sharing. Their behavior, like a rock thrown into a pond, can cause ripples distorting the organization’s culture and affecting people far beyond the point of impact.⁷

If multi-source feedback is incorporated in the CSP, it has potential to help identify flawed leaders prior to command selection.

Identifying flawed leadership by category provides granularity in understanding its appearance. For the purposes of this analysis, flawed leaders will be separated into three categories: the narcissist, the micromanager, and the tyrant. These categories are important because they delineate lines of thinking about flawed leaders, they can contribute to failure in command, and they are highly likely to be identified by a multi-source feedback tool.

In his April 2020 Stanford Business Review article titled *“How Narcissistic Leaders Destroy from Within – When the Person at the Top is Malignant and Self-Serving, Unethical Behavior Cascades Through the Organization and Becomes Legitimized,”* author Lee Simmons makes the following observations of narcissistic leaders:

These are the individuals whom corporate boards tend to select as CEOs, especially in times of upheaval, when the status quo is failing. They’re adept at self-promotion and shine in job interviews. Then, once they’re in power, we find out who they really are. Sometimes they’re as good as their promise. But many

turn out to be not just confident but arrogant and entitled. Instead of being bold, they're merely impulsive. They lack empathy and exploit others without compunction. They ignore expert advice and treat those who differ with contempt and hostility. Above all, they demand personal loyalty. They are, in short, raging narcissists.⁸

Within the same article, Simmons notes the detailed work of two colleagues: Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Thomas O'Reilly, and Jennifer Chatman from the University of California Berkeley. These two individuals embarked upon a quest to analyze literature on narcissistic leadership, and reviewed over 150 studies.⁹ Their findings are both revealing and alarming; they support the need for a more well-rounded look at Marine Corps leaders when they are screened for high-level leadership positions. O'Reilly and Chatman observed that because narcissists are fundamentally driven by their own self-interest, they lack empathy and are less constrained by ethical standards. They can cause tremendous harm once in power, and can even put the organizations they lead at risk.¹⁰ O'Reilly writes:

True narcissists are self-serving and lack integrity. They believe they're superior and thus not subject to the same rules and norms. Studies show they're more likely to act dishonestly to achieve their ends. They know they're lying, and it doesn't bother them. They don't feel shame. They are also often reckless in the pursuit of glory — sometimes successfully, but often with dire consequences.¹¹

Simmons also mentions that the most harmful dimension of a narcissistic leader is that their behavior shapes the culture of their own organization, and can have lasting impacts even after they are gone.¹² Narcissists are likely to only tolerate those who agree with them, which opens the door for “toadies” and “opportunists,” while ostracizing or firing anyone else.¹³ A new employee working with a narcissistic leader may observe behaviors such as withholding information and scheming are required for their own upward mobility, and that they must conform or face rejection.¹⁴ In a hierarchical organization such as the military, making the boss

happy is an important priority for those who wish to advance in their careers, as reports from the boss have a definite hand in an individual's future.

The article's recommendation for CEO selection boards provides a connection to support the case for examining the use of multi-source feedback in the Marine Corps CSP:

What would really be far more illuminating would be to go talk to the people who've worked for them and with them in the past. You have to get data from people who have seen that person operating. But that typically isn't what happens. It's up to the hiring teams and voters who select leaders, O'Reilly says, to do the proper background checks: We're not helpless. The information is out there.¹⁵

Individuals with narcissistic personality traits may do extremely well in front of their supervisors, as mentioned in the article, and receive extremely good reports. However, there may be another record, one invisible to board members who select the "future CEOs" of the Marine Corps, that can only be uncovered through peer and subordinate feedback.

In a similar lens, leaders who micromanage have corrosive effects upon an organization and spur negative impacts on morale and performance in the unit. A September 2018 *Forbes Magazine* article titled, "*12 Traits Bad Bosses Have in Common,*" notes:

Micromanaging not only limits an employee's ability to deliver success, but also causes the boss to stretch themselves too thin and not lead the company well. Micromanagement leads to distrust and only serves to slow a business down long term, so it's best to avoid it.¹⁶

The article does acknowledge that micromanagement may be necessary at times, and is referring to a more "chronic" micromanagement, whose roots lie in the anxiety of the boss, not the competitive mindset of a demanding, pragmatic leader.¹⁷ Extreme micromanagement is a characteristic that may not be visible to a supervisor, and is one that peer and subordinate feedback would likely identify.

A tyrant is another type of leader worthy of mention in an analysis of flawed leadership. It is also a type of individual that peer and subordinate feedback would aid in identifying prior to

an officer being selected for command. An individual with the characteristics of a tyrant is very unlikely to lose his or her temper in front of their supervisors, as they likely want to advance in the organization. They are much more likely to display abusive characteristics in front of peers and subordinates internal to their own organization. If the behavior becomes a frequent occurrence, the leader falls into the classification of a tyrant. Unless this behavior is reported by subordinates or peers, or observed by supervisors, it is likely to remain hidden. Furthermore, if the unit performs well, the individual will likely continue to advance with accolades. In his June 2004 New York Times article titled, *“Fear in the Workplace: The Bullying Boss,”* author Benedict Carey elaborates:

So tyrants spread misery, and from the outside it looks as if they are doing a fine job. It does not help matters, psychologists say, that people who enjoy abusing power frequently also revere it and are quick to offer that reverence to the even-more-powerful. Bullying bosses are often experts at managing up.¹⁸

Multi-source feedback from peers and subordinates may very well be the only mechanism to identify tyrannical behavior, which can be hidden from supervisors.

