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14. ABSTRACT

Open, honest communication about failure should be encouraged rather than stigmatized within military culture. Military leaders should recognize the inevitability of failure and view discussions about it as an opportunity to build junior leaders and reinforce their resiliency. Too often failure is glossed over when its lessons are what forge our ability to handle adversity and grow. Failure can be linked to each of the Marine Corps Leadership Traits: it is unavoidable yet nowhere to be found in our leadership doctrine. The words fail and failure only appear in Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10 Leading Marines six times. Each instance is a description of an anecdotal outcome or a leadership failure. The publication does not discuss the potential for using failure as a leadership development opportunity. The word hardship appears only four times, but only in telling the reader that they will face hardship or that it is a leader's responsibility to prevent unnecessary hardship. The evaluation process does not address how leaders should deal with adversity, thereby ignoring this critical leadership development issue and missing a chance to help Marines realize their fullest potential.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: Get Over Yourself: Exploring the Role of Failure in Leadership Development

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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AY 2020-21

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Executive Summary

Title: Get Over Yourself: Exploring the Role of Failure in Leadership Development

Author: Major Nathaniel G. Miller

Thesis: The concept of learning from failure is absent from Marine Corps leadership doctrine but should be included in the evaluation process and utilized as a leadership development tool.

Discussion: Open, honest communication about failure should be encouraged rather than stigmatized within military culture. Military leaders should recognize the inevitability of failure and view discussions about it as an opportunity to build junior leaders and reinforce their resiliency. Too often failure is glossed over when its lessons are what forge our ability to handle adversity and grow. Failure can be linked to each Marine Corps Leadership Trait; it is unavoidable yet nowhere to be found in our leadership doctrine. The words "fail" and "failure" only appear in Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10 *Leading Marines* six times. Each instance is a description of an anecdotal outcome or a "leadership failure". The publication does not discuss the potential for using failure as a leadership development opportunity. The word "hardship" appears only four times, but only in telling the reader that they will face hardship or that it is a leader's responsibility to prevent unnecessary hardship. The evaluation process does not address how leaders should deal with adversity, thereby ignoring this critical leadership development issue and missing a chance to help Marines realize their fullest potential.

Business, psychology, and medical professionals use a diverse array of failure concepts to capitalize on the diverse lessons that can be learned from failure. By breaking through the stigma of failure, military leaders can exploit this valuable tool. Using concepts such as failure aversion, authentic leadership, growth mindset, intelligent failure, posttraumatic growth, and prudent risk provides military leaders with a new lens through which to view the role of failure in personal and professional development.

Disclaimer

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Preface

When was the last time a superior sat you down and talked to you about adversity and how you handled it? My answer is never, yet I have failed numerous times. I chose to write about failure because it is a factor that forms who we are as leaders regardless of your career or position in life. We all fail. As military leaders, failure should be viewed as an opportunity to build our junior leaders and bolster their resiliency. Too often failure is glossed over instead of using its lessons to forge the ability to handle adversity and progress. Failure can be linked to each Marine Corps Leadership Trait; it is unavoidable yet nowhere to be found in our leadership doctrine. The evaluation process does not address how leaders deal with adversity, and by ignoring this critical leadership development issue we are missing a chance to grow people to their fullest potential.

Failure provides the opportunity to recognize innate imperfections within ourselves. It is the recognition of these imperfections that protect against arrogance and hubris. This acknowledgment develops our ability to lead with tact because we understand we are fallible. Our endurance is reinforced as we face unexpected failure, fight through it, and realize the experience did not break us. We become more evenhanded through failure because our decisions in dealing out justice are filtered through the realization that we are just as imperfect. These are three examples of how failure can build our leadership traits, and why it is important that we face failure head-on instead of pretending that it does not happen to us. Failure can be a painful experience. It is our job as leaders to help those under our charge to use the experience to grow, rather than break.

