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Marine Corps Mentorship Program: The Effects of Mentorship on Career Progression and Talent Management

December 2021

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Acquisition Research Program

Naval Postgraduate School

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.



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ABSTRACT

In 2017, the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP), changed from a formal to informal framework. A key addition to the informal framework is the six functional areas of fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finances, and future. This research focuses on the functional area of future, specifically individual career goals and retention decisions. The research explores aspects of the informal framework; discovering the mentor/mentee relationship, career advice received, and how the mentoring interaction influenced the retention decision of the individual Marine. As retention continues to be an issue in the Marine Corps, the MCMP is an established program that has potential to effect retention problems in a positive manner. The researchers interviewed enlisted Marines and explored their perception of the program and the overall effects of their mentoring interactions. The research provides an overview of the results and provides suggestions that will enhance the MCMP within respective units.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CPG	Commandant's Planning Guidance
DOD	Department of Defense
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MARDET	Marine Corps Detachment
MCLD	Marine Corps Leadership Development
MCMP	Marine Corps Mentorship Program
MCU	Marine Corps University
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
OPFOR	Operation Forces
POM	Presidio of Monterey
USMC	United States Marine Corps



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I. BACKGROUND

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has been devoted to and successful in evolving civilians into an elite organization of warriors. The USMC has historically been a force in readiness, meaning that it is prepared to deploy in support of contingency operations for our nation. However, the value of having such force is often challenged during times of fiscal restraint. It has been argued that the USMC's mission could be performed by other ground forces within the Department of Defense. As an example of this relevancy concern, General Krulak wrote in *First to Fight: An Inside View of the Marine Corps* that "the United States does not need a Marine Corps... however, for good reason, the United States wants a Marine Corps" (Krulak, 1999). General Krulak argues that the Marine Corps is beneficial to American society through dependability in inimical conditions and is relied on to win (1999). Stated differently, America wants a Marine Corps because of the institution's resourceful culture, reliable force readiness, and ability to develop quality citizens. With a prestigious reputation to uphold and the backing of the American public, it is imperative that the Marine Corps retains the most talented individuals our country has to offer. To support doing so, the 38th Commandant released his planning guidance for the Marine Corps and set forth some initiatives that will prove relevance. One key component of the initiative was talent management (retention), the need to recruit and retain the brightest of what the American Public has to offer.

As a result of transitioning to an all-volunteer force in 1973 and the subsequent Enlisted Grade Structure Review in 1985, the United States Marine Corps' personnel structure relies heavily upon first-term enlistees, the majority of whom only serve their initial enlistment and leave the service once their contract obligations are met. This personnel structure accomplishes two goals. First, having a "bottom-heavy" personnel structure lowers the pay burden on the Marine Corps given that newly enlisted Marines are paid the least amount. Second, the personnel structure created an "up or out" promotion pyramid where only a minority of Marines were able to be promoted to the next higher rank that, when coupled with retention control points (e.g., time-in-grade / time-in-service limits), set the conditions for forced exits of enlisted Marines (Reid, 2021). Though this implementation worked in 1985, it has failed to adapt to technological



advancement and societal changes within the United States and failing to account for retention. For example, now there are Marines with special skill sets that are being forced to fit this antiquated criteria and they don't. Therefore, they are left with no other option but to exit the Marine Corps, which is one of the factors aiding in the lack of retention of Marines.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Marine Corps is responsible for establishing the fundamentals of professionalism and leadership, but leaders continuously strategize in ameliorating recruit retention. Major efforts such as incentives for re-enlistment, support systems and change in protocol were implemented to reduce turnover but have been proven to be insufficient. In comparison to other military services, enlisted management practices for manpower are “unnecessarily disruptive” to the Marine Corps’ warfighting philosophy and are wasteful of talent and proficiency with requirements of the modern battlefield (Reid, 2021). Despite these efforts, the Marine Corps continues to struggle with meeting manpower demands.

In the article *Facing Retention Issues, the Corps Needs to Recruit Highest Number of Marines in a Decade*, Snow reveals the highest turnover rates in the Marine Corps were amongst young recruits, ranked E-5 and below (2018). The annual mass exits drastically increase demand on drill instructors and recruiters, but it also disrupts accession for re-enlisted Marines (Snow, 2018). Despite increased demand for new recruits, Marine Corps recruiters still meet annual recruiting goals. Snow’s article emphasized the importance of retention and demanded a new solution that will directly address this crisis.

An additional factor that contributes to strain and decline of young Marines is exit through misconduct. According to Szoldra (2019), alcohol, drug offenses, sexual assault and hazing was additionally responsible for the overall decline in Marine Corps enlistees in 2018. The author noted that General David Berger stated despite the effort to mitigate misconduct, the measures taken to date have yet to cease some of these offenses.



A revised system is needed to decrease the number of misconduct dismissals and mass exits within the Marine Corps. Modernizing the management of enlisted manpower could achieve the designed goals of General Berger. Increasing investment in the modernization of talent management techniques to preserve Marines' advanced in experience, technological proficiency, and adaptability, will support the designed goals.

For example, mentorship is a common and efficient tactic used for professional career development of individuals to gradually enhance an organizational structure. Generally, organizations endorse one of two types of mentorship programs, formal and informal programs. According to Johnson and Anderson (2010), formal mentorship occurs when organizations control over who is mentored and how they are to be mentored. Formal mentoring is started by the organization and includes formal assignment of mentees to mentors. Conversely, Johnson and Anderson (2010) note that informal mentorship is left to happenstance and emerges instinctively through normal relationships between senior and subordinates without any formal control. Informal mentorship is based on mutual interests and initiation.

In 2006, the formal mentoring process of the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP) improving interactions of Marines in a professional and personal context, was developed to aid in the establishment of goals and interpersonal relationships, replicating a combat environment (Kisla & Yang, 2020). Kisla & Yang (2020) states that the program was intended to ensure the Marines were up to standards regardless of their location or duty status. The MCMP program is also formally based in the encompassing of all aspects of a junior and senior Marine to aid in retention. MCMP consists of three types of individuals: a "mentor, mentee or a buddy" (Kisla & Yang, 2020). A mentor is typically a senior with experience to serve as a guidance counselor to a subordinate Marine. The mentor is responsible for that Marine's understanding of the mission of their unit, their role in the team and developing a plan for further maturation. A mentee is a junior Marine who is expected to commit to growth and be receptive to guidance of mentors. A mentee's responsibility is to have regular meetings with their mentor every 30 days (Kisla & Yang, 2020). Lastly, the buddy system states that Marines will be paired and responsible for each other's wellbeing, as well as upholding Marine Corps values of "courage, honor and commitment" (Kisla & Yang, 2020). The formal Marine Corps



Mentoring Policies system resulted in many success stories, but not sufficient to limit retention and was considered in need of reform.

In 2017, the USMC went from the MCMP to the MLD program which made the mentorship relationship voluntary between subordinates and junior Marines. The USMC did this because they wanted to better aid in the holistic development of a Marine, thus maintaining retention and evolving the promotional opportunities throughout the service branch (Kisla & Yang, 2020). The focus in change was established in the Marine Corps Leadership Development (MCLD) policy, the objective being to “develop leadership qualities” and enable leaders with tools to “assume greater responsibilities” within society and the Marine Corps (Department of the Navy, 2017). The goal of this policy was to be a tool to assist Marines in becoming the best version of themselves inside and outside of the military. Unlike the Marine Corps Mentorship Program consisting of only three components, the revamped Marine Leader Development framework includes six functions.

