Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Trust in the Marine Corps – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Principal Investigator: Kerry Fosher, PhD
Translational Research Group
Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, MCU/EDCOM
kerry.fosher@usmcu.edu, 703-432-1504

Lead Researcher: Erika Tarzi, MA
TRG Contracted Researcher, Davis Defense Group

Publication Date: 11 May 2020

Distribution: Unlimited

Marine Corps Organizational Culture (MCOCR) Project
Report Front Matter

The following seven pages of front matter provide background relevant to the report that may be of interest to some readers. This material accompanies all reports from the MCOCR Project posted in the Open Anthropology Research Repository. MCOCR reports were designed for an applied audience of military and civilian officials of the U.S. Marine Corps rather than a scholarly audience. Therefore some background information, such as research team composition and the incidents of social media harassment that led to the project, is assumed rather than explicit. Included in the front matter are:

Pages	Information
1-2	Project Overview
3	Frequently Asked Questions
4	Media and Congressional Attention to the Project
4	Background on the "Marines United" Scandal
5-7	Background on the Translational Research Group

Copyright/Licensing

Since a 20 Dec 2019 change in 17 U.S.C. 105, government employees who are civilian faculty at military universities may hold copyright to certain scholarly works created as part of their duties or on government time/with government resources. This work is copyrighted under the name of the principal investigator for the project. Other authors listed were contractors at the time the report was created and therefore are ineligible to hold copyright.

June 2020 *(updated Sep 2022)*

Project Overview

The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project was an exploratory research effort requested by the U.S. Marine Corps, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), in July 2017 to gather information on Marine Corps culture. The project arose in part from concerns related to the Marines United social media misconduct (see page 4 of this document for more information) and also from longer-term leadership questions regarding shifts in Marine Corps culture. The research was conducted by the Translational Research Group (TRG) at Marine Corps University (MCU). [See pages 5-7 for more information on TRG.] The project was governed by Marine Corps Human Subjects Protection Protocol #USMC.2017.0005 and the provisions of academic freedom in MCU's *Academic Regulations*. The Principal Investigator for the project was Dr. Kerry Fosher.

The intent of the project was to develop a broad, robust base of data and analyses related to Marine Corps culture that could be mined over the years to provide context and insights that could be used to inform problem-framing and decision-making on a range of issues and to complement/enhance other research methods, such as surveys. Additionally, the project was intended to support scholarly analysis and publication. The project was not intended to be representative of the entire Marine Corps or to support statistical analyses. As with most exploratory research, results were intended to inform discussion rather than make claims or advance particular positions regarding any Marine Corps program or policy. For additional information see the Frequently Asked Questions on page 3.

The **first phase** of MCOCR involved research design, data gathering, initial analysis, and production of two expedited reports. The research team collected data from Aug-Oct 2017 at installations in the United States and Japan, conducting 182 interviews and focus groups that were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Initial analysis focused on issues related to leadership, cohesion, and gender bias, captured in reports to the Marine Corps' Personnel Studies and Oversight (PSO) Office, later renamed the Talent Management Oversight Directorate (TMOD).

A *Quick Look Report* on issues specifically related to the Marines United misconduct was delivered to PSO in February 2018. A broader initial *Report to PSO* was expedited and delivered on 30 March 2018. This report organized preliminary analysis into the following themes:

1. Marines United and the Prevalence of Online Misconduct
2. Challenges with and for Leadership
3. The Procedural and Social Uses of PFT/CFT Scores
4. Experiences of Female Marines
5. Hostile Environments
6. Remaining a Marine: How Enlisted and Officers Deliberate and Decide
7. Cohesion, Leadership, and Difference through the Lens of Humor

With the delivery of the initial report and associated materials to PSO, the Phase 1 of MCOCR was complete. This report is available on DTIC: AD1079774. Links to other project reports from Phase 2 are provided on the next page.

Initial release of this report was scheduled for May 2018. Release was delayed due to leadership questions about the applicability of MCU's academic freedom policy. These questions were resolved in September 2019. The release resulted in **media and Congressional attention. See additional information on page 4 of this document.**

The **second phase** of MCOCR was intended to have three parts:

- Correct errors in the transcripts and removing protected information to develop them into a dataset that TRG could mine on a broad range of issues of interest to the Marine Corps.
- Conducting deeper and more structured analyses on issues of interest to the Marine Corps and topics of scholarly value.
- Continuing to advise Marine Corps organizations based on MCOCR and other datasets as requested.

The Marine Corps' decision to close CAOCL and, consequently, disband TRG in June 2020 altered the plans and timelines for the second phase. Original analysis plans for Phase 2 also were disrupted by TRG's inability to procure necessary analytic software and the delay associated with academic freedom questions. These factors significantly reduced the scope of analysis planned for Phase 2. **See additional information below.**

Translational Research Group - CAOCL
Marine Corps University
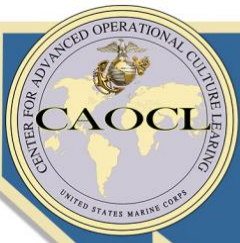
Advising

The TRG team continued to provide advice for problem framing and the development of more structured data gathering efforts to various Marine Corps organizations, including M&RA and TMOD until TRG was disbanded. Dr. Fosher continues to provide advice based on the project.

Dataset Development

Work to correct errors in the transcripts and remove protected information was completed in January 2020. This work ensured the transcripts could be analyzed accurately. It also allowed the transcripts to be placed in a repository for use by other researchers (see below).

Completed Analyses

Due to the limitations imposed by lack of software and impending closure, TRG focused on completing several "quick look" reports on different topics rather than the in-depth analyses originally planned. The following additional reports were completed and posted on DTIC:

- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Implicit and Explicit Perceptions of Fairness (DTIC AD1079415)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Pregnancy Loss (DTIC AD1085324)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Alcohol (DTIC AD1091445)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Rethinking Mentorship (DTIC AD1096699)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Trust in the Marine Corps – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (DTIC AD1103134)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Sexual Assault and Harassment (DTIC AD1103136)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Empathy in Leadership (DTIC AD1102322)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Generational Differences in the Marine Corps – Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and Younger Marines (DTIC AD1102357)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment (DTIC AD1102323)

All reports from the project were submitted to the Defense Technical Information Center for posting on the public portal. See also the section on data management below for additional locations and materials.

Scholarly Works

TRG team members presented on aspects of the MCOCR project at numerous academic conferences and in Marine Corps meetings. One scholarly article was published and another is in development as of this date:

- Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. Feb 2020 in *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12130
- Post-Heroic Leadership in a Heroic Organization: The Secret and Gendered Life of Empathy in the United States Marine Corps. (article in development by team member).

Long-Term Data Management/ Data Availability for Future Research

Protection of the Marines who volunteered for the project and the data they provided was a priority for TRG. However, TRG also felt a responsibility to ensure that the data provided by Marines was used to the maximum extent possible. The principal investigator worked with the Marine Corps' Human Research Protection Program to identify a data repository that balanced internal and external discoverability with necessary security. After reviewing several options, the **Qualitative Data Repository** (QDR) was selected. Versions of transcripts that have been scrubbed of protected information, along with project documentation and reports, were deposited in the QDR when CAOCL closed. They can be accessed at https://doi.org/10.5064/F6K4IVEP. Reports and other documentation are available to the public. Access to the transcripts requires an approved human subjects protection protocol that meets criteria specified in the project documentation. Reports also are being posted to the **Open Anthropology Research Repository** during September of 2022.

Some materials from the project, but not the data, also were included in the CAOCL collection provided to the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU and reports were posted on DTIC. The original audio recordings, raw transcripts, and any materials that could link participants with the data were destroyed when TRG was closed.
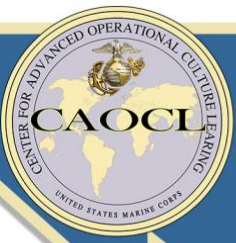
Translational Research Group - CAOCL
Marine Corps University

What was MCOCR?
The MCOCR Project was a small, exploratory, qualitative research effort intended to gather U.S. Marine perspectives on a range of issues related to Marine Corps culture. The project resulted in 150 semi-structured interviews and 32 semi-structured focus groups with 267 unique participants (nine Marines participated in both an interview and a focus group). All participants were volunteers, and the project was conducted under a protocol approved by the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program. The project was conducted by the Translational Research Group (TRG) at the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) under Marine Corps University's (MCU) academic freedom policy.

How should the information in MCOCR reports be used?
Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOCR were intended to inform discussions in conjunction with other information sources. They should not be used to make broad, statistical claims about Marines or Marine Corps programs and policies.

Were Marine statements fact-checked?
No. The intent of the project was to gather Marine perspectives without regard to whether the perspectives were based on full knowledge of current Marine Corps policies and programs. In some cases, it was important to capture misperceptions, as they had implications for internal Marine Corps messaging.

What are the project's limitations?
1. The MCOCR sample was not designed to be representative of the Marine Corps population in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, MOS, or other characteristics. Therefore, the data cannot be used in statistical analysis designed to make claims about all Marines. Sample demographics are included in the March 2018 report from the project, available on DTIC (AD1079774).
2. The project did not include Marines in the reserves or recently retired/separated Marines due to Marine Corps interpretation of DoD policy on information collections at the time the research was designed.
3. The project's designers did not actively seek volunteers above E-8 and O-5; therefore, senior voices are not strong in the sample.

Who funded and sponsored the project?
The project fell within the normal scope of work of TRG and the majority of the project was funded out of CAOCL's existing budget. Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) requested that the research be done, but the research design, conduct, and analysis were controlled by TRG. M&RA assisted with logistics, travel for research team members who were not part of TRG, and funding to accelerate transcription of audio recordings.
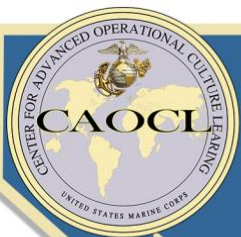
When and where were data gathered?
Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico, VA, MCB Camp Lejeune, NC, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, NC, MCB Camp Pendleton, CA, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, CA, MCAS Yuma, AZ, and MCB Camp Butler, Okinawa, Japan.

Can Marines who participated be identified?
Identification is unlikely. Marines who volunteered for the research went through an informed consent process that warned them of the risks and the steps the research team would take to mitigate them. (A copy of the informed consent information is available in the project documentation through the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU or the Qualitative Data Repository at Syracuse University.) Names were removed from the dataset and other measures were taken to mask identities, but Marines were cautioned prior to agreeing to participate in an interview or focus group, during the informed consent process, that it might still be possible for some readers to identify them through their habits of speech and/or combinations of characteristics, such as MOS and location.

What were the qualifications and characteristics of the research team?
The principal investigator was a cultural anthropologist with more than 20 years of experience working with and doing research on national security organizations, including 10 years leading research teams on projects focused on the Marine Corps. The composition of the MCOCR research team changed between 2017 and 2020, but team members possessed PhDs or MAs in the following disciplines: cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, international relations, education, communication, and evaluation science. Additionally, the project's design was peer reviewed by a DoD scientist with a PhD in psychology. Data gathering teams included male and female researchers. To the maximum extent possible, participants were allowed to choose the sex of the researcher with whom they interacted. All team members were caucasian. The data gathering team included two members with Marine backgrounds. One was a recently retired field-grade Marine officer, and the other was an active duty, company-grade Marine officer. The research team also consulted with other social and behavioral scientists and Marines during design and analysis.

For more information, contact
Dr. Kerry Fosher, Director of Research
kerry.fosher@usmcu.edu

Translational Research Group - CAOCL
Marine Corps University

Timeline and Background:

The initial MCOCR report was delivered to the Marine Corps on 30 Mar 2018. The Translational Research Group's (TRG) original agreement to conduct the project included public release of all outcomes under Marine Corps University's (MCU) academic freedom policy. However, release of project outcomes was delayed for 17 months due to Marine Corps leadership questions about the applicability of academic freedom policy to the project. After materials were released in September 2019, they received light attention in the media and Congress, examples of which are provided below.

Briefs to Congressional Staff

A team including the MCOCR Project's Principal Investigator, Dr. Kerry Fosher, BGen Daniel Shipley, then Director of Manpower Plans and Policies, and Dr Michael Strobl, then Deputy Director of Manpower Plans and Policies, briefed Military Legislative Assistants from the Senate on 07 February 2020 and from the House on 04 March 2020. BGen Robert Fulford, Legislative Assistant to the Commandant, and staff from the Office of Legislative Affairs also participated in the brief to Senate Military Legislative Assistants. (The brief to House staffers was truncated due to growing concerns over the COVID19 pandemic, which was emerging at that time.)

Media Coverage

To our knowledge, no major news outlets covered the MCOCR project. It received some attention on social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook in both military- and social science-related channels. It also was covered by some military-focused media outlets. Two examples of coverage are:

- Szoldra, Paul. 2019. An internal investigation spurred by a nude photo scandal shows just how deep sexism runs in the Marine Corps. Task and Purpose. 04 Dec.
- Pawlyk Oriana. 2019. Commandant Responds to Troubling Study on Marine Corps Culture. Military.com. 07 Dec.

Congressional Hearing

To our knowledge, the MCOCR Project was discussed in only one public hearing. In the 10 Dec 2019 hearing, LtGen Michael Rocco, Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, the sub-committee chair, Rep Jackie Speier, and Rep Susan Davis, briefly discussed the Marine Corps' handling of the report, challenges with Marine Corps culture, concepts of equity and parity, and the importance of empathy in the professional development of Marines.

- U.S. House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Military Personnel Hearing, "Diversity in Recruiting and Retention: Increasing Diversity in the Military – What the Military Services are Doing." Dec 10, 2019. The project is discussed or mentioned at:
  - 1:16:40 (LtGen Rocco briefly mentions the MCOCR initial report in his testimony)
  - 1:18:21 (Rep Speier and LtGen Rocco discuss the delayed release of the initial report and some aspects of its contents)
  - 1:31:08 (LtGen Rocco, responding to Rep Susan Davis, raises the report in his remarks on teaching empathy).

Marines United Background

In early March of 2017, The War Horse and Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting published a piece on a Facebook group called Marines United (See Thomas James Brennan, 4 Mar 2017). Members of the group had created linked Google Drive folders and posted photographs of women—some naked, some clothed—as well as personally identifying information and hostile comments about women. Some of the women targeted were Marines. At the time of the reporters' investigation, the Facebook group had over 30,000 members, some of whom were later determined to be active duty Marines. The investigations in the year following the initial news coverage identified 97 Marines as possible culprits. There were a range of punishments according to reporting in The Marine Corps Times (See Shawn Snow 21 Mar 2018). A brief overview of the legal actions taken was provided in a 2018 article in Military.com (See Hope Hodge Seck 13 Sep 2018). Although there were other signs of hostile behavior and social media-based misconduct that concerned the Marine Corps, the media attention and congressional scrutiny surrounding Marines United meant that it served as the primary frame for much of the subsequent discussion and action by the Marine Corps. Those actions included the formation of a task force and launching a number of initiatives. These efforts are not well documented in public Marine Corps reports, but news coverage and congressional testimony can be found via internet and library searches.
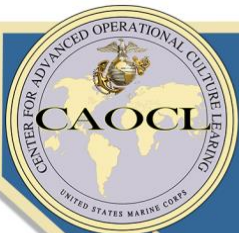
Timeline and Background:

General Background: The Translational Research Group (TRG) was a multi-disciplinary group of social scientists that operated from 2010 to 2020. The group was located within the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), which was responsible for providing culture-related, regional, and language education and training to the U.S. Marine Corps. Originally part of the Training and Education Command headquarters, CAOCL was reorganized and became part of Marine Corps University in 2012.

The idea for the group grew out of discussions between the anthropologist who became its director and Marine Corps leaders, one of whom was the Director of CAOCL. They had seen many problems in the Marine Corps' ability to leverage research results and scientific expertise. Many problems seemed to arise from the lack of persistent presence of scientific researchers in the Marine Corps' supporting establishment. Sometimes, researchers lacked sufficient understanding of the military and its context to design effective and useful research. Sometimes military leaders did not have enough experience with scientists to know how to interact with them and how to frame questions to ensure results were usable. Often, the long lag time between completion of a research project and implementation of results meant that researchers were no longer available when the Marine Corps had questions about how to use the knowledge developed through a research effort. Having researchers on site and employed full time, rather than on a project-by-project basis, was intended to help mitigate some of these problems.

In addition to attempting to work on the challenges above, TRG also was an experiment in the interaction of the social sciences with the military. It was formed at a time when tensions were very high between social science professional associations and military organizations. The tension was a renewal of mutual mistrust that emerged during and after past periods of engagement, most notably in World War II and the 1960s and 70s. As a result of these tensions, the resulting lack of familiarity on both sides, and unrelated changes in the civilian personnel system, most military organizations became undesirable employment options for social scientists who wanted to maintain their professional identities. Even setting aside the problems working with the military could cause in academic professional circles, the working conditions were not appropriate for retaining expertise. Job duties as civil servants or contractors did not include time for maintaining and advancing professional knowledge and networks, there was little support for publication, attending conferences, and other normal scientific work, and there were very few career tracks that allowed a scientist to advance while maintaining a scientific identity rather than becoming a rank-and-file manager. These conditions were mitigated to some degree for those working in military colleges and universities, but even in those settings, support for professional development was limited and research involving fieldwork was not easily accommodated. Taking a civil service or contract job supporting a military organization was, too often, a professional death sentence. TRG attempted, with a mix of success and failure, to address these problems by creating an environment that provided military officials with access to social science expertise, but also established more viable working conditions.

TRG drew its name and general orientation from the concept of translational research in medicine and other sciences, which emphasizes the ability to move knowledge from research to application quickly through increased communication between researchers and practitioners and by other means. The translational research concept in TRG differed somewhat from applied research in the military context because it included basic or foundational research. It emphasized continued scientific rigor and researcher control over design and execution with increased attention to the questions, ideas, and needs of potential end users and greater awareness of the implementation context.

People: The director of TRG, Dr. Kerry Fosher, was a civil servant at the GS-14 level whose PhD was in cultural anthropology. Although the original intent was to create government positions for the researchers, it was never possible to accomplish that goal and the group was staffed with full time contractors. Another aspect of the original intent was to focus recruitment on people from the fieldwork-focused social sciences, such as anthropology, geography, sociology, and similar fields at the PhD level. Hiring into civil service or contract positions is never a simple process and at no time was TRG completely staffed as intended. At various points, TRG had researchers with MAs or PhDs in disciplines including cultural anthropology, cultural geography, education, educational psychology, international relations, international studies, biological anthropology, and cognitive psychology. It also developed close collaborative relationships with several other researchers with backgrounds in sociology, social psychology, inter-cultural communication, and other disciplines, as well as collaborative relationships with military personnel from a wide range of backgrounds. Although the range of disciplines was not what was intended, researchers with different degree backgrounds brought other capabilities that turned out to be highly valuable. The number of researchers in the group varied over the years based on CAOCL's funding and the details of contracts, but averaged six researchers, not including the director.

Resources: TRG was funded out of CAOCL's budget rather than on a project-by-project basis, although it did occasionally take supplemental funding to enhance staffing or support requirements for particular projects. This approach to funding ensured that researchers would persist in the context, enabling them to advise on implementation of research results and other aspects of the selection and use of science. Funding the group in this way also had downsides. CAOCL had to focus on its core mission to provide education and training, which sometimes led to
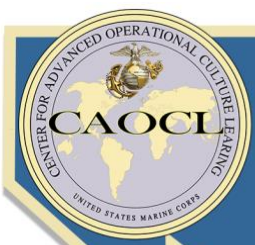
Functions: Although TRG's areas of emphasis changed somewhat over the course of the 10 years it existed, most of its work fell into three categories:

- research, advising, and outreach
- support to CAOCL
- assessment.

