Warrior Entrepreneurs: Fostering U.S. Marine Corps Maneuver Warfare Philosophy

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Abstract

Technological innovation occurs more rapidly, more frequently, and more diffusely today than ever – a reality many of our adversaries have seized upon. Despite evidence that unique human attributes (e.g., creativity, synthesis, empathy) drive success in a more automated world, the DoD still favors technological breakthroughs over human development to maintain competitive advantage. Rather than trying to outpace technological innovations, this paper suggests the Marine Corps focus on cultural changes that fill its ranks with entrepreneurial-minded individuals. Interestingly, the Corps codified several military entrepreneurship concepts in 1989 through its “maneuver warfare” doctrine. This paper summarizes potential characteristics and inputs to military entrepreneurship. It analyzes challenges to instituting entrepreneurial culture through the Corps’ struggle to fully adopt maneuver warfare doctrine. And it recommends several pathways to fostering entrepreneurial spirit from senior leader engagement to recruiting, to re-imagining our professional military schools.
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We have a military that is not a very adaptive institution. It always talks about readiness. Well, that’s an Industrial Era term. You need to be more adaptive to problems than you need to be ready for problems. Yet, [military leaders] still talk about readiness every damn day.

—Thomas Ricks

The demand for transformation is greater today than ever. Momentous disruptions occur when technology profoundly alters culture. Such events used to happen about once a century, which allowed society to adjust at a more gradual pace. But today, at least five disruptions will emerge in the current 100-year period that we expect to affect cultural adaptation in ways reminiscent of the upheavals preceding World War I.

For institutions traditionally dedicated to establishing order, such as the military, the present rate of change is vexing. But, the ubiquity of these disruptions is impossible to ignore or avoid. Moreover, to those who embrace uncertainty, such as entrepreneurs, disruptions offer great opportunities for revolutionary achievements. For these reasons, the Marine Corps in this era of accelerated change can and must adapt not just technologically or even organizationally, but culturally, and soon.

In recent decades, the Marine Corps worked mostly around the edges of true institutional change, following the American military-industrial tactic of bolting things on and deferring hard decisions, especially regarding people and culture. To prepare the Corps for a more dynamic future, some Marine leaders are satisfied with simply integrating new technology, adding or modifying training, and reorganizing forces. Many would call it reckless to tamper with the Corps’ unique culture, given its role in the institution’s many triumphs. And most are simply struggling to keep pace with high
optempo, discipline issues, and other impacts on daily operations. As a result, we have spent little time consciously focused on how our culture will sustain us in the future.

With the current state of affairs, the Marine Corps should become the United States Armed Forces’ preeminent “incubator” for military entrepreneurs – an institution that promotes, supports, and connects individuals who: (1) demonstrate “kaizen” – a persistent drive to change oneself, people, things, and situations for the better; (2) see the world in terms of interrelated ecosystems; (3) tolerate high levels of uncertainty; and (4) intrepidly shape the future through rational speculation to create, reimagine, and apply resources.

Historically, the Marine Corps relied on small groups of radical thinkers who overcame fierce institutional opposition to bring their ideas to fruition. Today, in an organization that has become more bureaucratic than entrepreneurial, those individuals have become harder to find. Our entrepreneur deficit is especially troublesome because studies reveal that technological dominance is less a determinant of military victory than previously believed and that unique human capabilities – such as empathy, creativity, and synthesis – drive success in a more automated world. Clearly, we need more than pockets of radical thinkers, we need a Corps full of entrepreneurs.

Further complicating matters is a self-delusion among many Americans regarding military performance in recent decades. Most notably, though civilian leaders bear responsibility for poor strategic decisions, proclamations of the “finest military in the world” overlook the part we played in America’s failure to realize national policy objectives. Similarly, Marine Corps doctrine cautions that, “We cannot rightly expect our subordinates to exercise boldness and initiative in the field when they are
accustomed to being oversupervised in garrison”; yet, one struggles to recall when a
sergeant at home station independently took his squad of Marines to the range for live
fire training.7

The 2016 Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) acknowledges the growing
importance of cognitive capabilities, and there is much about Marine culture that we can
and should preserve.8 However, the MOC does not acknowledge that: (1) while the
Marine Corps proclaims maneuver warfare is its governing doctrine, we inconsistently or
incompletely practice its tenets and (2) at present, we are not culturally adapting fast
enough to keep pace with the rate of change.