Introduction

Failure is an inevitable part of personal growth and development. Marcus Aurelius wrote, "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."[1] He meant that everything humans experience, good and bad, is an opportunity to practice virtue. Failure is an opportunity to learn. Surprisingly, the mention of failure as a leadership development tool is missing from Marine Corps leadership doctrine and its evaluation process. This paper will examine how often and in what context the Marine Corps discusses failure and compares it to what major academic disciplines and private industry say about the connection between failure and leadership. The literature review will begin by defining several concepts that illustrate this connection such as *failure aversion*, *loss aversion*, *growth mindset*, *intelligent failure*, *posttraumatic growth*, and *prudent risk*. This will be followed by a comparison of how these professional and academic terms and resources can be used to inform military culture. Drawing from the ways in which other professions have integrated the role of failure into the learning process, the Marine Corps can use these lessons learned to improve the quality of its leadership development practices and publications.

To better understand this issue, the research for this paper centers around three questions: [1] Where and how often does the Marine Corps mention failure in current leadership doctrine? [2] What does the academic literature say about the connection between failure and leadership? [3] Borrowing examples and lessons learned from both industry and academia, how can the Marine Corps incorporate failure into their leadership development practices and publications?

The use of scholarly, peer reviewed books and articles from the business, social science, and medical disciplines constitutes the bulk of the literature review. The purpose is to understand and highlight how these disciplines view and use failure in the development of their

leaders. The final section uses these findings to provide recommendations for incorporating

failure as a leadership development tool based on examples from various organizations and

private industry. Before this can be done, however, the paper examines if, and how often a

discussion about failure can be found in Marine Corps leadership doctrine.

Literature Review

Doctrine

The Marine Corps' foundational publication on leadership was first published in 1995 and revised in 2014. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 6-10 *Leading Marines* is the base document for leadership curriculum in all Marine Corps resident schools.[2] Admittedly, this publication was not written as a "how to" guide, rather it provides broad guidance to encourage discussions on leadership and leading Marines. The topics cover everything within the Marine Corps' leadership philosophy from its leadership traits and principals to defining physical and moral courage. The words "fail" and "failure" only appear in the text six times, either as a description of an anecdotal outcome or describing something as a "leadership failure." It does not discuss the prospect of using failure as a leadership development opportunity. The word "hardship" appears only four times, but only in telling the reader that they will face hardship or that it is a leader's responsibility to prevent unnecessary hardship. The word "adversity" appears just once.

If failure, hardship, and adversity are all experiences of leadership in the military, why are they not addressed as development tools within Marine Corps leadership doctrine? All conversation regarding failure in MCWP 6-10 is done so for the purpose of acknowledging the reasons why we should overcome failure, hardship, and adversity if they occur. The publication defines failure as an obstacle, one to be conquered or be prevented.[3] This is where MCWP 6-10 misses the mark; the doctrine presses the reader to display courage and develop others while never advocating for owning one's own failure. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10 promotes failure as neither necessary nor sufficient for one's professional development.[4] The

military is full of examples that illustrate this point but there is a gap in literature correlating the positive value of failure within military culture.

The Military-Failure Disconnect

Military culture is marked by tradition, discipline, hierarchy, and formality. Legends of Marines succeeding in the face of insurmountable odds provide role models for today's members. The legends of Chesty Puller, Dan Daly, and A. A. Cunningham leave out the moments of failure that most likely propelled them to their glory. Thousands of years of history show that courage, integrity, and discipline are pillars associated with success, while negative values and emotions such as fear and weakness are associated with failure. Every leadership trait within MCWP 6-10 can be strengthened and reinforced through positive failure management strategies. Without failure, military leaders would not be human; therefore, it should be confronted head-on.

Dominic Tiereny and Fernando Garetto, some of the few military authors on failure and military culture, relate the negative stigma of failure to its relationship with military culture.[5] Tiereny describes the intersection of military culture and failure as encouraging overconfidence stigmatizing failure. This is emphasized through the military ethos of mission accomplishment first and foremost.[6] Garetto affirms that failure is a part of learning and that leaders should be open and free to share their personal failures. He argues that this is more difficult than it appears and agrees with Tiereny, that military culture places a high value on overconfidence. Garetto claims this is for two reasons: the command culture and the relationship between failure and the loss human life. As part of the military tradition and culture, famed leaders and thinkers are known because of their successes but not their failures. In order to leave a legacy of personal success, leaders tend to focus their command culture on values such as discipline and integrity