Great Leadership Defined

Analyzing leadership traits that make the best commanders is another critical element of understanding the value of filling the current information gap in command selection. Multi-source feedback may aid in helping board members identify individuals with desired leadership traits, complementing the single-source feedback found in fitness reports.

Many scholars have devoted study to understanding leadership traits that enable success in the military. Brad W. Johnson sheds light on the topic in his *Military Medicine* article titled, *“Personality Characteristics of Future Military Leaders.”* The intriguing study evaluated the personality characteristics of 530 third-year midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy. The most interesting finding in the study revealed that midshipmen with the highest class rank were

determined to have the least empathy and were less likely to experience guilt.¹⁹ Empathy is commonly regarded as a key characteristic of great leaders. The study also suggests that subordinates' ratings of the degree to which they trust their managers may turn out to be the best single predictor of work group effectiveness and, therefore, of leadership.²⁰ Because subordinates' trust is such an important factor in leadership, it appears prudent for the Marine Corps to have a mechanism to gauge it during selection of leaders for its most coveted positions. Additionally, Johnson states, "Even when a leader is bright, hard-working, ambitious, and technically competent, he or she may be perceived as arrogant, vindictive, untrustworthy, selfish, compulsive, excessively controlling, insensitive, abrasive, or aloof, thus resulting in eventual leadership failure."²¹ If the "toxic perceptions" of subordinates uncover themselves when an officer is in command, it will be too late. Ideally, those perceptions are identified beforehand.

Experts note a clear link between personality and leadership, partially from organizational experiences with leadership failure. The cause of a concept known as "managerial derailment" is now attributed to flawed interpersonal skills that prevent effective teambuilding.²² In his book, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, author Norman F. Dixon observes that excellent leaders appear to score higher on measures of personality features such as inhibition of power needs, and lower in Machiavellianism, narcissism, and authoritarianism.²³ Good leaders are additionally high in self-monitoring, meaning that they are sensitive to, and act on social cues from subordinates.²⁴ Both the good and bad traits Dixon mentions are hard to capture in fitness reports. They are especially hard to capture in scenarios where supervisors have limited contact and interaction with the Marine upon which they are reporting, which happens frequently in the military. Providing a mechanism that gives board members some insight into what subordinates

and peers really think of an individual will facilitate a better opportunity to verify leaders have the correct traits and personality makeup for command positions.

The Marine Corps is an organization specializing in leadership. It is built on the principles of honor, courage, commitment, setting the example, and many other character-driven values that are instilled and reinforced from day one of entry-level training. General John A. Lejeune compared the way a Marine Officer should conduct themselves to that of a teacher. Another great analogy is a coach. Multi-source feedback from peers and subordinates may help identify the best teachers and coaches in the Marine Corps, because the best teachers and coaches are respected by fellow teachers and coaches, and also by their students and players.

Multiple-Source Feedback – A Brief History, Use of Results, and Risk Analysis

Multi-source feedback is a process by which individuals can be assessed by themselves, their managers, their peers, and their subordinates. The information is then compiled into a report and provides a review of performance from different angles. The intent of the process is to provide a well-rounded look at an individual, identifying strengths and weaknesses. Research shows the original concept of multi-source feedback lies in the American military's implementation of multi-rater feedback in World War I, slightly over 100 years ago.²⁵ However, the missing element of the American military's process was that it did not include any input from subordinates. In the Second World War, the German Military utilized a form of assessment resembling more of a modern-day multi-source assessment tool.²⁶ The Germans adopted a feedback process involving input from not only supervisors and peers, but subordinates.²⁷ The results of the process had an integral part in promotions and pay. In the private sector, Exxon-Mobile, known at the time as "Esso Research and Engineering Group," adopted a 360-degree feedback process in the 1950's, and it was reportedly a massive organizational success.²⁸ Other

companies took notice and followed suit, and the concept spread rapidly. This analysis shows that for over 100 years, organizations have perceived value in gaining a well-rounded look at individuals. Those perceptions led to action, hence the prevalence of multi-source feedback discussion, experimentation, and implementation in both the civilian sector and the military. Much of the research on multi-source feedback is not based on whether or not to use it, but rather on how to use it.

Varying opinions exist on how to use the results from multi-source feedback. The debate is centered upon whether to use the feedback for development, evaluations, or both. The RAND study highlights that few civilian companies use the 360s for evaluation purposes, and that most use them for development and training.²⁹ The study also mentions that none of the military services currently use them as an evaluation tool.³⁰ Some experts caution that if the results have the potential to impact high-stakes career outcomes such as promotion and selection for command, multi-source feedback can do more harm than good by instilling distrust and suspicion among the officers being screened on the board.³¹ The potential for distrust and suspicion highlights the importance of confidentiality in the process.

Scholars note key observations on some common reactions concerning 360-degree assessments. The first is that negative feedback was not seen as useful by the recipient, but instead triggered emotions including anger and discouragement.³² Additionally, those that received high ratings were observed to be pleased not with the positive ratings themselves, but instead, the absence of negative ratings.³³ Another key observation is that reactions may be different if the recipient of the feedback is expected to continue to work with one of the providers of the feedback.³⁴ Scholars also observe that multi-source feedback is seen as most useful by individuals who receive positive feedback, and negative ratings are often not viewed

by the recipient as useful or accurate.³⁵ These observations are important in case of the CSP because they build general knowledge on perceptions of feedback, though in this case the Marines screening on the board should never see any of the feedback themselves.

Researchers also note that some individuals believe multi-source feedback can have corrosive effects in the workplace. These effects can include undermining the authority of supervisors, fostering defensive reactions, and jeopardizing working relationships with co-workers and bosses.³⁶ If these negative effects were to occur, they would signal a mismanagement of the process itself because it would signal a breach in confidentiality, which is a key ingredient in the proposed process.