We must face these challenges directly. Marine Corps success depends neither
on technology nor training and equipping Marines to execute orders. Instead, it will rely
on institutional improvements to create ecosystems that build and engage every
Marine’s adaptability, interoperability, and personal contribution to mission
accomplishment. For these reasons, the Marine Corps should quickly seize the
opportunity to not only encourage innovation wherever it might blossom in the
organization, but to make cultural reforms that nurture entrepreneurial thinking and
behavior throughout the institution.

In the following sections, we consider the conditions calling for more
entrepreneurial Marines. We will then discuss potential characteristics and inputs to
Marine Corps entrepreneurship. Next, we will study challenges to instituting
entrepreneurial culture in the Corps, through its struggle to fully adopt maneuver
warfare theory. Last, we offer recommendations on how to accelerate the Marine Corps’
transformation into America’s leading incubator for military entrepreneurs.
Why More Entrepreneurial Marines?

Civilization is entering a new era that rewards creativity and mental agility ahead of simply applying knowledge and processes, which automation is quickly overtaking.¹⁹ Your already-outdated iPhone 6 has the computing power to guide 120 million Apollo-era spacecraft to the moon, and it has been twenty years since a computer beat the best chess player in the world.¹⁰ Consequently, meaningful contribution is becoming more about employing unique human abilities such as synthesis, judgment, and engaging organic and artificial networks to collaborate.

Although change is a common feature of human history, the velocity of change in recent times is momentous. Figure 1 shows the exponential rate of technological change over the past 300 years.

![Figure 1. Exponential Rate of Change](image)

The acceleration of technological progress since 1950 poses a challenge for any organization operating in a competitive environment. This struggle is especially acute within the Department of Defense (DoD), which has been criticized for its institutional lethargy and rigid managerial culture.¹² Notorious for Napoleonic-era staffs and using 1970s-era floppy disks to support its nuclear arsenal, the DoD shows signs of what risk
analyst Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls “fragility” by failing to position itself better to absorb shocks, such as the socio-political disruptions, “gray zone” conflict, and climate change impacts happening today. Various observers suggest the military has not adapted culturally to technological advances, since senior leaders have instead become more enabled micromanagers. Our failure to adapt produces disjointed operational and strategic results while retarding our warfighters’ potential contributions.

Another significant consequence of accelerating change is the different abilities required to prosper in the new era. In what we will refer to as the “Augmented Era”, it is clear that the role of automation is disrupting the ways we live, work, play, and fight. Figure 2 illustrates shifting talent requirements associated with technological conditions by era.

![Figure 2. Shift to the Augmented Era](image)

As the above illustration reflects, physical strength’s significance diminished over millennia as cognitive abilities became more determinative. That trend continues today...
as abstract thinking (empathy, creativity, synthesis, etc.) overtake objective thinking (logic, analysis, etc.) as the driver for success.\textsuperscript{17}

In the Augmented Era, automation will likely address anything that can be reduced to an algorithm and information will become almost universally accessible, enabling ever faster operations.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, team members who must reach back to a “decision maker” for confirmation or direction will likely be overwhelmed by events, as will leaders who fail to support, enable, and intervene only in rare cases. Units such as Task Force 714 (the joint interagency task force that captured Saddam Hussein in 2003) prove that technology can enable smaller, faster, more lethal units, if leaders act almost exclusively in an enabling role to maximize opportunities technology provides.\textsuperscript{19}

The centralized control preferred by the U.S. military is especially problematic because our adversaries seek asymmetric advantage by employing dispersion, networks, and more unconventional strategies. The National Intelligence Council and the Joint Staff identify the problem and its cure to be small, agile, distributed human networks.\textsuperscript{20} But American advantage in this environment will rely on the unique individual capabilities inherent to the human networks we develop and employ. Those team-oriented individuals must be ecologically thinking, comfortable with uncertainty, intrepid, and speculative – who we conceive in this paper to be military entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Spectrum

There is no universally accepted definition of entrepreneurship. “Entrepreneur” was coined in the early 1700s to describe economic risk-takers – a descriptor that remains popular today.\textsuperscript{21} Presently, interpretations of entrepreneurial behavior extend beyond economics into social, environmental, and other realms. Entrepreneurs are often portrayed as mavericks or extreme risk takers, and, occasionally, as exceptional
risk-avoiders. Economist Joseph Schumpeter considered entrepreneurs essential to society for disrupting equilibrium, thereby spurring development. Regardless, most experts agree that entrepreneurship requires some degree of creativity, initiative, and risk-awareness – criteria that equally applies to the military.

The terms “entrepreneurship”, “innovation”, and “creativity” are related but not synonymous. “Imagination is envisioning things that don’t exist,” observes Stanford professor Tina Seelig. “Creativity is applying imagination to address a challenge. Innovation is applying creativity to generate unique solutions. And entrepreneurship is applying innovations, scaling the ideas, by inspiring others’ imagination.”

