

Redefining how Relative Values are determined on Fitness
Reports

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to
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The current process for fitness reports remedied the previous system that had become overly inflated and undermined many Marine's faith in the reporting process.¹ A major component of the current fitness report process is the use of relative values, which compares the value of each report to the rating history of any given grade based upon a reporting senior profile.² Though the current version of the Marine Corps Fitness Report process is widely viewed as successful, its use of relative values, which is one of many measures used to determine promotions, can sometimes be misleading. In 2004 GySgt Antonio S. Payne, at the time a USMC Career Counselor, showed in his paper, "Misleading Raw Scores on a Master Brief Sheet", how a new fitness report can impact on a Marines relative value.³ For example, introducing a new report with a high or low average into a reporting seniors profile can skew his overall average and give a Marine a potentially

¹ Jostlin, Robert E. "Fitrep 2000" *Marine Corps Gazette* Mar 1996 pg 48.

² Marine Corps Order P1610.7F, *Performance Evaluation System*. (PES) Washington D.C., Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2006, Paragraph 8012 pg 8-8.

³ Payne , GySgt. Misleading Raw Scores on a Master Brief Sheet 2004 quoted in Hovey, Captain Eric. *Fuzzy Math: Do current relative values tell an accurate story?* February 2005, pg 4.

unflattering look during the promotion process.⁴ To alleviate these issues, the process in which relative values are assigned should be changed. A Marine must be allowed to establish a relative value prior to writing his or her first fitness report because the current method for determining an average can be faulty, relative values change over time, and the system does not have any merit for the first two reports written by a reporting senior for a given grade.

Process

To generate a fitness report average the reporting senior rates mission accomplishment, individual character, leadership, intellect and wisdom on a scale from A-H. A score is then generated per marking ranging from 0-7.⁵ These scores are then totaled and an overall average is assigned to the report.⁶ The score is then compared to the scores of other reports written on the equivalent rank and a relative value is assigned. Relative value for a fitness report is currently determined after the average score of three reports is taken. The report is further assigned a

⁴ Payne , GySgt.

⁵ MCO P1610.7F, (PES) a. Each block in the marking gradient for each PARS has an assigned numeric value as follows: A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5, F=6, G=7, and H (not observed)=0. NOTE: Block H (not observed) has no value and does not factor into the calculation of the average. pg G-2.

⁶ MCO P1610.7F (PES).

value between 80 and 100 in order to compare the report with other Marines' reports of the same rank written by the same reporting senior.⁷ The information is then shown on the Master Brief Sheet, which is the key document used by promotion boards for determining if Marines will be promoted. Though the process for determining the relative value of a fitness report is relatively straightforward, it is not without its critics.

Current system can be faulty

A Marine must be allowed to establish a relative value prior to writing his or her first fitness report because the current method for determining an average can be faulty. Captain Erik Hovey expanded upon GySgt Payne's topic in his research paper *Fuzzy Math: Do relative values tell an accurate story*, by saying,

While originally designed to add numerical objectivity to the subjective task of writing fitreps, relative values can be skewed and can paint a misleading picture of the Marine reported on.⁸

In his paper he also demonstrated how introducing a new report into a reporting senior profile with a high or low

⁷ MCO P1610.7F, (PES) Once calculated, the relative value will appear on the MRO's MBS in numeric fashion on an 80 to 100 scale. pg G-2.3

⁸ Hovey, Captain Eric. pg 4.

scoring average can impact upon the relative value.⁹ Since relative values are an integral part of the briefing process to determine if a Marine will or will not get promoted, it has the potential to skew an average and potentially affect a Marines chance of promotion.¹⁰

Relative Values can change over time

A Marine must be allowed to establish a relative value prior to writing his or her first fitness report because relative values can change over time. One phenomenon with the current relative values is that a reporting senior may change their average marks over time. For example, a Second Lieutenant may evaluate a Staff Sergeant differently when they are Major, based upon a change in perception in what skills are important to a Sergeant.¹¹ The newest version of the PES manual written in 2006 has attempted to guard against changing relative values by showing a relative value at the time of processing on the new Master Brief sheet.¹² However reporting seniors can also inflate reports over time, by continuously marking their Marines

⁹ Hovey, Capt Eric.

¹⁰ Payne, Gunnery Sergeant A.S.

¹¹ MSgt Klarzuk interview.

¹² MCO Order 1610.7F (PES) The Relative Value at the Time of Processing. This numeric value reflects the relative value of the MRO's fitness report based on the RS's rating history for Marines of the same grade as the MRO as of the time of processing of the MRO's report. This number is a constant and once calculated, it will not change. Pg G-2.

higher and higher. Inflated reports were one of the reasons the previous system was replaced.¹³ Worst yet is a reporting senior who attempts to manipulate his average by altering his or her reports:

Reporting seniors who attempt to change their rating philosophy may either positively or negatively affect the relative value of reports for MROs they previously rated.¹⁴

Current system does not "count" for first two reports in each given grade

A Marine must be allowed to establish a relative value prior to writing his or her first fitness report because the system does not have any merit for the first two reports written by a reporting senior for a given grade. Since a relative value is not determined until the reporting senior writes three reports on a specific rank the relative value does not apply to the first two reports. Obviously the promotion board will take into consideration that a reporting senior has only written on only one Marine. So the question is how many reports are enough to generate an average that accurately depicts the Marines written on? If relative value aids in determining how the Marine reported on "stands up" against other Marines of the same rank who a reporting senior has written on, then a

¹³ Jostlin, Robert E. pg.48.

