

"Adapting" the Fitness Report:

Evolving an intangible quality into a tangible evaluation... to further emphasize the importance of adaptive leadership we must bring it to a measurable format to aid combat leaders for future operations.

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## Report Documentation Page

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With the ever changing face of war, the environment in which it is fought, and the people who fight it, Marines' ultimate goals of leadership have not changed: mission accomplishment and troop welfare. However, the ways in which Marines must accomplish these goals are becoming much more difficult, particularly regarding the uncertainty involved in battling enemies such as guerrillas, terrorists, and insurgents. The ability to adapt to one's environment is more important than ever. Over recent years there has been an emphasized approach in Marine training: initial training, follow on schools, and P.M.E. Each has a type of training focusing on the person's ability to adapt and a certain grading criteria on which to base one's ability. This evaluation criterion has not made its way to the most important of leader evaluation tools, the fitness report (fitrep). The United States Marine Corps must add a category to the fitness report to assess a Marine's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment because, in history, successful military organizations have evaluated and rewarded adaptive traits and leadership; the United States' armed forces, Army and Marine Corps specifically, have recently recognized the importance of adaptive leadership training; and finally, adaptive leadership must be emphasized and measured because today's and future operations are calling for it in today's and future leaders.

## Adaptation Evaluation in History

The United States Marine Corps must add a category to the fitness report to assess a Marine's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment because successful military organizations throughout history evaluated and rewarded adaptive traits and leadership. Historically, some of the most successful military organizations trained their leaders and troops to be flexible and adapt to whatever may come. The Spartans of ancient Greece were famous for their military victories and efficiency. Most historians agree that their success was due to their solely military based culture. What drove this culture was its training of their male youth starting at the age of 7. This training was known as the Agoge. The training emphasized adapting at a young age. The Spartan boys were not well fed and were expected to steal and fight for their food. However, if they were caught stealing, they were often severely beaten. This punishment was not so much a berating for stealing, as it was for getting caught. That training, and others, served as a very identifiable measure of adaptability. Their reward for successfully completing this training of over 11 years was to be granted citizenship in Sparta and, of course, induction into the

Spartan army, although for further training, observation, and evaluation for the next couple of years.

Another successful military organization that applied and evaluated adaptive leadership was the German Wehrmacht before and during World War Two. The German military underwent dramatic change after being catastrophically defeated by the western allies of World War One. They were bound by many constraints put upon them by the victorious allies as far as what their military could consist of. Some of these limitations consisted of, the number of officers and number of troops allowed in the armed forces. It did not, however, limit the number of non-commissioned officers they could actively stand up. The German army then developed a highly trained and adaptable non-commissioned officer corps. Their evaluations were not in block form like the fitness report of today but consisted of their leader's commenting on the observed character of the soldier being evaluated. The soldier's ability to produce results was the basis of his leadership evaluation, not the doctrinal processes of which the results were achieved. The German's successes in adaptive leadership training and evaluation with limited resources have been documented and modeled by many military organizations. Not until recently has

the U.S. started to embrace the aspects and advantages of this training.

### Adaptive Evaluation Today

The United States Marine Corps must add a category to the fitness report to assess a Marine's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment because U.S. military organizations, Army and U.S.M.C. specifically, have recently recognized the importance of adaptive leadership and training. The U.S. military has just recently begun to embrace adaptive leadership training. They are still trying to learn fully how to grade for the aspect of adaptability that the Marine Corps, strives for in its leaders. From the beginning of forging a Marine, there are aspects of adaptive leadership training. In Marine recruit training recruits' skills are tested as part of an evolution called "The Crucible." Here they are presented tasks that must be accomplished by team work. The recruits' adaptive leadership skills are observed by the drill instructors, but, more often than not, nothing is permanently placed in the service record book. If only adaptive leaders were identified earlier, the Marine Corps would have a large stock to pull and hone its leaders from. In the initial training of its officers at Officers Candidates School, a training tool that is utilized

there is the Leadership Response Course. At the course, the candidates are posed with very similar tasks to accomplish as the ones in recruit training. These tasks can be accomplished only by the use of team work. The goal of the evaluator assessing these tasks is not to annotate the means by which the task was accomplished, but to observe the way the team is lead, how the team reacts to the leader, and the level in which they finally work together. Once again, these results are noted, but nothing identified permanently. This tradition is carried on to further officer training at The Basic School. The new second lieutenants are constantly faced with decision making points in the six month long school. More important than the outcome of the decision made, the thinking and reasons behind the decision are what is emphasized. This portion of evaluation at The Basic School is constantly conveyed in the second lieutenants' leadership grade, which consists of thirty four percent of the total grade (the remaining sixty six percent is split between academics and military skills). Adaptive leadership is evaluated and rewarded by a higher grade and helps the overall average, thereby helping the second lieutenants' standing in his Basic School class. These grades help his chance at getting his first choice of military occupational specialty.