while avoiding the topic of failure altogether.[7] A command culture that encourages individuals to acknowledge and learn from failure can increase the energy and innovation within an organization by removing the shame of failure. The best and brightest are not supposed to "need" effort, having to "try" casts doubt on their ability. If one is confident in their abilities military culture maintains that multiple attempts should not be necessary. Additionally, by giving maximum effort a person does not have any excuses if failure happens.[8] This is in-line with Dr. Carol Dweck's theory of expressing a *fixed* mindset, whereupon a person's qualities are permanent, they are who they are, and cannot not change.[9] Failure is a natural progression in the military profession, a challenge that all leaders will face. Josh Powers contends in his article, *Learning to Fail,* that failure is not what characterizes a person, it is not who they are, unless they allow the failure to define them as a leader.[10] What matters most is that leaders learn from failure, recognize its lessons towards improving the profession of arms, and not shy away from risk due to the fear of failing.

The confluence of military culture, identity, and an organization's perception of failure plays an integral role in the development of military leaders. Dr. Lauren Mackenzie discusses a variety of ways to analyze the effect of failure within education in her article *The Role of Dialectical Tensions in Making Sense of Failures in Teaching & Learning*. In it she observes the relationships between teaching, learning, and failure and how they link to work, identity, and in relation to cultural expectations.

In discussing the relationship between failure, work, and identity, Dr. Mackenzie provides failure examples of negative student critiques on courses or academic journal rejections. From a military perspective, one could compare being passed over on a prestigious board or being ranked below average on a progress review. She claims, "If successes are the only actions

that are rewarded in academia, then it often follows that failures are topics to be avoided."[11] The

same can be said for the military. Academia and the military are both professions that define the

individual to their core being, making it difficult to separate the job from their persona. This is

due to these profession's required acts of service and obligation to put others' well-being first.

Therefore, it is paramount that failure, and the reaction to it, are discussed within these

professions as a career builder rather than destroyer.

Dr. Mackenzie also examines cultural expectations regarding failure. Discussing failure

requires a focused effort and clearly communicated goals. What is considered professional

dialogue about failure, or freely shared experience intended as mentorship may carry unintended

consequences if not communicated skillfully and with purpose.[12] Due to the rigid hierarchal

system of the military, this type of interaction can have direct implications for those both up and

down the chain-of-command. For example, a leader may view the sharing of a personal or

professional failure as an act of interconnection, when in reality the effect is a loss in confidence

in the leader by the subordinate. This holds true for expectations set by leadership. The age-old

military leadership adage, "you are responsible for everything your unit does or fails to do" is

alive and well in today's military. Failure's ignominy can cause undue pressure to explain

failure away and negatively brand it down through the ranks if the commander's stance on

adversity is not clearly communicated.

Failure, Effort, and Risk

While Dr. Mackenzie's work focused on teaching and learning, her work can be applied

to military leadership development. It reinforces the idea that the intrapersonal view one adopts

for themselves profoundly effects the way they live their life.[13] Dr. Dweck's *growth mindset* idea

is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can improve through your efforts,

your strategies, and help from others.[14] The idea that valued traits can be fostered and grown

generates the desire for improvement and continued learning. This translates to the acceptance

of *prudent risk* and stretching one's learning to the limits, even if things do not go as planned.

The nature of military decisions inherently requires a certain level of risk. The

appropriate level of risk ranges from "no-risk" to an "absolute gamble". *Prudent risk* is finding

the minimum amount of risk required to reap the maximum amount of reward available.[15] If

military leaders do not take risk, experience failure, and learn from mistakes early on in their

careers, then they will not fully understand the characteristics of *prudent risk*-taking and will

never fully harness the rewards (and the potential for connecting with others) available through

taking risks. Risk and effort are two things that reveal your inadequacies. People's ideas about

risk and effort grow out of their basic mindset.[16] If an organization wants to build great leaders,

they must instill the *growth mindset* with a focus on development. If they remove the idea that

leaders can improve, individuals will only seek out the tried and true rather than experiences that

will test their limits through *prudent risk.*

Failure Aversion

In his article, *Epic Fail: Why Leaders Must Fail to Ultimately Succeed*, Timothy Trimalio

claims that Americans learned a version of *loss aversion,* he calls *failure aversion* from the