In a positive light, literature supports multi-source feedback by noting that performance assessments performed by peers and subordinates do often provide high quality feedback. The primary reason for this is because peers and subordinates have unique perspectives and are often in a better position than supervisors to assess an individual's daily performance.³⁷ Another interesting and often overlooked viewpoint is that participation in the assessment process can make the rater feel valued by the organization and allow them to be an active participant in the evaluation process.³⁸ Additionally, the implementation of these assessments may actually serve to improve the workplace environment. If officers know the service members that work for and with them may have to fill out an assessment in the future, it will likely induce many to be more conscious of how they are managing and treating others in the work environment.

A reasonable counterargument is that this process could infect leaders with a "disease to please," and make it harder for commanders to make tough and unpopular decisions for fear of receiving negative reviews. To combat this fear, the survey will be structured in a way that focuses on character and not on popularity.

Civilian Sector Application

Research reveals that most companies in the civilian sector utilize a form of multi-source feedback. The first CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, was one of the first to use 360s for appraisals. He used the results to justify firing the bottom 10% of workers in every feedback cycle.³⁹ That is an extreme example, however, it shows there is a precedent for using multi-source feedback for purposes related to employment and advancement, and not simply development. Welch's philosophy was to reward top performers, accommodate those in the middle, and get rid of the lowest performers.⁴⁰ The use of multi-source feedback in the Marine Corps CSP would serve to simply verify that high performers as designated by superiors are also high performers amongst peers and subordinates.

An interview conducted with a Program Director at a leading US company reveals insight into the process by which his particular company utilizes multi-source feedback. The company uses it for development purposes, and the individual finds great value in the process. The individual made a point often encountered when assessing developmental feedback experiences: the quality of the feedback one receives is based on how much time the people who complete the assessment are willing to put into it.⁴¹ Additionally, the individual stated that much of the value is derived from selecting individuals to complete the survey who may not say what you want to hear.⁴² Ultimately, the individual interviewed derives great value in the multi-source feedback program, saying, "at the end of the day, you get a realistic picture of what people think of you."

A noteworthy example of the successful implementation of a multi-source feedback mechanism in the civilian sector is the example of PepsiCo. PepsiCo did a phenomenal job of implementing their multi-source feedback program, which evolved from a development-only

process to eventually having a play in performance evaluations.⁴³ Sources attribute the most critical enablers of PepsiCo's success in this venture to the use of a pilot program in the first year, and to the fulfillment of a corporate promise that none of the data from the pilot would be released.⁴⁴ The pilot program appears to have gotten employees, supervisors, administrators, and senior-level leadership comfortable with the process prior to actually using any of the feedback. PepsiCo successfully manages a feedback process that involves over 10,000 people.⁴⁵ A similar process in the Marine Corps would involve substantially less people. Employing a pilot program and upholding the trust bond of confidentiality are two valuable lessons from the PepsiCo case study the Marine Corps must seek to emulate if it adopts a multi-source feedback mechanism for the CSP.

Military Application

United States Army

In 2008, the US Army adopted the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program in an effort to aid leadership development. US Army Colonel Kevin McAninch's September 2016 *Military Review* article, "*How the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program Could Become a Catalyst for Leader Development*," expresses dissatisfaction with the implementation of the program, not with the multi-source assessments themselves.⁴⁶ He believes they can provide great utility if the Army changes some elements of its messaging and strategy.⁴⁷ Although Colonel McAninch provides recommendations for how to improve the program, the article sends the message that many Army leaders simply do not value the program, put effort into it, or internalize the results. McAninch's viewpoint is corroborated by recent interviews on the MSAF program with two Army Lieutenant Colonels. Both Lieutenant Colonels view the program as an excessive administrative burden which no one takes seriously; a check in

the box.⁴⁸ Additionally, both Lieutenant Colonels stated that the program is devalued when many individuals send the surveys to their friends, so they are not receiving worthwhile feedback.⁴⁹

In 2018, the United States Army discontinued the use of 360-degree personality assessments for students attending the Brigade Pre-Command Course. The course is designed for already-selected commanders, and the Marine Corps has a similar commander's course in Quantico, VA, which every selected commander attends. In his *Modern War Institute* article, "It's Time to Fix the Way the Army Selects its Commanders," author Michael Symanski expresses both outrage and concern that the assessments were discontinued.⁵⁰ The purpose of the Brigade Pre-Command Course attendees' use of the 360-degree assessments was to improve self-awareness prior to assuming command.⁵¹ However, after reviewing many of the assessments with the already-selected commanders, Symanski began realizing that many flawed leaders were selected.⁵² Symanski's observations support the adoption of a multisource feedback tool utilized during the selection process to aide in the selection of the right leaders, and not to attempt to fix them after selection.

In his article, Symanski also touched on the United States Army command selection process, boldly claiming, "The Army leader-selection process does not reliably identify those officers with desired behaviors to succeed as leaders."⁵³ He also states the Army's board selection process is intended to promote merit and guard against bias, however, since the board only uses officer evaluation reports, which are written by superiors, it is only a top-down view from two people.⁵⁴ Symanski made an interesting observation: because the midlevel leadership tier is an incubator for more senior leadership roles, the flawed process can even spread an infection of bad leadership traits.⁵⁵ Similar to the Marine Corps, the Army's standard officer

evaluation report (OER) reflects the opinion of one rater about current performance and one senior rater about future potential.⁵⁶

United States Navy

The demand signal for multi-source feedback reared its head in the US Navy at the Surface Force Commander's Conference in 2004 after 26 Commanding Officers were fired.⁵⁷ Shortly thereafter, in 2007, the Surface Force began using 360-degree assessments for development purposes only. Known as the "System Measures Assesses and Recommends Tailored Solutions" or SMARTS-360, it was to be delivered via Navy Knowledge Online.⁵⁸ It was launched as a pilot program, and had several different surveys based on an individual's occupational specialty.

