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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

Talent Management in the Marine Corps: Optimizing Manpower
Systems to Meet the Needs of Force Design 2030

AUTHOR:

MAJOR NORMAN L RENFRO

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MMS Mentor Team and Oral Defense Committee Member:

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Executive Summary

Title: Officer Talent Management in the Marine Corps: Optimizing Manpower Systems to Meet the Needs of Force Design 2030

Author: Major Norman L. Renfro, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The current Marine Corps Manpower Process is not capable of meeting the needs of Force Design 2030 due to institutional talent management failures. The Service fails to provide a Manpower process that possesses the flexibility required to adapt to emerging requirements. Specifically, the Marine Corps fails to appropriately track officers' performance to shape retention and recruitment goals, fails to prioritize duty assignments adequately, and fails to provide officers with a career path that is either clearly understood or tolerant of change.

Discussion: The current Marine Corps Manpower system does not support the officer corps in the 21st century. The Marine Corps Manpower system lacks the ability to perform talent management on a large scale, cannot inform Marines of their options adequately, and is too rigid to support substantial Force Design efforts.

The author reviews the Force Design initiatives released by the 38th Commandant to inform the reader why the current Manpower tools will not provide the Marine Corps with the force that the Commandant envisions. The author establishes a baseline of the Manpower process and assesses the primary Talent Management failures. Once the reader understands the current operating environment, the author describes organizational change theory and provides examples of manpower problems that historically prevent the Marine Corps from enacting substantial changes to the system. The reader will gain an appreciation for the complexity of the issue by understanding the advantages and disadvantages of the present system.

The author succinctly defines the Marine Corps' Talent Management problems and establishes the current state and desired state envisioned by the 38th Commandant. The final section recommends feasible methods the Marine Corps can implement to achieve substantive Talent Management reform.

Conclusion: The 38th Commandant desires a flexible system that can adjust to the ever-changing needs of the Marine Corps. Changing individual assignments and tactical capabilities through Force Design 2030 is not enough. The institution must change the way it operates so that it can effectively recruit, train, employ, and retain high-quality officers in a 21st-century Marine Corps. Moreover, the methods used to enact change must align with the Marine Corps' specific cultural values and not compromise service identity as an expeditionary force in readiness. The Marine Corps can substantially increase its ability to perform Talent Management by clearly prioritizing officer billet requirements, increasing transparency in the assignment process, and enabling Manpower tools that allow the monitors to balance the needs of the Marine Corps with the officer population's desires. Implementing these actions will enable the Marine Corps to adapt to future requirements with confidence and speed.

Preface

I began examining failures in the Marine Corps Manpower system in 2017 when I was assigned to the Officer Assignment branch in Manpower Management Division (MMOA). As the Infantry Monitor, I assigned all active-duty company-grade Infantry and Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) Special Operations Officers, Infantry Weapons Officers (Gunners), and Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Officers. The problems I faced were complex, and I frequently found myself distinguishing between the worse of two options. I suspected the Marine Corps was falling short of creating the officer corps that it desired, but I lacked the perspective to address the issues. After two years as a monitor, I became the MMOA Center Desk, which involved coordinating the actions of the assignment monitors and synchronizing MMOA's efforts with the rest of Headquarters Marine Corps, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (HQMC, M&RA). As my perspective grew, so did my appreciation for the complexity of the Marine Corps' challenges.

The 38th Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG) and subsequent Force Design initiatives brought manpower concerns to the forefront. As the MMOA Center Desk, I reviewed the CPG implementation guidance and worked with HQMC planning teams to identify solutions to the problems at hand. Throughout the year, I considered other areas of improvement that would benefit the officer population and prepare the Marine Corps for a future conflict.

I began this study to assess how the Marine Corps could approach the Talent Management problem. I examined how the other U.S. military services approached the problem and reviewed how civilian organizations would do the same. The Marine Corps' identity is critical to our strength, so mirroring other military services or matching the actions taken by civilian corporations did not seem appropriate. I want to thank the professionals at Manpower Management Division and the Naval Postgraduate School for their support in this research and their dedication to finding a solution to the evolving talent management problems.

Introduction

The Marine Corps believes the Manpower process is failing.¹ The 38th Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG) and subsequent Force Design initiatives brought manpower concerns to the forefront.² The Commandant's criticisms echo concerns from the officer community, stating that the Marine Corps fails to retain top-quality officers. While those remaining in service are not properly utilized or appropriately employed. Optimizing Talent Management requires the Marine Corps to balance the Service's needs with the needs of the officers in uniform. Moreover, the Marine Corps must remain ready to "fight tonight" while undergoing large-scale organizational change that will allow the Service's force structure to adapt to emerging operational requirements.

The 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), General David H. Berger, issued his priorities shortly after assuming the duty in 2019. The CPG made it clear that his top priority was force design to prepare the Marine Corps for a fight with a peer or near-peer competitor.³ Shortly thereafter, he issued his vision for "Force Design 2030". Working groups, Operational Planning Teams (OPTs), and Integrated Process Teams (IPTs) across the Marine Corps convened to determine how the Service could adapt to these changes. Within six months of the initial planning for Force Design 2030, the Commandant released a document stating his implementation guidance.⁴ In this document, he highlighted 21 areas for his staff to investigate, 16 of which focused on the Manpower process. Across HQMC, OPTs synthesized the tasks and made recommendations regarding the implementation. A draft of Force Design 2030 was released in March 2020, defining the structural changes the Marine Corps would pursue to achieve the Commandant's end state.⁵ The Force Design 2030 document does not identify how

the Marine Corps will accomplish these changes, or which aspects of the future force will require significant manpower modernizations, only that change was necessary.

In December 2020, the CMC issued an updated document reemphasizing his interests. His leading concern is that the Marine Corps is not organized, trained, or equipped for great power competition. His second priority is Talent Management to meet that goal. General Berger states that “*The Industrial Age manpower management processes we use today will not support our larger force design goal.*”⁶ The Commandant stops short of defining the exact areas of the manpower process that will fail, likely awaiting bottom-up refinement from the manpower professionals at Manpower and Reserve Affairs (HQMC, M&RA).

This paper will address many of the officer Talent Management challenges that the Marine Corps faces as it attempts to adapt to meet the Commandant’s vision. It will begin with a review of Force Design 2030 and explain why Manpower reform is needed to meet the challenges posed in a future conflict. Second, it provides an overview of current Manpower organization and reviews organizational change theories to determine which aspects of the assignment process may reject substantive change. Third, the author defines which Talent Management characteristics the Marine Corps is currently failing to provide to its officer community. Then the author discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the current system so the reader can appreciate the complexity of the issues. Lastly, this paper provides recommendations to the Manpower process that would meet the Commandant’s intent without sacrificing the Marine Corps’ identity or readiness as an Expeditionary Force.