"participation award culture" of youth sports. *Loss aversion* is a psychological theory referring

to the common tendency of humans to prefer to not lose something versus acquiring equivalent

gains.[17] *Failure aversion* therefore is the idea that humans prefer to not to fail at something

versus achieving the possibility of success through risk. Without experiencing growth from

adversity, humans tend to fear failure, ultimately preferring not to fail rather than take a risk for

ultimate success. This is not just an issue within the civilian sector, this translates over to the US military and how leaders are trained and evaluated.

Just as Lieutenant Colonel Fernando Garetto argues in his article, *Failure: A Practioner's View*, Trimailo identifies the military occupation as an unforgiving environment that may result in death and destruction. Overconfidence is emphasized within the military because it operates in high-stakes endeavors where death and destruction are possible outcomes. There is a predisposition to overlook adverse consequences where lives are on the line to avert second guessing of decisions by leaders. Organizations take part in *failure aversion* when they ignore activity for fear of negative outcomes as they maneuver to promote their organization for resources and prestige.[18] Because death and destruction are high visibility outcomes, military leaders receive heavy scrutiny from higher headquarters, US Congress, and the American public; military leaders at all levels display the natural tendency to avoid scrutiny because of failure as it threatens their professional survival.[19] This then breeds a fear of failure and ultimately an expectation of error-free performance where failure at the lowest levels is met with unjust reaction resulting in a reduction in creativity and innovation. The result of *prudent risk* cannot be absolute success or absolute failure. If failure is not discussed, leaders will never feel as if they can faulter because they do not have the professional top-cover or means to recover from failure.

Growth After Failure

The suppression of creativity and innovation threatens the success of the military in today's era of Great Power Competition. The United States faces opposition and competition from peer adversaries, and this competition cannot be met without bold and resourceful thinking from defense policy down to leadership development at the O-5 command level of the military.[20]

Hardship pushes us to reassess matters we took for granted and find new ways to do things. In their book, *Wired to Create: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, authors Kaufman and Gregoire discuss the psychological phenomenon known as *posttraumatic growth*. The term was coined in the 1990s by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun to describe instances of individuals who experienced profound transformation as they coped with various types of trauma and challenging life circumstances.[21] The idea has now been observed in more than three hundred scientific studies, and research has found up to 70 percent of trauma survivors report some positive psychological growth.[22]   This theory should be recognized by military leaders to encourage *prudent risk* and push them to seek creative ways to accomplish goals or tasks they previously failed.

Kaufman and Gregoire offer a variety of specific examples that illustrate how changing the perspective on adversity can improve psychological resources and broaden attention to see new possibilities and goals.[23] Talking about failure up front and highlighting the good that can come from it is a way to discuss adversity in a positive way. It prepares leaders for the possibility of failure while encouraging them to take *prudent risk*, creating an opportunity to look at failure as a creative boost or a potential source of inspiration and motivation.

To use adversity to broaden attention to new opportunities, as Kaufman and Gregoire suggest, leaders must first evaluate their own personal views on failure.   In his article, *On Failure*, Major Dan Mauer tells the reader that the military services (through a set of values and beliefs associated with military culture) teach that to follow others, subordinates must trust in their leader's capacity to succeed and believe in them and the idea that personal success is achieved through their leader's success. He also identifies that for most, the primary professional goal is to advance through the ranks of one's service, but to advance one must strive

to beat their peers to elevated positions of authority. The service cannot have losers, complainers, quitters, or pessimists in its ranks. Mauer goes on to state, "The military leader must know, and they must do. Always. Successfully."[24] Mauer asserts that human nature and the relationship between success, failure, and memory tend to cause military leaders to diminish their recollections of previous failures based on their experienced upward mobility and positive reinforcement from superiors. Military culture expects leaders to incessantly strive to be the best and to promote an air of uninhibited, determined execution, which Mauer claims, ultimately keeps us from attaining true growth as leaders.[25] On face-value this is admirable, although, when combined with Dr. Dweck's theory of *fixed mindset*, as commonly done within military culture, those traits shield against growth from failure. Without correlating success with overcoming adversity, military leaders fear that the absence of absolute success threatens their professional advancement.