Research, Advising, and Outreach

TRG did not accept tasks in the way many research entities working with or within the military did during this time period. Project ideas might come from researchers, Marines, or other Marine Corps organizations. However, selection of projects was at the discretion of TRG's director, with approval by CAOCL's director. The intent was to ensure that the group conducted projects within its available range of expertise and resources and only on questions that the team found valid rather than having to respond to requests that might not have been a good fit with the group's capabilities or that would have challenged its integrity. This level of autonomy was highly unusual in DoD and frequently challenged, but necessary for the group to function as designed. Most research efforts focused on issues related to Marines and Marine Corps organizations such as stress and resilience, gender bias, humanitarian assistance missions, and cultural patterns in the Marine Corps. Projects leveraged the strengths of the team at any given time, but emphasized field research, including observation, semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured focus groups. A core strength of TRG was to bring Marine voices into discussions largely dominated by survey research and other quantified data.

The group provided a great deal of scientific advising to the Marine Corps and other DoD organizations. Originally envisioned as work that would focus on implementation of results, this line of activity expanded and became one of the most valuable aspects of TRG's work. Rather than focusing exclusively on implementation of its own results, TRG researchers also came to be valued for the advice they could provide based on their existing expertise, helping Marine Corps leaders scope problems, design research approaches, and evaluate research claims from other projects. Advisory conversations did not usually result in artifacts like reports or publications but rather in improved decision-making. However, it was one of the most valuable services TRG researchers provided.

Researchers also engaged in outreach through presenting work to scholarly and practitioner audiences, teaching guest classes and electives within Marine Corps University and elsewhere, publishing, and becoming involved in the professional associations of their disciplines. This outreach helped inform academic audiences about military personnel and served to improve relations between the military, academic social scientists, and scientific professional associations.

Support to CAOCL

TRG supported CAOCL's education, training, and policy sections in a variety of ways. Researchers reviewed and wrote inputs on doctrine and policy, advised on approaches to assessment, and occasionally supported training sessions with instruction. However, the most significant support it provided was in the area of culture general curricula, which provided Marines with the concepts and skills needed to operate effectively when they do not have sufficient/current culture-specific information. Although CAOCL had adopted the 5 dimensions model in 2009 (see *Operational Culture for the Warfighter* by Salmoni and Holmes Eber, 2008 and 2011), it was primarily used as a means of organizing regional or culture-specific material. The generalizable concepts and skills were not an integral part of curricula. For the first 5 years of its existence, TRG led the effort to integrate culture general material, first in CAOCL's distance education program and later in its training program. This work sometimes involved developing curricula or reference materials and at other times focused on advising CAOCL's sections about what should be included. Once the Professor of Military Cross-Cultural Competence (PM3C) was hired to be part of CAOCL and a member of the university's faculty, TRG was able to transition leadership of these efforts to her with TRG researchers supporting her efforts.

Assessment

TRG's director led CAOCL's assessment platform and TRG researchers worked with CAOCL's sections to help them design assessment approaches that would support required reporting and answer the more complex questions asked by CAOCL's director. One TRG researcher was responsible for collating annual information from the sections and using it to support various reporting requirements. TRG researchers also conducted assessment research, several examples of which are available on the Defense Technical Information Center's public portal.

For more information, contact
Dr. Kerry Fosher, Director of Research
kerry.fosher@usmcu.edu

Balance of Functions: This arrangement of tasks could be seen as a distraction from the core work of conducting research and advising or as simply "paying rent" to TRG's host organization, CAOCL. At times it was, but it also served a purpose. There was a reciprocal relationship between the work on training and education programs and the group's research. The support to CAOCL's sections and assessment work brought researchers into contact with the active duty and retired Marines in CAOCL and into discussions about Marines and the Marine Corps. In some cases, this work was a researcher's first introduction to the Marine Corps and a useful orientation before engaging in research-related activities. It also kept the researchers tied to the sometimes-frustrating realities of trying to get science integrated in the supporting establishment, something that was an important background for science advising. In turn, the group's research projects not only served their intended purposes, but also helped researchers develop greater knowledge of Marines and their missions, which informed their work on training and education.

Additionally, the arrangement ensured that the Marine Corps got full value from a relatively scarce commodity, fieldwork-focused social scientists. For the reasons noted above, during this time period, it was not easy to get qualified social scientists to work with the military and those employed purely in education and training sometimes struggled to maintain their professional standing or do research. TRG provided a mechanism that allowed social scientists to support education and training without losing their ability to conduct research, publish, and stay connected to their fields.

Closure: In 2019, the Marine Corps began substantial reorganizations and program cuts (referred to as divestment) in an effort to align its funding and personnel with the capabilities it believed would be necessary in future conflicts. These changes were difficult and controversial. For example, the service divested tanks, something that would have been unthinkable previously. Culture and language programs also were divested. CAOCL closed its doors on 30 Jun 2020 and, consequently, TRG was disbanded. Marine Corps University retained TRG's director as the university-level director of research and CAOCL's culture-focused faculty member who continued to teach across the university. Initially, a few of CAOCL's education and training capabilities were retained in the newly formed Center for Regional and Security Studies (CRSS). However, in the two years following CAOCL's closure, the CRSS lost staffing and funding. As of September 2022, CRSS has no dedicated funding and is staffed by one Marine officer who will not be replaced when his assignment changes, making it unlikely that the center will continue unless Marine Corps priorities change.

Of note, the other U.S. services underwent similar reductions or shifts in their culture and language capabilities during the same time period. (See *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs 2004-20* Fosher and Mackenzie, eds and *The Best-Laid Schemes: A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy* Deitchman. Both are available to the public via Marine Corps University Press.) These shifts corresponded with a number of fieldwork-focused social scientists from across the services, including TRG, leaving through retirement or transitioning to work in academia or the private sector.

Archives and Repositories: TRG has archived its materials in a number of places. The specific contents of each collection were tailored to the archive or repository.

Marine Corps History Division Archives Branch: The CAOCL Collection deposited in this archive includes materials from TRG. Materials include reports and publications, project overviews and summaries, assessment reports, and similar artifacts.

Defense Technical Information Center: TRG posted many of its research and assessment reports on DTIC. Most can be located by searching on Fosher or CAOCL.

Qualitative Data Repository: TRG deposited materials and data from four projects in the QDR. Reports, project overviews, IRB-related materials, and some data from the projects are available to the public by searching for Fosher. Access to data from two of the projects requires an IRB-approved protocol.

Marine Corps University Human Subjects Research Archive: All IRB records from TRG's projects are retained in the university's centralized storage. These records are accessible only to IRB-approved personnel.

Open Anthropology Research Repository: Starting in September 2022, a selection of reports from TRG is being deposited in the OARR.

For more information, contact
Dr. Kerry Fosher, Director of Research
kerry.fosher@usmcu.edu

Trust in the Marine Corps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Contents

Executive Summary

This paper offers Marines' accounts of how trust lives and dies in the Marine Corps. As with any organization, the Marine Corps and its members rely heavily on interpersonal and organizational trust to carry out Marine missions. And like any organization, the Marine Corps has spaces both where trust thrives and where it struggles. These Marines tell both stories – the good and the bad – and provide leaders their perspective on what is working and what is not. Key takeaways include:

1) <u>There is a lot of good going on</u>. Marines recounted myriad stories of good horizontal and hierarchical interpersonal relationships and, through their words, gave evidence that they know what it takes to make trust thrive in the Marine Corps.
2) There are challenges with interpersonal and organizational trust. Marines had much to say about the breakdown of peer and leader trust. <u>Many of the stories revolved around micromanagement and self-interest</u>. This could have more to do with the prevalence of accountability processes (the flourishing of an "audit" culture) than with the quality and qualifications of Marines.
3) <u>There are just some bad people out there</u> who break trust through action and intent. They seem to be the outliers.
4) <u>Marines tell of their challenges and concerns with performance evaluation and accountability measures and how that impacts trust in them</u>. When Marines face such obstacles, they report mixed outcomes, dependent on whether they have trusted leaders who take care of their Marines or ones who appear more self-focused. More challenges arise when Marines have one of those bad people at the helm.
5) <u>The intersection of trust based on position and trust based on shared identity warrants further attention through the exploration of the boundaries of Marine identity</u>, as the Marine Corps diversifies its force.

What follows is "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of Marine lived experience through the lens of trust.

Introduction

Teamwork starts with trust and mutual respect. Mentor and listen to your fellows Marines. Get involved and learn more about them…where they're from…the struggles they face…the ambitions they have. Every Marine has a story. Find ways to interact and talk to each other. Set goals for your team and yourself and lay out a path to get there. Identify and address each other's personal challenges early. Don't tolerate hazing and negative leadership because they destroy morale, erode trust, and stifle initiative.

- Robert B. Neller, 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps[1]

In his February 2017 message to the force, then Commandant Robert Neller positioned trust and mutual respect as the foundation of teamwork, calling on peers and leaders alike to invest in, mentor and care for, listen to, and interact with each other. Then in March, the Marines United Facebook misconduct hit the press[2], interrupting that message as peer relations, organizational and leadership response, and individual behaviors challenged the institutional and interpersonal trust upon which the organization was built and Marines rely. As part of the response to the misconduct, we in the

---

[1] Robert B. Neller, *CMC Message to the Force 2017: "Seize the Initiative,"* Commandant official correspondence (7 February 2017), 3-4.
[2] See, for example, Thomas James Brennan, "Hundreds of Marines investigated for sharing photos of naked colleagues," *Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting,* 4 March 2017, https://www.revealnews.org/blog/hundreds-of-marines-investigated-for-sharing-photos-of-naked-colleagues/.

Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning's Translational Research Group were asked to carry out an exploratory research project[3] looking at the topics of leadership, cohesion, and gender bias within the Marine Corps. We spoke with 267 Marines across the Marine Corps enterprise in semi-structured interviews and focus groups, a method allowing Marines to address these issues in ways and words relevant to them.

The concept of trust peppered Marines' stories of their experiences with Marine leaders, peers, and systems and processes. The Marine Corps like any organization relies on trust to lubricate Marines' relations with others and systems to accomplish its varied missions. When asked broad questions about leadership or cohesion, Marines wove trust into their discussions of idealized forms, expectations, and "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of lived experience.[4] Their stories of trusted leaders, personal aspirations and leadership ways, failed expectations, disillusionment, and maltreatment reveal the varied ways trust lives and dies in organizational life.

As you read, you will notice the prevalence of female and junior Marine voices. Both these groups are vulnerable populations within the Marine Corps, one due to sex and one due to hierarchical position. Researchers who investigate trust in organizations describe how identity and position in the organization can heighten individual awareness of trust factors and instances of trust violations. Because of that, these two populations may be more likely to discuss issues framed through the lens of trust than others.

The Marine Corps in its organizational structure and vision relies on teamwork and leadership to carry out its diverse responsibilities. According to Costigan et al., "The essential ingredient of collaborative effort is trust."[5] From the fire team to the Marine Expeditionary Force, these formations function because Marines at all levels trust those to the right and left, those above, and those below to adhere to Marine Corps core values of honor, courage, and commitment and carry out their duties competently and in the systems, policies, and procedures that create and support the chain of command. Captain #112[6] pointed out, "*If you can't trust somebody, can't work with 'em.*" Trust is the lubricant, the essential ingredient that facilitates cooperation and allows Marines to put their lives into the hands of their peers and leaders. Speaking of the role of the commander, Staff Sergeant #327 stated, "*[by] his office, the Marine Corps said, 'We trust you with X amount of Marines that you can take to combat and, essentially, they don't make it back.*" Inherent in this description is the recognition that trust involves risk. Trust involves potential vulnerability and a belief that others will watch out for your best interests. Rousseau et al. analyzed trust definitions across disciplines and distilled them down to the following: "Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon the positive expectations of the intention or behavior of another."[7] In this paper, we look at how the concept of trust displayed in Marines' accounts to deepen

---

[3] This research was conducted under Human Subjects Protection Protocol USMC.2017.0005 and Marine Corps University's academic freedom policy. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual speakers and researcher and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Marine Corps or Davis Defense Group.

[4] As participants told of their experiences in the Marine Corps, researchers at times would explicitly ask about trust to probe deeper into their stories; at other times, Marines brought it up on their own to offer explanation or frame their experiences.

[5] Robert D. Costigan, Selim S. Ilter, and J. Jason Berman, "A Multi-Dimensional Study of Trust in Organizations," *Journal of Managerial Issues* 10, no. 3 (1998): 303.

[6] A word about the participant numbering system. We originally assigned participants numbers chronologically; however, this became too difficult to manage when researchers were conducting interviews and focus groups in multiple sites at the same time. Thus, each researcher was assigned a series of numbers (100s, 200s, 300s, etc.) to apply to their participants.

[7] Denise M. Rousseau, Sim B. Sitkin, Ronald S. Burt, and Colin Camerer, "Introduction to Special Topic Forum: Not So Different after All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust," *The Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 3 (1998): 395.

organizational understanding of what is working and the nature and salience of trust concerns.[8] In our data, Marines discussed trust[9] in terms of peer relations, subordinate perspective of leaders, leader perspective of subordinates, and processes and procedures. Thus, we use those categories to structure the report. The following presents "the good, the bad and the ugly" of their accounts in the Marines' own words.

The Brotherhood – Peer Relations

The Good

We've all come from different walks of life. He's a Marine, he's my brother. I'm still going to put my life of the line for him. I'm going to trust him with my life as he would, I hope, trust me with his. That's really what it boils down to.
-   Gunnery Sergeant #633

Marines throughout the dataset described the strong bonds among and between unit members and their peers. Characterized as a brotherhood, sisterhood in some cases, or those to the right and left, Marines talked about foundational role trust played in building cohesion within their unit and among peers. Talking about a time he was stationed in California, Master Sergeant #641 offered that despite varied backgrounds, Marines came together as family. He said, "*You have the Marine Corps side where I think everybody just kinda adapts like no matter where you are from. I have friends now from that time in California that I'm still in touch with, that are from Baltimore, New York, Texas, Florida, California. You know what I am saying? … You became like- it was family, became brothers.*" Captain #120 stated,

> *In the Marine Corps, it is a brotherhood. We take care of each other. If you're the guy that doesn't, if you screw somebody else, then those are the guys, "Hey, I can't trust you to watch my back. I can't trust you. I don't want to be around you. I don't want to pull with you. I don't want to work with you." Those are the guys that are quickest to get ostracized. So as long as you show that, "Hey, you will take care of your own and take care of your fellow Marines, then you're part of the group. You belong to us. You're one of us."*

Major #303 noted through formation and shared hardship, "*you really build that camaraderie, that relationship, that trust in your fellow Marines.*" It is that willingness to accept risk because of the anticipated care and concern from others. He continued later to characterize that trust as the following:

> *I think for the most part there is a high level of trust between Marines. For example, if you're PCS'ing somewhere and you don't know anyone there, automatically, 'Hey, you know what? Friend of a Marine is a Marine. They can stay at my place until they find it." Complete stranger, whatever it may be, but because they are a Marine, you have that trust and to let them in your home to stay. So I don't think you would find that in the civilian sector, right? … There's a certain level of expectation in that you're gonna do the right thing regardless.*

Trust also allows for learning and growth because one can accept criticism or be vulnerable within a trusted relationship. Staff Sergeant #216 explained, noting that when her peers make an unknowingly inappropriate comment, she can let them know because of their relationship built on trust and respect. She offered,

> *When you meet a new person and you become more than acquaintances, more than friends, like it is a brotherhood. These are the people that I trust and that I rely on. These are my friends for life. This is my family.*

---

[8] For this quick look analysis, we coded each of the 180 transcripts for occurrences of trust and integrity to capture the varied ways and the types of experiences in which Marines incorporated trust. Then we delved into those stories and subcoded the trust excerpts to see what themes emerged from the data. This report is the result.

[9] Trust is a very complex concept. In this report, we are just looking at it from the way Marines talk about it. Please see other works from this project for deeper analysis on how trust displays in the data.

[pauses] They don't necessarily know when it's too far, and if I don't tell them, they're never gonna know. And if they don't respect when I tell them where the line is, then that's not a person that I want involved in my life. But, for the most part, they get it. There's really, really good men in the Marine Corps. They just don't know.

Many who have read other reports from this project and the resulting reporting will recognize Staff Sergeant #216 as one who recounted some pretty bad experiences in the Marine Corps. She did not discount those experiences nor the impact they had on her; however, she offered this perspective that positions trust in her fellow Marines in her framing of her experience in the Marine Corps.

The bad experiences that I've had and the bad Marines that I've had to work with in my Marine Corps career didn't even compare to the good experiences, to the benefits of my career, to the things that I love about it, to the organization. Like, for this one guy that's gonna pull me off of the gate in the middle of the night, there's like 25-50 brothers of mine that I'm best friends with, that I have great relationships with, that would back me up in a heartbeat. Like I would- if they ever saw that happen, would beat the shit out of the guy. Like they would stand up for me, and they would treat me like a sister.

Marines in this dataset described how these relationships helped them through tough times, face fears, and accomplish their work and how such relationships sustained them throughout their careers. Sergeant #611 put it like this,

When peers that are really, really close to me, they're more empathetic [to the challenges she is facing]. They're more sympathetic as well. They understand. And when I need it, they help me push through a lot. If I'm having all this stuff going on and I'm still- … on top of doing all this, I am going to college, and obviously, I have to still make time for the gym and everything so I'm strong, and then the next day, I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to be really tired. I don't know if I'm gonna be able to wake up" or something, and my peers are there for me. They're like, "Hey, we'll make sure we come knock on your door. We'll give you a call. We'll call everybody. If we have to, we'll send somebody. We will come pick you up" or anything. They're always there no matter what I need.

The Bad and the Ugly

I don't really see that much camaraderie in the Marine Corps now at all to be honest with you. I think a lot of Marines are just like- they just go their own way. I mean they might have a couple of friends here and there, but I don't really see a whole lot of like camaraderie or brotherhood or whatever.

- Master Gunnery Sergeant #231

Of course, Marines also discussed times when peers broke their trust, straining the brotherhood concept. **Marines' accounts centered on the violation of the trust agreement through self-focus or behavior that lacks care and acceptance**. Staff Sergeant #070 talked of his friend's disillusionment with the lack of camaraderie as the motivation to separate from service. He explained,

I remember I was talking to my buddies. He was a staff sergeant. He's like, "Hey, man, I'm getting out." I was like, "Why you getting out? You just picked up staff sergeant. That's probably the greatest thing you've ever accomplished." You know? … He's like, "Nah, man, because everybody out here is [sighs] they ain't playing like a team. Nobody has each other's backs. Everybody's just in it for themselves.

Captain #120 also noted this self-focus or lack of team spirit. He stated,

There's a lot of competition, especially when I went for the board, the Marine Corps was only retaining 55 percent of the officers that were on the board. So a lot of good officers were being kicked to the door. So there was some that felt like they had to make themselves look better above their peers and try and tear their peers down because of that competition. So. Wasn't very widespread, but it did occur. … To be honest, my biggest issue was actually with somebody of the same characteristics as myself, you know? Caucasian male, very similar upbringing, everything, and yet, that was his thought on how he could get ahead, get that designation. … So it created an issue with a lot of the other – at the time, I was a lieutenant – with … a lot of the other lieutenants that was within

the unit. … He kind of became the outside guy because up to this point, all the lieutenants, we took care of each other. We were all kind of in the same boat. We were learning. We were new to this. But he took a different route, and that was kind of a stab in the back. And so, you know, "Hey, if we can't- if I can't trust you to take care of me, why would you expect me to do the same for you?" So he kind of was, I don't want to say ostracized, but everybody was cautious around him. He didn't have that trust.