The six functions included in the MLD program include: fidelity, fighter fitness, family, finances, and future (Department of the Navy, 2017). Fidelity is defined in the MLD order as “faithfulness to one another, our Corps, and the Nation” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 3). The next function is fighter, which focuses on how well rounded the Marine is trained in different areas. These areas include individual schooling, education, specialized training, and their ability to communicate. Fitness is the next component of the MLD program, which builds upon well-roundedness of the Marine physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially. The fourth function is family, which is a part of the foundation of a Marine. Family is “the bedrock, fundamental social relationships from which Marines draw strength, and cumulatively make a stronger Corps” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 3). Most Marines are stationed away from their family, which makes this function hard for a Marine to grasp. Finance is another function, which alludes to the Marine being financially smart in maintaining their finances in order to be readily deployable and for future transfer to the civilian sector. The last function of the MLD program is future. Future is “the practice of setting and accomplishing goals in all of the other five functional areas of leader development” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 3).



The six functional areas include all aspects of developing a junior Marine holistically and are to be communicated by a senior Marine via teaching, coaching, counseling, and mentoring. Developing a junior Marine starts with ensuring Marines have a senior individual to learn from the is more experienced than they are (Department of the Navy, 2017). Coaching is similar to teaching, but differs in demanding an output, and requires individual success and team success. (Department of the Navy, 2017). Counseling is the tool of evaluation that Marine Corps senior leaders use in order to get positive or negative feedback based on performance (Department of the Navy, 2017). Mentoring is a “voluntary relationship between two individuals and should not be forced” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 5). It is important that the individual seeking mentorship has freedom in picking their mentor based on mutual interests, morals, and values. The Marine Leader Development framework is expected to be followed when developing a Marine within the six functional areas. It is required that the commanding officer enforce and abide by the MCLD order and incorporate it into their daily operations. They also need to ensure that junior leaders are aware of the resources available to them in order to properly guide their Marines (Department of the Navy, 2017).

This study will focus on the functional areas of future, as it is arguably the most impactful in how it affects career progression and talent management (retention). In reference to the 38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance, talent management and taking care of Marines were two topics of interest (Berger, 2019). Senior leadership believe the Marine Corps mentorship program is a major tool in assisting leaders in deciding the advancement of this resource. This research will explore the policy updates and published frameworks to assess the effectiveness of the mentorship program; as well as present a modern method to improving retention within the United States Marine Corps (Kisla & Yang 2020).

B. TALENT MANAGEMENT

“Talent management is simply a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and then setting out a plan to meet it” (Cappelli, 2008, para. 2). Retention is an important topic in organizational research and practice because it can have a bad effect on the



organizational as a whole and the leadership within the workplace. For example, as the United States Army states, “talent management and leader development are intrinsically linked. Talent management accounts for the individual skills, knowledge, attributes, and behaviors of Army professionals and the potential that they represent” (Odierno, 2015, p. 13). This practice can be applied to Marine Corps leadership as well, as it is imperative that leaders in the Marine Corps are effectively mentoring and developing their enlisted Marines into leaders, thus promoting their talent management initiatives as well.

The Marine Corps recruits approximately 30,000 new enlisted recruits annually. The recruited population are referred to as junior enlisted, and they make up 60.4% of the Marine Corps population (Snow, 2018). On average, 75% percent of junior enlisted Marines exit on their first four-year tour (Reid, 2021). As only 29% of youth are eligible for military service (Reid, 2021), it is imperative that the mentorship program is effectively managed and promotes retention within the force. At this rate the Marine Corps will not be able to maintain its position as a force in readiness because it will not be able to recruit or retain a large enough group that is willing and able to meet various Marine Corps standards.

As the retention rates continue to decrease in the Marine Corps, talent management practices become outdated and ineffective. One tenet of talent management that needs to be addressed is: does the Department of Defense have the right culture that promotes retention? According to Adam Grant during his congressional hearing, that is not the case, and he stated that:

I worry that DOD’s culture is a threat to national security. Culture is the system of values and norms that govern behavior, how we do things around here. Culture can shape whether organizations are built to last or doomed to perish. It has a dramatic impact on performance and innovation, and I believe DOD culture stifles innovation. (Para 1)

This research will consider the above question and attempt to explore effective frameworks of talent management as they pertain to retaining the best and brightest the Marine Corps has to offer. Talent management models for the Marine Corps likely need updating and a low-risk way to make gains is to change the Marine Corps mentorship program. Because leaders are charged with caring for Marines, new talent management



policies and procedures must be pointed towards helping leaders improve their relationships with their junior enlisted Marines.

The Commandant's Planning (Berger, 2019) guidance addresses the manpower systems by stating the following:

Our manpower system was designed in the industrial era to produce mass, not quality. We assumed that quantity of personnel was the most important element of the system, and that workers (Marines) are all essentially interchangeable. As the complexity of the world has increased, the spread between physical jobs and thinking jobs has increased dramatically. War still has a physical component, and all Marines need to be screened and ready to fight. However, we have not adapted to the needs of the current battlefield. The only way to attract and retain Marines capable of winning on the new battlefield is to compete with the tools and incentives available to them in the marketplace. (p.7)

Career progression can provide the tools and incentives that will compete with the private sector. In this instance career progression entails promotions, better job assignments and even training and educational opportunities. These incentives are not overtly financial in nature and if properly implemented will encourage better organizational culture, retention, and talent management. The Marine Corps leaders are charged with giving sound guidance that will help the junior enlisted advance in their careers. Between the Marine Corps directive on leadership development and the Commandant's planning guidance, leaders have an opportunity to change the culture that will encourage junior enlisted to stay in the Marine Corps longer than four-years.

The Marine Corps mentorship program especially focuses on junior enlisted because the junior enlisted population makes up over half of the Marine Corps population, and because most of those Marines will leave the service upon completing their first tour or sooner if involved in misconduct. Per the Commandant's planning guidance,

The continued loss of 8,000 Marines per year to non-EAS attrition is unacceptable. According to Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), between FY09-19, the OPFOR (operational forces) lost 11,765 Marines to non-EAS attrition for drug and alcohol offenses, and another 13,571 for misconduct. The total replacement cost for these 25,336 Marines is more than \$1 billion. (Berger, 2019, p. 21)



When coupled with the challenges of recruiting and low retention rates generally, the Marine Corps cannot afford to lose Marines in this fashion. The mentorship program has an opportunity to address the misconduct utilizing the six tenets of the leadership development framework. The Commandant has tasked his leaders to take care of the junior Marines and the mentorship program can be a tool leaders utilize to correct such issues.

As previously mentioned, talent management and retention are critical issues the Marine Corps must address. It appears that the Marine Corps' senior leadership believes these problems can best be addressed by small unit leadership, such as the battalion, company, platoon, and squad. To assist, the Marine Corps created supporting material and policy focused on the evaluation process, career progression, education opportunities, and career bonuses. All of these were published to ensure the Marine Corps personnel are properly employed and retained. The term the best and brightest has been a key phrase used by leadership to challenge mid-level leaders to address this population and make a conscious effort to keep them attached to the organization. In support of the Commandant's guidance, this research will attempt to address this practical issue that could eventually hinder the Marine Corps in future operations.