Failure and Organizational Culture

Mauer's assertions are reinforced throughout Schein and Schein's three levels of organizational culture analysis (Figure 1).[26] The combination of cultural artifacts, espoused

Figure 1
Schein's Multi-Layered Organizational Culture Model
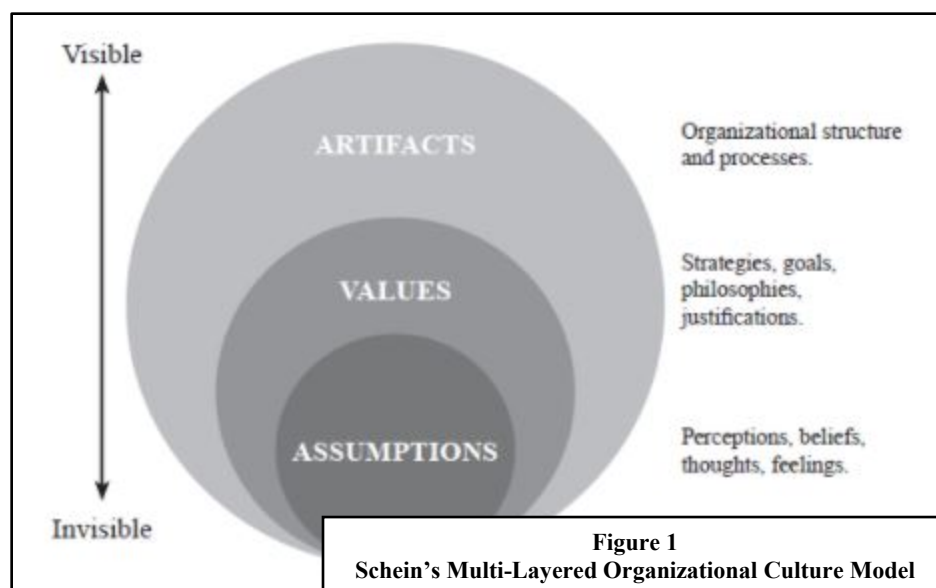
beliefs, and values created the basic underlying assumptions when it comes to leadership and the role of failure in the Marine Corps. Through the continuous need to justify their existence, the Marine Corps skillfully developed a special prestige among the American public and Congress that signifies elitism, patriotism, and the embodiment of American values of hard work and perseverance.[27] Cultural artifacts are instances or items that one would see, hear, or feel.[28] For the Marine Corps, this includes uniforms such as their dress blues, and slogans such as *Semper Fi* and *The Few, The Proud*. They also established espoused beliefs and values, such as once a Marine always a Marine, doing more with less, and emphasizing professional military appearance in and out of uniform.[29] These beliefs and values form the principles and ethical rules that standardize the cultural attitudes of organizational members.[30] These artifacts and beliefs create the basic underlying assumptions that diminish the value of failure Mauer describes. Marine Corps leaders begin to unconsciously seek and covet absolute success if the value of failure is not outwardly addressed as an element of growth within leadership doctrine and the evaluation process.

This begs the question: does Marine Corps culture teach us to self-reflect on failure? MCWP 6-10 tells us to "know yourself and seek self-improvement", but how deep does that reflection take an individual? This is the point where leadership doctrine can capitalize on the lessons of failure. Mauer makes three observations for how leaders deal with success and failure. First, they may ignore the failure, or decry its meaning as something so valueless it is beyond worth mentioning. Second, they lie about the cause of failure to themselves. They make themselves believe the failure was not their fault or that the failure was not really failure but success in disguise, Mauer uses the term "success in vitro." They lie to themselves by blaming the failure on external factors…it was not me it was the scenario, the test, the training, etc. In