Rumor and gossip challenged peoples' trust in their peers as well. This concern was raised primarily by female Marines.[10] Corporal #634 offered, "*There's just too much, like I said, too much like high school drama. Like there's just too much petty, catty, like 'I need to gossip about that with somebody.' … Like I said, this is my first unit, so I don't know any different. And I love the Marine Corps, I really do. I just don't like working with the people. Like I can tolerate them. You know what I mean? But it's like I don't trust anybody.*" Sergeant #601's description shows the cattiness prevalent in units amongst peers. Discussing the complicity of women in the problem, she stated,

> *The other thing is females do that to other females, too. They'll make comments about them and not respect each other either. So it's not just a man problem; it's the culture in general, but just knowing it's not just male Marines, it's also females. Females are mean to other females. And, you know, "I'm sitting here. I don't like you, so I'm going to go tell friggin' Sergeant So-and-So over here, 'Oh, she's this kind of way.'"*

Gossip and rumors attack a sense of trust in peers and deflate the positive expectations of intent and behavior of others. Lance Corporal #060 expressed frustration about the lack of trust and respect in her as a Marine shown her through rumors. She stated, "*I tried doing everything the right way, conducting myself the right way at work, staying in the open, trusting people, … always going out with a group of friends. Tried to do everything right. And still those rumors, no matter, it doesn't matter what you try to do. Those rumors will spark.*"

Several Marines provided examples of how a Marine's actions or words fractured the bond between Marines and threw into question that Marine's character and trustworthiness. In response to her colleagues' lighthearted discussion about the Marines United Facebook misconduct, Major #605 pointed out how such behavior is much more than "*well, social media, that's how kids these days communicate*" in an emotional retort to challenge them to see how that violated the very foundation of being a Marine. She stated,

> *I'm just like, you guys just don't fucking get it. It's-it's not the use of social media. It's the person that does this is breaking our honor code. Honor, courage, and commitment. How can a person that says awful things and posts things about a colleague that they're supposed to die for- such a blatant violation of our core values. … It's not a slap on the wrist. It's not a millennial using social media. It goes against the very core of what we're made of, why we serve, why we die for each other. Like how, I mean, those men that posted those things about women on Marines United stole their honor from them. I mean, they took from them something they can never get back while they [the women] were just already in a situation that- it's already hard – being a woman in the Marine Corps.*

Gunnery Sergeant #300 told of a peer whose words of greeting at Marine Corps Training left her unsettled. She recounted, "*The one thing that stuck with me, one of the things, was one of my own peers saying female Marines shouldn't be in the Marine Corps. And, of course, the city girl, I went just back at it, 'Well, I'm here, and I'm here to stay.' But it's something that I never forgot. And if I didn't care, I would have forgotten. But I've never forgotten. I've never forgotten what he said that day.*" Sergeant #611 described how one of the Marines in her shop responded to the news that her grandmother had passed away and how that impacted

---

her sense of belonging and trust in the unit[11]. "*And then one of the Marines in my shop laughed about it. And I just looked at him like, 'I don't get what's so funny. Like I'm telling you my grandma passed away, and you are laughing about it.' Like it just- I feel like the Marine Corps takes away a lot of emotions from the Marines.*" Another Marine, Major #100, compared his experience with a Marine and that with the Green Berets, stating

> *I mean, I had a guy when I was enlisted, I have a fellow Marine in my platoon put a gun to my head. I don't think you're probably going to see that in the Green Berets, I don't think. He said he was fucking around, but he put a gun to my head. … And that guy was one that said he didn't like white people either. But anyway, I don't think you're gonna see that sort of stuff in the Green Berets, that sort of behavior. … I just think it could be a higher caliber of individual.*

In an organization that needs peers to be vulnerable with each other up to the point of death, such behaviors challenge individuals' ability to trust that their fellow Marines have their back. This creates a hesitation and a tendency to self-protect. **"Without trust people assume self-protective, defensive postures"[12] that create obstacles to teamwork, personal and team growth, and, for the Marine Corps, mission accomplishment.** There is a need to restore that trust. Major #126 spoke about Marines' disparaging of "other" peers, especially women.[13] He explained,

> *Because ultimately, they need to work alongside those 'wooks,' 'WMs,' 'walking mattresses,' whatever you want to call female Marines, who really should just be referred to as Marines. They have to earn their trust. They've got to work alongside them. They've got to depend on them. They've got to depend on the black Marine who, you know, they may never have dealt with a Black person in their life. They may be a little bit racist, they may be, you know, the first joke out of their mouth when they're dealing with a black person as is, "Oh, watch out for the TV, they might steal it." You know, that sort of thing. They have to earn the trust of that black Marine, that Hispanic Marine or the white Marine or the male Marine. They all have to earn each other's trust when shit goes sideways and all of a sudden the only person that's- that's left is the person on the left or the right who could be that female Marine who before they were disparaging because they don't do as many pull-ups as we do on-on our- on the PFT. They have to believe that. Unfortunately, there aren't enough Marines who get shot at enough who see that, A) they have- they might have to depend on those other Marines and, B) that they can. That they can successfully depend on a female Marine to get them out of a jam in a firefight. Um, it doesn't even have to be a firefight. It could be, you know, whatever their job is. But they all have to work together. They have to believe that. They have to believe that by making these comments, by beli– forget about the comments– by the belief that a female Marine is not their equal, they are hurting their chances of coming out of a firefight, or coming out of the next deployment, or coming out of their training cycle successfully.*

Subordinate Perceptions of Leaders

The Good

My CO[14]'s a fantastic leader. He genuinely cares. He listens. He implements things based off what Marines tell him. He's sensitive to recommendations that are given to him. He's just not- he's not fake.
-     Captain #217

---

[11] We will revisit this scenario in the subordinate perception of leadership section as well to chart how the chain of command responded to this situation.
[12] Costigan et al., 303.
[13] See discussion below on category-based trust.
[14] Commanding Officer.

This captain's description of her commanding officer details attributes that researchers of trust across scientific disciplines identify in a trusted leader. Characteristics like honesty, reliability, openness, benevolence, humility, integrity, compassion, fairness, and competence run throughout the scientific literature[15] and Marine accounts of trusted leaders and how they inspire trust from their subordinates. Sergeant #234 talked of a trusted master sergeant, who for her captured the essence of a true leader with his integrity, honesty, and care. She stated,

> I like my master sergeant a lot. He keeps it real, he doesn't lie, and he's the true definition of a leader for me. He's there for me whether he agrees with me or not. He'll sit there and go out of his way and … even put his rank on the line to make sure that I'm taken care of and that what I want out of the Marine Corps I get career-wise, whether I get out of not. That's a true definition of a leader to me.

Subordinates expect their leaders to guide, develop, and care for them. How subordinates perceive their leaders directly impacts their willingness to follow and accept risk and not just the risk to life and limb but also the risk in challenging wrongdoing, providing input and ideas, and accepting criticism and correction. On reporting wrongdoing, Major #304 offered his thoughts on the importance of junior perception of leadership to willingness to accept risk and of leadership responsibility to act.

> If you have a command climate culture that, you know, the CO there, everybody's perceptive to it and they are vocal, "Hey, we wanna hear these reports, you know, whether you do it to me personally or anonymously," and they actually go through- … and … "investigations will be private" and that sort of thing but people know that it's taken seriously and that there are ramifications for those evil doers and those reporting are okay, then I think people are more apt to [report] because you still remain inclusive in your organization. And so, it's really driven by higher authority. And if they're seeing it from the top down, then I think the younger Marines are more likely to report it. But that pervades through, I mean, … the CO down to his department, his department heads down to their divi- you know, all that stuff. You know, if they're all saying the same thing and it's got a free flow of traffic up and down, then I think that you're gonna get people reporting what needs to get reported.

In the data, there are subordinates talking of their leaders or idealized versions and stories of leaders about how they cultivate trust with their subordinates. Together, they offer deep insight into what is working within Marine Corps leadership.

Many Marines in the study discussed trusted leaders as those who took care of them, provided individual and career development and mentorship, and helped them in the personal and professional sphere. This is the expected enactment of "Take care of your Marines" and "Mission first, Marines always." Leaders are to watch out for, support, and mentor those junior to them. "*I think with the mentorship piece as well comes a lot of trust. If they feel like you're going to lead them in the proper direction, I think there's going to be a lot more trust in there.*", stated Gunnery Sergeant #612. Master Sergeant #504 told of how his leader's pointing out a new career path made him change his mind on leaving the Marine Corps.

> I still planned on getting out of the Marine Corps. I wanted to go to sports medicine. I was already looking into schools and applying for them and accepted by a few colleges, and I didn't have much longer. But my boss told me, uh, he signed me up for contracting. "Go talk to Gunny [Name removed on accordance with human subjects protection protocol]." I was kind of like, "what the hell is contracting?" He said, "Just trust me. You're gonna want it." So I went over there and talked to him. He said, "What do you know about us other than we sit next to you every day?" I said, "I have no clue who you are or what you do." He explained it a little bit. Said, "We're

---

[15] See, for example, Roderick M. Kramer, "Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 569-98; Kimberly D. Elsbach, "Managing Images of Trustworthiness in Organizations," Chap. 11 *In Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 275-92. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004; Aneil K. Mishra and Karen E. Mishra, "The Research on Trust in Leadership: The Need for Context," *Journal of Trust Research* 3, no. 1 (2013): 59-69. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2013.771507.

a lat move at E-5 and O-3. Uh, because I've worked with you day-in, day-out, you don't need to do the essay or any other stuff. If you want to come, I'll sign off on it." So I went home, talked about it, decided to stay in, lat moved.

Corporal #640 talked about a trusted staff NCO who shielded his unit from others' meddling. "*Like my staff NCO, my current one, he's hard on us, but when it comes to other people trying to mess with us, like him? He won't let it happen. He's like, 'No, they're mine. The only person who's allowed to mess with them is me.' I enjoy that 'cause that's what I do about my siblings and all of my friends. … He's protective over whether who can mess with us and who can't.*" Captain #900 recounted how a commanding officer took a hard stand against the rumor mill following a sexual assault.

> *I remember we had a sexual assault that happened in the unit. … the CO took a hard stance on it 'cause there were people spreading, circulating rumors and stuff, and he brought everyone in and said like, "We can't have this. …" So I felt like he took a very moral stand in that to stand up for the victim and stand up for the process, and it probably wasn't easy and probably made some people not very happy about it, but I felt like he did a good job. … I would say there's been a lot of times where leaders have stood up and said something. And maybe they didn't use the perfect words or something, but they were there. They were present, and that means a lot.*

There are many examples of Marines whose leaders instilled trust through their actions.
Staff Sergeant #043 offered a story of a mastery gunnery sergeant who demonstrated care when a Marine was struggling.

> *I think it comes down to the little things too 'cause Marines see everything. So I had a master guns tell me, like, he saw a Marine out standing at the barriers, and it was in the middle- it was just a few weeks ago. It was hot. Marine didn't have any water. Marine didn't have anything. Master guns said, "Hey, go sit down. I'm gonna stand right here." And he stood there because that Marine was about to pass out. So doing those things as leaders, not necessarily saying 'I'm gonna stand your watch' or anything like that, but noticing when Marines are struggling and not being afraid to say, "you know what? You need a break. Go outside, take five, work's getting crazy." And not just pushing 'em. We have to know when to draw back.*

Master Sergeant #643 talked about a lieutenant who supported her in the flight squadron.

> *She was my protector, I would say, because working for pilots is a challenge. … I was with a squadron, and my responsibility was to debrief the flight missions, and she was there to mentor me. She took the time to help me out. … She taught me how to write those reports. She took the time to do everything. And she was there. She was definitely there. … [the pilots] started gaining the trust of me because she involved me in the process.*

Sergeant #611 from above explained how her staff NCOs helped her move in at Camp Pendleton.

> *But when I moved here … I didn't have a house, I didn't have any furniture, I didn't even know where to start, I didn't even have car. And my staff NCO was so quick. So, like my master sergeant, he found all these people and he's like here. He literally filled up my entire house with furniture. I didn't have to buy a single thing. And all of it was free. Otherwise, I would have been in so much debt. And they helped me go out and buy a car, make sure I didn't get a high APR. And I do the same for my Marines now, too. If they come here, like, I just helped find my Marine a car. He was getting a 15 percent APR. But instead we got him to get 5 percent APR.*

When asked about the check-in process with these staff NCOs, she continued,

> *I mean when I first got here-- they asked me like when I was due, if my kid was- if I had already signed up for daycare, which I didn't know I had to. There was a year-long wait list for it. And they asked me if I already had a house, which I didn't. So they helped me get that application going. They had somebody going with me everywhere to drive me around to check into places, and they had me go get the house. They had me- they had somebody with me, so I could go look at cars, and everything, so I could buy one. They asked me about like my financial situations. They asked me how my family was, how supportive they were [inaudible]. And when they found out, they were completely shocked[16]. So- and I know I have Marines who were like, "Hey, we'll throw you*

---

[16] This Marine in her interview detailed the lack of support from her family.

a baby shower," and they bought stuff for my baby. So, like a car seat, stroller crib, everything. The Marines have done a lot more for me, my family, and my kid than my actual family has.

This check-in story is what one hopes for. It can be a difficult time, especially for those most vulnerable, the junior Marines. Lieutenant Colonel #608 explained her experiences with check-in as a younger Marine, the challenge of knowing who to trust during this time, and the resulting vulnerability and need for leaders to be aware of it and take action to help their Marines integrate.

So I can remember very vividly the first time I checked into a squadron, walking through the gate. And you know, you don't really know where to go, but you're in your Alphas so- and there was a group of- … there were a couple of crew chiefs and mechanics, maybe a couple pilots who were in the smoke pit. It was right there. And they all, you know, were watching me very intently. And one of them made a comment about, you know, [in mock dude voice] "we'll see how you do when it-" – I don't even remember – but "when it came to flying something". And you know, … you just don't know. So, I did a little "oh, okay!" you know? And went up. But I can remember thinking, "Huh. I have no idea who I can trust in-in that group." … [now talking as a senior Marine] Well, I don't know what you can do about trust. But I think sometimes we're so flippant about the check in process or about integrating your new Marines into a unit, that it's just kind of- you forget not everyone's done this before. Yeah, you've gone through a schoolhouse or you've gone- but, you know, to have someone that at least you recognize as, "Oh! okay. I- yes I know you! You sent me an e-mail, and you said that I'm your sponsor." Or, "I sent you a text message." … [I]t's a different time for vulnerability, I would say. And it goes back to think about most of your young Marines. They're either late teens, early 20s, checking in for the first time. You, one, don't really know who you are. You've just come from boot camp, from your A school, from whatever it is. And you're still a deer in the headlights about this whole Marine thing, about who you are. Maybe you're struggling being far away from home. Maybe you feel liberated being away from home. Um, so. Yeah, I think there are a lot of conflicting things that are happening and definitely open up the avenue for vulnerability, and, you know, potentially putting yourself into a dangerous situation.

Having leaders help you navigate the new space and bureaucracy to set you up and welcome you to the unit fosters an environment of trust and care for junior Marines, and it provides a model for them, as seen with Sergeant #611, how she then repeated the actions for her Marines.

Honesty and integrity appeared frequently as well in Marines' discussion of trusted leadership. This spanned from being genuine to following through to admitting failures. "*I would say integrity is a big thing.*", stated Sergeant #615. Gunnery Sergeant #612 agreed, saying to keep the trust, "y*ou've got to be honest with your Marines … even if it's an answer that they're not going to like.*" This is supported in the trust literature. According to Kramer, "Research has shown that individuals are more likely to accept outcomes, even if unfavorable, when individuals trust an authority's motives and intentions (Tyler 1994)."[17] Corporal #264 offered, when describing an ideal leader,

It's anybody that you would actually want to go to for any questions you might have, work questions or not work related. They're the ones you want to be better for, I guess, and you trust them. And you believe what they say. If you can't believe what they say and you don't think they know what they are talking about, then you're not going to see them as a good leader. … If they can't follow through with what they say or keep their promises, then you're not going to trust them.

Captain #217 from above discussed how she cultivated trust within her units. She provided,

A lot of it is you have to practice what you preach. An that's really a lot of it. Leading by example, you have to practice what you preach. You have to admit your failures. I think you have to show your humanity. You have to

---

[17] Roderick M. Kramer, "Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 585.

be human. I think there's … also a mindset, again, especially on the officer side, that you have to be this picture-perfect person, who's flawless in all ways. And we all know that that's impossible.

Sergeant #273 agreed, offering that you cultivate trust by "*I think, one, showing interest like basically that you care about them and then two, being – what do you call it? – [pauses] consistent and like true to your word. Like if you say you're gonna help them out or do something, just do it, and don't say you're gonna do it and then you don't because that's how peop- that's how Marines lose trust.*" Private First Class #003 explained the importance of that, especially for reporting of wrongdoing, through her words during a focus group in Quantico. On whether to report or not, she stated,

I think it also depends on how many other conflicts are going on or how you've seen conflicts handled in the past. So if there's something that happens and you see that nobody really does anything, that what's the point of having that attention of speaking out and having to deal with everything that goes along with speaking out when you know nothing is going to happen anyway? … It goes back to the people that are there and how much you trust them. So if you have somebody that you trust is going to take care of a situation, obviously, you would go to them. But if there's not really anyone there that you trust to take care of it, you don't really have anybody to go to.

Gunnery Sergeant #001's follow-on to PFC #003's words reinforces the need for honesty and transparency from leaders to maintain trust, especially when things do not work out.

We underestimate how much Marines put their trust in us. … We join the Marine Corps, and we essentially we give our life. Not physically – some Marines do, absolutely, physically – but we put our trust in getting what we need from the people around us. We put this chain of command in place to get stuff accomplished, and when it fails you time and time again, you lose trust in the chain of command. So, if you can't trust your chain of command to do their job, why would I ever say anything? I'm just going to do my time, and I'm gonna get out. Because I can take care of myself on my own. [Moderator asks why trust some people and not others] Because they gave you a reason not to trust them. Whatever their action was, either you gave them something to help get accomplished, even if they couldn't get it accomplished, if they weren't straightforward with you about it, you lose a little bit of trust in that. So, "Hey, I know you asked me to get this done. I could not do that. This is why." You still have tru-- I mean, for me, I would still have that trust in that person because they were honest with me. They said no. I asked. They said no. The answer's no. "Okay, well at least you heard me." But, if you try and dance around it or you'll have that leader that's like, "Oh, yeah, I asked them." But it's, "Oh, yeah, I asked them," every single time, but no results ever happen. You lose trust in that too because you're like, "Did you really ask them? Because every time I ask you to ask something, there's never a response. Are you gonna tell me- don't respond to you every single time?" So, I mean, it gets frustrating, so you get tired of it.

Like Gunnery Sergeant #001 noted, **many Marines discussed the importance of having open, honest communication to building relationships and trust.** In an exchange between a corporal and sergeant, they discuss the role of communication in being a good leader and how without trust, there is no communication.

Corporal #233: Sometimes I have to give them my personal experiences so they know like, "Okay, well, things happen, you know. Um, she's not going to judge me for this," or whatever the case may be. They just have to feel open. I think she hit big on the whole hypocrisy thing. Because if you can't trust your NCO, your staff NCO, then there's nothing. Like you're not going to do what they're telling you to do, you're not going to feel comfortable doing anything, basically, because there's no trust. So I think she hit big on that.

Sergeant #234: Yeah, I agree with her. 'Cause a big thing I'm about is without having trust, you can't build communication; without communication, you can't build trust. So I know I'm approachable. … I'm not going to yell at you unless I have to. Now if you make me yell at you, you know, you did wrong. Now, know what am I going to do though? I'm going to yell at you, then I'm going to wait a bit, I'm going to let it sink in, then I'm going to come back and talk to you like, "You know why I yelled at you? You know why you did this? You know why I'm here? I'm just here so that you guys can get this so that you guys can fix that mistake." I do like to bring some of my personal life into it because it does help. It does. 'Cause sometimes

> *Marines, you don't have the similar background, but they have somewhat of a background of the same. So they can understand where you're coming from and that helps you out a lot. A looot. … You should be able to talk to your Marines. If my Marines could come talk to me, then I know that I'm a good leader.*

Corporal #269 agreed. "*You got to sit down, and you got to talk to Marines, like have a PME*[18]*, you know. … Sit down and talk to 'em and be like, 'Hey, this is my life. Anybody else want to share?' And they'll trust you a little bit more and a little bit more.*" Master Gunnery Sergeant #321 offered his experience.