However, previous research has stated that there is a knowledge and information gap within leaders responsible for mentoring junior Marines and Officers (Yang, 2020). The change from a formal to informal mentorship program should have had positive effects on the organization, but preliminary research has shown many Marines are not being mentored and, in turn, are not serving as mentors to others (Berger, 2019). Given that the Commandant's planning guidance states "leaders are expected to do everything within their power to ensure every individual Marine succeeds" (Berger, 2019, p. 6), the published research suggests that some Marine leaders are failing to do so, which begs the question: Why is this happening?

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary question the research will address; how are key leaders doing everything in their means, if they do not know what is contained in the published guidance? If leaders are not, what is preventing them from doing so?



With the understanding that military life is not for everyone, the question the research will address is if the mentorship program is having a positive effect on our retention and talent management, why or why not? As we review the literature on mentorship and talent management, our initial stance is if the Marine Corps was properly taking care of Marines utilizing the guidance given, would this help the organization retain its best and brightest? Retention of the best is the end state and mentorship will play a role in the individual's decision to stay or leave after their four-year obligation. If the proper human connection were being made through the mentorship program, would the Marine Corps retain a larger percentage of the best and brightest or does the Marine Corps need to readdress the 2017 policy change?

D. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to provide information on the effectiveness of the informal framework of the mentorship program as it pertains to the tenet of future and the Marine Corps declining retention rates. The study will attempt to provide best practices to the leadership that will be responsible with execution of the mentorship framework as outlined in the 2017 publication, taking care of Marines, and ensuring they are properly mentored is a leadership issue and has future implications if not properly addressed (Berger, 2019).

“Enlisted manpower management must be modernized if the Marine Corps is to have within its ranks the more experienced and technically proficient Marines required within a highly technical, distributed, and adaptive stand-in force” (Reid, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, “it must increase investment in—and retention of—enlisted human capital in keeping with its appetite for increased capability” (Reid, 2021, p. 2). The research will attempt to provide information that will assist with the modernization of our mentorship system. The modernization will be essential to future operations as the Marine Corps maintains its position as a force in readiness.

As the Commandants Planning guidance has been a key publication in addressing the Marine Corps future force design, a couple key takeaways were talent management and taking care of the junior Marines. The critical decline in retention rates for the Marine Corps means the organization cannot stand to lose one Marine due to factors that



could have been mitigated by leadership through proper mentorship practices. The Commandant as well as key leaders understand, that the junior Marine is the key for the Marine Corps future success as they make up the majority of the force.

This study will attempt to gain an understanding of the reasoning for Marines to leave the organization after their four-year term and did the mentorship program play a role in their decision-making process. Secondly, from a junior enlisted perspective the study will examine their views and experiences with the mentorship, thus giving the senior leaders a perspective to apply their mentorship practices. Mentors sometime refer to a generational gap between mentors and mentee, this study will attempt to bridge that gap thus allowing mentors to be affected when mentoring junior enlisted. Lastly, once all the information is compiled and analyzed, best practices will be presented to key leadership with an intent that they will be able to improve their mentorship programs withing their respective units.

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This thesis will be broken down into five chapters. The chapters are organized as follows: Chapter I details the background of this thesis and an introduction to our topic; Chapter II provides insight into literature that gives detail on the relationships between mentorship, talent management, and the Marine Corps; Chapter III gives the methods used for conducting the interviews; Chapter IV reveals the results of the interviews and analyzes data that was obtained; Chapter V covers recommendations, limitations, conclusion, and future implication of the study.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

While mentorship within the Marine Corps has been examined in the past (Yang & Kisla, 2020), our research adds to the literature by exploring how mentorship affects retention and career success. Mentorship is known to play a major role in the development of an individual inside and outside the military (Holt, 2016). In order for a mentorship program to work in any environment there must be a cohesive and fluid definition, there must be a positive framework and there must be an environment of leadership and helpfulness within the organization. As research will show an individual is more inclined to stay with an organization and progress through their career if they have a qualified mentor. Therefore, this research hopes to lay a framework for mentoring within the Marine Corp to best help the individual Marine and uphold the standards and values that the Marine Crop has had for generations past and generations to come.

This chapter will review literature on the aspects of mentorship in the civilian sector as well as the military. It will discuss the definitions of mentorship and explain why it is important to have mentors throughout personal careers. It will also explore effective forms of mentorship particularly an informal mentorship program that has recently been adopted by the Marine Corp. This literature review will attempt to bring together all directives from government sources to determine how to make all the aspects cohesive to ensure that mentorship inside the Marine Corp is conducive for those involved is the best for individuals in the workplace. Lastly, this literature will discuss the importance of talent management and how to provide a modern approach to managing their employees and their career progression and retention.

A. DEFINITION OF MENTORSHIP

Several definitions of mentorship from the literature include “a senior manager who provides emotional support, guidance, and sponsorship to a less experienced person” (Kirchmeyer, 1995, p. 72); “someone, other than your manager or immediate coworkers, who provides you with technical or career advice, coaching, or information on an informal basis;” (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999, p. 493–494), and “an influential individual with a higher ranking in your work environment who has advanced experience



and knowledge so he/she can give you support, guidance, and advice for your development” (Van Emmerk, Baugh, & Euwema, 2005, p. 314). Taken together, a few themes emerge, such as a mentor should be someone outside of your boss or immediate coworkers. They should also be an individual with more experience and expertise than the mentee.

In a similar journal published by Haggard et al. (2011), the definition of mentorship was described by Eby et al., (2007), and Wanberg et al. (2003).

Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007) described how mentoring overlaps with, but is distinctly different from, other developmental relationships such as role model–observer, teacher–student, advisor–advisee, supervisor–subordinate and coach–client. Although Eby et al. (2007) did an excellent job of differentiating these relationships from mentoring, they gave less attention to within-construct differences in the definitions of mentoring. In their review, Wanberg, Welsh, and Hezlett (2003) stated that while some scholars have criticized the lack of consistency in definitions of mentoring, there is consistency in the “general concept” of mentoring, at least for traditional mentoring relationships. (Haggard et al., 2011, p. 286)

While there can be varying different definitions and it may seem complicated to derive one solid definition, it remains that there is overlap amongst the definitions and the Marine Corp established a blend of many of the definitions to define mentorship as “involving a voluntary developmental relationship between a person of greater and lesser experience and is characterized by mutual trust and respect” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 6). The Marine Corps Leader Development order also states that mentor relationships can happen outside or inside the chain of command and can be initiated by a subordinate or a senior. This definition will be the foundation of how the Marine Corp will determine how to lay the framework and create an effective form of mentorship that can be beneficial to the Marine and the Marine Corp.

B. INFORMAL VS. FORMAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM AND EFFECTS OF MENTORSHIP

A review of the mentorship literature indicates that it plays a critical developmental role within organizations. For example, Nemanick states that mentorship programs “create stronger connections among organizational members or facilitate the development of talented individuals” (Nemanick, 2000, p. 136). Studies of mentorship



have shown positive correlations between receiving mentoring and human behavior (Kochan, 2002), and career advancement (Kram, 1983). Thus, mentorship is a good foundation for employees and service members to enhance their careers.

Literature also indicates that informal and formal relationships in mentorship may have different structures but have positive results on its members. In the mentorship programs of the Marine Corp the structure has varied between informal and formal mentorship. There are non-military related entities that have completed studies on whether formal or informal mentorship is more effective.