her article, "When We Learn from Failure (and When We Don't)", Gretchen Gavett summarizes the *Harvard Business School* working paper, "'My Bad!' How Internal Attribution and Ambiguity of Responsibility Affect Learning from Failure" [31] by Meyers, Staats, and Gino that underscores the importance of *attribution of responsibility*, "namely taking personal ownership for the outcome or blaming it on external circumstances."[32] Attribution of responsibility describes an increased probability that individuals will learn from, and work harder, after a mistake if the individual assumes personal ownership of the failure itself. This idea lends itself to Mauer's final description of the way leaders deal with failure by acknowledging and accepting it as their own.[33] The blending of Mauer's concepts and Meyers, Staats, and Gino's research on *attribution of responsibility* suggests that encouraging leaders to take ownership of failure will promote future learning and provide experience that can be used to develop subordinate leaders.

The Acceptance of Risk and the Power of Persistence

Leaders who cannot learn from their own mistakes cannot build other leaders. Dr. Melanie Stefan recommends keeping a record of failures to remind leaders of the "missing truths" of their professional achievements that sometimes get overshadowed by their success. Dr. Stefan promotes sharing failures to foster internal learning and encouraging others to do the same.[34] Sharing stories of personal failure prevents unrealistic expectations, promotes incentive for *prudent risk*, demonstrates responsibility for outcomes, and inspires team members to help their subordinates learn and build from their own mistakes. As a leader, one must be prepared for the emotional tax that adversity can extract so they may have the resilience to handle and move forward when their own subordinates fail. Gavett again references Myers, Staats, and Gino contending that the ability to assign responsibility for failure may be complicated by the involvement of teams of coworkers, participants, various stakeholders, and other variable

considerations.[35] As a leadership development tool, the supervisor's focus should be on

removing obstacles to failure acceptance. This means carefully designating areas of

responsibility, understanding reporting structures, providing guidance on the desired end state

and expectations, and talking about failure as a learning mechanism before the start.[36]

    Before one can accept failure, their own or others, they must first understand failure. An

intelligent comprehension of failure's causes and contexts will help avoid needless blame and

overblown reaction while establishing an effective tactic for learning from failure. Amy

Edmonson published "A Spectrum of Reason for Failure" (Figure 2) in her article *Strategies for

Learning from Failure* to clarify the relationship between failure and blame versus praise. The

spectrum covers a list of nine causes of failure ranging from deliberate deviation to thoughtful

experimentation and their positioning between *blameworthy* to *praiseworthy*. By understanding

Figure 2
Edmondson's Spectrum of Reason for Failure

the cause and the context, leaders can categorize failure into three broad categories: preventable, complexity-related, and intelligent.[37] Examining failure through the lens of this categorization encourages one to treat, punish, or praise appropriately while maintaining the ability to learn from the failure.

Implementing Intelligent Failure as an Organization

Organizations seeking to implement successful learning strategies from failure should seek to engage in strategies of learning by experimentation rather than avoid risk.[38] This harkens back to the idea of *failure aversion* from Trimailo's article, and the idea that the military should proactively pursue leadership development approaches that encourage exploration, rather than exploitation of the status-quo. Sim Sitkin, Faculty Director for Duke's Fuqua / Coach Krzyzewski Center on Leadership and Ethics, proposed five criteria for ensuring *intelligent failure*:

[1] Activities are carefully planned, so that when things go wrong you know why.

[2] Outcomes are genuinely uncertain, so the outcome cannot be known ahead of time.

[3] Problems are modest in scale, so that catastrophe does not result.

[4] Actions and feedback are managed quickly, so that not too much time elapses between outcome and interpretation.

[5] Something about what is learned is familiar enough to inform other parts of the organization.[39]

Rita McGrath adds two additional criteria in her article, *Are You Squandering Your Intelligent Failures?* First, underlying assumptions are explicitly declared; meaning everyone in the organization goes into an event with the same understanding of what questions have or have not been validated. Second, that the assumptions can be tested at specific milestones that are

known in advance and tracked, as planned results may not be equivalent to the actual outcomes.[40] These milestones serve as opportunities to validate assumptions so the outcome, even one considered a failure, is as accurate as possible. They also provide a roadmap to identify where the deviation occurred between the expected outcome and the actual outcome. How does someone define *intelligent failure*? Intelligent failures are those that provide new knowledge that can help an organization move forward and lead to future growth. This synthesized definition from Sitkin's and McGrath's criteria highlights that *intelligent failure* can occur with all experiences if those involved take the time to thoughtfully plan, examine the cause, and take responsibility for its aftermath. The Marine Corps can implement this methodology regarding failure into its doctrine and evaluation process and use failure to grow leaders rather than suppress innovation.