Section 1: A Need for Change. What about Force Design 2030 requires the Marine Corps Manpower Process to change?

General Berger's CPG suggests that the current process is not sufficient if the Marine Corps is to remain a lethal fighting force by 2030.⁷ The future force that he envisions is highly trained, highly adaptable, and adequately motivated to fight a near-peer competitor. An essential facet of Force Design 2030 is reducing the total requirements for manpower, from 186k in FY20 to 178.5k active-duty Marines in FY22. The method is to divest in the Marine Corps' underutilized areas to allow the service to invest in programs that we can use to prepare for or potentially deter a war. Most decreases come from the enlisted population while the Marine Corps marginally increased its officer requirements. One could assume, albeit incorrectly, that this is because the Marine Corps favors the officer community over the enlisted ranks. More realistically, the Marine Corps' focus is to develop the force that it currently has so that it can employ the force it wants in the future. The additional officers will allow the service to solve the problems which it faces today. When needed, the future force will have a foundation of well-trained officers and senior enlisted Marines capable of responding to crises. This foundation will provide the infrastructure for the inevitable, comparatively inexpensive troop surge of new enlisted Marines that historically follow the onset of wars. The end state is to have an officer corps that is smarter, more versatile, and better supported than the current force.

A concern with the current force is that Marine officers are not employed to their fullest potential, are not incentivized to remain in the service, and suffer unnecessary turnover in assignments that reduce their effectiveness. Another concern is that the Marine Corps is not recruiting and retaining the top officers needed to solve the problems created by fighting a peer-

competitor. This paper researches and discusses the assignment process to determine which areas of officer assignments, if any, require reform to achieve an acceptable level of Talent Management.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy first identified Talent Management as a critical organizational tenant. The *NDS2018* states, “*retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success.*”⁸ The Marine Corps subsequently defined Talent Management as “*[T]he institutional faithful and transparent manpower processes and policies from recruitment through separation or retirement, where each Marine is provided the opportunity to develop and utilize their individual abilities and continue to serve effectively, based upon their demonstrated performance and future potential, in accordance with the needs of the Marine Corps.*”⁹ Optimizing the Talent Management process is vital in ensuring that the Marine Corps can objectively review each officer, assess their current and future potential, and capitalize on their skills.

Section 2: The Organization

In almost every case, the basic goal has been the same: to make fundamental changes in how business is conducted in order to help cope with a new, more challenging market environment.¹⁰ – John Kotter

Creating change in large organizations is a complicated business. Organizational change theorists such as John Kotter and Kurt Lewin assess that organizations that undergo significant change will fail without a carefully constructed plan to achieve change.¹¹ Force Design 2030 is changing the Marine Corps' organizational structure, but it has yet to address the organizational behaviors that prevent effective changes in systems or culture. Organizational change theories start with analyzing the current system's failures to allow the leaders to develop their vision for the future. In many cases, organizations reject change because the current system's shortfalls are not clearly understood, or the vision for the way forward is opaque. In either case, it is critical to understand the organization and appreciate why it is the way it is. Reviewing the current process is instrumental in identifying which aspects need to change and how to change them.

A common trend among organizational change theories is implementing a step-by-step process that corporations can use to describe the change process to their employees. Kotter's "8-Step Change Model" (depicted below) is perhaps the most widely referenced.¹² Others include McKinsey & Company's "5-Steps to Successful Organizational Change" and Tom Galvin's "Six Activities" of Leading Change in Military Organizations.¹³ These models share a similar logic, which is that affecting change is a linear process. Organizations need to identify the problem, define it, and develop a vision for influencing it. Then the company must implement strategies to achieve their goal while finding feedback loops to assess their progress.

Kotter's 8-Step Model:

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition
3. Creating a Vision
4. Communicating the Vision
5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision
6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins
7. Consolidating Improvement and Producing Still More Change
8. Institutionalizing New Approaches

Research on organizational change reveals that the Marine Corps is currently in the middle of this process. CMC initiated the process by creating urgency, openly stating that failure to adapt will result in mission failure in future conflicts. He immediately punctuated his resolve by eliminating tanks from the active-duty inventory. He gained the support of senior leaders and communicated his vision in the 2019 CPG and subsequent guidance. The Marine Corps is now in stages five and six of the Kotter model. The exact path between the current state and the desired state remains unclear, which is a natural part of the evolution. However, the service could lose the progress gained by Force Design 2030 if momentum stalls.

The bureaucratic systems that constrain the Marine Corps allow institutional change to occur slowly. Laws, policies, and doctrine prescribe how the military services will access, retain, promote, assign, and separate officers. The execution arm for institutional change is the Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, and Costs (DOTMLPF/C) working group. This group assesses change through each pillar systematically to synchronize organizational development and change actions. The Commandant relies on the institution's members to find viable solutions, test them, and act to implement them. Still, such solutions may not be possible in the institution's current state of bureaucracy without changing the system itself.

The source document for all manpower laws is U.S. Code Title 10, Part II, Chapters 811-845.¹⁴ Title 10 defines which officers the Marine Corps is authorized to have. It prescribes the authorities required to assign an officer to a command position, defines promotion authorities, and directs when officers will separate from active-duty.¹⁵ The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) elaborates on the requirements identified by Title 10 and delineates the individual service requirements such as total officer demographics by grade.¹⁶ Marine Corps Order 1300.8 is the USMC Personnel Assignment Policy, which interprets Title 10 and DOPMA and provides a general assignment philosophy. The 1300.8 is less prescriptive than the laws that drive it, offering latitude to HQMC, M&RA to achieve the evolving needs of the Marine Corps.¹⁷

The Commandant is ultimately responsible for manning, training, and equipping the force that the combatant commanders will employ in war. He entrusts the staffing facet of manning to the Deputy Commandant of Manpower and Reserve Affairs (D.C., M&RA), headquartered in Quantico, Virginia. M&RA continuously assesses the officer population, providing guidance to assess, retain, or separate officers as demand requires. This system of systems is classified as the Human Resource Development Process (HRDP).¹⁸ The HRDP (Figure 1) defines the Marine Corps' methods to gain new accessions, when and how to calculate structural manning requirements and incorporate the assignment process into the system. The structural requirements are calculated and validated by the Total Force Structure Division (TFSD) within HQMC Combat Development and Integration (CD&I). TFSD generates the Authorized Strength Report (ASR) biannually, which M&RA receives and utilizes to input into the Officer Staffing Goal Model (OSGM). The OSGM produces the final manpower staffing requirements for the officer assignment monitors to fill.