Prior research suggests that formal mentorship programs that compel participation are largely ineffective, that the most effective mentoring relationships occur organically within an organization, and that little to no oversight or structure is required by organizational leadership. (Lester et al., p. 409–410)

In a recent study conducted by Kislak and Yang (2020), they examined the 2017 policy change with the Marine Corps Mentorship Program and how it affects how Marines are mentored. This policy change is recent due to the Marine Corps seeing that research shows informal mentorship is better than formal mentorship. Before the Marine Corps changed their mentorship program in 2017, the organization was using a formal mentorship program where each individual Marine was assigned to a mentor. One of the reasons for concern with the formal mentorship is there is a lack of a quality relationship due to a lack of similarity of between assigned members. Many studies show that personal characteristics play a role in development and success in mentorship programs. As analyzed by Holt et al. (2016),

Kram (1988) suggested that mentoring relationships evolve through stages as trust and confidence in one another are built; the more time a mentor and a protégé spend together, the more quickly trust and confidence develop. Mentors in formal mentoring programs, however, report less motivation to fully invest their time and effort. Johnson and Anderson (2009) indicate that the more formalized a mentoring program becomes the less likely mentors are to fully participate. (p. 69)

Rauschelback (2013) also found,

Formal mentoring programs sometimes have negative perceptions. Formal mentoring programs limit the choices available to mentor and protégés, provide no flexibility in establishing connection (e.g., Chao & Walz, 1992; Zey, 1988), and are usually assigned on a foundation of request by



mentors and protégés. A common perception is that formal mentoring is for at risk performers only; thus, individuals who go into such relationships are there because they need special attention (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Scandura & Williams, 2001). Moreover, in 2017 the Marine Corps transitioned from a formal to an informal mentorship program, which is in line with the empirical literature. (Ragins & Cotton, 1999, p. 14)

He also found that informal mentors will help more with “career development functions, including coaching, providing challenging assignments, or increasing proteges exposure or visibility” (Nemanick, 2000, p. 137).

In addition, other literature explores the mentorship-performance dynamic. For example, Lyle and Smith (2014) found that individuals that had a high performing mentor increased the percentage of that individual being promoted to the rank of Major. This finding held when demographic measures were included, thereby bolstering the generalizability across a large, diverse organization. The authors also found that individuals with mentors that were successful in their career saw a longer tenure in that relationship compared to those with lower performing mentors.

C. TALENT MANAGEMENT

Talent management is a modern-day issue that many organizations face but still apply age old frameworks. Harvard business school published an article providing management a modern approach to managing employees, their career progression and potential retention within their respective organizations (Capelli, 2008). This article directly relates to the Marine Corps and its legacy systems in place to manage its personnel, specifically the junior enlisted population, which comprises of 60.4% of the total Marine Corps population. With the private sector being the main rival to military service, the article states that the primary reason individuals leave their place of work is due to a better prospect (Capelli, 2008). This makes talent development difficult to maintain within the organization.

The Marine Corps mentorship program is a key tool for leaders to advise on advancement decisions. With the understanding that sharing in advancement decisions may encourage junior enlisted to stay in the Marine Corps, this literature provides a



modern-day approach to improving retention vice seeking other employment forming the mentor/mentee relationship. This literature also provides insight on modern talent management frameworks that could applied in the Marine Corps.

D. MARINE CORPS FRAMEWORK

It is critical to understand the difference between mentorship in the civilian section and mentorship within the military, which is supposed to help accomplish certain missions and objectives. The Marine Corps has policies that provides guidance for the objective of mentoring Marines and how to accomplish the organizational culture that the Marine Corps wants. This guidance also explains how the Marine Corps wants mentorship to be used in the development and progression of Marines throughout their career. The guidance is broken down into a couple of different areas. These areas communicated are within the following documents: Marine Corps Mentorship Program, Marine Leader Development, Commandant’s Planning Guidance, and Sustaining the Transformation.

1. Commandant’s Planning Guidance

The Commandant’s Planning Guidance (CPG) is written by the current Marine Commandant, General Burger, in which he provides guidance to the Marine Corps on his vision for the next couple of years. It explains the Commandant’s intent and focuses in on his top five priority areas. One of these priority areas is the actual Marines under his topic of force design. General Berger states, “Everything starts and ends with the individual Marine” (Berger, 2019, p. 6). This alludes to the fact that having a good mentorship, regardless if it is formal or informal, is included in taking care of the Marine. In order to take care of the Marines, one has to understand them as an individual and develop a relationship with them.

The Marines are the most important asset in the Marine Corps. As stated in the CPG, “Marines are the centerpiece of the Corps—our principal emphasis must focus on recruiting; educating and training; instilling our core values and sense of accountability; equipping; and treating them with dignity, care, and concern” (Berger, 2019, p. 6). He goes on to say that leaders must make sure that Marines are successful. The Commandant



of the Marine Corps is telling all senior leaders and enlisted personnel inexplicitly that they must have some type of mentor relationship with their Marines in order to make sure that they are successful. The Commandant does not use the term mentorship verbatim, but he refers to the definition of mentorship throughout the Commandant's Planning Guidance. He also mentions that the topic of talent management is an extremely important for the future of the Marine Corps.

The goal of mentorship is also to assist in retaining the most talented Marines. Mentorship and talent management are complementary as mentoring will be useful in retaining Marines and assisting them in progression in their careers (Capelli, 2008) The current model of the military only gives them the tools to evaluate Marines solely off of years in the military rather than the performance of the Marine (Berger, 2019). The structure lacks the ability to adapt to Marines that have changed interest or need guidance. The structure is flawed in which it can only evaluate whether a Marine should or should not remain in the Corps. A new method should be established to assist with the Marines that slip through the cracks.

The article particularity mentions that the current manpower model forces Marines into a career early on and the Marine is usually not aware of the ways to transition out of their decision and are forced out or create a low motivated individual. The article highlights the idea that Marines can change their interest and an incentive model should be put into place to retain them and although not explicitly mentioned, a part of the incentive program can include mentorship. This is true because if Marines were knowledgeable about their options and were better evaluated, they would have more success in their careers and the Marine Corp would have more talented manpower. "Even talented, high-performing officers have changing interests over time and the lack of incentives for self-improvement through education and personnel development discourages those inclined to learn, think, and innovate" (Berger, 2019, p. 7). These issues could be addressed through an informal method of mentorship to create more personal relationships and to encourage an individual's growth, to not exclude those who are less talented or who intend to separate from the Marine Corp. Lastly, in regard to talent management, a revamped system for evaluation and mentorship could assist in maintaining the talented manpower of the Marine Corps.



Another priority for General Berger in his CPG is command and leadership where he is explicitly talking to leaders and how they should lead Marines. He mentions that “leaders must ensure Marines are well-led and cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually, both in and out of combat” (Berger, 2019, p. 22). All of these task that should be accomplished by leaders can be done by using a mentor relationship between the leader and the Marine. There is no other way to know if the Marine is taken care of physically, emotionally, or spiritually without actually knowing the Marine and having a relationship with them. He goes on to mention, “do not encroach on their space unnecessarily and do not prescribe every action; instead, teach, coach, and mentor” (Berger, 2019, p. 22) This is the first time General Berger actually uses the term mentoring, but it is inexplicitly implied throughout the CPG.