Recommendation

Learning Versus Leading

While not discussed in leadership doctrine, the Marine Corps does discuss failure within education doctrine. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 7 *Learning* was published as recently as February 2020 with the purpose of describing the Marine Corps' learning philosophy and punctuate how important continuous learning is to the profession of arms.[41] Within this publication the terms "failure", "fail", or "failed" appear seven times, but in much different context than that of MCWP 6-10. While MCWP 6-10 speaks of failure in terms of an outcome, MCDP 7 identifies it as a learning tool. Chapter two begins with a quote on learning from failure from former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State Colin Powell, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure." Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 7 *Learning* goes on to promote the value of appropriate risk assumption in relation to danger caused by inaction and the fear of failure.[42] MCDP 7 draws a distinction by advocating for confidence but prudence by inspiring leaders not to fear failure but to be bold. This is coming from a "continuous education" publication that emphasizes 21st century learning while the older MCWP 6-10, first published in 1995 and updated in 2014 by General James F. Amos, remains silent on failure's developmental value.

Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10 promotes ideas of innovation and creativity by leaders, specifically addressing the topic in chapter three. Unfortunately, the stigma attached to failure cannot be broken by a single, one-sentence statement that "zero defects are not a measurement."[43] This would be an astute location within the doctrinal leadership publication to encourage leaders to talk about failure, how to overcome it, and how to learn from it.

Encouraging discussions within leadership publications fuels innovation, promoting traits of effective leaders, while crushing zero-defect mindsets.

Dispelling the Stigma Before Failure Occurs

Using failure as a leadership development tool requires trust by the superior and subordinate; before a leader can develop trust from their followers they must first establish and practice *authentic leadership*. Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, and Dickens define *authentic leadership* as, "the core traits of self-awareness, a trustful relationship with followers where one can share one's true thoughts and feelings, open and unbiased processing, and strong moral values and congruency of action."[44] Gardner, et al. further describe authentic leadership not as a "specific leadership style, but rather a way of being."[45]

This concept can only be accomplished through open communication regarding expectations. The Marine Corps instituted a mechanism for this within its evaluation methods in Marine Corps Order 1610.7A, Performance Evaluation System. The Performance Evaluation System establishes the requirement for Reporting Seniors, those doing the evaluation, to hold an initial session with the Marine Reported On (MRO), those receiving the evaluation, where the Reporting Senior describes the scope of duties which form the basis for evaluating the MRO during the reporting period to be contained within Section B of the report.[46]

Using this time to discuss views on failure and personal experiences could move the stigma in a positive direction, given it is done with awareness and clear communication. The expectation for success remains, but the discussion on the different forms of success opens the dialog and creates trust by sharing true thoughts and feelings and displaying appropriate emotions stimulates relational transparency.[47] Valuing initial success on the same level of success attained after appropriate struggle and the implementation of lessons learned reduces the

sense of a zero-defect mentality, creating an empathetic and healthy environment. It is incumbent on leaders to advocate for subordinates who take *prudent risk*, face down adversity, and succeed despite hardship by demonstrating a non-judgmental and self-compassionate attitude.[48]

Using Failure in Evaluations

What would happen if leader or instructor started off a class or a lecture by listing out their failures instead of all their accomplishments? Would that endear them to their audience? Would it break down perceived barriers and create connections based on shared experiences because everyone has failed at some point in their life? The idea of breaking down barriers is important when establishing a superior / subordinate relationship. Communicating views on failure to your subordinates is essential in building a foundation of trust. The previous section discussed developing relational transparency through open communication during the initial discussion regarding performance expectations and metrics. But that only works if the leader is perceived to be authentic and is willing to address failure in a non-negative light at the establishment of the relationship. The Marine Corps can take this one step further by implementing specific evaluation criteria into the fitness report itself. By putting specific evaluation criteria into the report, Reporting Seniors are forced to address and discuss the MRO's ability to learn from and excel through the experience of failure.