The pilot program was ultimately discontinued by the Navy. In his 2012 Naval Postgraduate School thesis titled: "*Harnessing the Transformative Tsunami: Fleet-Wide 360-Degree Feedback Revisited*," Daniel C. Rolnick provides a great description of the failure:

SMARTS-360 appears to have failed not on the basis of the tool's merits, but rather due to an inadequate implementation strategy. SMARTS-360 was likely unsuccessful for two reasons: 1) it did not garner sufficient organizational support because the Navy perceived the program to be more of a productized curiosity as opposed to a tool engineered to facilitate urgent transformation, and 2) because its original intent (e.g. development-only) became distorted before the initiative gathered enough momentum. Even though the majority of pilot participants showed incongruity between their ratings of self and ratings by others—a key indicator of imperfect self-awareness.⁵⁹

There are some key differences between the Navy's SMARTS-360 pilot and the proposed plan for implementation of multi-source feedback into the Marine Corps' CSP. First, the SMARTS-360 appears to have been too large of a program to be manageable from the start. Even though the questions were tailored for individuals depending upon their rank and position, it was rolled out on too large of a scale to be manageable. The process for the command

screening boards would be on a much smaller scale, as approximately 800 officers screen for command every year. Additionally, the fact that the SMARTS-360 was only used as a development tool likely led to the lack of organizational support for the tool itself as noted by Rolnick.

The Navy decision to use a pilot program in the SMARTS-360 rollout is one to emulate. There will inevitably be kinks in any rollout of a new program, and the use of a pilot program for the Marine Corps would not only identify flaws in the administration of the feedback tool, but would shape the mindset of the population before an analysis would ever be used in a situation where it could affect commander selection.

United States Air Force

In 2014, the Air Force instituted a multi-source feedback mechanism, the “Airman Comprehensive Assessment,” as part of an ongoing effort to revamp their evaluation system and develop leadership qualities aligned with organizational values.⁶⁰ The feedback from the assessments is used to initiate a detailed conversation between the supervisor and the recipient of the feedback, with the goal of forming and refining expectations, so when an individual eventually receives their actual evaluation, there are no surprises.⁶¹

On February 2, 2021, the Air Force announced a new addition to the Airman Comprehensive Assessment. The goal of the new addition is to measure leadership qualities specifically related to character and competence for officers and senior enlisted Airmen.⁶² The Air Force expects the new additions, based off of the “10 Airmen Leadership Qualities,” to lay the groundwork for the organization’s future performance evaluation system.⁶³ When compared to the Marine Corps performance evaluation

system, there are some similarities, including the categories of proficiency and initiative. However, there are some areas the Air Force will include that are unique among the services, including how well one fosters teamwork, creates an inclusive environment, and a rating on emotional intelligence. This update to the evaluation system is still in its infancy, and the Air Force is using a clearly-stated methodology for testing. As of now, the assessment is voluntary. The organization is relying on and encouraging its leaders to begin unofficially assessing individuals against the “10 Airmen Leadership Qualities” and providing feedback on trends. That feedback will be used to refine the process before the new system is finalized.⁶⁴

Air Force vs. Marine Corps Evaluations

10 Airmen Leadership Qualities

- Job performance
- Initiative
- Adaptability
- **Inclusion and teamwork**
- **Emotional intelligence**
- Communication
- **Stewardship**
- Accountability
- Decision-Making
- Innovation

Marine Corps Evaluation Categories

- Performance
- Proficiency
- Courage
- Effectiveness Under Stress
- Initiative
- Leading Subordinates
- Developing Subordinates
- Setting the Example
- Ensuring Well-Being of Subordinates
- Communication Skills
- Professional Military Education
- Decision-Making Ability
- Judgment
- Evaluations

Figure 2: 10 Airmen Leadership Qualities vs. Marine Evaluation Criteria⁶⁵

Time will determine whether or not the Air Force plan succeeds. However, the organization has already taken several key actions to facilitate successful implementation. The first notable action is that the organization is establishing relevance and value in the assessment by aligning it with the values of the organization. The “10 Airmen Leadership Qualities” clearly define the categories in which Airmen will be evaluated, and illuminate what is valued by the organization. Secondly, senior-level leadership has clearly and publicly endorsed the plan, which signals importance to the force. Finally, the Air Force

is utilizing a pilot program to not only identify friction points, but also to carefully prepare the force for this new culture change before implementing the assessments as a part of the evaluation process. These carefully-thought out actions signal the Air Force is serious about improving leadership.