2. Marine Corps Mentorship Program

Mentorship is not a new concept for Marines, it has been around for years and has forged positive relationships and has assaulted in the growth of many Marines current and past. The current issue with this style of mentorship is that there is not a “formal direction to the current mentoring construct” (Department of the Navy, p. 1). Therefore, although it may seem like mentorship is a natural cause within the Marine Corp, however “that not every Marine is mentored, not every Marine is held accountable, and not every Marine is provided with exacting one-on-one leadership by his or her direct senior” (Department of the Navy, p. 1). Once again there is evidence to show that mentorship is evident in the Marine Corp and has positive effects on the individual Marine, but there is no official construct that is in place in order for the positives to reach each and every Marine.

The construct of the Marine mentorship included the guidance for the mentees and mentors. Each Marine will have a senior leader mentor them that resides in their same organization. Mentors are expected to be the “primary counselors, guides, and teachers to the Marines under their direct care” (Department of the Navy, p. 1. In addition, mentors had to be the example and show what is the true meaning of being a Marine while maintain professional relationships with their mentees. Lastly mentors were expected to have five skills to include “self-awareness and discipline; questioning



techniques; listening skills; empathy; and feedback skills” (Department of the Navy, p. 3). The construct expected that Marines being mentored must be “committed to growing and be open and receptive to new ways of accomplishing tasks” (Department of the Navy, p. 3). Additionally, mentees set goals for themselves with their mentor and identify ways to accomplish them. After this was accomplished, the mentees progress was monitored every 30 days and updates were documented. (Department of the Navy, 2006).

This kind of mentor-mentee relationship was not conducive to creating healthy relationships between junior enlisted and their chain of command. The formal style of mentoring was positive. The mission was to educate and assist Marines in being the best they can be but unfortunately created environments that essentially had the opposite effect of what was intended for both the mentee and the mentors. This previous construct had the proper intention of reaching Marines, unfortunately the format was flawed and therefore the commander made a transition to an informal mentoring program known as Leadership Development Program which revamped this old mentoring system.

3. Marine Corps Leadership Development

In 2017, the Marine Corps adapted a new mentoring policy that is under the most recent Marine Corps order, Marine Corps Leadership Development. This order cancelled the previous order, Marine Corps Mentorship Program. “While a formalized, structured approach to mentoring is no longer prescribed, mentoring remains an important component of developing Marines and is addressed in this order along with teaching, coaching, and counseling” (Department of the Navy, p. 1). The reason is because the Marine Corps wanted the mentoring relationship to be voluntary and not forced. “Mentoring happens most effectively when two individuals find commonality and although it is not limited to the chain of command, the initial relationship between leader and led should contain an element of mentoring.” (Department of the Navy, p. 5). The Marine Corps’ new philosophy on mentorship is that it is more effective when it is not forced, and leaders do it willingly instead of making it an order. The order goes on to mention that all of the following should take place under mentoring: teaching, coaching, and counseling.



The order explains the reason why this mentoring relationship must start as soon as the Marine goes to boot camp. Boot camp is a life changing event for every Marine with a transformation from being a civilian to an actual Marine. Leaders must be dedicated to developing and making the next generation of Marines. The order also shows that mentorship has been around the Marine Corps since the 13th Commandant, General Lejeune.

While resources and methods vary over time and must be adapted to the individual and the environment, the spirit in which leaders prepare Marines and Sailors for future challenges was captured by our 13th Commandant, General John A. Lejeune, when he compared the senior/subordinate relationship to that of a teacher and scholar, or a parent and child (Encl (1)). (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 1)

Even during the early 1900s the philosophy was the same in which a senior Marine should have a relationship with their subordinates that could be compared a parent and child or a teacher and student. This order also states basic definitions that must be understood in order for the Marine Development Program to work. The first one is the actual definition of mentorship. “Mentoring is a voluntary relationship between two individuals and should not be directed or forced. One individual has experience and knowledge and is seeking to guide another experience and model his or her development after the person providing guidance” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 5).

The Marine Corps sees mentoring as a relationship that happens voluntary instead of involuntary. The next important definition is teaching. Teaching is the transfer of information from an individual with expertise to someone with less expertise than them. In order for this to happen a senior Marine must pass information down to their subordinates. The order also defines coaching, in which leaders should be coaching their Marines. Coaching is the “process of both encouraging and demanding output” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 5). The last term defined is counseling. “Counseling is the mechanism Marine leaders use to provide feedback on performance” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 5). Counseling can either be positive or negative. The coaching and counseling sessions follow a comprehensive framework that includes six essential areas which include: fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finances, and future. Counseling,



mentoring, teaching, and coaching must all happen in order to have the full concept of developing the Marine. One cannot exist without the other.

4. Sustaining the Transformation

Sustaining the Transformation is a publication that focuses on one of the Marine Corps most important values which is to understand and comprehend your Marines and assist them when needed (2018). The Marine transformation starts at Officer Candidate School or Marine Boot Camp and last for the rest of Marines' lives. *Sustaining the Transformation* has been Marine Corp doctrine since 1999 and has continued the tradition ever since. This doctrine is another piece of literature that shows how important a form of mentorship plays in a Marine's career and for the rest of their lives.

The doctrine mentions that a Marine is assigned a voluntary mentor upon arriving to their command. It also states that Marines first integration with the recruiter before joining the Marine Corps is actually their first mentee relationship. Most recruiters do not have their best intent in mind when recruiting Marines since they are just trying to accomplish a quota. The Marine does not really establish a real mento until they get to their first unit, if assigned one. "Upon arrival to a unit, Marines must be assigned a mentor who can assimilate them into the unit." (United States Marine Corps, p. 6-4). It is the job of the commanders to ensure that the unit provides a quality mentor. This particular Marine Corps publication states that, "mentorship is voluntary, but every Marine should look for opportunities to help another Marine attain his/her future goals, both in or out of the Corps" (United States Marine Corps, p. 8-14). Once again a piece of literature from Marine Corps doctrine telling leaders to ensure that mentorship is available to the Marines but it is also voluntary. This can be a very confusing process for junior Marines and junior officers to understand.



III. METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of mentorship on Marines' retention and career progression and the impact it has on the Marine Corps organization as a whole. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with enlisted Marines from Defense Language Institute stationed at the Presidio of Monterey (POM). The researchers analyzed the interviews to identify themes, similarities, and differences amongst the Marines. The researchers received all approvals from all organizations before conducting interviews with participants, to include NPS Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Marine Corps IRB, on 12 June 2021. The proposal was also endorsed by Marine Corps University (MCU). The completed thesis resides at Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) library and a copy was sent to Marine Corps University and the Marine Detachment at Presidio of Monterey.

A. INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS

Interviews were conducted with Marine Corps enlisted personnel stationed aboard the Defense Language Institute at POM in Monterey, California. There were 13 semi-structured interviews conducted through an approved interview questionnaire. The enlisted Marines were recruited via a random sample by the Company Gunnery Sergeant. The Company Gunnery Sergeant provided career retention information as it pertained to the research topic. The approved interview questionnaire focused on gaining individual perceptions in the areas of leadership and mentoring post 2017 policy changes. The interview questionnaire asked questions about career goals and plans. The interview also discovered the effects of mentorship on the Marines' career progression and retention. While executing social distancing, the interviews were conducted in-person on POM at the Marine Detachment (MARDET). Random selection process was discussed with the staff at the MARDET. Interviews were conducted in three days consecutively from 4–6 October 2021.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, utilizing a transcription program through the Acquisition Research Program. The data received was given to the research



team's advisor for storage. Upon receiving consent from the command, we conducted all interviews within a three-day time frame using 2 hours for each day.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

The development of the interview questionnaire was based on a previous study conducted by Kisla and Yang (2020). The original interview questions were adjusted to fit this study and to address the effects of mentorship on retention and career progression. The primary questions in the interview addressed background information, mentorship, well-being of the individual Marine, retention decisions, and career progression. The purpose of the primary questions explored previous billets served, how their respective mentor has enhanced their career choices, the Marines retention decision, and their future aspirations. The second category focused on the senior enlisted advisors and their perspective on the Marine Corps mentorship program. The purpose of the secondary questions will be to explore leadership concerns, the gaps of the mentorship program and some best practices from their experience. Information collected from the interviews provided data concerning the mentoring program and its overall effects on the retention and career progression.

C. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

The student researchers initiated the recruiting process via email, to a point of contact (POC) at the MARDET on POM. The MARDET Company Gunnery Sergeant sent our recruitment email to the Marines in his company to see who wanted to volunteer to participate. The Company Gunnery Sergeant sent out the recruitment email via an all hands enlisted Marine list to his marines. Individuals who wish to participate contacted the student researchers directly to be interviewed. Contact was made through email to set up a face-to-face interview.

D. RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The researchers developed a sample recruitment letter and email that described the purpose of our study and explained that the subjects' participation was voluntary. The letter and email stressed the research topic and specifically the effectiveness of the mentorship program on Marines' retention and career progression. It also provided the



background on the Marine Leader Development policy. The email and letter explained that there would be no benefits from the subjects participating and they will not be paid for their participation. It also stated that the Marines' identity will stay anonymous and their answers will have no effect on their personal careers. Once the subjects agreed to participate, the researchers sent a confirmation email to setup a date and time for their specific interview.

E. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS/DATA

The researchers interviewed a total of 13 participants of which were all enlisted Marines in the Marine Corps stationed at POM. Of the 13 participants three of them were females and the rest were males. Participants ranged from 19–40 years old. The pay grade of participants ranged from E-2 to E-9 with the years of service ranging from 1–23 years. The majority of the participants race was Caucasian. See figures 1–4 for demographics on gender, race, pay grade, and age.