¹⁴ MCO Order 1610.7F (PES) Paragraph 2(e)(2) pg 8-9.

true depiction of a relative may not take effect for some time. ¹⁵ In Capt Hovey's research paper he pointed out that certain billets just do not have the opportunities to write a large sampling of reports. ¹⁶ Therefore it may be a number of years before you can generate enough fitness reports to take an average. The down side of this is that the Marine reported on may appear before a promotion board during that time. The way to change how relative values are used is to allow the reporting senior a chance to determine his or her own relative value prior writing his or her first report.

Counter-argument

Allowing a reporting senior to establish his or her own relative value prior to writing his or her own first report represents a shift in how a relative value is used. The intent behind establishing a relative value prior to the first report though is to paint a better picture to the individual at the promotion board briefing a Marines' fitness report and determining if he or she should be promoted. One of the arguments to continue the current method of determining relative value is that the process

¹⁵ MCO Order 1610.7F (PES) The profile is a snapshot of the RS's rating history. The relative value of each report is based on how the report compares to the RS's rating history for a given grade. Paragraph 8012 2b, pg 8-8.

¹⁶ Hovey, Captain Eric. Pg 6.

should not be changed and relative values are only one piece of a Fitness Report. After all, the section I is intended to give a more accurate "word picture" of the Marine reported on.¹⁷ However, by adding a Marines' relative value that he or she has predetermined to the briefing process it can paint a more accurate picture of how the Marine reported on compares against other Marines and increase or decrease a Marines chance for promotion. Another argument to continue the current method is that a second lieutenant does not have enough experience to determine his or her average when he or she first writes reports. Under the current system a relative value is determined anyway after three reports, regardless of how much experience a reporting senior has. A problem with the current system is that a second lieutenant writes three reports and relative value is immediately assigned. If those three reports represent three "strong performers" the reporting senior has established a high average. If the Marine Corp determines that an individual is qualified enough to be a Marine officer then that officer should be

¹⁷ MCO 1610.7F (PES). The RS will make mandatory comments to make a word picture for all observed reports. These comments are intended to provide a more complete and detailed evaluation of the MRO's professional character and may address any entry made in sections A through H or as the Reporting Senior deems appropriate. Paragraph 4012 2a. pg 4-40.

qualified enough to determine his or her own average. In addition by allowing a reporting senior to establish can lend more creditability to the first reports that he or she writes on and can prevent a high or low average. Most importantly by allowing a reporting senior to pick his or her own average it will guard against a reporting senior writing to a perceived average. In addition the reporting senior will maintain consistency throughout his or her career as a reporting senior. The PES manual clearly states that reporting seniors should remain consistent in their reports and warns against reporting seniors inflating reports over time by stating:

Reporting seniors who attempt to change their rating philosophy may either positively or negatively affect the relative value of reports for MROs they previously rated.¹⁸

A final argument, and admittedly the strongest against changing the current method, is that the system would eventually revert back to the "old way" in which everyone was marked above average.¹⁹ The best method for ensuring that reports are not inflated once a reporting senior establishes his or her own average is by rating a Marines performance based upon "displayed efforts" not some type relative value. If a reporting senior writes to "displayed

¹⁸ MCO 1610.7F (PES) Paragraph 8012 2(e)(2) pg 8-9.

¹⁹ Joslin, Maj Robert E.

efforts" vice his or her own average then they will not have to worry about inflating their reports. ²⁰ An established average is a method for guarding against inflating reports over time. By allowing a reporting senior to determine his or her own average it frees him or her up from writing to an average and writing as he or she should to a "displayed effort." Ultimately the relative value can then be used for what it was meant for as a benchmark to compare the Marine against other Marines of the same rank in the reporting senior's average.

Conclusion

The current Fitness Report System is undoubtedly better than the last one. One thing that has remained constant and always will in the Marine Corps is the evaluation of our Marines and determining their potential for promotion. Further refining the process and maintaining steadfast vigilance over the system will only improve upon a valuable tool. Giving a reporting senior the flexibility to establish a relative value prior to writing his or her first fitness report will add merit to the report and circumvent issues with the current process. At the very minimum the United States Marine Corp and its leaders must continue to educate reporting seniors on the Fitness Report

²⁰ MCO 1610.7F (PES) Paragraph 4006 4(b) pg 4-23.

System and most importantly steadfastly guard against inflated reports. The importance of maintaining the integrity of the performance evaluation system is stated by the Commandant's guidance within the PES manual,

Every officer serves a role in the scrupulous maintenance of this evaluation system, ultimately important to both the individual and the Marine Corps. Inflationary markings only serve to dilute the actual value of each report, rendering the fitness report ineffective.²¹

Word Count

1763

²¹ MCO 1610.7F (PES) Paragraph 1004 pg 1-5.

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