In addition, military entrepreneurial culture must embody a spirit of kaizen – Japanese for “continuous improvement”. It is neither simple adaptation nor change for change’s sake, but an inclination to constantly seek opportunities and a willingness to make incremental changes to improve oneself, people, things, and situations. Through the lens of kaizen, the entrepreneur perpetually analyzes the status quo to sustain current conditions, improve them, or find ways to apply learnings to other contexts. Applied to all elements of entrepreneurship, kaizen combines curiosity, determination, and optimism towards improving every situation.

Entrepreneurship is not one specific condition but actually exists among the upper realms of a spectrum reflecting varying degrees of outlook, uncertainty tolerance, foresight, and engagement, as illustrated in Figure 3.
An entrepreneurial outlook is ecological. This means sensing environments in terms of interdependencies and ecosystems (i.e., dynamic relationships between multiple items) rather than linear causalities, which are often more difficult to accurately detect.\textsuperscript{25} Central to ecological outlook is the role of productive competition, which recognizes that the best results emerge from vibrant competition, but stops short of the point where the enterprise, the network, or the environment would be worse off.

Uncertainty lies at the far end of a scale with observable and known risk at its opposite.\textsuperscript{26} The potential for catastrophe in armed conflict makes warfighters instinctively alert to controlling risk. However, risk is inherently subjective and thus uncertainty is more typical than we tend to recognize.\textsuperscript{27} Using the Cynefin (kun-EV-in) Framework (Figure 4), we explore the merits of uncertainty tolerance more closely.
When working in Simple or Complicated Domains, risk can be calculated, and solutions developed by applying already available knowledge (Simple) or by bringing in experts (Complicated). In the Complex and especially in the Chaotic Domains, relationships between cause and effect are only known in hindsight (Complex) or not at all (Chaotic), thereby obscuring one’s ability to detect risk and thus creating uncertainty. Only by engagement can one begin to eliminate unacceptable options and identify where hazards and opportunities exist.

Significant is the boundary between the Simple and Chaotic Domains, known as the “complacency zone”. It is often represented as a cliff, where overconfidence from past successes, oversimplification, or belief of invulnerability to future failures leads to a crisis. Bureaucracies are especially vulnerable to this jeopardy caused by dogmatic adherence to standard operating procedures, planning processes, or similar frameworks attempting to simplify problems.
The “sense-analyze-respond” methodology favored among senior headquarters must shift to helping operators apply “probe-sense-respond” or “act-sense-respond” approaches in the field. This adaptation requires greater uncertainty tolerance throughout the organization because it involves interacting with the environment well before understanding it.

On a positive note, the Chaotic Domain is not necessarily negative nor a condition we should reflexively seek to stabilize. In fact, to invent or innovate, we must intentionally enter the Chaotic Domain. It stands to reason that if the emerging environment will be dominated by continuous change, we should be the drivers of that change.

Accordingly, “intrepid” foresight assumes, “To the extent that we can control the future, we do not need to predict it”. As demonstrated in President Kennedy’s 1962 speech on America’s future in space, entrepreneurs strive to shape the future rather than try to anticipate it. Using “safe-to-fail” experiments, entrepreneurs engage novel situations in a manner that allows unproductive ideas to dissipate while harvesting information to develop more productive results. This continuous and deliberate process creates options that increase the likelihood of success, based on a clear vision of the desired end state. Ultimately, the engagement becomes speculative, as the entrepreneur conducts bolder (yet still rational) experiments to achieve more decisive results.

Inputs to Entrepreneurship

Considering the elements of our entrepreneurial spectrum described above, certain individual and leadership characteristics for entrepreneurship emerge. Professor and Civil Affairs Officer, Miemie Winn Byrd collated forty years of research on the
anatomy of innovative organizations and identified traits important to creative performance. Professor Byrd’s traits apply as “individual” and “leadership/organizational” inputs to our entrepreneurial spectrum (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Inputs to Entrepreneurship

An entrepreneurial climate arises from simple conditions: attracting people with the desired individual and leadership inputs and motivating them to contribute to the enterprise. In fact, applying this formula is quite difficult. Of the military services, the Marine Corps is arguably the most entrepreneurial, yet we struggle to introduce and sustain cultural innovation at the institutional level. In studying the Corps’ resistance to one of its most significant cultural innovations, the introduction of maneuver warfare philosophy, we gain a perspective on the challenges ahead when trying to institute entrepreneurial culture in the Marine Corps.
The Challenges of Instituting Entrepreneurial Culture in the U.S. Marine Corps

Entrepreneurship and the Marine Corps’ maneuver warfare philosophy are complementary, but the Corps has not fully assimilated maneuver warfare’s tenets.