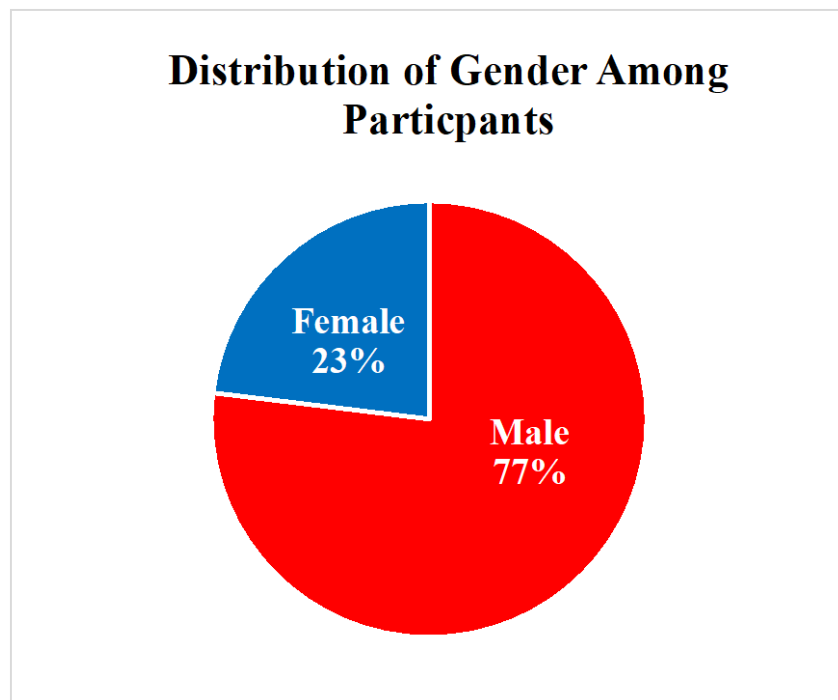


Figure 1. Distribution of Gender

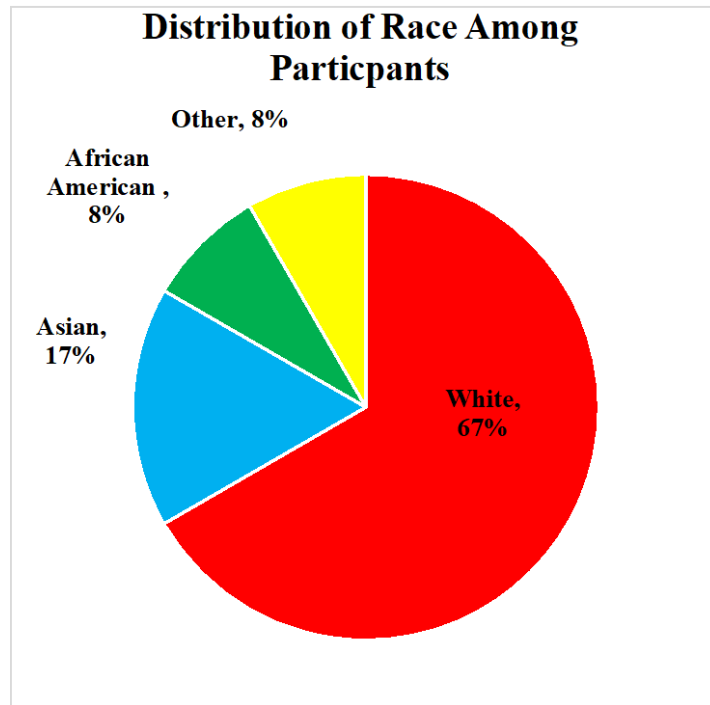


Figure 2. Distribution of Race

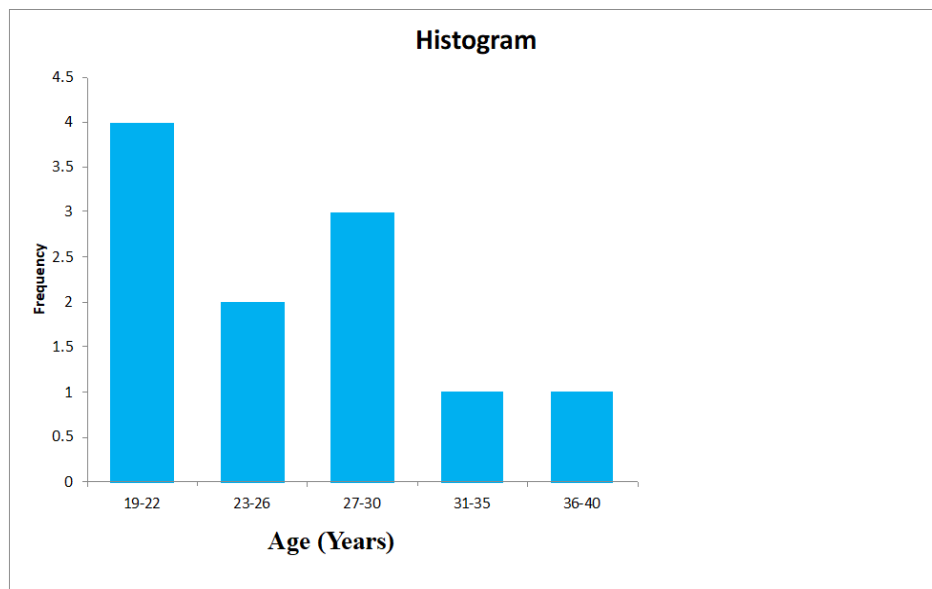


Figure 3. Distribution of Age

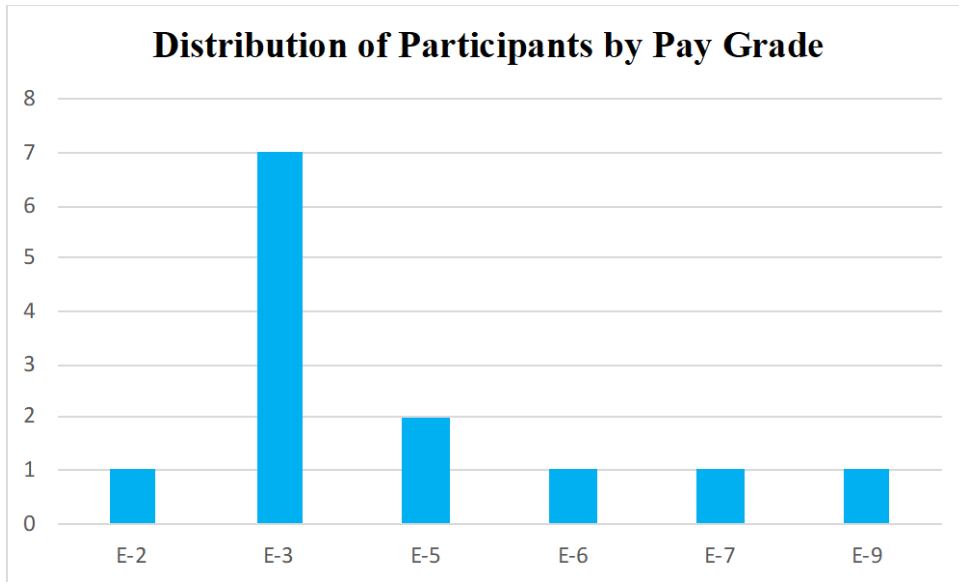


Figure 4. Distribution by Pay Grade



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IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Chapter 4 describes the data collection, analysis, and data of the interviews. The interviews were quantified by the number of participants, the questions presented to the Marines, and the responses to the questions. The interview data was broken down per question with the common responses highlighted. The questions address the awareness of the mentorship program, the understanding of the tenets of the program, effects on career progression, and the question of whether the program has an influence on their respective retention decisions.

A. INTRODUCTION

The data for this research were collected through in-person interviews and explored if the Marine Corps mentorship program is being effective in this goal. Data from the interview discussed the implementation of the mentorship program and the perspective of the Marines involved in the program. Secondly, the interviews address the retention decision of the individual Marine and what influences individual junior Marine retention decisions. The interviews assess the experience of the Marines involved in the program, as well as the perspective of the leadership mentoring the junior Marines. The questions in the interviews attempt to collect data on the efficiency of the mentorship program, the perspectives of the participants, and the best practices that promote participation in the program. The intent of the data is to gather information on the program to bring awareness and highlight the effects on career progression and retention.

B. SAMPLE

The interviews for this study were conducted at Marine Detachment POM. The interviews focused on the individual's involvement in the program and whether the program has an impact on their retention decisions. The interview consisted of six (6) questions addressing the participation, frequency, career advice, future ambitions, and retention decisions as a mentee. The second half of the interview consisted of four (4) questions addressing the same issues but from a mentor's point of view. The responses from the interview questions have been transcribed and stored with the researcher's team



advisor. The responses have been charted below and most common responses highlighted for context.

Table 1. Sample

			Are you participating in the program	
Pay Grade	Response Percentage		Yes	
E1-E3	61%		75%	
E4-E5	15%		100%	
E6-E7	15%		100%	
E8-E9	7%		100%	

C. PARTICIPATION/AWARENESS OF THE MARINE CORPS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The first five interview questions evaluated the participants’ awareness of the mentorship program. The questions addressed the mentorship program and the new tenets of informal framework. A vast majority of the participants were aware and participating in the mentorship program. The Marines were introduced to the mentorship program by a senior leader within their respective chain of command.

Table 2. Participation in the MCMP

	Aware of the MCMP	Aware of the Tenets	Assigned a mentor
Yes	70%	38%	38%
No	30%	61%	61%

D. FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION SESSIONS

The interview questions explored the frequency of communications between mentors and mentees. The frequency of communication varied from daily to quarterly. More commonly the frequency of communication was event-based, typically if there was a promotion, retention decision, or questions about career advancement. Mentees reached out to their mentors to gather information on several topics that varied from leadership advice, professionalism, career progression, and retention decisions. Frequency of communication increased when the individuals were in a common unit or training



program. The data for frequency can be found in the transcribed interviews that are stored with the researcher’s advisor.

E. CAREER PROGRESSION ADVICE

Inquiries regarding those who are aware and participating in the MCMP program investigated the provision of career progression advice, the content of advice, and the efficacy of the information received. Many of the individuals actively participating in the program were receiving some form of career advice and options available within the Marine Corps. Of the individuals interviewed, most were either a student or stationed at a training command. Those with more seniority/ longer tenure admitted that the advice they received influenced the career decisions and consistently resulted in positive advancements in their careers. Table 3 further depicts the findings of these interviews.

Table 3. Career Progression Advice

	Are you receiving career advice?	Was the advice effective?
Yes	70%	23%
No	30%	77%

Most of the Marines interviewed received career advice from their mentor. The advice ranged from career options, educational opportunities, enlisted to commissioned officer programs, and general advice on the promotion system. Although most of the Marines are receiving career advice, the advice given has not been effective because the majority are students in a training environment. The advice given to students lacked specificity because the Marines do not know what their next assignment will be. The more senior Marines expressed that the career advice they received was effective when they were a junior Marine, but not so much as a senior Marine. Below are a few examples of the career progression advice given:

“But nothing like—nothing that we would know about, I guess, unless it’s something that she’s looked into”

“Well, the major was like very trying to push me hard towards MECEP, and I was like, “I don’t know if I want to go there yet.” The first sergeant was more on general Marine Corps because he was not a [SIGINTer] (signal intelligence Marine) or in the intel field”



“As much as she could so far, sir, because a lot of what her experience in just this MOS, they can’t say things that—they can only say things generally, and also since she’s aware that a lot of our career paths can go many different ways and she can only state her only personal experience”

“When I was a junior Marine, yes, but now as a staff NCO, not so much. I’ve been finding it a lot more difficult to establish a more clearly defined mentor/mentee role with persons more senior to me that would offer that kind of guidance”

F. RETENTION DECISIONS

Interview questions were formulated to explore the retention decision of each Marine participant. The junior Marines were asked if given the opportunity to re-enlist in the Marine Corps currently, what would be their decision? The second part to that question was if their mentor played a role in their decision making (Appendix A). Due to the sample being limited to mostly junior Marines, the responses varied. For the more experienced Marines, the influence of their mentor played a role in their decision making during their career. Experienced Marines in the interviews re-enlisted several times in their career and each time a mentor had influence on their decision. Although not exclusively the reasoning behind their decision making to stay in the Marine Corps, some stated that either their leadership or mentor had an influential role in their decision-making process. As Table 4 shows, the majority of the Marines interviewed expressed that the mentorship they received via the MCMP has encouraged them to remain with the organization. Those who voiced no desire to remain explained that an extended tenure in the Marine Corps was never the objective of their long-term plan. Instead, these individuals sought to utilize their time within the organization as a steppingstone for advancement in other areas of their life both personally and professionally. Table 4 further depicts the findings of the interviews.