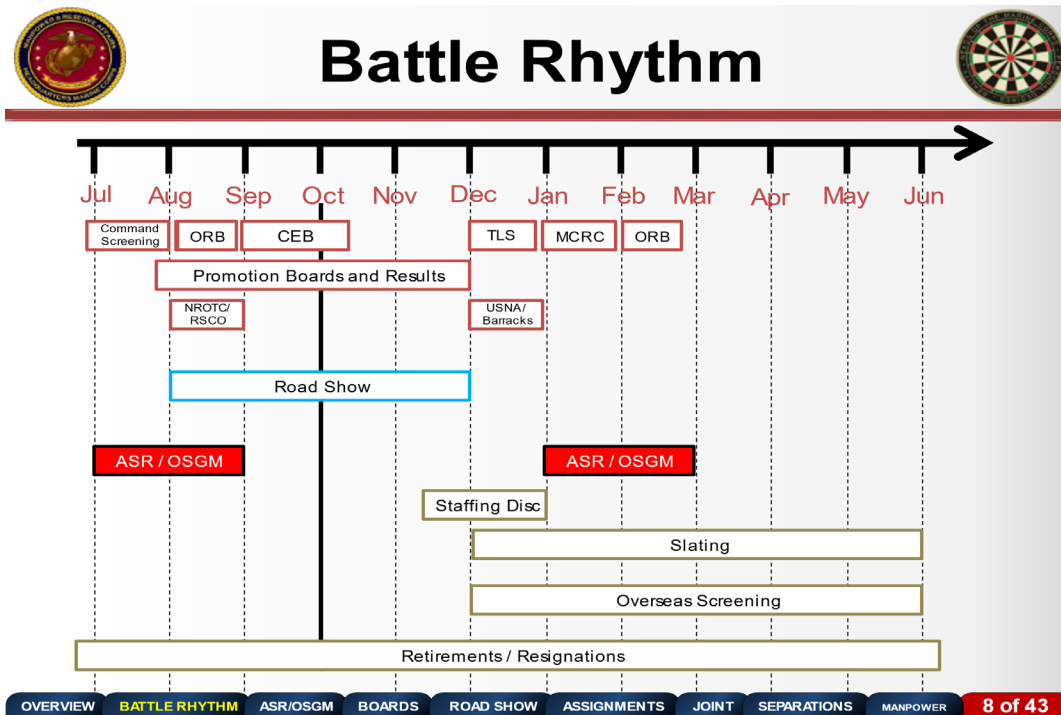


Figure 2: MMOA Battle Rhythm

Source: "FY21 Roadshow Brief," Manpower Management Officer
 Assignments Branch, HQMC, M&RA, July 2020,
https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/webcenter/portal/MMOA/pages_page17il

Historically, the Marine Corps had little ability to change the overall manpower process. The laws and regulations imposed by Congress limit substantive changes on the front end of the process. The prescriptive regulations require modifications to occur further down the chain where the assignments are made. However, the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (2019 NDAA) offered significant opportunities to the military services should they wish to redefine their processes.²⁰

The 2019 NDAA provides significant latitudes to the human resource constraints defined in Title 10 and DOPMA.²¹ The updated NDAA offers the services Talent Management options such as: Opting out of promotion, brevet promotions, lifting age restrictions, and modifying

career intermission periods. The Marine Corps has an office dedicated to managing many of these initiatives, the Talent Management Oversight Directorate (TMOD). TMOD works directly for the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) to allow Talent Management to reach the highest level. In June 2020, TMOD published an overview of an NDAA working group which discussed which authorities the services would pursue.²² According to the TMOD overview, the Marine Corps was not interested in many of the 2019 NDAA authorities, which contrasted the other military service branches which were eager to implement change. The Commandant has since expressed his desire to capitalize on all the resources the Marine Corps has at its disposal, stating that he will “*work with the Secretary of the Navy as required if additional authorities are necessary.*”²³ It remains unclear whether CMC will employ the latitude afforded under NDAA 2019 and subsequent issuances providing more service authorities. But broad institutional changes are required if the Commandant wants to see his design efforts materialize into the force he desires.

Large organizations frequently reject change. In the Marine Corps’ case, the bureaucratic system facilitates change slowly but deliberately. The Commandant desires a force that is adaptive and forward-thinking. The Marine Corps must optimize its Talent Management system to ensure officers are positioned to respond to emerging requirements while ensuring the system is organized, balanced, and self-sustainable. Changing individual assignments in Force Design 2030 is not enough; the organization needs to identify the specific failures that prevent the Service from implementing an adaptive Manpower system that optimizes Talent Management principles.

Section 3: Failures of the Current System

The Marine Corps' officer corps believes the Manpower system is failing.²⁴ Not only have both the Commandant and the individual officers expressed their dissatisfaction, but many of the Manpower professionals at M&RA support the claims as well.²⁵ However, it is less clear as to what specific failures are occurring. This section will attempt to diagnose discernable failures that the Service can address.

Not all failures are quantifiable, and others can be misperceived. In 2020, MMOA attempted to gain insight into the weaknesses of the assignment process by administering a survey to officers who received PCS/PCA orders. The MMOA Assignment Survey was designed to allow officers to express their satisfaction with the assignment process.²⁶ The results of that study, combined with the experience of the assignment monitors and a Manpower Systems Analyst at the Naval Postgraduate School, helped identify several areas where the Service failed its officers.²⁷ This section will highlight six areas where the Manpower process is perceived to be failing:

1. The Marine Corps fails to retain its top talent.
2. The Manpower process fails to provide the transparency that 21st century officers desire.
3. Officers do not trust the assignment process.
4. The system lacks flexibility: The rigidity of the system stifles creativity.
5. The assignment process lacks appropriate prioritization. Manpower professionals are unable to determine the needs of the Marine Corps until late in the assignment process.
6. The assignment process fails to provide officers the time required to plan a PCS move.

The first concern is that the Marine Corps fails to retain its top talent. Many officers, including the Commandant, may believe this to be true. This statement is not only hard to prove, but it could be entirely false, which leads to a more specific failure: *The Marine Corps does not have a metric to assess the quality of officers that are exiting the Service.* By comparison, the

Marine Corps Enlisted force uses a tier system to assess the quality of all Marines at their retention point. Regardless of whether the metrics are correct, the Service has an understanding of the quality of both those retained as well as those who exit.

Officers exit the Service for different reasons. Some exit voluntarily through the standard resignation and retirement process, while others are directed to exit the Service by force shaping tools such as career designation or failure to select for promotion to the next grade.²⁸ The latter methods are tracked closely by Manpower Plans and Policy Division (MPP-30), and the Service can adjust with relative confidence to account for annual anomalies, but the changes are slow and can take years to reflect.²⁹ However, little is studied regarding the caliber of the officers who elect to resign voluntarily. Unit commanders and the officer assignment monitors have the best insight regarding future employment potential, but there is no method to track or consolidate their comments. Without a system to capture the usefulness of departing officers, it is impossible to assess whether the officers who voluntarily resign are better than those retained in Service.