Introduced in 1989 in *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, Warfighting*, maneuver warfare “seeks to shatter the enemy’s cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope”.\(^{37}\) Perhaps misnamed because its focus is actually psychological dominance, note the entrepreneurial characteristics of maneuver warfare philosophy described in *MCDP 1*:

Besides traits such as endurance and courage that all warfare demands, maneuver warfare puts a premium on certain particular human skills and traits. It requires the temperament to cope with uncertainty. It requires flexibility of mind to deal with fluid and disorderly situations. It requires a certain independence of mind, a willingness to act with initiative and boldness, an exploitive mindset that takes full advantage of every opportunity, and the moral courage to accept responsibility for this type of behavior. It is important that this last set of traits be guided by self-discipline and loyalty to the objectives of seniors. Finally, maneuver warfare requires the ability to think above our own level and to act at our level in a way that is in consonance with the requirements of the larger situation.\(^{38}\)

*MCDP 1* reads as if it was conceived today to address our emerging geostrategic environment. *Warfighting* was then-Commandant General Al Gray’s equivalent of Kennedy’s moon speech. But Kennedy’s vision was realized within a decade; so, nearly thirty years hence, why is the Corps so slow to fully embrace maneuver warfare?

One answer: maneuver warfare diverges from firepower-attrition theory, the doctrine responsible for victory in two World Wars that made the United States a global hegemon.\(^{39}\) Attrition warfare seeks to inflict continuous losses of enemy personnel and materiel until capitulation. Given America’s material wealth, resources, and geostrategic
location, attrition warfare remains an integral part of the “American way of war”. Understandably, a strategy contributing to U.S. supremacy for over seven decades develops status quo defenders. However, cracks emerged as early as the 1950s when our adversaries sought vulnerabilities in our conventional approach to warfighting. Today, as irregular networks of empowered individuals, contested norms, and persistent disorder begin to dominate our security environment, the defects in firepower-attrition warfare are even harder to ignore – or should be.

Meanwhile, the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GCA), public indifference to military effectiveness, and our own bureaucratic inertia continue to reinforce a culture heavily invested in practices more indicative of firepower-attrition than maneuver warfare. Despite the benefits of a joint force derived from the GCA, productive competition among the services – and with it, greater adaptiveness – has suffered. Former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Michelle Flournoy complains, “This consensus-driven process…takes more time, undermining the Department’s agility and ability to respond to fast-moving events, let alone get ahead of them”.

Additionally, the American people’s superficial interest in their Armed Forces deprives the military of rigorous public scrutiny that stimulates positive change. The “reverent but disengaged attitude” of many Americans and potential for being branded unpatriotic mutes criticism of military shortcomings in securing national objectives while focusing attention on peripheral concerns. Hence, the DoD is catechized for gender integration, sexual assaults, and suicides – all important issues – but otherwise unchecked on how well it performs its core national security mission.
The military also has its own biases when self-reflecting. “We have a military that’s very good at fighting battles. It’s not very good at winning wars and it doesn’t think that’s its job anymore,” notes Tom Ricks.44 “Historians have argued that because militaries study the last war, they do badly in the next. The historical record indicates that such a picture is largely wrong,” adds Williamson Murray. “For the most part, military institutions rarely study the last war, and even when they do, they have a tendency to examine only what agrees with their inclinations, preconceived notions, and prejudices”.45

Dr. Murray’s observations capture a common tendency among bureaucracies, including the U.S. military, to become more mechanical, and to mindlessly perpetuate the bureaucracy, also known as bureaucratic inertia.46 Perhaps the most pervasive indicator of bureaucratic inertia in the Marine Corps today is the increased emphasis on the measurable. Failing to heed the warning in the phrase, “lies, damn lies, and statistics”, the DoD has fixated on data, such as number aircraft available, vehicle egress training completion rates, and percent decrease in suicide ideations.47 Unsurprisingly, Marines tend to perceive activities like personnel management, training and education, and innovation as quantifiable and thus controllable parts of the machine instead of vital elements in a dynamic ecosystem. The Corps’ apparent faith in formulaic approaches to risk management instead of on greater human interaction, moral courage, and even “gut feeling” is concerning for an institution whose historical success derives from practicing the art more often than the science of war.