Sections D through H of the fitness report are designed to provide a clear picture of the "whole Marine", both on duty and off. These sections record the way a Marine discharged their duties and responsibilities through the evaluation of 14 attributes divided into 5 sections.[49] Section D is labeled "Mission Accomplishment" and would be an ideal place to insert evaluation

criteria focused on an individual's ability to succeed in adversity. Adding a fifteenth attribute

within Mission Accomplishment (Figure 3) focusing on adversity would accomplish two things.

1. Marine Reported On:				2. Occasion and Period Covered		
a. Last Name	b. First Name	c. MI	d. ID	a.OCC	b. From	To

D. MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

3. OVERCOMING ADVERSITY. Demostrates the ability to identify opportunities for taking prudent risk, develops trust with subordinates, and encourages innovation. Reflects the ability to assume responsibility, face hardship, and display grit and tenacity.

ADV	Competent and thoughtful in planning responsibilities. Seeks out tasks and takes resposibility for their outcomes. Understands success is not always the intial outcome.		Develops prudent risk within subordinates. Actions are well planned, and individual is quick to identify points of friction and amends plan to overcome adversity. Institutes lessons learned for future success.		Meets challenges head-on, communicates the desired outcome to subordinates. Apt at evaluating results and identifying areas for improvement. Creates empathetic work environment promoting creativity and innovation.		N/O
A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**

Figure 3
Proposed Fitness Report attribute.

First, including an adversity attribute would serve as

a forcing function for leaders talk about failure and provide an opportunity to earn trust while

displaying empathy. Second, adding the attribute would normalize the idea that success through

prudent risk, failure, and ultimate mission accomplishment is rewarded and valued.

Incorporating adversity into evaluations demonstrates that grit and tenacity are traits the Marine

Corps seeks in its leaders. Maintaining consistency with words, thoughts, and actions creates the

foundation of relational transparency and trust so subordinates know that failure is not the end

but a step towards achieving growth as a leader.

Conclusion

Summary

Failure is not something anyone strives for, and it is not something leaders should promote; however, everyone will fail in some way, at some point. Rejecting it as a development opportunity is wasteful and irresponsible. The key themes of this paper are summarized as follows:

[1] Encouraging relational transparency in senior leaders will enable them to become authentic leaders.

[2] The Marine Corps encourages honest communication between seniors and subordinates regarding expectations and responsibilities within its Performance Evaluation System, but it can go further.

[2] Failure hardens leaders and prepares them for future situations of hardship and tribulation. The military's mission is inherently dangerous but learning success through *intelligent failure* can be accomplished through trustworthy, empathic guidance that encourages *prudent risk* resulting in a creative and innovative force ready to face tomorrow's challenges.

Limitations

The research with this paper compares attitudes about failure from the military cultural lens with ideas and theories from the business, psychology, and medical professions. This research, however, is subject to several limitations. The first limitation is that of time constraints to survey military members regarding their personal views on the role of failure in leadership development. Without access to survey data, the recommendations of this paper were based on scholarly, peer reviewed military authors and current published Marine Corps doctrine.

The second limitation for this research concerns the lack of personal interviews with senior military leaders with experience at the O5 level of command or higher. These interviews provide insights on influences that shape attitudes regarding failure and adversity. Questions regarding the value of a forcing function within the Performance Evaluation System or the usefulness of a tool such as Edmonson's "Spectrum of Reason for Failure" (Figure 2, page 14) when judging failure push the conversation to the upper levels of military culture and those who form it.

Future Directions

Based on the above themes, the overarching recommendation is that Marine Corps leadership should consider providing tools for leaders to facilitate grit producing discussions by promoting intelligent failure in its leadership doctrine and creating adversity evaluation criteria that normalizes success through failure, *post-traumatic growth*, and a *growth mindset*.

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