United States Marine Corps

United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College recently finished its second year of requiring students to utilize a multi-source feedback tool. The school serves as the Marine Corps' resident professional military education (PME) institution for Majors. The Director of Command and Staff College, Colonel Thomas Gordon, devised the idea after successfully leading the implementation of 360-degree assessments at the Cornerstone and Capstone Commander's Conferences, which are designed to prepare already-selected Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels for O-5 and O-6 command. In an interview, Colonel Gordon expressed the belief that although there is value in the 360's at the aforementioned commander's conferences, a more ideal time for development purposes is at the rank of Major. The Director believes at the rank of Major, an officer is at a time in their career where they possess confidence and organizational experience, yet are still malleable enough to make necessary adjustments to their leadership style. The idea behind the 360's at resident Command and Staff College is that they will expose Majors to their blind spots before departing to their next assignments, many of which will be critical roles within the organization.⁶⁶

The specific tool resident Marine Corps Command and Staff College utilizes is called the "Leadership Practices Inventory" (LPI). The LPI is centered upon the concept of "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership," including: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. The creators of the LPI,

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, approach leadership as a measurable, learnable, and teachable set of behaviors. The “Five Practices” are based off of their analysis of hundreds of interviews, thousands of case studies, and over two million survey questions.⁶⁷

The LPI used at Marine Corps Command and Staff College requires students to list contact information for a goal of 10 total “observers” (former bosses, peers, and subordinates). The facilitators of the LPI distribute the questionnaire to the listed individuals, who are asked to complete the surveys. The individual officer is also required to complete their own self-assessment. The results of the survey are then compiled by the administrators and returned to the student in the form of an Individual Feedback Report. Students are subsequently debriefed on how to read and interpret the results by a trained administrator, and then review the results with their Military Faculty Advisor. One of the goals of the survey was for the students to identify “toxic trends” and attempt to correct them, or at least become cognizant of them prior to their next assignment.

The real value of the LPI lies in the clear picture the individual receives of where their perception of themselves stands in relation to the view of others. Based on interviews and discussions with students, it appears that those who benefitted the most were the ones who made the decision to choose raters with whom they had challenging relations in the past.⁶⁸ Those students were truly seeking honest feedback to improve their self-perception and awareness.

Using the resident Command and Staff experience as a case study in completing a multi-source feedback process, the process in and of itself was minimally time consuming. The most time-consuming part for most was ensuring the contact information for the raters was accurate. The feedback was valuable, and ultimately, most feel the experience was beneficial. Almost everyone saw an area upon which they could improve, and now students will have an

opportunity to adjust trends they may not have been aware of prior to the 360. The positive experience of 360s at Marine Corps Command and Staff College leads to the follow-on recommendation that the Marine Corps sustain the use of 360s at resident PME and invest in 360s for all officers when they enroll in non-resident PME as a senior Captain or Major, which will give them a baseline well in advance of screening for O-5 command. Some officers do not have the opportunity to attend resident PME as a Major due to career timing, or are simply not selected. Those officers should also have an opportunity to benefit from the candid feedback a 360 provides.

The Marine Corps also employs a dimension of multi-source feedback at both Officer Candidates School (OCS) and The Basic School (TBS), both of which are required steps in the training pipeline for all officers in the organization. Peer evaluations are an essential element of an officer's experience during entry-level training. As illustrated in figure 3, the premise behind the peer evaluations is that leadership is not always present to monitor and observe behavior. But peers, with whom Officer Candidates and TBS Lieutenants have the most interaction, have valuable insight to offer on the character and habits of their peers. Though no study exists to correlate peer evaluations in entry-level training with success in the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF), the mere fact that peer-evaluations still exist in entry-level training points to their inherent value. The presence of peer evaluations in entry-level training also shows that all Marine Officers are familiar with them, so the implementation of a multi-source feedback tool will not be unfamiliar. Instructors take the peer evaluations seriously, and they are a significant factor in the grading system.

An interview with a Field-Grade Marine Officer assigned to OCS reveals an appreciation for the merits of peer evaluations in entry-level training. The officer stated that although it

happens infrequently, sometime leadership issues emerge through the conduit of the peer evaluations which the staff was not previously aware. The interviewee did note that the feedback needs to be taken into context, as the evaluations have potential to become adversarial and petty as the training progresses and the candidates are under a greater amount of stress.⁶⁹



Purposes of Peer Evals at OCS



- **Evaluation.** Peer evaluations provide a key element of the “360-degree” evaluation process for candidates because candidates see each other even more often than staff members do and therefore have greater observation time to identify the positive and negative traits in their peers. Some candidates are spotlight performers but do not routinely work hard to support those around them and be a valuable team member.
- **Performance Improvement.** In addition to their benefits for evaluation, peer evaluations also provide another feedback loop for candidates to self-assess based on how their peers are perceiving them and to make changes to be more effective in leadership billets and be a better team member while not holding billets.

Figure 3. Purpose of Peer Evaluations at OCS⁷⁰

An interview with a decorated and well-respected former Staff Platoon Commander (SPC) at TBS also provides evidence to support the value of peer-evaluations in identifying flawed leaders. The former SPC estimated there was approximately one lieutenant per squad who received “surprisingly negative” peer evaluations. That Marine typically did well academically with a great military appearance and military skills performance. However, peer evaluations revealed another side of the Marine; one expressing character flaws not immediately evident to the SPC.⁷¹ Fortunately, at TBS, the highly-talented swath of instructors puts great effort into developing leaders and improving leadership performance. However, as long as an officer makes

it through the curriculum, they will graduate, and the only trace of those peer evaluations lies in their total Grade Point Average (GPA), which impacts their TBS class rank. The total GPA at TBS is a combination of leadership, military skills, and academics, so it is impossible to trace how a Marine specifically did in “leadership” alone after graduation. Nor would anyone normally seek to discover that data. The TBS example shows it can be difficult to identify flawed leadership even in entry-level training, where supervisors are within close proximity to subordinates for extended periods of time. The combination of the instructor’s impression combined with peer evaluations form a well-rounded picture of an individual. Upon transition to the Fleet, peer evaluations cease to exist.