> *Working in the S4 in the logistics area – the S4 is where a lot of Marines with issues in the unit get placed, working parties and stuff like that usually come out of our office – so my experience coming up, I've always had Marines that have issues. So I've always had to deal with them, and I've always had to learn like what's going on. And some of these Marines where their chain of command felt that they were lost causes, all it took was a conversation with them and building that trust.*

According to Kramer, one key attribute of trustworthy leaders is subordinate trust in their benevolence, which "refers to individuals' beliefs that authorities with whom they deal are well intentioned and honest in their decisions."[19] As evidenced above, these Marines' accounts provide leadership examples throughout the rank hierarchy that embody this attribute.

The Bad

We're not leading Marines and taking care of them.

- Master Sergeant #236

There were also many Marines in the study who talked about the failure of leadership to live out and up to the expectations of them as Marine leaders. They told of leader self-interest, stripping junior leaders of authority and purpose, jeopardizing their subordinates' career path, bad behavior, and cruelty and discussed how these acts undermined the trust that undergirds unit cohesion and a sense of belonging. These stories offer a glimpse into what is going wrong in the Marine Corps. As Savolainen et al. point out, "trust is fragile in nature and, thus, difficult to repair (Schweitzer et al., 2006). In order to repair trust, it is critical to first understand how it was damaged, since different means of damaging trust are likely to require different reparative response (Schoorman et al. 2007)."[20] These stories help to do that. While not the only place where trust is interrupted, the fractured subordinate-leader trust relationship was the one most referenced.

The emphasis on self exhibited by some leaders frustrated many Marines in the study. This self-interest was characterized as a willingness to sacrifice junior Marines for personal advancement or to protect self. "*Some leaders that I am disappointed with are those that, you know, [short pause] they don't really care about Marines. Like I said, there are those that are more concerned about themselves than necessarily the Marines.*", stated Major #303. Staff Sergeant #519 explained, "*I've known master sergeants that were like, 'You know what? My career is more important than sticking my head out for this young guy or my counterpart.'*" Gunnery Sergeant #046 saw the same thing from some officers, providing "*I had a captain and a major once tell me – and it was the most offensive thing I have ever been told by a leader – is that I am too quick to fall on my sword for subordinates. And it made me sick to my stomach because I wear these chevrons for the benefit of my subordinates.*" First Sergeant #220 pointed out, "*Image is everything, unfortunately, right now. It's like – I don't know. … People are more worried about their image than how your junior Marines are perceiving them. I was like, 'your image is not important if your junior Marines don't trust you.' So I do see that. It's like*

---

[18] Professional military education.

[19] Kramer 1999: 586.

[20] Taina Savolainen, Palmira Lopez-Fresno, and Mirjami Ikonen, "Trust-Communication Dyad in Inter-Personal Workplace Relationships – Dynamics of Trust Deterioration and Breach," *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* 12, no. 4 (2014): 235.

they're chasing billets." Lieutenant Colonel #901 explained that leaders are not holding people accountable or speaking out against wrongdoing "*because they want to command or they want to get promoted or they want their fitness report. Recent command we were at, the common running joke was certain people, although they were the ones doing things that were in violation of the UCMJ[21], made general officers feel good about themselves, so they were the next new commander. They were the next hand-chosen position.*" Lieutenant Colonel #618 had a similar perception. He stated, "*That is 'cover your ass' stuff that I was flabbergasted by. So it's a rewarded leadership style. The asshole leadership style – also very well rewarded. … I think maybe you guys would maybe call it toxic leader. I just call them assholes. They care about themselves, only themselves, couldn't care about anybody else, and they will flame any of their people.*" Corporal #233, in talking about one of her sergeants, explained,

> There are different ways to lead people. You don't always have to be knife hand, knife hand, knife hand. 'Let me yell at you. Let me blast you in front of everybody.' … And that's just the way she was. She only looked out for herself. And the higher-ups, they were like, 'Oh my God, she's great. She's amazing.' But everybody else in the shop were like, 'if you all can only see the real her. … She actually made me want to leave. Like before she left, I was so done with Yuma. I wanted to get out of the Marine Corps.

Many subordinates also discussed the rise of micromanagement and not allowing junior leaders to exercise the roles of their rank and position and stripping them of their authority and sense of purpose. Captain #642 explained, "*There's a lot of people, I think, that were starting to develop in some ways, I think, a culture of micromanagement. And so I think that pushing authority down, I mean, that's the Marine Corps. That's what the Marine Corps claims we do best. But there's tons of examples and there's tons of ways that I think the Marine Corps doesn't necessarily do a good job at that.*" Gunnery Sergeant #046 stated,

> I mean, I've seen battalion commanders micromanage company commanders to where the company commander is like, "Why am I even- why do we even have a job? I have to present all of my COAs to the battalion. I have to ask permission from my battalion any time I make a decision because I have no ability to accept risk or to make any decision because the battalion's not willing to back me up." And that's rampant. I mean, it is rampant in our community, and I'm assuming around the Marine Corps. I would hate to say that this would be on the ground side, but, I mean, it's insane to see a company commander say, 'Well, I'd really like to do that. That's great, but before we do that, I need to go ask the battalion commander.' I'm sorry. What? This is a company exercise. This is a company mission. This is a company priority. This is what we do as a company. … You are a company commander. You should be able to employ your forces as you see fit because you're empowered to do so by your commander. That's not the case.

Captain# 005 offered his experience coming into a battalion where the previous battalion commander,

> had been an extreme micromanager, which let to people working insane hours even before they locked on for deployment. And it really damaged a whole generation of Marines because you had officers doing NCO work, NCOs doing junior Marine work, and junior Marines who weren't allowed to do a thing because everything had to be perfect. And I think even after the change of command, because of the op-tempo, because of these issues, that generated kind of distrust in the abilities of higher.

Gunnery Sergeant #013 offered personal insight of what this micromanagement looks like and how it impacts trust and mission accomplishment. While a bit lengthy, it reveals how micromanagement can fracture the trust relationship and create conditions where subordinates, because of fear, could potentially harm mission or not perform to their optimum. He explained that he had peers come to him and say,

> "You know, my corporal didn't call me because the Marine was sick, and … he just told him to go home and then brought me the paperwork. I don't understand why he didn't have the Marine come in and explain to me

---

[21] Uniform Code of Military Justice.

what was going on with him and why he was sick." Why? He went to a competent medical authority. The competent medical authority said, "Hey, you're sick. You don't need to be around other people. Go home." And the NCO took the initiative, took the Marine to the group aid station or the BAS or wherever, and then took him home. He took care of him, took the personal initiative, the personal interest in that Marine, cared for him, came back, and then now that corporal is viewed upon of not taking things up higher before the Marine went home to feel better. You know, I've seen just something as small as that. You know, we all get sick. Nobody wants to deal with the BS of explaining to six different people why you're sick. 'Well, I don't know, I woke up and I felt like hell. You know, I can't really explain it. I wasn't out binge drinking. I wasn't doing anything like that. I just woke up, and I felt like hell because it's flu season.' But now days that corporal can't even make that sound decision. You know, I've seen it within my own unit. I've experienced it. I woke up one day. I was sick [laughs] as a dog. I had my wife drive me to the BAS because I couldn't drive. I could barely stand up. And I go to the medical. I see the medical officer. He says, "Hey, you need to go over to the emergency room because I think you might have spinal meningitis. They need to do a spinal tap." I go over to the emergency room, and my phone's blowing up from my senior leaders as to "Why are you so damn sick? What's going on?" Well, then the doctor comes in and sees me. I text them back an hour later, "Hey, they're not going to do it. It's just real dehydrated, everything like that, couldn't keep enough fluids down." "Well, you need to make up your mind next time before you tell us, and now we gotta think we gotta go over there and see you in the emergency room." Well, shit, I'm just relaying the information that I got. Now I feel like I made a bad decision call by going to medical. And that's what I mean. Like it's hard to say who the ideal Marine is when you can't even be sick without getting six million questions as to why you're even sick. That makes no sense. And when you see the young Marines that are trying to take care of their Marines, you know, they're a corporal, and this is their first time of really empowerment to take care of Marines, to see the wellbeing, to get that opportunity to remember everything that they said, 'when I become a leader this is what I want to do. I don't want to do this.' But when they do, they're still getting their hand smacked for trying to be that ideal Marine because they didn't run it through six other people before they let a Marine go home and rest to feel better, to get back in the fight tomorrow or two days from now. … But now that corporal is looked upon differently because he took the initiative to take care of his Marine so he could feel better. And that's just like a small, small thing, but, I mean, if we can't do that, imagine how our junior Marines feel when it comes to a bigger task. Now they're going to be hesitant. Then you're going to be mad at them because they hesitated and didn't make a decision fast enough because they remember the simple thing that they tried to do, they got their pee-pee smacked for it. And then we wonder why the culture's changing, you know, why Marines aren't reporting things, why they aren't saying things. Well, shoot, I mean, go back and look at the smallest thing and ask that Marine, 'what made you hesitate?' 'Well, I remember that one time ….." We've got to go back and look at the small things that we're doing that's making Marines scared to come forward about the smallest things because they have before, and somebody's gone high and to the right, but that's just leadership now days. … There's a huge trust issue in the Marine Corps now.

Corporal #634 noted that "*the higher-ups kinda take out power being NCOs. We can't really be NCOs. We can't push paperwork. We can't like give a- without a staff NCO being like, 'No, that's not necessary. Just leave it be. It's fine.' Like no, it's not fine. We gotta correct certain things. … If you ask like any of the NCOs in my unit, they're like our power is being taken away kinda.*" It is interesting to note that many, not all, of those commenting are at the mid-level officer and enlisted ranks, potentially indicating their having enough experience within the chain of command to offer commentary.

Micromanagement erodes subordinate trust in leaders. One facet of a trustworthy leader, according to Kramer, is a leader's recognition and validation of subordinate value and "sense of full-fledged membership"[22] in the organization. Lester and Brower found that "Our findings highlight

---

[22] Kramer 1999, p 586. Also, see Amy C. Edmondson, "Psychological Safety, Trust, and Learning in Organizations: A Group-Level Lens." Chap. 10 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 240.

how important it is for supervisors to communicate through their actions that they perceive their subordinates to be trustworthy."[23] That sense of "felt trustworthiness"[24] inspires trust in that leader. The experience of Master Sergeant #643, comparing his experience with another of his same rank, reveals the threatened sense of felt trustworthiness of subordinates. He said, "*In any move I make, I have to get approval. And in any move that he makes, there's no need for approval. He can just make it. … Slows me down. It's micromanaging. It tells me that you don't have trust of the decisions that I'm deciding. So then what am I doing here? I think I earned some trust since I'm confident that I can make decisions. But yet, it's not- it doesn't matter.*" Major #402 recounted similar frustration with micromanaging of even liberty. He explained,

> *Like the whole leave package. It was during 06 when you had the 45-page liberty packet for a 96[25], and I can remember talking to guys like, "I'm not going anywhere because I don't want to fill out a package. Like this is miserable. I'm getting out of the Marine Corps because I'm tired of doing this every weekend." And I was kind of thinking like if we can't trust you to do a holiday, then why we giving you a half-million-dollar vehicle to go drive? … I think we lost a lot of good people because of … babying them.*

First Lieutenant #047's words show the lack of value he feels his leadership places in him and his sense of futility and how he perceives that negatively informs his ability to foster trust with his junior Marines.

> *I like to think there's a sizeable percentage of individuals who like myself came into the Marine Corps to develop their leadership potential, to become better mentors, to empower their people, to better ourselves as a junior officer staff, junior officer corps in order to best mentor and empower our people to as is said, return them better citizens. We can't do that. We're not – we're the button pusher. We're not allowed to be leaders. So when we're talking about why people are leaving I would say from my limited experience in the junior officer corps, we're not allowed to even be Marines. … We are generalists at our core. The Marine Corps is a generalist organization. Every Marine are riflemen. I think that's good. It has expanded. However, I'm not even allowed to be an officer. I am an unnecessary link between someone else who is going to make a decision and the people who they're making the decision about. I am not allowed to affect that change. … I am a connecting file. … I'm a repeater. I'm a repeater in a network, and I can't do anything about it. … I like to think I can affect my Marines' trust of me, that they know I have their best interest at heart, that I can go out and advocate on their behalf to the best of my ability, but when I come back with negative responses, when I fail over and over again, it doesn't change anything. … So even if you have initiative at the lowest ranks, I want to say the NCO, staff NCO-junior officer ranks, it's not going to go anywhere. It's going to create a temporary shield around those Marines, which I am a firm believer is a very big part of our job. You are a shit filter. Great. But when your filtering device is cut out from higher because you're no longer allowed to exercise judgment in what you're filtering, why are you there?*

This micromanagement also contradicts the heart of mission command, a key tenet of the Marine Corps' command philosophy that relies of the trust relationship.

> Mission Command is the leadership philosophy that compliments and supports the maneuver warfare philosophy of the Marine Corps. Rooted in service culture and fundamental to our warrior spirit, Mission Command is a cultivated leadership ethos that empowers decentralized leaders with decision authority and guides the character development of Marines in garrison and combat. Mission Command promotes an entrepreneurial mindset and enables the strong relationships of trust and mutual understanding necessary for decentralized decision making and

---

New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004. She places this sense of subordinate value as an attribute of a psychologically safe environment, something trust contributes to but does not create alone.

[23] Scott W. Lester and Holly H. Brower, "In the Eyes of the Beholder: The Relationship between Subordinates' Felt Trustworthiness and Their Work Attitudes and Behaviors," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 26.

[24] Lester and Brower, 25.

[25] Long weekend.

the tempo of operations required to seize the initiative, degrade enemy cohesion and strengthen our own cohesive relationships in the crucible of combat.[26]

Furthermore, it does not allow for the development of the strategic corporal. "*I'm saying there is, as the institution likes to call it, a trend of centralized leadership when like I said before, our strength, our critical strength, as stated in our doctrine, is the strategic corporal. We no longer give trust to our strategic corporal as an institution.*"[27]

Other Marines discussed leaders who broke their trust by not following through, taking care of problems, or keeping their word. Corporal #264 put it this way, "*If they don't follow through, if they're like, 'Okay, yeah, I will get that done for you.' And two days later you're like, 'Oh, hey, sergeant, did you do that?' They're like, 'Oh, I forgot.' And it's just like, if they can't follow through with what they say or keep their promises, then you're not going to trust them.*" Major #304 noted how not taking care of problems indicates lack of care, breaking the benevolence pact, and the impact that has on future action once the trust is broken.

> *So if someone does say, "Hey, whatever it is," say, "we shouldn't be doing this." And everybody's like, "Whatever." And the CO, you report it through, or your normal chain, and nobody pays attention to that. And that's [chuckles] that's an echo heard around the world inside that unit, that the command doesn't actually care about what's going on. And so then people are less likely to speak up against those sort of things for fear of retaliation, for fear that they're not gonna be included, because I think most people argue that being a Marine, … you wanna be part of the club, so to speak. You wanna be part of the unit.*

Corporal #637 agreed with the major's assessment that leadership lack of action can breed a fear and lack of trust in how a leader will handle a problem. "*Junior Marines or Marines in general, they just don't feel comfortable when reporting it because they don't trust their leadership. It could have happened where before they got kicked to the curb or something. But if they don't trust them, they're not going to report it. And then the problem is still going to be there.*" He continued by offering a personal example when asked by the interviewer, "But like I think other people look at the option of you know requesting mast or some of these specific procedures, and they say, 'why don't they have enough intestinal fortitude to go do that?' Do you have an answer for that?" It is insightful to read his whole account, as it shows how leadership inaction, in this case to address perceived unfairness in professional evaluation, and a break in trust can lead in the end to a Marine's deciding to separate from the Marine Corps. He answered,

> *I do. Because we're scared. … This is actually a personal- this happened to me. Something happened one time, … I talked to my gunny, "Hey, I don't feel comfortable about this. … I'm coming to you because I need help, and you're the Gunny, so I'm supposed to-" and he'd be like, "well, yeah but you know." I went to talk to him into his office. He kind of kicked me to the curb and told me to just f--- off. But it's not a big deal. Just leave it alone. And I'm like, "Well, what the hell?" You know? That's not right! … I'm coming to you, trusting you because I have an issue. And I don't have enough rank to do something about it, but maybe you can. … He tried once talking to the person that gave me a scoring issue, his supervisor. But when he was told no, like he- that was it. Even though he knew it was wrong, he didn't do anything else. He was like, you know, "Just leave it alone. It happens to everyone." And that's my problem. Why does it have to happen to everyone? You know? It doesn't have to be that way. If someone works really hard for something, they earned it. It's not that they deserve it. They earned it. So that was my issue. So now every time I have a problem like, a legit problem, I'll just talk to someone else instead of my own leadership. There are some people in the leadership that really do trust. And if I have and issue, I will go up to them. But as far as it comes down to him, probably, I won't.*

---

[26] *Marine Corps Operating Concept*, 3rd ed, (June 2010), 16-17.
[27] First Lieutenant #047.

It is important to remember, like First Lieutenant #047 above, **some leaders may not be able to follow through due to circumstances beyond their control.** Though there is no way to ascribe intent on the gunnery sergeant in this story, it is important to note how the lack of communication translated into lack of care and ability to trust. Savolainen et al. précis earlier research findings on lack of communication, stating "'the silence', i.e., lack or very poor communication creates distrust and sooner or later leads to trust breach and needs for trust restoration (Ikonen, 2013; Csik, 2012)."[28] Being open and honest and having transparency are critical to maintaining trust. Master Sergeant #044 described how she shares schedules and rationale with her Marines and the impact it has within the unit.

> *[O]nce you become more open like that, the Marines will trust you more. That's what I found, and that's what's worked for me, and that's why I say with the respect being a two-way street. Because I feel like if I was afforded that much information when I was a junior Marine or kinda spoken to on a level where, you know, it was kinda straightforward, "Okay, this is what's going on" and it wasn't like hidden behind a closed curtain, that you had to have the secret handshake or a password to- then it would have been a lot different for me in my first four years.*

After seeking advice outside of his chain of command, Corporal #637 from above was able to approach his sergeant major who listened and was able to "*help me out a little bit.*" The corporal explained what would have happened if he had not found the sergeant major.

> *Probably would have been me disgruntled as hell and just not caring anymore. Going from me leading a shop, or whatever, to just not doing anything.[29] Because if other people are not doing it, then I'm just not going to do it. "Okay, you know what? If I'm not getting the getting the rating I deserve, then I'm not going to be good for promotion. So why compete when you don't get what you want you deserve when you compete?" So I work- honestly it sounds bad. But I try- I would have been disgruntled. That's it, and it would have taken me a couple of months, probably more, I don't even know. Well, a bit of time to just bounce back and snap out of it or just completely just go with the flow through the cycles until my time was up and I'm out.*

As to why he chose to not reenlist, he explained,

> *Sometimes no matter how hard you work, your efforts don't get noticed. So I don't know what's in the mind of- it's probably from my personal experience right now, but your efforts sometimes don't-don't get noted. And when it comes down to like, "Oh, that's how the process works." You know, you're that gunny or that staff NCO, staff sergeant or whatever, "Oh, it just works. Like that shop just works itself out." Well, no, it just doesn't work itself out. There's someone there running things. There's little gears running, but it's not just like "Oh, yeah, I'm staff NCO for so and so shop." Well, no, it doesn't work that way. If you're not there knowing your Marines and knowing what they do, then what are you doing as staff NCO? That's a problem. So one of the reasons why, it's because of that.*

Marines also reported leaders who treated them poorly. Lance Corporal #060 talked of her immediate leadership talking behind her back and how that eroded cohesiveness in the platoon.

> *They wouldn't necessarily treat me horribly at work, but there was times where I just didn't trust them at all just because of the things that I would hear about them saying behind my back, they things that they were saying to other Marines in my shop, in my platoon. They never looked out- and these are like my NCOs – and they never looked out for me. They kind of went out of their way to kind of talk crap to other people within my unit. …*

---

[28] Savolainen et al., 238.