Not all is lost, but the Marine Corps needs more of the characteristics essential to maneuver warfare. “Adaptability, whether in the biological or commercial realm, requires
experimentation—and experiments are more likely to go wrong than right—a scary reality for those charged with excising inefficiencies,” laments management expert Gary Hamel. “Unfettered controlism cripples organizational vitality,” he adds. “Engagement is also negatively correlated with control. Shrink an individual’s scope of authority, and you shrink their incentive to dream, imagine and contribute”. In short, when an organization skews towards efficiency and bureaucracy, adaptability and innovativeness suffer.

Hamel’s comments echo a growing chorus of criticism in the military against leaders’ failure to remove second-rate performers, controlling instead of commanding, and otherwise promoting a climate where the greater career risk is not mediocre performance, but making a mistake. Even the Ellis Group – the Marine Corps’ own think tank – criticized its service in this regard:

The Marine Corps, as an organization is less strategically fit in the sense that institutional factors interfere with many of our philosophy’s tenets. Maneuver warfare is an ideal that we have yet to reach. This is not just a complaint but also an explication of a risk…Marine leaders who cannot lead in accordance with maneuver warfare, who persist in using authoritative and overly supervisory styles of command, are a threat to the institution as a whole.

Without question, control is important like accountability, discipline, alignment, and performance. But as long as Marine leaders see command and control and freedom as mutually exclusive, the Corps will struggle to embrace maneuver warfare philosophy.

Marines pride ourselves on innovation, and we should lead the effort to establish an ideological construct that ensures our nation’s security into the future. “Today’s overbearing atmosphere of military standardization certainly makes resourceful improvisations…far more difficult,” wrote Lieutenant General Krulak in 1984. “But, one way or another, the Marines are going to have to keep the pioneering spirit alive because it is very near to the heart of what the Corps is all about”. 
Incubating Entrepreneurial Spirit

Assuming it is in the Corps’ best interests to become a more ecologically-minded, uncertainty-tolerant, intrepid, and speculative force, the question becomes, do we have the time to fiddle at the margins before America calls for Marines in the next great crisis? Not likely, but worse, history shows we should know better. Adam Sweidan coined the term “Black Elephants” to describe epic, patently obvious problems that we refuse to see, despite the threat of catastrophic consequences if left unaddressed.\textsuperscript{52}

The Marine Corps’ bureaucratic inertia and failure to operationalize the special trust and confidence inherent to maneuver warfare is a Black Elephant. We must stop taking cues from the officialdoms of the Army, Navy and Defense Departments who acknowledge the need for dramatic change but apparently lack the will or the means to take decisive action. We must evoke the entrepreneurial spirit that inspired earlier Marines to establish our advance naval base seizure mission in the late 19th century, to break from the 1930s consensus that amphibious landings were impossible, and to introduce maneuver warfare doctrine in the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{53} Like them, we must fundamentally change how the Corps does business, which means disrupting the status quo while continually asking two critical questions: (1) Are we accomplishing our mission? (2) Are we keeping our honor clean? In sum, the opportunity to become the preeminent incubator for military entrepreneurs rests upon how the Marine Corps reorients towards, builds, employs, and sustains entrepreneurial spirit.

Reorienting Towards Entrepreneurial Thinking

Fostering entrepreneurial spirit in the Marine Corps begins with our generals and their sergeants major admitting personal failures or, better, how they “got away with it”. Arguably, our senior leaders are old entrepreneurs. As younger Marines, they applied a
kaizen mindset, took risks, failed, and persisted when others did not, which helped their units, their Marines, and them to excel. But in our love for success stories, we often skip the more instructive conversations on doubts and fears, setbacks, and protectors (or “godparents”) that were instrumental to our senior leaders’ success. We need greater transparency of all the factors – good and bad – to achieving eminence. Seeing our senior leaders not only admit personal failure, but enjoy talking about it as a natural part of being a Marine would be an impressive signal to the Corps to engage in the intellectual honesty inherent to entrepreneurship.

Demystifying failure would also modify our typical reactions to mistakes. Instructive is the story of then-Captain Krulak running aground an amphibious tractor prototype during a 1940 demonstration for Atlantic Fleet commander, Admiral King. Krulak’s boss, then-Brigadier General H.M. “Howling Mad” Smith, never reprimanded Krulak for his failed attempt to impress the admiral, despite the upbraiding Smith received for Krulak’s error. Fifty-four Seventy years later one can only guess why, but surely General Smith realized that stifling entrepreneurial spirit was a greater risk to the Corps than ensuring the next demonstration went flawlessly. Recalling our history and honoring the two key questions: mission accomplishment and keeping our honor clean, we must apply greater moral courage to protect our well-intentioned mavericks when they make mistakes.