A second former TBS SPC echoed a slightly different perspective. This individual expressed discontent with the numerical ranking system the school uses in the peer evaluation program. The officer stated the true value he found was in the actual word pictures, as they were more revealing in regard to the nature of the individual. This officer also said that at times, the peer evaluations allowed him to gain a better visual on certain individuals’ behavior when he was not present.⁷² During the interview, it was evident that some individuals “shined up” and the peer evaluations were able to highlight issues which may have otherwise gone undiscovered.

The Way Forward in a Changing Culture

Change is occurring across the Marine Corps. The organization is currently amidst the massive “Force Design 2030” initiative, which includes large-scale changes such as the divestment of tanks along with massive personnel and unit restructure. The modernization is aimed at creating a smaller, more agile, and lethal force with substantial investment in technology to compete and win in the future operating environment.⁷³ At the same time, the assignment process is undergoing modernization efforts, investing substantial effort to make the

process more equitable for individual Marines and families at a time when service members demand more of a play in their future. These efforts aim to give both the Marines themselves and commands more equity in the process, and advancements are possible given the abilities of modern technological platforms. The Marine Corps also briefly implemented a mechanism for accelerated promotions known as “meritorious re-order.” This was an attempt to reward superior performance, responding to a common criticism of the military concerning a static promotion system. Given the massive changes occurring at the organization level of the Marine Corps, a small additive to one of the many Marine Corps boards in the form of multi-source feedback is by no means an impossible task.

Technology is an extremely important factor to consider when examining the potential for the implementation of a multi-source feedback tool in the CSP. In 2021, all service members have consistent web and email access, with the exception of some unique individuals deployed in austere locations. The link for a survey can easily be emailed to raters with instructions and a timeline. The ability to send reminders can even be automated. The days of paper surveys and mail are far behind us, and have been for quite some time. Tools to implement surveys are readily available. Manpower Management Officer Assignments (MMOA) creates and disseminates a survey each year to all forecasted movers, which can serve as a model for the multi-rater feedback survey. The annual MMOA survey is easy to construct and incurs no additional cost for the Marine Corps. It is simple to administer and simple for the recipient to complete and return. In light of Marine Corps’ massive undertakings in other areas, the implementation of a survey is but a small task.

Construction of the Survey

A common theme in case studies of ineffective multi-source feedback is that the questions were not aligned with organizational values. Therefore, the survey must be constructed to align with Marine Corps values. Alignment occurs when the multi-source tool is tied to the strategies, values, and goals of the organization, then translated into competencies and/or desired behaviors for the employees.⁷⁴ In this case, an examination of the values the organization demands from its commanders is necessary. Those values, known as the “11 Leadership Principles,” are instilled in Marines from the first day of bootcamp, and should ultimately be the basis for the construction of this survey.

11 Leadership Principles

- 1. Know Yourself and Seek Self Improvement
- 2. Be Technically And Tactically Proficient
- 3. Know Your People And Look Out For Their Welfare
- 4. Keep Your Personnel Informed
- 5. Set The Example
- 6. Ensure That The Task Is Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished
- 7. Train Your Marines And Sailors As A Team
- 8. Make Sound And Timely Decisions
- 9. Develop A Sense Of Responsibility Among Your Subordinates
- 10. Employ Your Command Within its Capabilities
- 11. Seek Responsibilities And Take Responsibility

Figure 4. 11 Leadership Principles

Experts also mention a key to assessments working properly is cooperation of the raters, meaning quality and timeliness of the responses.⁷⁵ As opposed to a full 360-degree assessment, which requires input from the supervisors, peers, subordinates, and ratees, multi-source feedback for the CSP would only require information from peer and subordinate raters. Although some of the overhead associated with a full 360-degree assessment would be removed, obtaining feedback on the scale of the command screening boards is still a weighty challenge, and a clear

strategy is required to ensure the feedback is thorough and timelines are enforced. One key aspect of the strategy is to keep the survey short and concise.

A short and concise survey will undoubtedly contribute to its effectiveness. A major complaint of the Army's MSAF is that it is too long and cumbersome. Like any survey, the longer it is, the less likely individuals are to complete it well, and the more likely they are to view it as a "check in the box." The bedrock of leadership principles must be merged with the question of "what does the command screening board really need to know about a Marine?" The answer is that the purpose of the survey is to identify flawed or toxic leaders before they are selected for command in an effort to enable successful command across the organization. The LPI-360 used at Marine Corps Command and Staff College is very comprehensive and useful for the individual, however, for the purposes of the CSP, much of the feedback is unnecessary.

Another important factor to account for in the construction of the proposed survey is the time constraints of the boardroom. The Lieutenant Colonel Command Screening Board consists of 21 members who have six minutes to brief each package. Board members have two hours to prepare each package, and the board takes approximately two weeks from start to finish. The board members travel to Quantico from across the globe, and are on a tight timeline. Scouring OMPFs to provide detailed briefs and recommendations on such a tight timeline is a difficult task, and adding even more information to the mix can easily and rationally be viewed as excessive. This is but another reason why the survey must be short, concise, and provide an easy-to-read output for board members.

Taking the above-mentioned factors into consideration, effective results can be achieved by asking few simple questions. These questions provide great insight into whether or not a leader is "flawed" or "toxic."

Survey questions:

1.) Does this officer treat people with dignity and respect?

2.) Does this officer set a personal example of what he/she expects others to do?

3.) Do you trust this person?

The first two questions are the most valuable questions in the LPI-360 utilized by resident Marine Corps Command and Staff College. The third question is a critical facet of leadership. A survey consisting of only three questions may seem overly simplistic, but these are revealing, character-driven questions drawn from the bedrock of organizational values. If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” it raises a red flag. These questions will likely unveil the flawed leadership traits of narcissism, extreme micromanagement, and tyranny before they hit the cover of the Marine Corps Times.