[29] Research shows that work performance and motivation will decrease when subordinates perceive inequitable performance evaluation, among other things. Organizational researchers often refer to this as a type of psychological contract breach. Bal et al.'s research shows "that when employees perceive that the organization does not fulfill its promises and obligations [the breach], employees reciprocate by reducing their efforts in the job." See P. Matthijs Bal, Dan S. Chiaburu, and Paul G.W. Jansen, "Psychological Contract Breach and Work Performance: Is Social Exchange a Buffer or an Intensifier?", *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2010): 257, 268-269.

They never treated me bad to my face. … But there was definitely that, I guess, [pause] bade vibe from them …, which then in turn would affect the cohesiveness within the platoon.

As did Corporal #145, who provided, "*It's not happened once but twice now that I've been talked about behind my back by the people that I'm supposed to trust and work for and trust that they're not gonna do that. I can tell them …, but he's my boss. So he can- he's gonna do it regardless.*" Gunnery Sergeant #300 described incidents involving several leaders. Talking of three of the leaders, she recounted,

But I did have one of my sergeant- female sergeant, African American, and the PT gear that I was wearing, she's like, "Tell me why Latinas always have to dress like that." So that's when I first started experiencing probably the race thing. Snd I was kind of like, "I don't even know how to answer that. I don't know." So that was kind of weird. … At Lejeune, I had a gunny that I remember telling him, "Hey, the Marines are ready to be dismissed." And he'd be like, "Well, if you dance for me first." And that's when I started speaking up. I was tired, and I said, "Well, I guess they're going to sleep here. And we're not leaving." Every 96 he would invite me to his house. Every 96. "Why don't you come over?" And I was like, "No." … I remember the senior enlisted of where I worked was trying to hook me up with his nephew, which was a sergeant too. I didn't want to hook up with him. That master guns changed completely how he treated me after that. He was like, at every little thing, he would just like, "Why did you do this? Why din't you go to this training? Why don't you…" I'm like, "Um, I have a 1-year-old at home, and I can't just drop her." But he was just attacking me once I didn't want to hook up with his nephew.

In the above section, we heard good stories about the check-in process. Here, the exchange between Sergeant #041 and Corporal #040 point out the negative side of check-in for junior Marines.

Sergeant #041: There was only one time where I felt singled out when I checked into a unit. I had my first sergeant bring me into his office and said, "Hey, I know you're a female. Just don't sleep around."

Moderator: And you don't think that was useful.

Sergeant #041: No. I mean he's a first sergeant. It's not something you should say to a new join. And I've had other first sergeants that have brought me into their office and they're really nice. They ask me if I have any concerns, if I have a car, if I have a way to get around, if I know the area, stuff like that. That's stuff that feels genuine.

Corporal #040: I literally had the exact same thing happen to me.

Moderator: You had a first sergeant say, "Don't sleep around"?

Corporal #040: Yes. Yes.

Moderator: And that's it? Just the one thing. Welcome to the unit.

Corporal #040: At schoolhouse. Yeah. And he like literally was yelling at me. And I didn't do anything. I was just – it was into the schoolhouse, but I was kind of taken aback, like "What just happened?

It is reassuring that Sergeant #041's experience was a one-off; however, for some Marines that could be enough to force silence about or acquiescence to future bad behavior, as it sets a bad tone and shatters expectations of these vulnerable members. After recounting several incidents of sexual harassment, leadership mistreatment, and worse, Lance Corporal #624 described a unit environment full of mistrust and fear and talked about not having anyone to turn to within her unit. She then expressed a sense of futility about seeking change.

Lance Corporal #624: [W]hat if they snitch and tell the other NCOs? Or like they know who I'm working with, who are the people I'm with. And so I can't tell them what they do. Well, that sounds really bad. But like I-I can't tell them like what goes on if they're already part of it. … I notice myself changing since I've been in the fleet. Like I've- like personality-wise. Like, I don't know. I get- I'm different. Like I used to be a lot more- like happier, more patient. I thought it was just like work stress, but then now … it's not worth [trying to stop people]. No, 'cause it's not- it's not only me. It's all the female Marines. Like you- there's always like that one belligerent dude that's gonna like – even if you fix it – there's always that one belligerent

> *dude that's gonna turn it back around. … [E]veryone is just waiting for the NCOs to start the hazing again. Like, we're all just waiting for it. So far it still hasn't-*
>
> Interviewer: *Why? What's gonna happ- like what's gonna trigger it? Just time after the-*
>
> Lance Corporal #624: *Frustration. Like they can't do what they wanna do. So they're gonna- we're just waiting for them to explode or have us to stay there until like 8 o'clock or something, past like the normal time. I don't know. We're just waiting for it.*

Other Marines talked of the volatility of leadership. Captain #016 offered his perspective, stating,

> *And it seems to be a common trend amongst a lot of these commanders getting fired, is they're unpredictable. They berate their subordinate leaders, and you're constantly guessing what's right. Like "What does the boss want for me to do today?" So you kind of turn everyone- like as a commissioned officer or a senior staff NCO, we're here for the institution, we're here to represent the Marines, we're here to represent the institution and kind of find that balance in between it all. But if your immediate supervisor just constantly berates you and belittles you and you're always afraid of what they want to make them happy, you turn into a 'yes man' that doesn't- you're not doing what's right for the institution and the Marine if you're afraid to voice your opinion because of the rank based system. I mean, everybody knows what rank you are in the room, but if you have to come in the room and say, 'I am the commander', then you've probably already lost the respect of the majority of your subordinate leaders that sit at that table.*

In a focus group exchange, several enlisted Marines discussed their experiences with unpredictable leaders. After Gunnery Sergeant #001 made a comment about bipolar leaders, the moderator questioned whether that happened a lot.

> Gunnery Sergeant #001: *When I was a junior Marine, yes, absolutely. [agreement from others] I worked at a duty station. I was Lance Corporal, PFC, literally terrified to go into work every single day because I didn't know which – one person – I didn't know which person I was going to get that day.*
>
> Private First Class #004: *If they were going to be happy or mad.*
>
> Moderator: *So how do you police yourself to not set them off? What do you do?*
>
> Private First Class #004: *Sometimes it's not even you. It's if, say, a higher up makes them mad, and they want to yell at their junior Marines. But it's not really their fault. It's like everybody's fault. You never know.*
>
> Private First Class #003: *I don't think there really is a way to police yourself to not set those people off because if they're in that mood, it doesn't matter what you do. And I think that's part of what makes it so-so unpleasant to be around those people because you could do the same exact thing two different days, but you could have them be in a different mood, and they'll react totally differently. So there's not really anything you can do.*
>
> Staff Sergeant #002: *I just wouldn't approach them. Yeah, I'd just stay away and find somebody else to go to.*

That was the advice that Corporal #640 gave to a subordinate faced with a staff NCO who had a bad reputation for poor treatment of subordinates. He told his subordinate to,

> *"Avoid him." I was like, "Avoid him at all costs." He was like, "Why?" "He's gonna yell at you. No matter what you do – you could be doing everything great – he's gonna yell at you, and if he sees me around, he's gonna make sure I yell at you. You need to know there are certain people in the shop, in this squadron, that will- they'll make it their job to make your life miserable." At least it seems that way, and that's the way he seems- it- so almost everybody in my squadron was like, "Avoid- there's certain people- there's two or three people." They were like, "Make sure you avoid these people."*

Others discussed leaders' actions that impacted or could have impacted their career trajectory negatively. Sergeant #041 told of a situation where an immediate supervisor tried to undermine her chances at a meritorious promotion and then treated her poorly afterwards.

I was put on a board by my staff NCO. … I was on leave, and my sergeant – the male that didn't like me – was supposed to text me and let me know, give me a heads up 'cause I was still supposed to be on leave during the board. And he was supposed to let me know so that I could check in early. He never let me know. My staff NCO sent me a text the night before the board, and she said, "Hey, just want to make sure you got your alphas ready and everything for the board tomorrow." I had no idea what she was talking about, so I spent all night rehearsing, doing everything, getting ready for the board. … [after winning the board] I got a bunch of bad comments after that. My sergeant laughed at me. He didn't even congratulate me when I ended up getting promoted the next month. None of the males in my shop congratulated me. They came to the formation 'cause they had to, and then as soon as it was over, they went back inside. … And the other thing I noticed too. The sergeant that was laughing, he was making fun of me with a staff NCO. So I think that's when I started noticing that you can't even trust staff NCOs.

One staff sergeant[30] told of her challenges getting to talk with her monitor. The monitor required her to go through someone else, an individual whom she did not trust, to talk with the monitor.

I don't know if this is a unique situation, but I've never- [inhales] I haven't heard of other Marines having to go through somebody. I understand like cc'ing your sergeant major when you're going to contact the monitor, but the monitor specifically asked that we go through this individual. Um, I don't trust him. … I trust him as far as I can throw him. And that-that doesn't…[pauses]. And the thing is-is like I've worked with him before. So, you always want to see the good in people, and you want to see that people have your intentions- good intentions at heart for you. But that-that doesn't seem like to be the case. And, you know, he even made a comment, saying like, "Oh, well! There is a spot for you here in Yuma." "Yeah, I don't want to be in Yuma anymore. Why would-" Like career progression, if anything! … But it's just like, "Why are you so heavily involved? Why is the monitor asking you to be so heavily involved?" And I know the answer. And I don't think I should say it in a recorded setting, but I just feel like I'm getting royally screwed over. And I'm not- like I don't want to whine about it because again, I understand the needs of the Marine Corps! But I've waited my entire career to be able to become a staff NCO, so at least I can have that conversation with the monitor. … I have a buddy of mine who got orders to Hawaii. And … before him and his family PCS'd, I was in San Diego for the weekend, and his family was in San Diego. So, we got together, and I was like, "How did you get orders to Hawaii?" And he's like, "Oh, I just emailed the monitor." The same monitor that I have, and I'm like, "Really? Why did you get to do that?" And he's like, "'Cause it's my career, and that's what I'm going to do." And I'm like, "I'm- I was told that I'm not allowed to do that. Like I have to go through this individual." And he was like, "No, don't do that." And I'm like, "I'm scared to not do that because I might piss the right person off, and he'd be like, 'all right, Twenty-nine Palms, there you go,'" you know? And I just- I mean, I feel like I sound like a scaredy cat. I don't want to put myself in a position where I'm gonna be stationed in Barstow, or Twenty-nine Palms. Like I've been in Yuma for three years, you know? So it's just like I'll play along because that's what the monitor wants to do. … "… I'm [loud whisper] not even asking for Hawaii." Like I'm not asking- like I just feel like I'm not having an unrealistic expectation. I just want, as a staff NCO, to have an open dialogue with my staff NCO monitor. And please be considerate of the fact that I have a school-aged child.

Providing another monitor story, Gunnery Sergeant #614 recounted the experience of someone he knew, stating,

I've been working with a guy whose monitor hated him. Hated him. And this guy ended up retiring. He actually retired last week. But his monitor did everything under the sun to try to screw him over. But then again, if you know the monitor and he likes you, you can maybe get a better assignment or something like that. …If you're a sergeant in an MOS it has a thousand sergeants, chances are you're going to get what you get. But I think after a certain point, there's definitely some good old boy network going on.

---

[30] Staff Sergeant #639, Interview, MCAS Yuma, 26 September 2017.

The Ugly

I was asked to get an abortion by an O6 because it fucked with his manning. Who the heck asks that?
- Major #201

Then there are those Marines who offered stories that represent the ugly category. This paper will not recount Marine accounts of "ugly" leadership behavior that have appeared in other MCOCR reports[31] but will present two other incidents that provide examples of the ugly side of Marine leadership. Returning to the sergeant whose grandmother had passed away and one of her peers laughed at her, presented here is the reaction from her chain of command. She received the call from her mom at work, informing her that her grandmother who lived in a different country had passed away.

> *I had to tell my staff NCO like, "Hey, I just got a call my grandma passed away, and my family wants me there. I haven't seen them in 12 years." … [A]t first, their first question is like, "Okay, do you have a Red Cross message?" Like, "does anybody actually verify that she's died?" and all those stuff, and then they like, "How much do you actually love her? Do you really want to go back?" Like just stuff like that. You know, you think, like, "Okay, my grandma passed away. I don't really want to think about all this stuff. Like what do you mean? If I really love her, you know? But then you think like, "Okay. I'm a Marine. I have to be able to put up with this. This is just what the Marine Corps is all about. They have to know certain things in order for me to go somewhere." Like my grandma's funeral was on Sunday, and it's not like I can just get to [country's name removed due to potential risk to participant] like that. And so all day I was waiting. My family was gonna fly out that same day, but I'm a Marine. I can't fly out just like that. So I asked my shop [inaudible], like, "Hey, can I go?" and "You can't. You've got to find out from Red Cross first. We can't do anything about you. … We don't know if you can buy a ticket or anything yet." So all day my family is trying to get in touch with Red Cross, and Red Cross -- there's a time difference between [country's name removed due to potential risk to participant] and here, too. So they had to get in touch with the hospital. And then, finally, the next day … Red Cross called. And then it still took time …. [I]t kinda took all the emotions out for a long time. It's like, "Okay, you have to focus on all this on top of taking care of my Marines." Because I was a sergeant at the time. So I had to take care of being a sergeant, keeping my bearing, while dealing with all this technical stuff in order to go to a funeral. [responding to the question, 'who had asked all of those questions?'] It's through the entire chain of command. They wanted to know. I guess you could say the CO, XO, first sergeant, my staff NCO, my OIC, they all want to know all these answers before I am able to go.*

When asked if this could have been handled differently or in a better way, she responded,

> *There could be. Because, like at first, right off the bat, it comes off really harsh. Like, "Really? This is what you care about right now?" … I think they could have been more like, "Okay, let's already get you started on this process. Here's what you need to do. Here is the [inaudible] your leave right now," versus being, "Okay, how much do you really love your grandma?" Like those are not the questions you should really- they should really ask. It's just like, "Okay, if you want to go, then go ahead." Because I know there is another Marine in the company whose dad passed away. … [H]e'd found out, and they were going out to the field, and his staff NCO said, "Do you really need to go to your dad's funeral? We have this field op to go to." It's just stuff like that in the Marine Corps where it's, like, that makes you think, "is it really worth it?"*

---

[31] Please see the following MCOCR Reports: Erika Tarzi and Rebecca Lane. *Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005 – Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Pregnancy Loss.* Distribution unlimited. Quantico, VA, CAOCL, 15 October 2019; Rebecca Lane, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, and Eric Gauldin. *Report to PSO: USMC.2017.0005: Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Report to Personnel Studies and Oversight Office: Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture.* Distribution unlimited. Quantico, VA: CAOCL, 30 March 2018. https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf.

As noted above, this was coupled with the callousness of her peer as he laughed at her over her grandmother's death. Master Sergeant #643, recounted her experience as a staff sergeant with a master sergeant on deployment, explaining,

> That deployment was a tough one .... That's the one that the- my boss back then, my master sergeant, there was no trust. No matter what I did, he just didn't believe that I knew anything about work or war or the threat or anything. My writing skills were not up to par, not at the way that he wanted. And he just insulted, insulted me in a way that it-it was, uhm, stressful, you'll say, in the environment. I was the night shift chief, and I had about eight analysts under me. And one time, ... we wrote something. I guess it wasn't up to par for- as an assessment. And when we came in the night shift, he had some crayons and color books on the table and took us to the back and threw it onto the table and said, "You all are not worth nothing. You all are not worth anything. You- my kindergarten kid can do better than what you guys are doing. So, I want you to waste your nights and go color." So, the lance corporals, the younger ones, corporals, they sat down and color with crayons in the middle of deployment because he felt that we were not up to par, we were not doing our job. And then, he turned around and looked at me and "You were the chief, and you can't even do your job as a chief" and started yelling at me in front of the junior Marines. And he told me- it was like, "You got the biggest color book." And I didn't color. And I told him, I said, "You can have all the color books you want. I'm not coloring." And he kept yelling at me. He was like, "You need to sit down. You're worthless." And I stood quiet, and I say, "I'm not coloring." He left. The next day, my first sergeant was involved in- everybody was like, "Don't take this. Don't take it." Because I was a staff sergeant. ... So, I asked him if we can talk the next day. And we spoke, and I told him, I said, "You don't need to treat me like that. You don't need to do that and-" But it didn't work out. The captain gave me my worst FITREP ever at that time. I guess I was in fault, and no one asked me what happened. Nobody sat me down within ranks and asked me what happened, you know, to get both sides of the story. Nobody did. At the end of the day, I was in the wrong, and my FITREP just is the worst one I ever had in my entire 20 years and the only one. ... Nobody asked me because it was a night shift. It was only him and, in that situation, and the junior Marines. That's all it was. There was nobody else, meaning a major or a captain, the first sergeant. Nobody was on deck to see what happened or to- so, they heard about it the next day, not from me, from him. But no one came and asked me what happened. He is the one that gave the story, and they took it for granted.

In this section on the bad and ugly side of leadership, the Marine accounts describe a work environment that instills fear, places subordinates in a self-protection mode, and depletes motivation. These environments can be characterized as psychologically unsafe. Kahn describes a psychologically safe working environment as one where employees feel "able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" and feel "safe in situations in which they trusted that they would not suffer for their personal engagement."[32] Major #053 offered an example of what that looks like. He described,

> I'm fortunate that I have a CO who keeps no secrets. ... I think that most commanders try to instill that. What I'm saying is I believe that the command climate at my battalion is particularly strong. What I was going to say is even things that come packaged in for commander's eyes only, he shares them with us because he values sergeant major's opinion and voice and counsel, same with me. He values that with me. ... [T]hat then permeates, that kind of trust and fairness, fairness in judgement, fairness in application, all that permeates the unit. So, I absolutely do believe that the climate that's set is fundamental to the cohesion of the unit. ... So, again, in setting the climate, trying to make things as transparent as possible. Make sure that everybody is understanding how things happen and why things happen in the battalion. And he also tries to be – he's very deliberate. Tries to be very consistent with how things are applied.

---

[32] William A. Kahn, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work," *Academy of Management Journal* 33, no. 4 (1990): 708.

When subordinates perceive a psychologically unsafe environment, they turn to defensive postures to self-protect[33], and their motivation to work, team cohesiveness, and collaboration suffer. Corporal #052 described the impact on individuals, in this case female Marines experiencing continual harassment and disrespect, in this way. When asked why female Marines do not perform very well, he responded, "*Motivation. Motivation because [pauses] it's- yeah, I think that's way because people are always making comments or just being disrespectful, and after a while, they're like, 'Okay, well, this is work now.' This isn't like a service. They see it as work, 'Clock-in, clock-out. It's the weekend. I get to take off my uniform. Whatever.' It's like a lot of people lose pride over it.*" Master Sergeant #643 from above just "*became numb after a certain amount of years. I just take it and keep going and not fight it*" because it would be cast negatively on her.

Many, not all, of the stories come from a time early in the careers of Marines. In any hierarchy, those in subordinate positions are vulnerable. However, those at or near the bottom are especially vulnerable and, according to Kramer, more aware of issues involving trust and when trust erodes or is broken.

> Because of their greater dependence and vulnerability, trust concerns are more salient to individuals in low-status positions. As a consequence, they tend to be more vigilant and ruminative about trust-relevant transactions. They also code more transactions as diagnostic of trustworthiness and can more easily recall instances of trust violation.[34]

This possibly could account for the large volume of stories. The presence of so many stories of broken trust involving junior Marines may be an area that warrants further examination.

Leader Perceptions of Subordinates

Trust goes up and down the chain, not just up.
-       Captain #230

As Captain #230 noted, trust must flow both ways in an organization. In the Marine Corps specifically, inherent in the definition of mission command is the need for trust in subordinate capability and reliability. "Effective exercise of command requires a commitment to employing mission command, the command philosophy that empowers individuals to exercise judgment in how they carry out their assigned mission."[35] Leaders must commit to trusting their subordinates' abilities and character to carry out their assigned mission and empower them to do so. Is that happening? Do leaders trust in their subordinates? Participants, through their accounts and experiences, offer their perspective on the matter.