Concurrently, we must engage the Marine Corps’ most influential cohorts on entrepreneurs: colonels and gunnery sergeants. Some refer to colonels as the “Senators” of the Corps for their relative seniority and considerable power, and gunnery sergeants (“Gunnies”) as the “Mama Bears” of their units. Marines of both ranks help
set and implement command agendas, they allow (or restrict) access to decision makers, and they can bring resources to bear through their large formal and informal networks. Colonels and Gunnies will not likely initiate the changes our Corps needs, but they wield substantial influence over entrepreneurial spirit within their units.

With this in mind, the Marine Corps should specifically assess colonel and gunnery sergeant candidates’ contribution to entrepreneurship in promotion boards. Fitness reports should include a performance anchored rating scale (PARS) descriptor that includes phrases such as, “Views all Marines as leaders, innovators, and change agents,” as well as, “Recognizes that innovation is the number one competency of the future by creating environments for entrepreneurs to flourish”. The existing fitness report challenges Marines to innovate and to develop subordinates, whereas this change motivates all Marines from sergeant through lieutenant colonel to encourage and protect entrepreneurs. Promotion boards should weigh this new performance measure heavily when selecting the “best qualified” colonels and gunnery sergeants, given their pivotal role in enabling entrepreneurs.

Another cohort sorely needing review is the Marine Corps’ civilian employees, who exemplify a paradox Steven Kerr captured in his 1975 article “On the Folly of Rewarding A While Hoping for B”. Seeking to create stability and efficiency within an organization with active duty turnover every 2-3 years, we inadvertently incentivized maintaining the status quo over innovation and agility. Absent productive competition such as in private industry, protected by numerous regulations, and often handled with kid gloves by military leaders who contemplate becoming civilian employees after retirement, there is little motivation to disrupt our civilian workforce. Therefore, General
Schedule (GS) employees in supervisory roles should receive an evaluation rubric similar to the previously-described PARS and should recompete for their positions every four years. No one in the Corps, uniformed or civilian, is “owed” a career – we must restore our legacy of earning one’s reputation every day through constant improvement.

**Building Entrepreneurial Ecosystems**

Consistent with getting our house in order, the Corps should increase interactions between Marines and our American society. In the years preceding World War II, Commandant General Thomas Holcomb sent Marines to perform at community fairs and air shows to expand awareness and interest in the Corps. Entrepreneur that he was, he incorporated training into the Marines’ public events, thus cultivating positive relations, saving money, and enhancing proficiency. Today this might include: granting a communications Marine permissive temporary additional duty shadowing employees at the telecommunications data center near his hometown; sending an engineer platoon to an under-resourced school district to conduct vertical construction training while building a playground; or sending recently redeployed junior officers and staff noncommissioned officers on a month-long speaking tour at university departments and businesses with interests in the region from which the Marines deployed.

Additionally, we should expand interactions such as senior fellowships with private institutions and include more junior officers and staff noncommissioned officers. These exchanges could be a few weeks or months in conjunction with a permanent change of assignment or station. Also, we must remove the stigma of the sabbatical program and consider making it a requirement for junior field grade officers and senior enlisted Marines, as well as sergeants and junior officers in certain military occupational specialties such as communications, intelligence, and even administration. Seeing the
Marine Corps as a part of the American ecosystem instead of as a separate and distinct culture gives our Marines access to a wealth of innovative ideas, helps the Corps recruit the type of entrepreneurial minds we need, and enables civilians to actualize their “Support the troops” ribbons and slogans more productively.

Correspondingly, current recruiting and entry-level training practices already attract and develop candidates possessing many of the individual and leadership inputs illustrated earlier, but more can be done. We have not capitalized on the increased survivability and technological enhancements of our warfighters. American casualties in recent conflicts are a fraction of those from Vietnam and earlier, while optics, computer, and satellite technology enable individual Marines more than ever before.60 Meanwhile, greater longevity among professional athletes, and developments such as the Iron Man-like Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS) signal the diminishing relevance of physical youthfulness to military capability.61 Yet, despite these trends, we pursue high school-aged recruits with their still-adolescent brains.62 These findings should compel the Corps to recruit older, more mentally mature individuals for service.

Additionally, new research suggests that emotional quotient (“EQ” – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills) and curiosity quotient (“CQ” – inquisitiveness, desire to explore and learn), are equal or better determinants of success today than intelligence quotient (IQ).63 EQ and CQ should weigh heavily in our recruiting and integration practices to bring the more entrepreneurially-minded into our Corps. Understandably, this demographic shift raises other manpower concerns like compensation, family support, and career length, but if we wish to remain an “elite” force, the Corps will find a way. We should likewise prepare to meet the expectations
which these higher IQ, EQ, and CQ Marines will have of their leaders to produce environments conducive to entrepreneurship.