The inability to capture the quality of the officers who exit the Service exacerbates existing problems in the HDRP cycle. The restrictions imposed by DOPMA and the cumbersome force shaping tools employed by HQMC inhibit the Marine Corps from enacting changes to a dynamic environment in a timely manner.³⁰ For example, MPP-30 prescribes career designation goals for first lieutenants and captains based on three MOS categories: Combat Arms, Combat Service Support, and Aviation. In this process, the retention boards could select a high number of infantry officers and a low number of artillery officers since they are both considered to be combat arms officers. This lack of precision allows the board process

to move quickly but creates future problems by forcing the entry-level training (ELT) pipeline to rapidly adjust to shortages or excess officers in each MOS community. It also contributes to issues regarding promotion and command opportunities since the number of available command positions may be disproportionate to the number of officers in that occupational field.

Contributing to the lack of clarity regarding future potential is the performance evaluation system. The Service cannot rely on the Fitness Report (FITREP) process alone to assess the quality of officers. Fitness Reports are subjective, and the cumulative values fail to represent quality officers serving at duty stations with disproportionately high numbers of equally high-quality officers. The FITREP process is incomplete and lacks the clarity required to make a valuable assessment of an officer's future potential. This is especially true for young company-grade officers who have limited FITREPs or young evaluating officers who may not understand the system. Relying on FITREP data to assess officers' aptitude who depart the Service is likely to present only half the picture.

The critical failure concerning officer retention is the lack of processes to determine who the Marine Corps is losing. The assignment monitors are likely to have the most accurate depiction of exiting officers' potential, though MMOA will only see part of the picture. Further analysis is required to determine if the Marine Corps is retaining its top talent.

The next failure to examine is the claim that the Manpower process fails to provide the transparency that current officers desire. MMOA issued a survey in 2020, which asked officers if they were satisfied with the assignment process's transparency. Manpower Systems Analysts in the Manpower Studies and Analysis Branch (MPA) and at the Naval Postgraduate School

processed the results and provided the data to MMOA. Figure 3 and Figure 4 depict the results of their analysis.

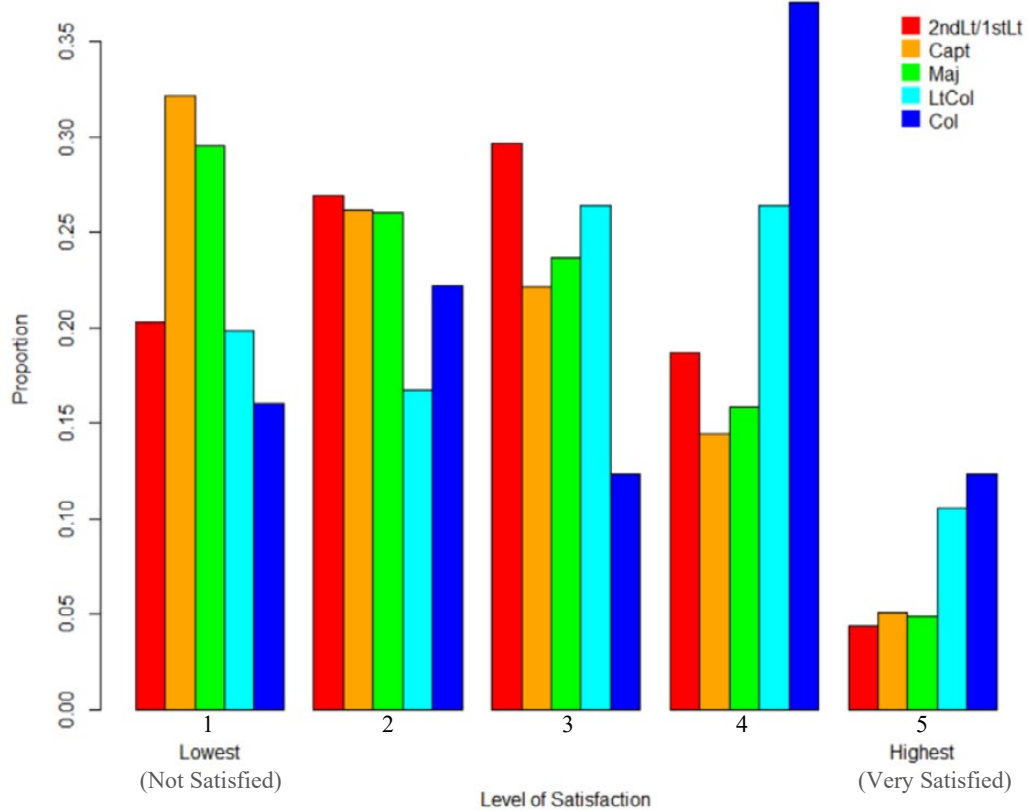


Figure 3: Satisfaction with the Transparency of the Assignment Process by Rank

Source: Malia, Andrew M. “Data Analysis to Support a Limited Objective Test/Experiment of a Billet Marketplace for Marine Officers,” June 2020

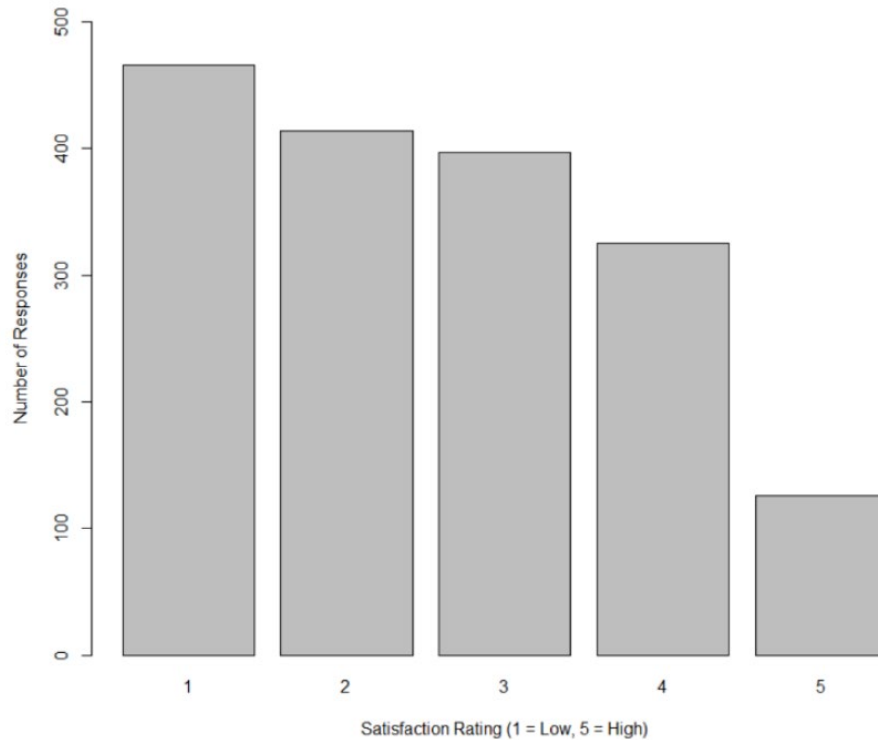


Figure 4: Satisfaction with Transparency of the Assignment Process

Source: Malia, Andrew M. “Data Analysis to Support a Limited Objective Test/Experiment of a Billet Marketplace for Marine Officers,” June 2020

Note: The survey asked additional questions regarding the officer’s overall satisfaction with the Marine Corps. The analyst reviewed the data to ensure the officers with an overall negative perception of the Service did not skew the data regarding transparency. His analysis holds true after accounting for statistical anomalies.