The Good

And I think that for me the perfect Marine is a Marine that, you know, he doesn't have to get a superior first class or PFT or CFT. If the Marine can perform within standards – obviously, we don't want the bare minimum standards – but is a Marine that I can count on, they can do their job well, think creatively on their feet, still stay within the left and right lateral limits to accomplish the mission I think that is, to me, the more ideal Marine. The Marine that I know that if I got to take leave, if I've got something going on with my family, and I have a young corporal like I do now, I know that he knows his left from right lateral limits, but he's going to think critically, smart, seek guidance where he needs to go either within an order or someone within the unit, and make sound judgements. To me, that's the ideal Marine.

---

[33] Edmondson, 262.
[34] Kramer 1999, 594.
[35] Marine Corps Concept for Command and Control (2015), 7.

- Gunnery Sergeant #013

Capable and reliable are two of the prominent descriptions for trusted subordinates. Leaders are looking for those who, like Gunnery Sergeant #013 noted, can do their jobs and be trusted to stay on task and be available to step in when necessary. Captain #005 gave this example after giving a description of what makes an ideal Marine. He stated, "*I'm thinking of one NCO I had in particular where we could really do mission type orders, where I could give him a tasking and he would not only execute that tasking without any further guidance but he would knock out the follow-on tasks too. Next time that scenario rolled around, I didn't have to tell him a darn thing because when I go to task him, he'd already have it done.*" Major #303 framed it as someone "*that, hey, if you had to actually for a team to do a project, that you would want on your team. There's people that are trustworthy, hard-working, they're smart. They do what they say.*" Chief Warrant Officer-4 #514 saw this in one of his staff sergeants. He explained, "*I had this staff sergeant a couple of years ago. He retired as staff sergeant, but he was-he was phenomenal in my eyes 'cause he just- he provided so much wisdom and knowledge and oversight to the Marines.*" Corporal #640 described how he was the trusted subordinate for his leader and what that meant. He stated, "*As a lance corporal, I was the NCOIC of my shop, and [the master sergeant] knew that no matter what he did, what needed to happen, he could trust me to get it done in a timely manner.*" For First Lieutenant #307, that was what she is looking for, a trusted subordinate who she could "fire and forget." She offered, "*Like you hear the phrase 'fire and forget weapon.' If I can just fire you, know you are going to hit the target, and I can turn around and go do something else, then that's, you know.*" Captain #230 recognized the inherent capability of her subordinates, noting the need to get out of their way and allow them to do their job. "*Your Marines flourish when you back off. When you take two steps back and just watch them, they're going to flourish. And when you need to step in and say something, by all means do that.*"

This – the need to empower juniors and let them run – was echoed in many Marines' accounts. Part of this has to do with trust in systems and processes to produce capable individuals, which will be addressed further down, and part in the character of the leader. Captain #214 described how it all comes together for him in his unit,

> I don't have all the answers. And I don't come up with all the plans. I create a te- I have a team, we create a plan together, and I provide limits to your left and right. And I've been very fortunate in this unit to have a great team. [interviewer: … What makes a group work well together?] So, like I said, collaboration. But also having a strong central figure who can provide clear guidance to them, clear tasks, clear goals, clear deadlines, being able to listen to their input, and also being able to trust them. So, trust in a sense of…you know, "I'm going to leave you to do this, and you need to do it," and set a deadline that in my mind still gives me enough wiggle room that if they jacked it up, I can fix it. But on the other hand, at some point you just have to let them- you have to be able to fall on your own sword, if they make a mistake, and to hold them accountable but also not to let blame be the main driver of your decision making. So if you fail, you fail, and that's on you. But if the Marines know that their failure is something that- their success is something other people are depending on, they'll typically perform better. But that requires you being willing to fail because of their actions.

Others framed their perception in terms of their subordinates as being human adult beings with personal agency and responsibility instead of as children and how that strengthens the relationship and effectiveness of their units. They expect and trust their Marines to be able and willing to support the mission, respecting and treating them as responsible, capable adults. Staff Sergeant #327 explained,

> Because my thing with my guys was, "Look. I'm pretty sure you never went to jail before you came in the Marine Corps." "Yes. No, I've never been to jail before." "Okay. So that tells me that you know how to think. Is that

assessment correct?" "Yes, it is." "Okay. Now that you're here, you're no longer a kid. You're a grown man. You make your own decisions, and mommy and daddy are not here. And I am not your dad. I will hold you responsible and accountable for all your actions. And number three, if you have a problem, you need to bring it out. Because when you're standing in front of the boss for him to stand an NJP, it is not the time to say, 'Oh, well, my dog died, something [chuckles] happened, my girlfriend- it is not the time. And as long as you trust me, I'll do everything to take care of you." And I told them, "Hey, look at this as I'm your big brother. Might be many years older than you, but I'm your big brother. What did your big brother do when you messed up? I'll punch you in the chest. I'm not gonna do that because it's illegal here, but [interviewer chuckles] just think about those type of things. So call me at night if you have a problem." And with that, everything ran smooth. … And I think for me, 'cause I said, I like to spend time. I like to say what don't I know, and I go find it. Because when you're dealing with humans – humans are very complicated – I can't take one size fits all.

First Lieutenant #516 agreed on the need to treat subordinates as adults, empowering them to do their job. He stated,

It all goes to the top-down leadership and delegating responsibility because I can't keep track of PFC's every movements, but I know his fire team leader can. So putting the responsibility, uh, of our Marines back into their own hands and treating them like adults, because as soon as a squad leader starts treating his fire team leaders like kids and, you know, doing their job for them or same for the platoon sergeant of the OIC, um, [smacks lips] you treat them like kids, and they'll just- they'll run wild. They need responsibility. They n- it is a human want almost or it's a Marine want to be in charge of something.

Several Marines discussed how outward appearance to them was the first indication of trustworthiness. Master Sergeant #641 described how outward appearance informs his judgment of a subordinate's character, as it reveals to him that individuals' level of reliability and trustworthiness. He explained,

I judge people by their cover all the time. But I at the same time, I'm also the type of person that I'll trust you until you give me a reason not to. … It's probably part of the way I was raised, the way I became as a leader. So, initial impression, a male and female sergeant sitting at the PX, in uniform, without their cover on. I can't just straight away say black and white, they're poor leaders. Because maybe at work, they're not. But that's a basic Marine thing. So, that automatically makes me judge them on something, "Seriously? Like you know this is the basics. This is boot camp stuff. You don't go outside without your cover on in uniform. That's basic Marine 101." So, if you can't do that, then what else can't you do? What else are you're skirting the rules on? What else are you- where else are you going in your tank tops and your freaking hoochie short cut off jean shorts that, you know, with your butt hanging out? You know what I'm saying? … That's my automatic perception. It's, "If you can't do the basics, then what else are you trying to get away with?"

First Lieutenant #326 also saw trustworthiness displayed in outward appearance. "*Appearance is a big thing, and that goes to even sleeves rolled, hair, everything. It comes down to like, 'we made this arbitrary rule, and how well you follow it determines people's first impression of you as a Marine. Ad in some ways I see the benefit where it's sort of like, 'Well, if I can't trust you to do something really small, like go get a haircut, how can I trust you do something big?*" First Lieutenant #036, in a focus group, offered a similar description,

One thing I look at is how do they present themselves as a Marine? How does he wear his uniform? How does he have a haircut? Does he come in without a shave? … I look at my NCOs, and I judge-and I judge everybody. But I mean like how do you present yourself as a Marine? Because how much do you have- how much pride do you have in this institution? If I see a Marine that takes the time just to be squared away, … he takes the time to have a clean sharp looking uniform, then it tells me that he cares about the institution, probably more than he cares about himself. And I think that's a good start. It's an intangible thing. … That's one of the standards that I have on my Marines. It's like, "You're representing the Marine Corps. [unidentified participant utters 'uh huh'] We are the first ones to want to brag and tell everyone that we're the best branch of the military and all this stuff. Okay, well, look the part." … And that's one of those things I think you can look at and judge some of

these Marines on, is how they exhibit themselves as a Marine and how serious they take their career and their profession. And that's one lens you can look through.

Two captains discussed the unique relationship between officers and their enlisted leaders and how being able to trust their subordinate partners was critical to their success. Captain #600 explained, "*I was a legal officer for quite a bit. I had a female staff sergeant. We've had a couple of cases where … they would go to her first [to raise sexual or other harassment claims], and I trusted her enough to tell me what I needed to know, so I could make a better decision of how to deal with it for my commander.*" Providing his experience with trusted subordinate partners, Captain #120 stated,

> *The officer has to kind of set the standard, set the "Hey, this is the way it's going to be." … And then the staff NCO has to be out there enforcing that, ensuring that that happens. That is their role. So I mean you've got to have a lot of trust. You've got to have a good relationship with your staff NCOs. I actually, to this point, I've had great relationships with my staff NCOs. We've seen eye-to-eye. We've had great discussions. I've never had an issue with them enforcing my visions, my thoughts when it comes to executing any kind of either the Marine Corps standards or my own requirements. I've been very lucky.*

Captain #120, like Captain #230 above, pointed out that the leader has a responsibility as well, however, in allowing the subordinate the wiggle room to exercise judgment and discernment. He noted,

> *I think there needs to be [wiggle room] because everybody's got their own leadership style. … If I expect everything to be done one very specific way, then, yeah, it doesn't leave room for whatever the staff NCO's style is for, you know, kind of to do things his way as well as his own growth. So I don't like to be too rigid as far as how it is going to be done. But this is what is going to be the end product.*

This perspective, emanating from the same rank level as the micromanagement stories, recognizes what it takes to live out the mission command philosophy, suggesting mid-level leaders, while seeing challenges with certain leadership trends, also recognize and embody others that more align with the Marine Corps' command philosophy.

The Bad and the Ugly

It seems like the Marine Corps in general doesn't trust us and thinks literally thinks that we're stupid. And I think that's like a feeling I get all the time, and I'm like, "Oh my god, these are- the people in charge of me really think that I'm a blundering idiot. Gah, I didn't know I couldn't rape people, I couldn't give her any drugs.

<div align="right">- First Sergeant #118</div>

There was not as much commentary from leaders on lack of trust in subordinates. There was one major[36] who provided an example of a sergeant who betrayed her trust and that questioned her blanket trust in her junior Marines. She recounted,

> *When I was a junior captain, and I had a sergeant. He got a DUI, and he was a good sergeant, and I, you know, backed him up when he went up to NJP[37] and things like that. And then I- he had requested leave for 30 days 'cause he was going to go home. He was going to volunteer with his father and doing this great stuff. Well, then, I come to find out that he was actually not on leave, not volunteering, but in jail because he had gotten a second DUI, and he had lied. So that was discouraging because he's this- a Marine that I had defended, that I really thought highly of. And, as a Marine, like, "You just, you just lied to me." [chuckles] Right? And that was a huge blow, and I was like, "Oh my god. Is this what leaders have to face every day?" Because you want to think the best of your Marines. You want to do everything that you can. But, yeah, that really like shook me.*

---

[36] Major #303.
[37] Non-judicial punishment.

The majority came again from the subordinates' talking about senior lack of trust in them or leaders talking about the need to empower or reempower junior Marines. For example, Master Sergeant #641 talked of a potential trust gap between senior officers and senior staff NCOs, something he saw develop around 2012, at least in the aviation field. He referenced a lack of follow-through on holding Marines accountable for behavior infractions and not seeking their subordinate partners' advice and perspective. While not understanding why the senior officers lack trust in the senior enlisted, he opined it likely has to do with self-protecting commanding officers who do not want to be "the guy that NJP'd 18 Marines while he was at the command". He explained,

> *I don't think the black chevron community- right now, I think overall there is a [pause] a gap in the level of trust between the senior officers and senior staff NCOs. And I think that's where a lot of this stems from [leader self-protection]. A lot of stuff we've talked about, I think, stems from these senior enlisted advisers--you know, I'm being paid to be a senior enlisted adviser as an E8 in the United States Marine Corps. But … when I'm not asked my opinion- and not even opinion, … when we aren't asked to advise COs and senior officers are making decisions with- based on … what they feel is best, which is their right, but without not knowing what the tempo is with the boots on the ground, because they're up there in their office, and they don't see what goes on downstairs every day, it's frustrating. It's frustrating to go, "Why was this decision made?" … I, of course, I take my grievances to the master guns because that's who I directly work for. And when he goes, "I wasn't asked either." … Now the perspective is, well, the CO is making decisions based on asking one person, the sergeant major. Well, sergeant majors in aviation unit? You have very, very few that have ever been in an aviation unit. They come in, they do one tour in aviation unit, they're back to the ground side. … When we were at war for 12 years, I think we went through a process where officers had to start trusting. At the beginning of, you know, we're saying post 9/11, enlisted were entrusted by officers – because a lot of the enlisted had more experience than the officers – to go forth and execute. And I think at some point- and I think it started right around, you know, I-I'll say 2012 timeframe, … when I think you had an old breed generation of officers, the General Mattis peer group, … a lot of the lieutenant colonels now would have been junior officers when he would have been at like CENTCOM[38]. So, that's the group officers we're dealing with. And somewhere along the way, I don't know if- I don't think it's a mentality that has been bred by the senior officers …. They will be the first to tell you, you have to listen to your Marines on the ground to get the full perspective of what's going on to make thorough and educated decisions. Somewhere this group of senior officers, and I say senior – CO, colonels, lieutenant colonels, they've lost that. They've- I don't know where that trust gap is. I don't know what happened, but it's- there just seems to be- senior enlisted advisers aren't asked to advise anymore. You know, we're asked to, "Here's what I want done. Make it happen." And that works, sometimes. You know, as Marines I wanna do- go forth and do what I'm told, and I'm gonna pass to my Marines that, "Hey, this is what needs to be done," and we're gonna get it done. But when you see that, when- it's disheartening when you're telling your Marines to do something, and they're looking at you like, "Are you freaking kidding me? Like who made this decision?"*

A colonel also recounted a time when his senior leader counselled him about his leadership methods with his subordinates, blaming him for a problem Marine within the unit, one the colonel's predecessor had already identified as a challenge. After detailing the problems with this Marine and concluding "*my particular opinion on her was that she just didn't like being a Marine. She didn't want to be a Marine. And certainly, she didn't want to be a Marine in a deploying unit. So whatever caused her to join the Marine Corps was probably no longer valid,*" he explained,

> *When I was I was getting my counseling on a FITREP, the colonel said, "You're too aggressive with your Marines, and you're too aggressive, which caused issues with probably, you know, PFC whatever and made her, uh…you know, so you had more request mast than most other units your size and time and location." Uh. I said, "Yes sir." Um. For…"and all my request masts were for that single Marine. So perhaps the single Marine was part of the problem, as was substantiated by your predecessor that." "Well, yeah, but it's still an indicator*

---

[38] Central Command.

that there's something wrong with the unit." "Well, sir, you know if that's what you feel then you've lost confidence, probably you should fire me." "Well, I don't think it's that serious." "Okay, then noted sir." [chuckles] You know, so. So, to answer your question, I didn't feel…that-that wasn't a concern, really, for me. So it's one of those 'I did the job as best as I knew how. … If it's over that, then that's fine.' I mean, that's what you got to do right? So it's-it's everybody's purview who's senior to you to chop your head off, if they see fit. Although you would hope…you would hope that that wouldn't occur, you would hope that they would give you a chance to--if they see a shortcoming in your behavior, as long as it's not an unforgivable sin, so to speak right? Something like that, which if they deem it as a leadership failure, hopefully they will give you a chance to fix it before they fire you.

Several Marines referenced a shift, a change within the Marine Corps, noting that things did not use to be like this. Thinking about his peer who chose to separate because of his perception that "*nobody has each other's backs,*" Staff Sergeant #070 said, tying it to leaders,

You kinda get a sense of that nowadays, here and there. And it could be the older generation is getting ready to retire and they want to secure their way of life the last few years. Possibly. Could it just be a lot of push back from higher-ups, higher than me, maybe out of control? Maybe, perhaps. I don't know. But I've-I've noticed- [sighs] it wasn't like it used to be, you know, where everybody was like, "Look, man. I'm going to go out and bat for you."

Major #053 contributed it, in part, potentially to the reconfiguration of the squad bay, that the break in trust and cohesion started there.

I don't want to say the NCOs aren't empowered like they used to be. I don't want to necessarily say that. And I say this on the one hand, but with the full understanding that it would be very inconvenient for things to change in the way I'm about to describe. But there's something to squad bay life and the cohesion you have that there's something to- there's something to your off-time being around those same individuals, and particularly around your fire team leader or your squad leader. And I feel like from the, I don't know, maybe the early 80s, naturally, clearly, I wasn't- I didn't have adult perspective on the military from a 'being in it' standpoint from then. But just looking at film, reading about how things were then, talking to folks that were in back then and earlier, it just seems like the corporal and the sergeant felt a lot more – the weight on their shoulders was palpable, and welcomed. But it was, "I am responsible 24/7 for these guys." And not just their immediate health and wellbeing but their professional and personal development. It is kind of the, "I am the big brother if not father," or "Big sister if not mom or aunt," or something like that. I don't get that feeling universally now. There are some individuals who I can point to who I would say, "They are living that." And that's awesome. But I think that modernity has consumed us, and we just aren't there anymore. … It's amazing what a wall and door can do. I mean, we see it operationally all the time where, speaking from an Intel perspective, you have one section here. And it requires you to get up and walk and break a threshold to interact with some other section. And like literally there cannot even be a door. It can be an open tentage where there is a tent door but the doors are pulled up. And you're still not as productive as if everybody were in the same- and not as cohesive.

There are probably a myriad factors causing this perceived shift. Gunnery Sergeant #046 stated, "*the quality of Marines has not gone down,*" disabusing people of the idea the recruit pool is to blame. First Lieutenant #047, who had much to say about the negative trajectory of leadership, pointed to the rise of an audit culture (although not using that exact phrase). He described, "*the Marine Corps has become numbers and colors.*" Captain #600 put it this way, "*You're a number. You're a data point.*" These perceptions signal the PowerPoint stoplight charts that visualize compliance and metric-comfortable performance measures and emphasize continual accountability. According to Sauder and Espeland, such measures are part of a "global movement that is redefining accountability, transparency, and good governance in terms of quantitative measures. ... The simplification and formalization that performance measures impose disrupt power relations. … [T]hey diminish the salience of local

knowledge and professional autonomy, they absorb vast resources, ….”[39] **The Marines' stories herein give evidence to reduced professional autonomy with the perceived rise of micromanagement and subordinates' feeling their leaders do not trust or allow them to do their jobs. Time pressures abound, and the need to document and account drain leadership time to dedicate to care and mentoring.** Employing such measures, as Sauder and Espeland noted, alters interpersonal relationships by formalizing control processes, which can negatively impact cooperation and collaboration and other intangible resources that organizations rely on to accomplish their goals. "Control-based forms of governance are hardly effective in the leverage of these intangible resources."[40] Additionally, such easily visible and comparable measures elevate anxiety[41], which could explain the perception of leadership self-focus and the fear-based climate that Marines throughout the dataset described. It also helps to explain the zero-defect mentality that some Marines raised, like Gunnery Sergeant #046 when he said, *"[Commanders at all levels] are absolutely incapable of failure, and since they're incapable of failure, they're not going to all their subordinates to fail. And if they do, then they're done. They're smoked."* Captain #642 agreed, *"I think that we've got a zero-defect mentality whether or not people actually like to admit it."* This process of accountability, while not in and of itself distrusted, can breed distrust among individuals and of other processes.

Systems

Throughout the above narratives are references to Marine Corps systems and processes. Marines talked about judicial, career advancement, and reporting processes to name a few. They also referred to rank hierarchy, the chain of command, or the way the Marine Corps organizes and expects itself to carry out its mission. For the organization to function, its members must trust these systems to support them and continue to produce and maintain quality and qualified members to populate the organizational hierarchy. Organizational trust "refers to trust in the functioning of organizational, institutional and social systems."[42] These systems must be perceived as fair and effective. Costigan et al. explain that this trust is "determined more by the efficiency and fairness of the organization-wide systems than the personal characteristics and behavior."[43] Interpersonal trust typically is built over time. The more time people spend together, they gain greater insight into others' characters and motivations and can assess levels of trust more easily. "The longer one is the job, the higher the level of dyadic[44] trust of one's supervisor."[45] Organizations cannot wait for such trust to materialize, as they need members to trust in their superiors from day one. Thus, organizations establish barriers to entry, training and socialization processes, and accountability measures[46] to position quality and qualified individuals into leadership positions. This section will examine two such systems – rank structure and accountability processes. It will not follow the Good/Bad construct of the previous sections.