Regarding more formal approaches to preparing Marines, the Corps must revise its current emphasis on training (skills development) in favor of education (conceptual understanding). Compared to education, training is typically more easily standardized, readily applied to large groups, and directly measurable, especially regarding resultant performance. Unfortunately, the rapid pace of change accelerates the depreciation rate of many skills traditionally taught at our formal schools. Worse, it creates a generation of Marines conditioned to look to the institution for “the” answer instead of finding it themselves. Today and into the future, a Marine who is not constantly learning new skills and deepening understanding will quickly fall into obsolescence. Since new contexts are continuously emerging and we cannot reliably predict what new skills our Marines will need in the future, we must energize Marines to perpetually acquire new skills, concepts, and principles, especially problem finding and solving competencies, while continuously striving to interact with their environments.

Lectures and tests should rapidly evolve into more adaptive scenario-based/experiential team exercises that: (1) place individuals and groups in uncertain environments and force them to address surprise, (2) encourage members to scrutinize and challenge their contextual presumptions, (3) emphasize the criticality of information sharing, (4) reinforce an understanding that problem solving is a shared responsibility not just the leadership’s purview, and (5) help members appreciate that leader roles change based on the situation.64 Honoring our Core Values and applying speculative engagement will be encouraged with emphasis on “failing fast” to quickly identify what
does not work as the team progresses towards what works while always keeping our honor clean.\textsuperscript{65} The Socratic Method would dominate intellectually honest interactions between faculty/exercise leaders and students as both parties gain deeper understanding of ethics, world views, thought processes, relationships, and context rather than arriving at the perfect solution.

**Employing Entrepreneurial-minded Marines**

Operationally, greater emphasis on entrepreneurship will require a style of leadership that is dramatically more enabling than directive. To dominate the Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) network, General Stanley McChrystal reversed the traditional leadership model, where subordinates fed information to leaders who used it to issue commands. Instead, Joint Interagency Task Force leaders fed information to their subordinates who, “armed with context, understanding, and connectivity, could take their own entrepreneurial, empowered initiative”.\textsuperscript{66} While the highly successful leadership model McChrystal used to defeat AQI might appear revolutionary, \textit{MCDP 1} captured it thirty years earlier when it noted, “Advanced information technology especially can tempt us to try to maintain precise, positive control over subordinates, which is incompatible with the Marine Corps philosophy of command”.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, the more technologically advanced we become, the more critical moral courage and self-discipline becomes to enabling our entrepreneurial Marines.

**Sustaining Entrepreneurial Thinking**

Taking another page from history, the Marine Corps should engage our educational institutions to play a greater role stimulating entrepreneurship. In the years preceding World War II, the most promising officers taught at the Naval War College, and the Marine Corps Schools suspended classes for four months so faculty members
and students could write the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*, one of the seminal contributions to our amphibious success in World War II. Both institutions were known for intellectual honesty and rigorous war games, whereas today we focus more on meeting specific learning objectives towards joint credit.

Henceforth, our professional military education institutions should become the Corps’ innovation engines. Re-designated as “Warfighting Laboratories”, students would attend for six weeks to a year to focus on individual and team projects aimed towards improving the defense establishment from the small unit to the DoD writ large. Attendees would be mentored by hand-picked faculty members who model the previously mentioned inputs to entrepreneurship. Marines throughout the Corps could submit projects to our Warfighting Labs and connect via Wikipedia-like social media pages to apply lessons learned from the work done at the Labs. Former faculty members would return to billets that enable maximum access to other Marines who can benefit from the faculty member’s experience.

**Conclusion**

Critics might say the entrepreneurial approaches described here are expensive and arguably unproven, thus risky. Perhaps so, but lest we not forget the austerity of the 1930s and 40s, when the purchase of three 81mm mortars constituted a weapons modernization program, but also when the Corps was perhaps its most innovative. Moreover, our current Industrial Age model is not only expensive but it has been proven not to work, possibly all the way back to 1950 and noticeably in the emerging operational environment. So, how severe must the military catastrophe be until we stop fiddling with metrics and rhetoric and make substantive changes?
Military entrepreneurship offers a path to supercharge the Marine Corps’ innovation engine to make our institution as antifragile as possible in an increasingly disordered environment. Moreover, the foundation was laid over thirty years ago in the seminal publication, *Warfighting*. Now is the time to fully embrace maneuver warfare philosophy. Lieutenant General Krulak presciently informs us:

> In the most profound sense . . . the future of the Corps lies within itself, because, however large or small its problems are, nobody else is going to find solutions to them. It has been that way for over 200 years and it is that way today. It is a challenge that will demand the very best of a Corps that has been sharpened on challenge for all of its colorful life.⁷²

Admittedly, the term “entrepreneur” carries too much baggage, especially given the considerable resentments between military and civilian society. So ideally, for the purposes of this paper, a neologism might have been derived to describe entrepreneurial traits and conditions while shedding the emotional consequences associated with the existing language. That being said, now that we have explored what it means to be an entrepreneur, what it takes to enable entrepreneurial spirit, and how closely entrepreneurship resembles the Marine Corps’ maneuver warfare philosophy, it is this author’s earnest hope that someday soon the neologism for “military entrepreneur” is quite simply, “U.S. Marine”.

Endnotes


11 McGowan, “Education and Accelerated Change.”


McGowan, “Education and Accelerated Change.”

Ibid

Ibid.

Ibid.


The Joint Staff warns of an emerging security environment defined by “contested norms” and “persistent disorder”. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Operating Environment 2035 (JOE 2035): The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2016), 4; The National Intelligence Council sees “individual empowerment” and “diffusion of power” as two megatrends in the coming decades. National Intelligence Council, Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Agency, December 2012), ii-xii; General Martin Dempsey, concludes: “I think size and technology matter, but what matters more is the rate at which we innovate…Size matters, but the rate at which we can innovate, adapt, and respond to changes in the environment matters more…I don’t find the options to be that crisp in [conflicts with non-state actors], and therefore we have to be more thoughtful and more open to negotiating them, remembering that we have to have a moral compass.” R.D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, “From the Chairman – An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” Joint Forces Quarterly 78, 3rd Quarter (July 1, 2015): 7.


Taleb, Antifragile, 56.

Slovic notes, “[Risk] does not exist ‘out there,’ independent of our minds and cultures, waiting to be measured. Instead, risk is seen as a concept that human beings have invented to help them understand and cope with the dangers and uncertainties of life. Although these dangers are real, there is no such thing as ‘real risk’ or ‘objective risk.’” Ibid., 4.


Ibid.

Ibid.


John F. Kennedy, “Nation’s Efforts in Space Exploration,” public speech, Rice University, Houston, TX, September 12, 1962.


Of note, a distinguishing feature of speculation for military entrepreneurs is personal exposure to the consequences of their acts. In other words, the military entrepreneur has “skin in the game” as compared to those who make decisions with others people’s resources, such as money, physical wellbeing, et cetera.

Perhaps implied in Dr. Byrd’s “persistence” category, but worthy of emphasis is “self-discipline” in entrepreneurial pursuits, especially when operating in distributed, austere environments. Similarly, Byrd’s research does not identify commitment to core values as an input to entrepreneurship, but it is worthy of emphasis among Marines and especially among Marine leaders. Figure created by author with information adapted from Miemie Winn Byrd, The Anatomy of the Innovative Organization: A Case Study of Organizational Innovation within a Military Structure (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, February 24, 2012), 25, 36.


Headquarters Marine Corps, Warfighting, 73.

Ibid., 75-76.


43 Ibid.

44 Rothkopf et al., “‘We Fail Better’.”


54 Interestingly, the amphibious tractor aided Marines in almost every major conflict since its introduction and Krulak became one of our most influential leaders, including his role in saving the Corps from assimilation into the Army and Navy and preserving civilian oversight of the military. Krulak, *First to Fight*, 103-104.

A more complete PARS might articulate the following: Views all Marines as leaders, innovators, and change agents. In the spirit of intellectual honesty, regularly gains new perspectives from peers and team members and likewise provides constructive input relative to others’ ideas and suggestions. Values creativity, productivity, and efficiency as the keys to development. Through personal example, fosters a spirit of creative collaboration, working in uncertainty, and questioning common practices in an effort to reinvent the routine. Recognizes that innovation is the number one competency of the future by creating environments for entrepreneurs to flourish. Adapted from Paul Falcone, “Sample Creativity and Innovation Phrases for Performance Appraisal,” October 8, 2014, http://playbook.amanet.org/sample-creativity-and-innovation-phrases-for-performance-appraisal/ (accessed January 23, 2017).


Adapted from Schultz, Military Innovation in War, 13-14.


70 Krulak, *First to Fight*, 146.


72 Krulak, *First to Fight*, 227.