At other schools within the Marine Corps adaptation is the key to operational success. At the Marine Security Guard School in Quantico, a Marine's ability to adapt to his soon to be operational environment is weighed heavily in the performance evaluation at the school. If a Marine does not show that he does not have the skill to adapt to operating with civilians who work for the Department of State, foreign nationals who work at the embassies and consulates, and the people of the host nation, then that Marine will not be allowed to graduate the school or be afforded the opportunity to serve on embassy duty.

The Marine Corps has set up schools and institutes to educate and focus their efforts towards leadership and specifically adaptive leadership, such as The Lejeune Leadership Institute. LtCol. Michael B Parkyn, in his article titled "Ecclesiastes, Hedgehogs, Lejeune, and You," discusses some of the goals of LLI. One in particular that he mentioned is change measurement. "Unlike its counterparts in other Services, LLI intends to gain unparalleled competency at measuring change in the individual. This competency will, in turn, drive other LLI activities."<sup>1</sup> The fruits of these efforts are later transferred to the resident and nonresident staff non-commissioned officer

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes, Hedgehogs, Lejeune, and You, Michael B Parkyn. Marine Corps Gazette. Quantico:Feb 2006. Vol.90, Iss.2, p. 17-19 (3 pp.)

and officer professional military education courses offered. The grading systems vary with each course but each has the same goal: to measure a leader's ability to remain flexible in his or her thinking and the reason behind the trains of thought. When these can be identified and measured, they can then be taught to subordinate leaders, and then can be transferred to a tangible identifier within the fitness report.

### Adaptation Evaluation in the Future

The United States Marine Corps must add a category to the fitness report to assess a Marine's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment because with the world, the wars, and the enemies changing, no one can tell what the future has in store in the operational environments. Some things are certain, the ability to adapt will help leaders think critically, and emphasis on adaptive leadership will continue to reinforce training and evaluating. The better training these leaders receive, the better prepared they will be. All of these certainties will aid adaptive leaders in dealing with the unknown. Once it can be identified who will be the most qualified to accomplish certain missions, the Marine Corps as a whole will benefit. Major Donald E Vandergriff and Colonel George Reed make the case for training and evaluating adaptability in their

article titled "Old Dogs and New Tricks: Setting the Tone For Adaptability." They state, "Some of the easily measurable short-term results valued in today's military culture can endanger the culture and climate needed to promote adaptability over time."<sup>2</sup>

### Counterargument

Some might say that the fitness report does not need to be changed. Others would say that the fitness report already has blocks for evaluating adaptation. Adaptability is inherent in the mission accomplishment and individual character blocks. Others would also say that the fitness report has too many blocks. While the fitness report blocks list many qualities eluding to adaptability, especially effectiveness under stress, initiative, and performance, the ability to free think and adapt to situations are not thoroughly covered in these blocks.

Opponents further argue that the terms improvising, adapting, and overcoming go hand in hand, and if left unchecked, can go awry and lead to immoral, and sometimes, illegal practices and actions. These practices would then lead to a tradition of short-cutters who are only worried about the marks

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<sup>2</sup> Old Dogs and New Tricks: Setting the Tone For Adaptability, Donald E Vandergriff, George Reed. Army. Arlington:Aug 2007. Vol. 57, Iss. 8, p. 11-16,18-20 (9 pp.)

they get on their fitness reports and not on the mission. Yes, improvising and adapting can lead to actions such as these, but there in lies a leadership challenge that is not new. Marines everywhere have adapted within the realms of morality and the law of war for ages. Those Marines who have acted outside of the law have been and must be dealt with. Dealing with such infractions or wrong doings is a key factor in what makes a good leader.

In summary, the ability to adapt must be identified, harnessed, improved, and evaluated to prepare the leaders of today and tomorrow. Where to start? By putting evaluation of adaptation in black and white, letting someone see what it means to be adaptable, a new block on the Fitness Report.

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