---

[39] Michael Sauder and Wendy Nelson Espeland, "The discipline of rankings: tight coupling and organisational change," *American Sociological Review* 74, no 1 (2009): 80.

[40], Katinka Bijlsma-Frankema and Ana Cristina Costa, "Understanding the Trust–Control Nexus." *International Sociology* 20, no. 3 (2005): 265. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580905055477.

[41] Sauder and Espeland, 74-75.

[42] Bijlsma-Frankema and Costa, 261.

[43] Costigan et al., 309.

[44] Interpersonal trust, trust between two persons.

[45] Costigan et al., 311.

[46] Kramer 1999, 578.

Rank structure

When you come from different command and you just come in right away and no one knows who you are but they see that you're a captain, that obviously triggers like, "Okay, this person's been in for a certain amount of years, this person probably has some experience in doing things. This is someone I'm gonna look up to."
- 		Second Lieutenant #125

In the Marine Corps and the military in general, building horizontal and vertical trust relationships is more challenging than in the civilian sector as it is disrupted by the continual movement of personnel throughout the enterprise. Therefore, **rank more than individual becomes more important; this is known as role-based trust.** *"I think the best way is just to, I'll say, just trust the Marine Corps. One of the colonels said this. It's like, he said, 'You just have to trust the Marine Corps, that the leadership they put in front of you, they've been tested, they've been tried.'"*[47] This role-based trust is a "presumptive trust based upon knowledge of role relations, even in the absence of personalized knowledge or history of prior interaction. … [I]t is not the person in the role that is trusted so much as the system of expertise that produces and maintains role-appropriate behavior of role occupants."[48] Marines are expected to trust that the leaders, because of their rank, deserve their trust, respect, and loyalty. The Marine Corps system of formation instills *"instant willing obedience to orders, trust in superior chain of command."*[49] And Marine leaders are supposed to *"guide you and lead you and invest in you."*[50] And the systems are designed to produce and keep quality Marines. *"You have to trust that the system has produced a Marine that's capable of doing the job."*[51] First Lieutenant #047 talked of how, for subordinates, having leadership espouse the rank responsibilities *"directly relates to job satisfaction. It directly relates to unit cohesion and it directly correlates to continued trust in the institution through the immediate chain of command, which is the face of the institution itself."* **The challenge becomes when those wearing the rank do not adhere to the rank norms and expectations, as noted in the above sections, or the supporting systems (such as performance and accountability processes) are deemed unfair or create unintended consequences, like those described resulting from an "audit culture"-type environment.**

Another challenge occurs in the intersection of role-based and category-based trust. **Category-based trust is a presumptive trust predicated on similarities among group members.** Group members "tend to attribute positive characteristics such as honesty, cooperativeness, and trustworthiness to other group members."[52] "Marines" is such a category. All have earned the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, been forged through the formation processes of the Marine Corps, and been deemed worthy. As Major #303 put it, *"There is a high level of trust between Marines. For example, if you are PCS-ing somewhere and you don't know anyone there, 'Hey, you know what? Friend of a Marine is a Marine. They can stay at my place ….' Complete stranger … but because they are a Marine, you have that trust to let them in your home to stay."* This presumptive trust facilitates teamwork and collaboration in a highly mobile organization. As Major #303's words demonstrate, "[I]ndividuals may confer a sort of depersonalized trust on other ingroup members that is predicated simply on awareness of their shared category membership."[53]

---

[47] Major #525.
[48] Kramer 1999, 578.
[49] First Lieutenant #047.
[50] Major #111.
[51] Lieutenant Colonel #400.
[52] Kramer 1999, 577.
[53] Kramer 1999, 577.

However, such acceptance does not extend to all members equally, as other factors or categories can interrupt the cohesive image of the collective self. Most prevalent in this dataset, due to research timing and focus, is the category of "woman." Despite sharing the Marine title, many male Marines fail to presume the trustworthiness of Marines who are female. "*When I came through the Basic School, I had very limited choices in MOS. I couldn't even be an intel officer 'cause we weren't trusted being a women.*", explained Major #201. Throughout the data, women talked of having to prove themselves.[54] Male Marines often talked about female Marines not being able to carry them to safety. Lance Corporal #137 captured this sentiment with his words, "*I just feel like they were … shit-deep in a situation, … I don't know if a hundred-pound female's gonna be [able] to pick me up and get me out of a situation the same way a man would with the adrenaline.*" There is an inherent, presumptive distrust in the female form. Such "categorization of individuals into distinct groups often result[s] in individuals' evaluating outgroup members as less honest, reliable, open, and trustworthy than members of their own group."[55] Lieutenant Colonel #400 explained, even though women made it through the same schools and processes as men,

> *you're gonna get young Marines who have the attitude that, you know, "Well, she's just a woman Marine." And I don't know how to root that out of the Marine Corps. They see, you know, ladies as their prom date, as their, you know, that girl that hung out with them on the block. They don't see her as a peer that's moving to, in a combat formation, to do something. … You will still have the outliers that will be like, "She can't do it 'cause she's a girl."*

Left unchecked or unchallenged, this presumptive distrust "can lead to perpetual distrust,"[56] which undermines mission command and then weakens unit cohesion and effectiveness. When female Marines become leaders, they face a tension between roles and categories that can inhibit their effectiveness in their rank. "*[A]t first, they didn't like me 'cause I was a female leader,*"[57] not incompetent, not living up to rank expectations or norms, but female. Master Sergeant #643 put it like this, "*At least in my experience, it doesn't matter what rank I have in my collar, I am not gonna be part of the decision-making process unless … I have proved myself. … Anybody that is a male checks in as a master sergeant or as a gunnery sergeant? They don't have to prove anything.*"

Performance Measures

It's not the way the Marine Corps does it. It's just the way the Marine Corps has its system. It's based off of a score. It's up to the people in charge of them. And if the people in charge of that person has- plays favorites and has favorites, then he's gonna promote his favorites over- that's not the Marine- nothing that the Marine Corps can specifically do about. … [E]specially in my MOS- 'cause I know in my MOS, most of my staff NCOs will, that I'll ever have, will play favorites. … I don't wanna stay with that. I don't wanna do that, so I'd rather get out and go to somewhere else, where I might not make as much money, I might not have as many benefits, but I'll be happier than be somewhere where I'm not happy, because- if I'm not going anywhere because, or it takes me four years to go somewhere because my staff NCOs and my higher-ups wanna play favorites.

-   Corporal #640

For Marines to trust in the rank structure that is vital to Marine Corps functioning, individuals have to trust in the systems of expertise that produce and curate organizational members, one being the way Marines are evaluated and then selected for higher ranks. Corporal #640 pointed to leadership influence in the promotion process as interrupting the fairness and objectivity of the process. The

---

[54] Please see PART IV: What is it like to be both a woman and a Marine?, 47-53, *March 2018 MCOCR Report*.
[55] Kramer 1999, 588.
[56] Kramer 1999, 594.
[57] Lance Corporal #224.

above sections have offered commentary of the status of the individual adherence of leaders to the norms and expectations of rank. This report will not look in depth into performance processes, as that was covered in the March 2018 report.[58] That report notes the emphasis of easily measured skills over intangible leadership qualities and limitations in tool design and interpretation along with how personnel management processes and policies impact the performance evaluation process, and, of course, the above-mentioned leadership influence. However, we do want to acknowledge the importance of fair and transparent performance processes to interpersonal and organizational trust and, as Corporal #640 described, to the future force structure. We will just include an exchange between a master sergeant and a gunnery sergeant in a focus group to offer a glimpse into the potential challenges Marines can experience with this process and how that can inform trust in the system. The dialog displays issues with identity, fairness, leadership, values, and rank.

> *Master Sergeant #613: I have officers told me- my first FITREP, he refused to write it because he doesn't believe the females should be in the Marine Corps. … So I had- I literally had to get that on email, and by the time I got it, he was already out. And it wasn't an email from him. It was a gunny that was willing to say that "Yeah, I was there when he said it, and we couldn't change it." He EAS'd. … So it didn't impact my career but definitely impacted how I would interact with officers, especially officers that never served with female before. So, so I had officers saying they refused to write my FITREP because I'm a female. And I had an officer that say, "If you are not a 300 PFTer," … So if you couldn't run, "you're not gonna get on top of my rating scale." So all of those will have an impact on your promotion, eventually. Let's say if everything is a fair playing field up at the promotion board that Gunny [#614] was talking about, but if it's not fair at the small unit level, then it's not fair to start with.*
>
> *Gunnery Sergeant #614: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The FITREP is probably the-*
>
> *Master Sergeant #613: It's the most impacted thing-*
>
> *Gunnery Sergeant #614: Yeah that's probably the worst place if you're talking about any kind of discrimination or trying to hold someone back. That's the worst place for it. Because you're really at the mercy of your reporting senior. You know your RO[59] a little bit, but he usually just agrees with whatever the reporting senior says, but … it's all up to his or her perceptions. They think everyone should be a 300 PFTer and you're a 200 PFTer, you're screwed. If they rate- I'm sure you've had it too. You know, we've had the RS, he has ten guys, and he decides who he wants to be one, two, three, four, five and adjusts everybody's fitness report markings to be like that. I've had guys that showed me literally "This is my graph, and this is where you fall." You know, "You're number three, and number one is here." And I'm like, "That's not how it's supposed to work! You're supposed to rate the Marine in every one of the areas, and they get what they get. You're not supposed to try to fit them in somewhere." … But that's the place where an RS, depending on his or her feelings or how they view what they think the Marine Corps should be, that's really where people can get affected.*

With this and in reviewing the referenced section of the March 2018 report, one can see the prominence of fairness (or perceived lack thereof) in the stories. The emphasis on fairness makes sense given it is foundational to trust in systems, as does Marines' attention to it because of the intimate impact these systems on their lives and careers. Another place where Marines pointed to issues of fairness was with the systems used to curate organizational members. We will now look at what they had to say.

---

[58] Please see Part II: Challenges with and for Leadership – Why are there bad leaders?, 21-25, *MCOCR March 2018 Report*. Due to CAOCL's impending closure in June 2020, researchers are leveraging existing work to allow time for presentation of new material to maximize the opportunity for Marine voices on a diversity of topics to be heard.

[59] Reporting officer.

Accountability Processes

There's distrust within the processes."

- Captain #610

Organizations design systems to ensure member alignment with organizational values and expected behavior. The Marine Corps is no different. When people step out of line with these, the processes and procedures are to be in place to ensure fair, transparent correction to the problem. In the Marine Corps, there, of course, is the legal process with the Uniformed Code of Military Justice as well as other corrective tools, such as non-judicial punishments (NJPs), Page 11s, and 6105 formal counselings. There are also different reporting mechanisms, such as unrestricted and restricted reporting processes for sexual harassment and assault, request masts, and command climate surveys.

Marines need to trust that these systems are effective and fair. Sergeant #106 reported complete confidence in the process for the big issues. If he had to report an incident of racism up his chain of command, he stated,

> *I don't think there would be any hesitation whatsoever that … it would be resolved quite quickly. … In every survey it ask[s] like, "Do you feel like you'd receive push back from your command if you were to report this incident?" Uh, no, I've never had that feeling, and I felt like that the command structure, you know, the way things are just set up and the way people can be approached, I think that it's been very, very open. A feeling of openness and that goes for basically, you know, the SAPR or EO, whatever channels that are set forth. That those people that are in those positions are- they're trained well, and they're receptive. So, in that sense, Marines can feel free to go to those individuals.*

Unlike Sergeant #106, however, other Marines raised concerns with these systems. Captain #610 from above described a situation where her brother was hazed at his first duty station and, at her insistence, requested mast, a way to elevate one's concern to a higher authority than one's immediate chain of command. Despite the fact that someone was relieved of duty (indicating validation of concern), her brother "*was pretty much shunned after he requested mast.*" She then went on to describe the challenges with the request mast process.

> *Captain #610: Like, you're telling me that I can request mast, and no one's supposed to have retribution towards you. Well, it still happens because there's no- so if I request mast, if I'm a young Marine, or even right now, if I'm a Marine and I request mast, and I get kind of kicked around because of it, why would I and then request mast again about my request mast? Instead, I'm just going to keep my head down, and just ride this one out.*
>
> *Interviewer: So you're saying basically these institutional supposed-tools for correcting behavior, being able to be empowered to point out wrongdoing, they themselves have limitations in terms-*
>
> *Captain #610: Absolutely.*
>
> *Interviewer: in terms of their ability to be effective.*
>
> *Captain #610: Right. But if you request mast, [laughs] you have to tell your immediate supervisor that you're requesting mast, … and they forward it up the chain to wherever you wanna request mast to. So like if a Marine has a problem with me, as their company commander, their request mast has to go through me. Like, there's just- that doesn't make any sense. Now I'm gonna know that you requested mast. And according to request mast, I'm not supposed to stop it in any way, but what if I'm asking you, "Hey, well, can you tell me what's going on?" That's- I'm influencing the situation. Nobody's going to know about that really unless the Marine brings it up, but chances are that something going on, you know, that obviously they don't think I can handle or that they want me to handle.*

> *Interviewer: Do you think there's ever been an effective request mast for the- I mean do you think it's likely or possible? Or like 50 percent of the time … nobody has any bad recourses?*
>
> *Captain #610: I think it is, but it depends on the topic. … So with something like hazing I think a lot of leaders think, "oh, man, I'm gonna get in trouble for this. So I need to kind of make this not into as big a deal as it is, right, because then I'll have to report this to my boss that there is hazing in my unit." So they don't want to get a black eye.*

Lieutenant Colonel #901 also expressed concern with request mast that reveals a different challenge, the civilian-military hierarchy, noting that even though "*an investigation showing issues came back*," the three-star took no action. She explained,

> *Our three-star doesn't take actions against the civilians. … So, again, back to that mentality of, if we only, if we have a portion of the problem that people either fear or are just not willing to go there, but we're putting civilians in positions of leadership, right? But we're not holding them accountable, and we're letting them do everything that we preached to the Marines you can't do, then are we ever going to fix this?*

For many, request mast is a very useful process to bring attention to their concerns. Whether leaders take action and the associated impact on trust have already been covered above. In these examples, the Marines are describing situations that seem to point to structural issues (having to inform immediate chain of command of intent to request mast when the problem may lie there and lack of perceived or real authority over civilians) that can create obstacles to correcting problems and lead to the erosion of trust in the system.

The command climate survey is also another tool that Marines discussed. Some questioned the veracity of the input. Captain #523 said, "*How many people are honestly honest with those command climate surveys that [coarse joking or sexual or racist misdeeds are] going on? They don't wanna dime their buddies out. They don't wanna bring attention to themselves. So were they really being trustworthy?*" One corporal[60] explained that leaders tried to influence their numbers by offering extra time off right before Marines were encouraged to fill out the survey.

> *I feel like a lot of commanders will try to manage around the command climate survey where they will say things like, "our numbers have never been so high" or "our numbers are really low compared to this, so we need to get that up, XO." And they look at the XO, and XO is like- for a while that's all they talk about. And guess what we have right before our command climate survey? 72[61], just like little things that kind of- [interviewer: Yeah. To try and boost the numbers.] … Maybe when I was like a PFC or a lance corporal, like I didn't really get it, and I thought it was the coolest thing. But now I'm like, "Dude, you just did that so that-" or you tell us that the command climate survey's due Friday before a safety, a safety brief. No one's leaving before the safety brief. Not- this isn't coming from the CO. This is coming from others, saying that we're not leaving until the saf- or the command climate survey is done. So, what do Marines do? They just click, click, click, click agree, agree, agree, agree, agree, agree. And they don't agree or they feel like they're pointless and they won't speak out.*

Some Marines do not feel leaders take command climate surveys seriously or will not act on them. Captain #230 explained,

> *Those are a joke. So the problem is Marines know that. [exhales] So say you had a terrible sergeant major or XO[62]. I'm just using those. Those are easy. And the command climate surveys said that about those people. What's going to happen? Nothing. The commander is going to take care of his XO because that's his boy, or he's going to take care of his or her sergeant major because they're awesome in their eyes, and nothing's going to happen. So those Marines go through either being- they- [paper flipping] so Marines when they start to pull away*

---

[60] This participant asked for special protection for this section, so this individual will not be identified beyond rank.
[61] Early dismissal from work on a Friday.
[62] Executive officer.

from you and try to handle things on their own, that's when people get in trouble. … When the Marines don't trust the leadership, that something will actually be done, they start taking care of it on their own. And sometimes a junior Marine that doesn't have experience does it in a negative way because that's- they don't know. That's just how it is. Um, but, yeah, command climate surveys? No. I've never seen, like I said, I, just from my perspective, but anything that was ever addressed was never addressed. … So Marines, "Oh, this is a joke." They put funny comments in there. They do because they know that the CO is not going to care what I think. I'm only a PFC that's been here three weeks, but people are already hazing me. Why should I say anything? Joke.

Like Captain #230, Corporal #221 also pointed to a lack of trust in leadership action on results as demotivating Marines to trust in the tool. He was surprised to learn that problems have been addressed as a result of the surveys. He then stated that there may be implementation concerns that could be resolved to make these more useful.

> *Corporal #221: The problem is that those aren't implemented very well. Like, I've never actually done one of those 'cause they're anonymous. So they say do it, and I just don't. Because like I've always thought they were a joke. I talked to a sergeant major recently, and he told me that he actually-- when he was in charge, he read every single one of those. Um, and I was talking to my buddies in Corporal's Course, and their gunny got fired last year because of a command climate survey. And he got posted from position. So they-they do work. The problem is they're not explained properly. So, when you tell the PFC "you're gonna go on this website, and you're gonna submit your opinion. Have it done in an hour.", he's only doing it because staff sergeant is making him. And he doesn't actually know if it's anonymous or not. You know, like, can you- dudes are freaked out, "Marine Corps is gonna find out that I said gunny's a jerk." So he just [tapping] click it like, "Yes. Good. Every- everything's awesome. This is great. Wonderful." And a lot of that, especially in the infantry, is gonna be fear as well. 'Cause if we do a command climate survey three months before we deploy and they post my commanding officer because of it? Now we got a dude that we've never worked with that's supposed take us into a- potentially a combat zone. So you might sweep some things under the rug? Just to ensure that your deployment goes well and looking out for your junior Marines. So if there is a way to implement those a little more consistently and get them properly explained.*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah. I didn't realize that people just weren't doing them.*
>
> *Corporal #221: Yeah, I've never done one.*
>
> *Interviewer: Okay. I thought they we're mandatory.*
>
> *Corporal #221: But they're anonymous. So there's no way to- like you can't say, "Hey, corporal, you didn't submit your command climate surveys." Like, "Yes, I did." And they never ever follow up. Like they say, "Hey, command climate surveys are out. Go do them." And that's the last you hear about it. Like I don't even know where you do a command climate survey. I've never been passed a paper with a link or anything like that so they're just not implemented well. So if they were implemented a little better and Marines started to see things change based on their opinions, they'd probably become more trusting of the system. But they're implemented very poorly. Some Marines don't see changes. So they just assume they don't work.*

As the corporal noted, the surveys are supposed to be anonymous; however, there are times when that is not the case, especially if the Marine is in an identifiable category group. Master Sergeant #643 filled out a survey in 2015, "*and they were able to tell it was me.*" This could affect trust levels as well, as leaders could seek retribution or use social sanctioning on reporters, like in Captain #610's account of her brother's request mast. First Lieutenant #045 felt the tool was effective in getting leadership attention in the visible accountability world in which she dwells; however, it then has the explained impact from above of fear generation and micromanagement.