Officers were asked to rank their satisfaction on a 1-5 scale. The data suggests that senior officers are generally more satisfied with the transparency in the assignment process, though the data can be interpreted in several ways.³¹ The first interpretation is that as officers progress, their understanding of the assignment process improves, so their desire for additional transparency likely decreases. The second interpretation is that junior officers are not as valued by the Service and therefore receive less mentorship about the process, whereas senior officers have access to more information. A third view is that as officers progress through their careers,

the dissatisfied Marines attrite, leaving only Marines that are generally satisfied with how the Marine Corps operates. Moreover, all three of these views may be true simultaneously.

Research suggests that the failure to provide transparency is a valid concern for Marine officers. With the proliferation of technology and social media, officers are now accustomed to having information at their fingertips. They desire to understand the manpower process, and the Marine Corps fails to offer accessible education methods.

The third failure is that officers do not trust the assignment process. This is related closely to the second failure that the system lacks transparency. The primary contributor to both these failures is a lack of education. Marines distrust what they do not understand. As figures 5 and 6 suggest, satisfaction with the process increases with rank. Officers that have more exposure to the process are more comfortable with it. The author of the data analysis, Captain Andrew Malia, assesses that *“captains and majors have the most pronounced dissatisfaction with the transparency of the assignment process, roughly one-third of all captains state the highest degree of dissatisfaction with the transparency of the assignment process.”*³² The Marine Corps’ failure is not getting that information to the junior officers early in their careers.

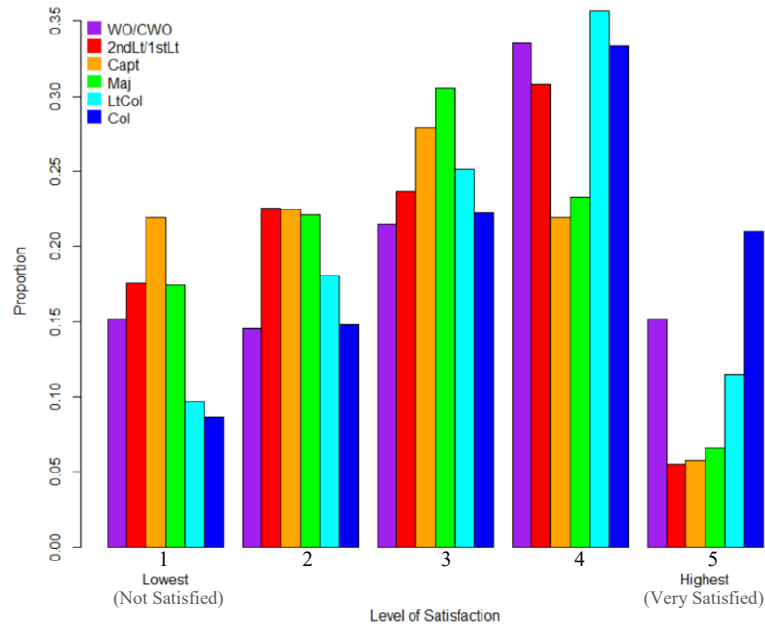


Figure 5: Satisfaction with Marine Corps Assignment Process by Rank

Source: Malia, Andrew M. “Data Analysis to Support a Limited Objective Test/Experiment of a Billet Marketplace for Marine Officers,” June 2020

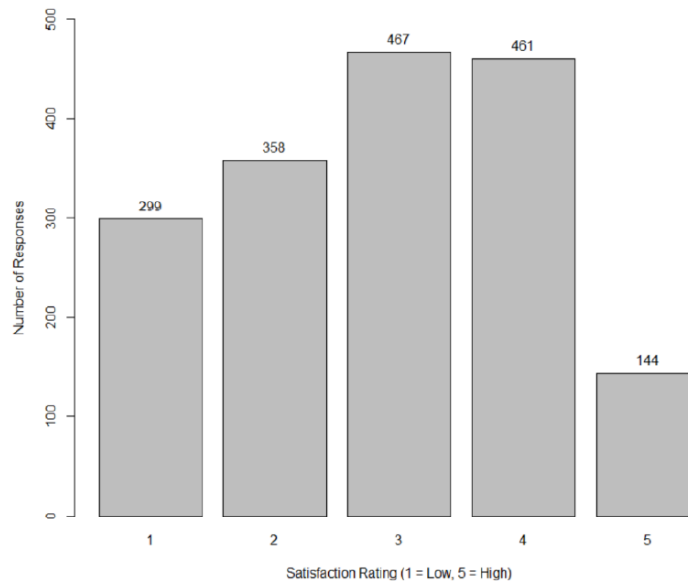


Figure 6: Marine Officer Satisfaction with Assignment Process

Source: Malia, Andrew M. “Data Analysis to Support a Limited Objective Test/Experiment of a Billet Marketplace for Marine Officers,” June 2020

The fourth failure is that the system lacks flexibility. In the CPG, General Berger states that “[t]he current manpower model does not accommodate a Marine whose interests change over time.”³³ Officers are discouraged, and in many cases, prohibited from changing the MOS they were assigned as second lieutenants at The Basic School (TBS). Even if an officer receives their most desired MOS at TBS, that preference may change over time. Moreover, as officers promote to senior ranks, their opportunities decrease due to billet limitations. Some officers desire to stray from the prescribed MOS track and pursue a specialization in a unique skillset that the Marine Corps desires. Some lateral moves are encouraged, such as the transition into the acquisition field, while other divergent career paths are prohibited. Similarly, majors and lieutenant colonels do not have the opportunity to restrict their Service to only command or staff positions or strictly to positions in HQMC or the training pipeline.

The rigidity of the system likely creates an environment where officers may feel trapped in their career paths. Those that are pleased with their career trajectory feel encouraged to continue Service, whereas those who wish to perform a more niche skillset may not anticipate the same opportunities for advancement. The Marine Corps fails to offer career paths for officers with nuanced skills that may be required for a more capable force in 2030.