Questions	Yes	No	Unknown
1. Does this officer treat people with dignity and respect?	X		
2. Does this officer set a personal example of what he/she expects other people to do?		X	
3. Do you trust this person?	X		

Table 1. Example Multi-Source Feedback Survey

A final question to consider adding would require a narrative response:

4.) Is there anything you would like the board to know about this person?

There would undoubtedly be some interesting answers to this question and it may be worth adding. This question has potential to paint an incredibly positive picture of an individual as a leader, and may help individuals who may not have had the good fortune of getting a “premier”

billet at the right time in their career, of no fault of their own. However, responses to this question could also carry legal implications and leave too much open to interpretation with no method of clarification for the board members. At the very minimum, adding a question with a narrative response deserves further analysis.

Questions such as “would you work for/with this individual again?” should be avoided because they have the potential to be misleading. Many individuals have worked for and with individuals who they may not necessarily want to work for or with again. The reasons may not involve character, and they may still have a great deal of respect for the individual. Quite simply, a “no” to a question such as this may not mean someone is a poor leader. This is precisely why the questions must be centered on fundamental aspects of character, and additionally, aimed to avoid potentially unwarranted negative impacts.

Administration of the Survey

Administration of the survey has potential to become a function of the Manpower Management Officer Assignments-3 (MMOA-3) Plans Section. This entity already handles many of the administrative functions of the CSP, and is responsible for the administration of the annual questionnaire to officers who are scheduled to screen for command. Administration of the survey would encompass distributing the survey, publishing timelines, compiling results, and ensuring the results are in the boardroom by the time the board convenes.

The most difficult part of this process lies in identifying raters, and there is more than one way to accomplish the challenging task. Based on this analysis, the most effective method is to have the officers who are screening for command list three peers and three subordinates they have worked with in the last five years on their command-screening questionnaire. The officers would be required to list the name, work relationship, and a primary and secondary email

address. Upon receipt of the command screening questionnaires at MMOA-3, the multi-source feedback surveys would be emailed to the listed individuals with instructions and dates. MMOA-3 would then collect the data and ensure it arrives in the boardroom in an easily-readable format for the board members. This method would be the most efficient and realistic way to receive actual data.

One could easily argue that allowing officers to choose their own observers may defeat the process; naturally, one would choose those whom they know will give good feedback if it will be used for selection and not development purposes. However, if a leader really is “flawed” or toxic enough for concern, that individual would naturally have a tough time finding people that worked for or with them that would advocate for them, especially when the feedback is confidential. The application process for a job is a great analogy. It is quite normal for letters of recommendation from former employers and peers to be required as part of the application process. If an individual possesses the flawed leadership traits discussed in this analysis, they will naturally have a tough time finding individuals to write good letters of recommendation. Likewise, an individual who has a poor track record with peers and subordinates will have a tough time finding service members who would positively endorse them.

Another potential means to administer the survey would be to have commanding officers manage the process internally within their commands. This would likely involve a Marine Online (MOL)-type platform where the raters are assigned electronically and instructed to complete their evaluation within the time allotted. Commanding officers would choose the raters for each Marine, and subsequently direct those Marines to complete the survey and return to MMOA-3, while emphasizing the importance of confidentiality. For officers in joint assignments, this responsibility would fall upon the senior Marine observer in their command. One likely

challenge this process will encounter is if an officer works in a totally independent assignment, including some Attaché duties, or if they are at a PME school with only peers and seniors. If the Marine Corps opted to explore this route, further research is required to devise a workable solution, which may include an exception to policy letter (ETP) for no feedback or feedback from service members from their previous assignment.

In a method of administration where the Marine screening on the board has no play in choosing the raters, there is currently no efficient or dependable way for Headquarters Marine Corps to assign raters for them. The tools that are available would allow administrators to identify who an individual wrote fitness reports on, but those individuals would need to be located and contacted, and many have likely exited the service since their last fitness report. This route appears to be too monumental of a task when considering the sheer number of individuals whose history would need to essentially be “dissected” to find out who they worked with. Unless a system was developed which could pull data from an individual’s recent assignment history, combining the factors of identifying peers and subordinates, along with which of them are still on active duty, with current contact information, the task is unrealistic. This may change in the future as systems become increasingly sophisticated, but at the present moment, this is not a realistic task for an entity such as Manpower Management Records and Support Branch. For any of the potential options for administration of the survey, the use of a pilot program prior to rollout would greatly assist in solving challenges such as these and aide in confirming the most preferable method.

Using the Air Force, Navy, and PepsiCo models as examples, the Marine Corps should utilize a pilot program before multi-source feedback is employed in a selection board. This pilot program would serve to work out any unforeseen friction in the collection process, and more

importantly, it would familiarize the force with the concept and method. A proposed pilot process is displayed in figure 5:

Proposed Pilot Process

1. On the upcoming Command Screening Board, the screening population is required to list the appropriate individuals on their screening questionnaire: (3) peers and (3) subordinates the individual worked with in the last (5) years from the convening date of the board.
2. Manpower receives the questionnaire, and emails survey to listed individuals. During this phase, Manpower also rehearses process of sending reminders for non-compliance.
3. Manpower executes the process of consolidating and transferring data into the Digital Boardroom (DBR) system, which contains the records of those who will screen.
4. Manpower then creates a “test command screening board” of individuals with experience in the boardroom to conduct a “mock” command board including the results from the collected multisource feedback but displayed in an anonymous, non-attributional fashion.
5. Results are analyzed and published to the force to provide transparency and instill trust in the process.
6. A key note: the force must not rush to failure. The process must be tweaked until it is reliable.