> *Everybody is kind of scared of a command climate survey. You know? If you put in that command climate survey, "Staff NCOs – officers – unapproachable. They don't care about us. They don't allow us to come into-" – we have an open-door policy – "They don't counsel us." They can put whatever they want in there, and immediately who's the target? The command. So, now, when the command goes, "Well, you didn't document this stuff," right? "Well, this Marine is just misunderstood." Really, it's just them opening the door of, "Well, I don't want to get*

freaking fired for somebody saying that I didn't really look into this and really give them the environment in which I could hug them, give them a cup of hot cocoa, and tell them it's going to be all right." Like what happened to the trust and confidence in the staff NCOs and officers? What happened to, "No, like they have this rank for a reason. We're going to trust that they're doing the right thing"? But if we don't document it, then we're screwed. And then the feeling of "felt untrustworthiness" of subordinates.

Other Marines talked about the measures for holding individual Marines accountable, such as the 6105, Page 11s, and NJPs. Gunnery Sergeant #046 offered his perspective on this subject and raising some significant concerns.

[W]e had a PME recently and … one of the questions that was asked and we had our little small group sessions which everybody where I'm at right now – I mean there were lance corporals there, corporals, sergeants, staff sergeants, gunnery sergeants. I think we had a master sergeant there as well. No officers. And one of the most emotionally charged questions was can you recover from a minor infraction. Something as simple as a 6105, page 11, even an NJP? And the resounding theme from everybody in that room was absolutely not. And I could give specific examples again, for days, of- I'll just be blunt and I'll say it. I think commanders use administrative tools to destroy careers. I've seen it happen where commanders will give an official counseling in the form of a page 11, 6105, knowing that that's going to stay in a Marine's record for the rest of their career, that's going to influence promotion boards and retention all the while knowing that there's no legal restriction for them to be factually accurate or have due process or there's also no ability if I get one of these things in my record I don't have any way to fight it. I can't deny it going into my record. … No checks and balance. I can rebut it, but then it's my commander said I did this. I said I did this. Who's going to win? Of course, the commander is going to get the benefit of the doubt. But there's absolutely no requirement for it to be factually accurate or vetted or checked or balanced in any way, shape or form. And that's why I believe that – and to hear this from our lance corporals who should be the future of our Corps that are so disillusioned with our processes and the fact that they think that their commanders are going to screw them with administrative counselings because it happens. It does happen. It's rampant. And it's a shame. … So I think the policies and practices are in place for it to be fixed. I think we are afforded due process. I figure, or I know we are. We have rights under our laws. We are afforded the right to be innocent until proven guilty. But that's not the case in the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps you are guilty until you are proven innocent. You have to – if you invoke your rights in any way, shape or form to remain silent, to seek legal counsel you are immediately considered guilty and you are ostracized by the chain of command. I've seen this happen dozens of times at the Intel battalion. I've been here since 2012. I've seen very good Marines who said you know what, I don't like this. It looks like a witch hunt. I'm going to go ahead and get a lawyer. Oh, really? Bam. You are gone. You are not afforded any opportunity for due process. And I think that that's a resounding theme. I've been told that by Senior Enlisted Advisors that if Marines that are accused of something would write a statement and would basically not invoke their right to remain silent, not invoke their right to legal counsel, you just give us a statement and we'll go on about our business, I've been told by sergeants major that those Marines would be treated differently. That's insane. For a Senior Enlisted Advisor who is supposed to be the advocate for the enlisted, the advocate for us, our person, that's supposed to go to the commander and say "sir, this is wrong." For him to come down and basically blatantly deny us our right to due process and encourage us not to invoke our rights is, it's insane. But it happens a lot. I've seen it at the regimental level. I've seen it at the battalion level. I've seen it at the MEF level recently, and it's unfortunate.

Gunnery Sergeant #069 also saw this happen, where the subordinate had no recourse. He recounted, "*What a lot of times happens is you get a … and they might not even know – you get a charge sheet up on them, and then it goes to the sergeant major. The CO signs 6105, and the lance corporal, or whoever, is informed, 'You have the 6105.' 'That didn't happen. AT ALL.' 'Well, you still have to sign it.'*" Legal administrator Chief Warrant Officer-2 #616 talked about how individuals are not given the chance to defend or even present self when facing the judicial process.

[Y]ou got the rights of the accused at trial and the rights of the respondent at an admin separation hearing. And I wouldn't say they necessarily sought to take away a right of the respondent to have his board by notifying him in particular way, that kind of triggers some things. And if they were to notify him of, you know, a characterization of service that wasn't necessarily the lowest, then- because he doesn't have more than six years of service, he doesn't get a board. So it's all paper. He never even gets a chance to stand before a board and say, "I would like to stay." You know? "I made a poor decision. Yes, I absolutely did that." When it comes to like drug abuse and stuff that, we're pretty str- like, "hey, zero tolerance." But if a Marine was really, really great, and he was like, "Hey, you know, that- it was a mistake. It was a poor choice. But I'm 19." And if he was able to articulate that, then we'll go, "yeah, good to go." That is not what normally happens. Usually, like, "No, I don't know if I will buy it. Have a good day." Right? Then they give you the lowest, anyway. But not even affording him the chance is scary on the ethical level, right? Because now we're just wiping that away. "Push him on through it. Because we know how it's going to end." Do we? For every single one? I don't think we do. And when it comes to manpower, how much manpower do we put in this thing? We already know because we've got to get three people. They all have to come together. If we just notify him this way, that all goes away. It's easy. Easy button. I'm scared, scared of the easy button.

Corporal #637 discussed the unfairness in doling out of punishments and how enlisted or junior Marines get the hammer while senior enlisted and officers get at best a slap on the wrist. He explained how this affects junior Marines' trust in their seniors.

A lot of people just because they are [chuckles] officers, they get away with things. Staff NCOs get away with things, and that's a big one. Yeah. I've seen it happen where you have a lance corporal, or somebody, an enlisted Marine that- he messed up, understand. They bring down the hammer, and boom! He gets what he deserves. Then a week after, you have like – I don't know – a high ranking officer, like "Oh, he does this and this." "Sell, let's just change units for him. Let's send them somewhere else. Or let's do something." And then, you just never see him again! But you know like that lance corp- that Marine- enlisted Marine's career is over. And then the other officer is like, "Okay, I'll just move on." … And I think that's a problem because you hear like the barracks … and the lance corporal level like, "Oh, Gunny So-and-So did this, or the captain did this, and nothing happened to him!" Now we get someone that gets drinking underage, and boom! You're NJP'd. Now you can't re-enlist anymore because how times are right now, and that's it! He could have been a good Marine, you know? He probably just did a bad decision. But … everybody makes bad decisions. And that's not an excuse, but it happens to everyone. … [P]ersonally, I think that makes junior troops not to trust their seniors. … I think it hurts trust. It really does.

Lance Corporal #060 saw the same thing in her unit. In response to the question whether command response to reporting was appropriate, she answered,

[Blows raspberry] Yes? And no? And the "no" is just more of a personal belief. Yes, because they do follow up with it. They do take it seriously, and they handle it the way they're supposed to. Now, sometimes, like there's another one right now that— this is an officer. He was harassing one of the females, and he's kind of creepy. And he is in the process of being investigated for the sexual harassment of a female, towards a female and like these other suicide attempts from guys in his platoon. But I just, there, there was so much evidence at one point, but nobody did anything about it that I hate it that now it's brought up, it, it kinda seems like the, the command is kinda like dragging it along because he is an officer, and we have to kinda, you know, like, "Oh, be careful. Tread on, like careful where you, where you tread because he is an officer, like careful, you don't wanna ruin-" [Interviewer: It's political.] Yeah, exactly, it is political. And this wasn't just like with that. There was one time that this gunny, he was so adamant like, "No driving drunk". Blah, blah, blah, DUIs and whatnot. Low and behold, he gets pulled over for DUI, gets arrested. Yada, yada. Nothing comes, nothing comes of it. He didn't— no repercussions. Nothing. Kept his rank, kept his job, and all they did was just transfer him units. Because nobody in that unit could take him seriously, and they kept it under wraps. So the few people that did know about it talked about it, and those people like started not taking him seriously, but that's— it's, it just sucks because a

> *lot of times depending on who it is and if there's no concrete evidence showing that something happened, it's all very, very political. So that's why I say "yes" and "no."*

It is important to note that the last two accounts came from more junior Marines who may not have full visibility into the judicial process for those senior to them. However, this does not discount the impact their experiences have on their trust in the systems and their leaders. From a senior perspective, Master Sergeant #236, in a focus group, described a similar experience and the impact failure to correct leadership problems, in this case a staff NCO who popped on a drug test, can have on individual Marines, a unit, and, in the end, the Marine Corps. He stated,

> *I checked into this unit in January from my old unit. I got 22 Marines. Eight or nine of them are getting out. "Well, why-why are you getting out? You're great Marines!" And I'm talking about eight or nine good Marines. And all--the first thing they said was leadership. So, [with the drug-popping staff NCO], that leader who is already- just kind of like squirmed his way out of his situation, the staff NCO just did drugs and got away with it, is in charge of a shop. And we all know Sugar Honey Iced Tea rolls downhill, right? Shit rolls downhill, right? So, the leader was already the cancer. So, within that shop, because the leader got- he's got his own issues. While he's in charge of his shop, he's spreading that, and if you think junior Marines don't know what's happening with that leader, then you're sadly mistaken. So when they see the leader who's not a good Marine, they feel they don't have to be a good Marine, and misery loves company! No bad Marine wants to be alone, as the only bad Marine, because too many eyes are on him. He needs someone to be with him. And … the leader … can spread that cancer because the focus is on the leader and how screwed up the leader is. But they developed the concept, "What's the wors[t] they can do to me? What's the worst?" You know? And usually they walk away with an ADMINSEP[63]. They go home. They're back on the block, doing whatever. So that's the mindset … nowadays. Or even the good Marines saying, "I'm out. I'm just-just done with the Marine Corps. Because of our leadership." And it starts from that point, from staff NCOs, up. That's where the stuff starts.*

In this case, eight to nine good Marines decided to separate. In the above section on subordinate to leader perceptions, we heard Marines' accounts about leaders not following through or taking care of problems. This allows these systems to be vulnerable to pressures and manipulation, the individuals who are meant to be corrected to feel invincible, and the problems to fester. If there are structural barriers to fairness and transparency, the impact intensifies, and in the end, the individuals and the institution suffer.

Concluding Thoughts

As the intent of this paper is to give voice to Marines' experiences of trust within the Marine Corps, this paper will conclude with two Marines' thoughts. This first is a word of caution from Major #126 about the current state of affairs and a call to leaders of all ranks to do different and differently to revitalize the brotherhood of care, guidance, and respect. His words show how important modeling good leadership and how impactful learning models and methods are in cultivating successive generations of quality leaders and to the survivability of a force of quality Marines.

> *[T]he brotherhood piece is missing. Marines don't feel like they're part of a brotherhood. Not the Marines in my section, not the Marines in any unit that I've been to. Unless we were in a small group. [Pause] And I think it's because- I think it's all related. Marines don't rise to the occasion. They sink to the level of their training. So when you're a junior enlisted leader, corporal, or whatever, you haven't had intensive leadership-type mentoring and training … from a qual- like a quality leader, an actual mentor, you default to what you've always known. And what do we all know? We all know the drill instructor yelling. So we end up thinking, especially the guys*

---

[63] Administratively separated.

that MCT[64], SOI[65], and entry level schools, the lance corporals, corporals, and sergeants who are in charge of herding the students along [snaps finger] do this thing, right? The snap fingers, point the fingers, give the knife hand because we assume that coming out of entry level training, you are worthless, and you are not worthy of respect. "Just shut the fuck up and color. You're not allowed to know why." I've actually heard sergeants say that. **That's how you start breaking the transformation that we were supposed to have instilled in them at boot camp. That's where you start- the mythos of the Marine Brotherhood ends up having a really short shelf life.** *Because they don't feel like they're brothers. They feel like are peons. They feel like they show up, and all they do is working parties, and they sweep floors, and nothing they ever do is good enough. It's difficult to adjust that behavior on the part of the junior enlisted leaders in such a way that our boot PFCs, privates, very junior lance corporals feel like they're part of a brother- feel like they're being taken under someone's wing, without making those junior enlisted leaders feel like now they've got to do the "PC thing" and "care about feelings" and shit like that, right. That's a very difficult thing to ask 20, 21, 22-year-old to do, but we're asking them to do it anyway. But because we don't set them up for success, they default to what they've always known, which is, "Shut the fuck up." And so the Marine Corps as an institution no longer becomes a thing that you want to be a part of.* **And the legend of Marine Corps Brotherhood fucking dies.** [emphasis added]

The second is from First Lieutenant #047, who is well represented in this paper. One of his recommendations is to reinvigorate mission command, so to speak, with leadership care and guidance and empowered juniors. He framed it in Marine-speak, challenging leaders to care for their people as they do for their weapons. He also provided a word of caution that attends to the "audit culture" of accountability, offering that too much emphasis on those measures can distract from the larger picture and detract from organizational effectiveness.

To put it in institutional language, commanders should look at their Marines as their TO[66] weapon systems. And in order to do that, to use the analogy of an M4, what do you do to your M4? You don't throw it in the dirt all over the place and then expect it to function well when you need it to. You take care of it. You CLP[67] it. You clean it. You brush it. Because at the end of the day, the betterment of your TO weapon system will directly relate to the success of your mission. … People too often hear "mission first, people always" and assume a mutually exclusive relationship. Maybe it's because we're in the HUMINT community, but **empowering people is how you accomplish the mission.** *You can say good order and discipline every day of the week, twice on Sunday, but if your good order and discipline leads to an erosion of the trust of the institution and the chain of command, you're going to see a precipitous downfall of mission success.* **So if your people are not treated as your TO weapon system, they're never going to function as well as you hope, as well as they could, and you're never going to reach your institutional full potential.** [emphasis added]

As can be seen through the myriad stories presented here, trust lives a complex life within the Marine Corps. At times it is flourishing; at others it is on life support. It channels through interpersonal relationships (both horizontally and vertically) and flows through organizational processes. At times, it is interrupted by individuals, sometimes by structure. We hope these Marine voices help the Marine Corps better understand what is going right and where there is room for improvement. The Marines in this study offered their stories in the hopes of improving an organization they have dedicated their whole beings to. They care deeply about the organization. Here are parting words from two very vocal Marines on this issue – Gunnery Sergeant #046 and First Lieutenant #047. Capturing the essence of many of the participants in this study, Gunnery

---

[64] Marine Corps Training.
[65] School of Infantry.
[66] Table of Organization.
[67] Clean, lubricate, and preserve.

Sergeant #046 stated, "*I'm incredibly passionate because I love the Marine Corps. I love what I do. I have chosen to stay in for 18 years even though I have had some serious issues with the way we've been going.*" First Lieutenant #047 followed, "*We are hopeless romantics in the fact that we like to think that something like this [study] may have an impact and do something to help regain the image that we both have of the Marine Corps institution by hopefully helping to influence the people of that institution in the right way.*"

References

Abu-Doleh, Jamal Daoud, and Mohammed Daddi Hammou. "The Impact of Psychological Contract Breach on Organizational Outcomes: The Moderating Role of Personal Beliefs." *Journal of Competitive Studies* 23, no. 1/2 (2015): 34-54.

Bal, P. Matthijs, Dan S. Chiaburu, and Paul G.W. Jansen. "Psychological Contract Breach and Work Performance: Is Social Exchange a Buffer or an Intensifier?". *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2010): 252-73.

Bijlsma-Frankema, Katinka , and Ana Cristina Costa. "Understanding the Trust–Control Nexus." *International Sociology* 20, no. 3 (2005): 259-82. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580905055477.

Brennan, Thomas James. "Hundreds of Marines investigated for sharing photos of naked colleagues." *Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting*, 4 March 2017. https://www.revealnews.org/blog/hundreds-of-marines-investigated-for-sharing-photos-of-naked-colleagues/.

Costigan, Robert D., Selim S. Ilter, and J. Jason Berman. "A Multi-Dimensional Study of Trust in Organizations." *Journal of Managerial Issues* 10, no. 3 (1998): 303-17.

Darley, John M. "Commitment, Trust, and Worker Effort Expenditure in Organizations." Chap. 6 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 127-52. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

Dirks, Kurt T., and Donald L. Ferrin. "The Role of Trust in Organizational Settings." *Organizational Science* 12, no. 4 (2001): 450-67.

———. "Trust in Leadership: Meta-Analytic Findings and Implications for Research and Practice." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 78, no. 4 (2002): 611-28.

Dirks, Kurt T., and Daniel P. Skarlicki. "Trust in Leaders: Existing Research and Emerging Issues." Chap. 2 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 21-40. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

Edmondson, Amy C. "Psychological Safety, Trust, and Learning in Organizations: A Group-Level Lens." Chap. 10 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 239-72. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

Elsbach, Kimberly D. "Managing Images of Trustworthiness in Organizations." Chap. 11 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 275-92. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

Ferrin, Donald L., Michelle C. Bligh, and Jeffery C. Kohles. "Can I Trust You to Trust Me? A Theory of Trust, Monitoring, and Cooperation in Interpersonal and Intergroup Relationships." *Group & Organization Management* 32, no. 4 (2007): 465-99.

Hogg, Michael A., and Deborah J. Terry. "Social Identity and Self-Categorization Processes in Organizational Contexts." *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 1 (2000): 121-40.

Hogg, Michael A., Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White. "A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1995).

Kahn, William A. "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work." *Academy of Management Journal* 33, no. 4 (1990): 692-724.

Kramer, Roderick M. "Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions." *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 569-98.

Kramer, Roderick M., and Karen S. Cook. "Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches." Chap. 1 In *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, 1-18. New York: NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

Lane, Rebecca, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, and Eric Gauldin. *Report to PSO: USMC.2017.0005: Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Report to Personnel Studies and Oversight Office: Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture*. Distribution unlimited. Quantico, VA: CAOCL, 30 March 2018. https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf.

Lau, Dora C., Long W. Lam, and Sabrina Deutsch Salamon. "The Impact of Relational Demographics on Perceived Managerial Trustworthiness: Similarity or Norms?". *Journal of Social Psychology* 148, no. 2 (2008): 187-208.

Lester, Scott W., and Holly H. Brower. "In the Eyes of the Beholder: The Relationship between Subordinates' Felt Trustworthiness and Their Work Attitudes and Behaviors." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 17-33.

Mishra, Aneil K. "Organizational Responses to Crisis: The Centrality of Trust." Chap. 13 In *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*, edited by Roderick M. Kramer and Thomas Tyler, 261-87. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1996.

Mishra, Aneil K., and Karen E. Mishra. "The Research on Trust in Leadership: The Need for Context." *Journal of Trust Research* 3, no. 1 (2013): 59-69. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2013.771507.

Robinson, Sandra L. "Trust and Breach of the Psychological Contract." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1996): 574-99. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2393868.

Rousseau, Denise M., Sim B. Sitkin, Ronald S. Burt, and Colin Camerer. "Introduction to Special Topic Forum: Not So Different after All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust." *The Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 3 (1998): 393-404.

Sauder, Michael, and Wendy Nelson Espeland. "The Discipline of Rankings: Tight Coupling and Organizational Change." *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 63-82.

Savolainen, Taina, Palmira Lopez-Fresno, and Mirjami Ikonen. "Trust-Communication Dyad in Inter-Personal Workplace Relationships – Dynamics of Trust Deterioration and Breach." *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* 12, no. 4 (2014): 232-40.

Tarzi, Erika, and Rebecca Lane. *Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005 – Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Pregnancy Loss.* Distribution unlimited. Quantico, VA, CAOCL, 15 October 2019. https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/QL%20Report%20Pregnancy%20Loss_wFM_101519.pdf.

Terry, Deborah J., Michael A. Hogg, and Katherine M. White. "The Theory of Planned Behaviour: Self-Identity, Social Identity and Group Norms." *The British Journal of Social Psychology* 38 (1999): 225-44.

United States Marine Corps. "MCOC 1-1: Mission Command." *Marine Corps Operating Concepts, 3rd Edition* (June 2010).