Fifth, a significant failure of the Manpower system is that the assignment process lacks appropriate prioritization. Manpower professionals struggle to determine the true needs of the Marine Corps until late in the assignment process. TFSD issues the structural officer manpower requirements twice a year, ideally in February and August.³⁴ The biannual process provides the assignment monitors up-to-date requirements. However, frequent structure changes and last-minute inputs result in the models being released 30-90 days late. TFSD releases updates to the

ASR throughout the year, which MMIB manually inserts into the OSGM and informs the monitors of their new requirements. However, neither the ASR nor the OSGM captures all the requirements. Last-minute additions of high visibility joint billets, foreign exchange officer billets, and assignments to senior aide positions are a regular occurrence. The process is iterative and responsive, but it lacks prioritization and clarity on the front end. The disjointed process contributes to the next failure: the monitors cannot accurately forecast which assignments they need to fill with enough time to allow the moving officers to plan a PCS move effectively.

Lastly, the officer assignment process fails to issue orders promptly. The officer assignment process operates on an annual cycle, concluding with the preponderance of officers executing PCS moves in the summer. The officers need to receive orders to the new assignment with enough time to prepare their families for the move. Some orders, such as those for board-selected commanders, are issued 10-12 months in advance, which is ideal. However, the majority are issued in the spring, with the officers reporting to their new assignments in June or July, giving the officers approximately four months to plan their move. A small percentage, usually those for junior officers, are issued 30-60 days before the required move date.³⁵

Section 4: Discussion Topics

Why haven't the failures been addressed at the institutional level? The first and second sections of this paper addressed why the Marine Corps needs to adapt and explained why it is postured for failure. The third section identified which specific issues need to be remediated. This section will discuss some of the challenges that the Marine Corps historically faces that prevent it from addressing the Manpower failures. The complexities of each of these discussion points require further analysis that will not be covered in this paper.

The Marine Corps is tasked with being capable of responding to a crisis anywhere on the globe. The "fight tonight" mentality, combined with the Marine Corps' requirement from the 82nd Congress to be the Service that "*is the most ready when the nation is the least ready,*" presents a critical challenge to drastically changing the organization. The Marine Corps must maintain its current readiness while ensuring it remains relevant to fight in the future. The impetus to remain ready means that any substantial Manpower changes must occur rapidly, regardless of the officers' detriment. The following discussion topics highlight areas where the Service is at odds with itself, struggling to balance the needs of the Marine Corps with the needs of its officer corps.

This section will discuss the following topics:

1. Specialists versus generalists.
 - Can the Marine Corps afford to have its unrestricted officers be specialists?
2. Control versus autonomy.
 - Should the monitors be empowered or strictly bound to the policy?
3. Adaptability versus stability.
 - How early can PCS orders be issued while accounting for emerging requirements?
4. Digital integration versus human involvement.
 - Should algorithms and digital systems replace the assignment monitors?

The Marine Corps values its unrestricted officers as generalists rather than specialists in their occupational field. The relatively small size of the Marine Corps, combined with service priorities, creates an environment where officers must demonstrate proficiency in multiple areas to remain competitive for advancement or even retention. The future force desired by the officer corps and envisioned by the Commandant demands that the service search for solutions to this paradox. Congress may remove some legal restrictions, but the Marine Corps will need to identify its priority and then develop a system that supports it.

Presently, the Marine Corps values command experience over supporting officer roles. The career path for unrestricted officers focuses on keeping officers competitive for promotion and ultimately for command opportunities at the O-5 level.³⁶ Promotion to O-6 and beyond is closely related to previous command performance, meaning that lieutenant colonels are unlikely to promote to colonel without succeeding as an O-5 commander, and so on. Command tours are rewarded with promotions, and the officers who fail to select to the next rank are forced to exit service to make room for younger officers with the potential for advancement.³⁷ Since commanders are responsible for a broad area of functions, being specialized in a single skillset reduces the likelihood of command selection.

It is common for officers to wish to remain in Service, despite not being selected for promotion to the next grade. It is equally common for officers to desire staff tours or technical billets over command opportunities. Arguments against this kind of specialization include citing the DOPMA and U.S. Code, Title 10, which restrict the time-in-service requirements for officers. The services are capped regarding how many officers they are authorized by grade and prescribed age limits to Service. In 2019, the NDAA directed that the military services could

request exceptions to the legal parameters regarding officer retention and promotions.³⁸ The Marine Corps could permit officers to remove themselves from consideration for promotion and remain in Service at their present grade. This would increase the number of field-grade officers, demanding an opposite action on the accession of new officers.

The Marine Corps of 2030 may require smarter officers and more of them. The Commandant states that he wants to recruit and retain the most talented officers in the force.³⁹ Officers with specific skills will need to be allowed to remain in the Service and remain competitive for advancement. Officers with technical expertise such as tactical aviation (TACAIR) pilots, cyber and information warfare experts, and intelligence officers will be instrumental in the future fight against a peer competitor. However, in the current system, these officers are frequently pulled away from their career field to fill billets that can be filled by any unrestricted officer such as basic staff positions, recruiting, or as instructors for entry-level training.

The Service tasks officers to serve in billets designed for any MOS for two reasons. The most obvious is that these billets are legitimate requirements and must be filled. Recruiting, for example, is an assignment that the Marine Corps values highly and is not limited to specific MOS fields. The second reason is that the Marine Corps values officers that can demonstrate the ability to serve outside of their MOS. This institutional incentive is self-imposed and may be subject to logical fallacies. It is generally accepted that commanders have a wide range of responsibilities, so proving proficiency in multiple areas could be a valuable evaluation requirement to become a commander (though it is possible to be proficient in multiple areas without having previously served outside one's MOS.) Another justification for having officers

serve outside their MOS is to create space within the MOS for younger officers to gain experience. Creating room within an occupational field is only necessary if the Service is promoting or separating those that are already within it. As such, it is possible that the Marine Corps artificially created the incentive to serve outside ones MOS as a way to justify its own manpower constraints and is not related to the desire to demonstrate a broad spectrum of proficiency. If the Service elects to allow officers to opt-out of promotion, the constraints shift accordingly.

If the 2030 Marine Corps intends to value its officers' personal career desires, it will need to develop the structural requirements to support it. Officers will need to have the ability to pursue their own professional objectives while still contributing to the Marine Corps' mission. The Service will also need to arm the assignment professionals with the tools to achieve this end state.