Figure 5. Proposed Pilot Process

Using the example of the Air Force model, the Marine Corps should also ensure senior leadership publicly endorses the effort.⁷⁶ That is a key ingredient to create buy-in within the organization.

Instructions to Board Members

If the use of multi-source feedback is implemented for the CSP, board members would receive the multi-source feedback via the boardroom IT platform known as “Digital Boardroom,” or “DBR.” It would ideally be a one-to-two page document highlighting the observers’ answers to the questions in a “yes,” “no,” or “unknown.” format (see table 1). Instructions to the board members would be that fitness reports are still the primary tool utilized in briefing and selecting future commanders, but to ensure they review the multi-source feedback results. If there is an anomaly, the board member should discuss it during the brief. Again, the purpose of the assessments is to identify

anomalies on either side of the bell curve. If someone has a great record on paper, yet many “no” answers from the multi-source feedback, it raises concern. Likewise, if someone is on the border of being selected, the multi-source feedback could serve as a tie-breaker.

Due to the competitive nature of the command screening boards, a tribute to the wealth of talented leadership in the Marine Corps, there are often times when several individuals are competing for one remaining command spot. These individuals will have almost identically impressive records, and there must be some means of breaking the tie and choosing one. Several factors have historically been employed as “tie breakers” in these tough decisions, including physical fitness scores and even TBS class rank. With TBS nearly two decades or more in the past, that metric should not be used as a factor in determining selection. People have inevitably changed a great deal since TBS. Physical fitness is an important part of leadership in the Marine Corps and should not be discounted by any means, however, multi-source feedback would be a better tie breaker when it comes to what the organization needs from its commanders, which is great leadership. If an individual has the winning combination of great fitness reports and positive reviews from peers and subordinates, the organization can say with almost complete certainty that the individual truly is the “total package” and not a flawed or toxic leader.

Voluntary vs Required

An important aspect of the implementation process for this multi-source feedback tool is to determine whether or not participation in the process is voluntary or mandatory. As things currently stand, officers with appropriate career timing will screen for

command unless they submit an official Request to Be Removed, or “RBR,” to Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). Instructions for the RBR process are contained in the annual MARADMIN announcing the command screening board for that year.⁷⁷ If an officer does not officially RBR or return a command screening questionnaire, they will still screen; however, it can reflect negatively on them and may be perceived by board members as a lack of desire to command. If a multi-source feedback tool is adopted by the organization, providing the information for raters should also be voluntary, yet highly recommended. If an officer who screens declines to provide rater information and the board has no multi-source feedback results for them, it will likely be perceived as though the Marine put forth a lack of effort or that they are attempting to hide something. As a result, an officer who is serious about competing for command would naturally complete the command screening questionnaire in its entirety, including the information for raters.

Rater Feedback Security

Security of the rater feedback is a legitimate concern in the proposed process and must be analyzed. The integrity of the proposed process is dependent upon careful handling of the rater feedback. If the data were compromised and raters’ answers exposed, the results could be catastrophic. The first act of a command screening board is the swear-in process, where board members and board support personnel take an oath not to disclose any details of the board. The administration of the oath successfully mitigates the risk of disclosure from individuals present in the boardroom. MMOA-1 and MMOA-3 are adept at handling sensitive data; these results would be yet another piece of sensitive information. The most significant risk lies in the cyber security realm, as the results will reside in information technology systems and databases. The risk of a

successful hack is substantially reduced by constant measures taken to protect the network; however, it still exists. Ultimately, there will always be risk involved with any information transmitted over a network. The organization will have to weigh the risk of potential damage from a spillage of this data versus the harm flawed leaders can cause to the organization.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The primary recommendation is that the Marine Corps examines implementing the use of a multi-source feedback mechanism consisting of ratings from peers and subordinates into the Command Screening Program. More research is required to determine the most fair and realistic method for identifying raters to complete the feedback, and whether or not to include a question requiring a narrative response. A secondary recommendation is that the Marine Corps continues the use of 360-degree assessments at resident Marine Corps Command and Staff College and expands their use to Marines who enroll in the distance Command and Staff College course. When completed as a senior Captain or junior Major, officers will achieve better understanding of their self-perception versus the perception of their seniors, peers, and subordinates. This will provide a valuable opportunity to make leadership adjustments years before they screen for command.

There is a blind spot in the process by which the Marine Corps selects its senior leaders that can and should be illuminated. Examples from industry and the benefits of modern technology highlight the possibilities of multi-source feedback in the Command Screening Program. The potential for a multi-dimensional look at a leader is now present and is readily attainable. Nearly all civilian companies use a form of multi-source feedback, setting a valuable precedent. In an organization centered upon servant leadership, the voices of peers and

subordinates deserve to be heard; they can show a different perspective than a fitness report alone. Previous attempts to utilize multi-source feedback within the Department of Defense lacked success, but there is much to be learned from those experiences. Multiple considerations, including the concept of alignment, use of a pilot program, and brevity of the survey are critical. Incorporating a multi-source feedback mechanism into the Marine Corps Command Screening Program is cost-free additive that will assist the organization in selecting the right individuals for command.

Notes

1. Updated Commander Relief Statistics, Headquarters Marine Corps, February 2021. Information updated from Thomas R. Gordon, "Director's Leadership Session #4 – Toxic Leadership," PowerPoint Presentation, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, October 13-16 2020
2. Independent Survey of approximately 10 Field Grade Marine Corps Officers, December 2020 - January 2021.
3. Updated Commander Relief Statistics, Headquarters Marine Corps, February 2021.
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