The second discussion topic is the issue of control versus autonomy. The Marine Corps values the assignment monitors' efforts, but it does not always support their efforts in ways that benefit the officer corps. The monitors have wide latitude to operate within the Marine Corps Personnel Assignment Policy (MCO 1300.8) with little oversight. They are entrusted with keeping officers competitive, by assignment, for continued advancement and promotion. But they must share the Marine Corps' view regarding what is required for advancement.

The Marine Corps does not have a prescribed career path for officers; with the exception of focusing on command experience for senior officers. Each occupational field has assignments that are valued over others, but those can be subject to speculation by the officers serving on promotion or command selection boards. Each year, the monitors review the board results and

work to keep the officers in their population on similar career trajectories. This creates a cyclical system that rejects changes to the status quo.

The self-fulfilling assignment methodology inhibits the adaptive and innovative force that the Commandant describes in his CPG. Officers are neither incentivized to test new skills and try new assignments nor are they encouraged to remain in an assignment after they have mastered it. One method to increase both career flexibility and trust in the assignment process is to allow the monitors to assign officers outside of the stereotypical career paths. If desired, the officer monitors can coordinate and track divergent career paths that are tailored to the ever-changing needs of the Marine Corps.

Increasing the responsibility of the individual monitors can have positive or negative outcomes. The monitors may abuse their authority through their own biases or lack of understanding. Alternatively, the monitors could flippantly assign quality officers to unique and challenging positions without concerns for career ramifications in the officer's future. The increased authorities proposed in the 2019 NDAA should correspond with increased oversight of the officer monitors. The Marine Corp can benefit from allowing divergent career paths or officer specialization, but these paths will need to be closely monitored and contain viable feedback loops. Ultimately, generating tempo in the assignment process while increasing trust in the system could increase the retention of top-performing officers.

The third discussion point is adaptability versus stability. The officer assignment process is reactionary – constantly changing requirements and struggling with a lack of prioritization. The officer monitors at Manpower Management Division could issue orders to officers 12 months prior to the report date, but that would create a manpower process that is slow to adapt to

emerging requirements. Conversely, the monitors could wait for the requirements to be defined, but that would result in orders being issued weeks before the officers are required to report for duty. Does the Marine Corps need to strike a balance between the two extremes, or should it prioritize one method over the other? The current system tips the balance to the needs of the Marine Corps at the expense of stability, transparency, and trust. The environment that CMC describes with Force Design 2030 is one where the officers feel the Marine Corps values their Service and promotes stability.

The fourth discussion point is balancing the integration of digital systems with the desire for human involvement in the assignment process. The Deputy Commandant for M&RA states that the Marine Corps values face-to-face interaction in the orders process.⁴⁰ Every year, the monitors are required to travel to each major Marine Corps installation to interview the officers who are eligible for a new assignment. This costly and time-consuming process is advertised with pride as a method that the other military services would not perform. However, as the world becomes more digitally integrated, officers may desire a more automated and timely approach.

The U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force have adopted new web-based systems that allow their officers to express assignment preferences and communicate their desires to eligible commands. The Marine Corps has refrained from this process for several reasons. The first, and most likely, is that the Marine Corps was late in developing the requirement for a web-based assignment program due to lack of funds and understanding. Another reason is that even after careful research of the sister-service program, the Marine Corps did not readily pursue its own

version because the Marine Corps was unsure how much power it wanted to remove from the monitors and grant to the individual officers or the unit commanders.

Increasing the digital systems utilized by assignment professionals has advantages and disadvantages, especially if the systems detract from the Marine Corps' desire to keep manpower a human-led process. However, increased web-based capabilities could increase the Marine Corps' integration with other services. The Department of Defense promotes joint interoperability, which none of the current systems provide.

Section 5: A Future Path

The Marine Corps must undergo significant organizational change to achieve the Commandant's intent of having a smarter and more capable fighting force. General Berger already initiated the change and is now relying on the service members to identify feasible solutions to the numerous complex problems that plague the Marine Corps. Changing the Marine Corps' institutional culture is a daunting task, but not all the solutions need to be drastic. John Kotter's model for organizational change teaches that small victories are required to maintain momentum and prevent the organization from stalling prior to reaching the desired end state.⁴¹ Some simple victories include the following:

1. Prioritize billets for assignment.
2. Implement an Exit Survey that assesses the quality of officers exiting Service.
3. Gain NDAA authorities that enable the Marine Corps to:
 - a. Opt-out of promotion.
 - b. Waive age and time-in-grade requirements.
 - c. Promote by MOS.
4. Update web-based systems to synchronize the monitors' efforts with the Service's requirements while providing transparency to the officer population.

The end state is that the Marine Corps maintains readiness by producing smarter, more versatile officers who are supported by the institution they serve. The above options are simple and relatively inexpensive, allowing the Marine Corps to reach its talent management goals without compromising readiness or service identity. The Service will be able to create a flexible manpower system that can adjust to emerging requirements, retain its top talent, and optimize the productivity of the units it leads.

Perhaps the simplest method to create substantive talent management reform is for the Marine Corps to issue clear priorities regarding assignments. The manning precedence levels as listed in MCO 5320.12h are not enough to effectively prioritize all assignments.⁴² Monitors

should have a clear understanding of all the requirements they are required to fill, to include primary MOS requirements as well as all “free MOS” requirements. More importantly, the officer population needs to understand the requirements and priorities of HQMC. The individual movers can then shape their expectations and accurately and effectively inform the monitors of their desires.

The current Manpower process attempts to prioritize assignments through the ASR and OSGM. Still, the efforts are poorly captured as grade and MOS requirements vary considerably, specifically when considered with career progression expectations. An effective prioritization effort includes input from each of the following organizations: The Commandant and all his Deputy Commandants, Manpower Management Division, the Occupational Field Sponsors, the Talent Management Oversight Directorate, Recruiting Command, Training and Education Command, and representatives from Fleet Marine Forces. Synchronizing all the efforts and prioritizing assignments by MOS and grade will ensure the requirements are communicated to the monitors clearly.

Prioritization should be an annual occurrence. The needs of the Marine Corps regularly shift based on emerging requirements of unforeseen difficulties, and the force must be able to adjust as necessary. Reducing competing interests in the assignment process will allow monitors to remain transparent about the process while providing stability to moving officers. Solidifying this process 12 months before orders are executed is ideal to allow the monitors to optimize the slate while providing at least six months for officers to plan for PCS moves.

The second process that the Marine Corps can implement is an exit survey that assesses the quality of officers that exit the Service. The Service must understand who is exiting the

Service and why. It is impossible to determine if the Manpower system is working without a clear understanding of its consequences. This survey will serve as a feedback loop that can inform the system of its inefficiencies. The surveys must capture two things: Why the officer is exiting Service and the future potential of that officer.

Officers exit service for multiple reasons, so the survey must account for the various answers an officer may provide. The subject should prioritize and stratify their reasons for leaving. At a minimum, the survey should inquire about: Employment opportunities, graduate education plans, family stability concerns, career progression concerns, and questions regarding their sense of self-worth or belongingness. The survey should prevent officers from providing one-word answers or oversimplifying their responses. Officers should have the opportunity to communicate that they desired to serve longer but that they are being forced out due to failure to select for promotion, that they didn't feel valued by the Service, or that they were selected for an assignment they didn't desire.

The Service must balance the information that the survey subject provides with an assessment of the officer's future potential. If the officer is being forced out due to a failure to select for promotion or career designation, then the data will be simple to collect. However, information on officers that exit voluntarily will be more challenging to manage. The best method is for unit commanders to assign a qualifier to all resignation and retirement packages that they endorse. This endorsement will be saved and filed by the Separations and Retirements Branch at Manpower Management Division (MMSR). Next, the monitor will assess the officer's potential based on the individual's service record and compare it to similar officers of grade and MOS. The data collected should include a wide variety of metrics that analysts can

utilize to assess which officers are getting out. Examples of the metrics collected include the officer's MOS, FITREP values, promotability for the next two ranks, the likelihood of command selection, and special skills such as language, cyber, fires, acquisitions, recruiting, instructors, etc.

The two perspectives gained by both the losing commander and a representative of HQMC will capture a realistic vision of the officer's potential. This data, combined with the officer's survey, can be analyzed by MPA or TMOD to assess the effectiveness of the Marine Corps' Manpower tools. Analysts can compare the separating officers' data with those still in service to determine if, based on service priorities, the better officers exited service. This feedback loop will allow the Service to identify inefficiencies and implement changes as required.

The final institutional change that the Marine Corps can implement is to seek congressional authorities that modify the requirements the Service must follow. The Service should be authorized to retain exceptionally qualified officers beyond the current age and time-in-grade requirements, promote by MOS, and should Marine officers be allowed to opt-out of promotion should they so desire based on the needs of the Marine Corps.

The current "up and out" promotion system forces officers out of the Marine Corps if they fail to select for promotion in a given amount of time. The "up and out" process simplifies the accession and promotion pathways and brings stability to the system. Still, it also punishes officers who diverge from their prescribed career path to work in assignments that they find more interesting or valuable. Allowing officers to opt-out of promotion can help retain highly specialized Marines who are comfortable with their current work and paygrade. Highly technical

billets are subject to the adverse effects of manpower turnover, and training new officers is expensive and inefficient. Conversely, developmental billets (key billets) are subject to increased turnover as units attempt to provide all officers in their command with the opportunity to serve in the coveted key billets. Allowing officers to opt-out of promotion can decrease turnover while affording officers with the flexibility to balance their careers with their personal desires.

The other tools offered in the 2019 NDAA can offset the downsides of allowing officers to opt-out of promotion. The disadvantage of authorizing officers to opt-out of promotion is that the force will not have the appropriate number of officers at each grade as prescribed by DOTMA.⁴³ The Service can mitigate this concern by allowing officers to serve past the current time-in-service requirements and by allowing the Marine Corps to promote based on MOS. Currently, the Marine Corps does not promote based on MOS, with a recent exception of Financial Management Officers.⁴⁴ Failing to promote based on requirements in each field results in the Marine Corps frequently shifting priorities and reallocating assignments. The Marine Corps can stabilize the assignment process by promoting the needed number of officers to specialized fields as required. This flexible assignment, accession, and promotion methodology will allow the Service to prioritize billets on an annual cycle and adjust as new requirements emerge.

Common to each proposed recommendation is an updated web-based model that synchronizes the Manpower efforts into a single system. Talent management starts with knowing your talent pool, and the Marine Corps lacks the systems to track and coordinate the Manpower process. An efficient and coordinated approach will allow the monitors to receive the

updated guidance from HQMC, publish the requirements to their respective populations, gather the results, produce an assignment slate, and track the officers who exit service. A data system that allows all stakeholders, including the individual officers pending assignment, to view the requirements and make changes as necessary will facilitate information flow and increase trust in the process.

Section 6: Conclusion

The Marine Corps must modernize its Manpower process to attain the degree of readiness that General Berger envisions with Force Design 2030. The current process lacks appropriate prioritization, fails to achieve the basic Talent Management principles of retaining top talent and promoting transparency, and does not have the tools to support the officer corps in the 21st century. The author proposes that the Marine Corps prioritize assignments annually, implement a survey that assesses the quality of officers that exit service, and gain the authorities offered in the 2019 NDAA, which increases the tools the Services can use to shape their forces.

The officer community has low confidence in the assignment process, which stems from a lack of transparency and a lack of understanding. The monitors cannot clearly and consistently communicate the Service's priorities to the officers they manage due to ever-changing priorities and competing requirements. The Marine Corps can promote transparency by streamlining the convoluted assignment process through appropriate prioritization and by investing in digital systems that allow officers to see all the available options. Informing officers of all the options available to them, including those not available based on timing or other prerequisites, will enable the monitors to justify their assignments coherently. Officers who consider leaving the Marine Corps will have a better understanding of the options available to them, which will allow the Marine Corps to capture the actual reasons that officers depart the Service.

The Marine Corps needs to survey the capabilities and potential of the officers who elect to exit the Service. If M&RA clearly prioritizes assignments and promotes transparency, then the officers who leave the Service voluntarily will be well informed and understand what the Marine Corps values. Officers who resign or retire should provide their justifications for doing

so in a system that captures the data and provides feedback to HQMC. The information should be compared to assessments made by the officer's unit commander and assignment monitor to create a full picture of the officer's future potential. If the Marine Corps determines that the top talent is departing the Service prematurely, then other tools can be utilized to reward and retain high-value officers.

The 2019 NDAA offered several manpower tools that the Marine Corps can implement to retain high-value officers. The Service can allow officers to opt-out of promotion, waive time-in-service requirements, and promote by MOS. The Marine Corps can retain highly specialized field-grade officers, retain them at their present rank, and not be forced to separate them as they would in the current "up and out" promotion system. Additionally, promoting by MOS will allow the Marine Corps to shape its officer corps at each paygrade as required. The Marine Corps can elect to maintain its current "generalist" promotion system for General Officers while specifically tailoring "specialists" at crucial influential positions.

The Marine Corps needs to identify the type of Manpower system it wants to employ. The Service can understand what to change by asking the following questions and researching the advantages and disadvantages of each: Are officers specialists, generalists, or can the Service retain a mix of both? Does the Service value the thoughtful judgment of the human-controlled Manpower system or desire a more streamlined automated system? Does the Service value a stable and predictable Manpower system over one that is flexible and adaptive but more reactionary? Virtue is somewhere in the middle, and the Marine Corps must balance the needs of the Service with the needs of the individual officers that will lead it.

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