Table 4. Retention Decision

	Retention Choice	Mentor Influenced	Personal Decision
Yes	76%	70%	50%
No	23%	30%	50%



G. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

During the interviews, Marines were asked about the kind of advice received from their mentor not related to career progression. The topics discussed were within the informal framework of fighter, finance, fidelity, future, fitness, and family. The subject matter discussed during consultation was deemed as enlightening and appreciated by the mentees. There were multiple interviewees who stated that they reached out to their mentor for personal matters and their mentor actually provided valuable advice that eased their personal concerns. Another topic consistently discussed was small unit leadership. Junior Marines are placed in leadership positions in which they must lead their peers. The Marines chosen for those respective leadership positions sought out a mentor to help with their leadership decisions. Overall, the mentees seemed to have a positive experience due to the advice given, and even those without a mentor stated that those with mentors in the unit seemed to be excelling in the training. Table 5 further depicts the findings of the interviews.

Table 5. Psychosocial Support

	Yes	No
Shared Personal Experience	62%	38%
Given General Life Experience	54%	46%
Given Leadership Advice	62%	38%
Considered mentor a friend	62%	38%

Below are a few examples of psychosocial support:

“Mostly just how to survive here. Like how to maintain, you know, positive mental state and the best strategies to try and—at least best strategies personally—for trying to get through class”

“Like I guess, not disciplining people, but like solving problems when it came to other Marines and like how to situations if I felt uncomfortable or like hadn’t see that before”

“Everything from, you know, Marine Corps topics, leadership, down to football games and everything in between”

“So, prior experience. Corporal and I have both been to college. Corporal and I are both married. So just any sort of thing. Also, Corporal was a football player and had to do weight loss. That was one of my big issues when I first got here “But other times we would have social interaction. We’d just be able to talk about anything very freely.



H. CONCLUSION

Based upon our analysis of the interview data, it appears that the mentorship program has a positive impact on the participants. The topics discussed varied from everyday life to complex matters of career progression. The overall participation in the program was encouraged by the unit, but the decision to participate was ultimately left to the individual Marines, as was how to manage the relationship. The Marines who had mentors, were more likely to re-enlist than those who did not have mentors. Also, the mentees attributed some of their career successes to the guidance they received from their mentors. All interview questions can be found in appendix (A).



V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to determine whether mentorship played a role in career retention within the USMC. Below we offer a brief review of our key findings, provide recommendations for future research, and describe the study's limitations, including a brief discussion of the bias that the limitations may have on the data collected.

A. REVIEW OF FINDINGS

This research explored the informal mentorship framework outlined in the MCLD order. The overall goal of this program is “to provide a common framework and practical tools to assist leaders in developing all Marines and Sailors to achieve their full potential and be successful” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 2). The MCMP functional area of focus for this research is *future*, defined as “the practice of setting and accomplishing goals in all of the other five functional areas of leader development. Goal setting maximizes the likelihood of personal and professional success, which carries through to civilian life.” (Department of the Navy, 2017, p. 3). As the Marine Corps continues to find unique ways to increase its retention, the MCMP is a low-risk option to assist in that goal. The research shows that those who have personal success in their work fields are more inclined to have a vested interest in their respective organization. This same sentiment seems to hold true for military personnel. Our successful interviewees had a positive mentor interaction and were more inclined to re-enlist due to mentorship.

The literature shows that those involved in a mentorship program are usually successful in their workplace, and this also held true for our population interviewed for this study. Those Marines involved in the program had some form of success and wanted to share their experiences with their subordinates. This positive perception of the program encouraged senior enlisted personnel to become mentors and encourage others to do the same. Those involved in the program received information relating to psychosocial support, career progression advice, and retention options. These factors played a significant role when enlisted Marines were making their retention decisions and all Marines interviewed mentioned that their mentor had a significant role in their decision.



With the understanding that mentoring can have a positive effect on retention, the USMC has an opportunity to take advantage of this established program.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MCOMP

The Marines involved in the mentorship program were introduced by a senior Marine in a leadership position. POM MARDET introduced the mentorship program to all “new joins” and encouraged the Marine to find a mentor. The functional areas were introduced to the junior Marines, presenting them with topics to discuss during their initial interactions with their mentors. The individuals that participate in the program expressed that their senior leaders made the mentorship program a priority within their respective commands. The senior leaders expressed that the mentorship program had positive effects on their units when properly utilized and stated that they enjoyed their experiences in the program. Based on the analysis, the research team recommends that all units be directed to participate in the MCLD program. Although the MCLD program shifted to an informal framework at the individual level, units-level participation should be mandatory, and that participation should be reviewed during command inspections. Further, a survey should be taken annually with the goal of encouraging participation and publishing best practices. As this research focused on career goals and retention, a survey providing quantitative data to senior leaders could help increase equity with the junior enlisted Marines.

In an effort to ensure the efficacy of the MCLD, one of the key areas the program must address is psychosocial effects of the Marine Corps experience and the ways in which mentorship can improve this experience. Many of the junior enlisted Marines expressed that the main benefits of the program were the life and leadership lessons provided by their mentors. As the average age of the junior enlisted is 22 years, they appreciated having a support system that could provide potential solutions to their respective situation. The Marine Corps could use these data to improve and perhaps accelerate leader development on two fronts. For example, the Marine Corps could create a repository of information for access by both mentor and mentee that covers a range of mentorship topics. Secondly, the psychosocial issues can cross interpersonal lines that could be perceived as fraternization, so the MLD order can also address the inappropriate



topics. Since the relationships can become intimate between mentors and mentees the MCLD order needs to address this issue. Psychosocial issues were very prominent in the interviews and the Marine Corps could benefit from having a framework for senior leaders to study and be prepared to engage with mentees.

The research addressed career progression and retention decisions for those involved in the Marine Corps mentorship program. With this being a concern of Marine Corps leaders, the Marine Corps should closely follow the retention decision of the Marine and their reasoning. These data will assist with talent management initiatives as the Marine Corps attempts to address the low retention in junior enlisted Marines. As previously stated, the units should be directed to participate in the MCLD program, and another metric that should be required is retention stats, specifically focused on retention decision of junior enlisted Marines. All the mentioned factors combined could provide a root cause as to why junior enlisted made their respective decisions and allow senior leadership to publish effective initiatives that could have a positive effect on retention.

C. LIMITATIONS

This research faced several limitations, most of which can be linked to sample recruitment constraints traced back to COVID-19's impact on the military. Due to these constraints the results from the research lacks generalizability. The interviews were confined to one location and one type of career path, which left a small sample size for this study. The participants were a mix of entry level Marines, non-commissioned officers and a senior enlisted advisor assigned to the POM MARDET in Monterey, California, which did not allow for much variation in rank. Although, the researchers conducted only 13 interviews, the range of experience varied from 1 year of service to 22 years of service.

The other limitation that this study faced aside from small sample size was, the primary Marine military occupational specialty participating in the interviews was 27XX linguist. These particular group of Marines were still in a training/school environment and most had no experience in the OPFOR. Since the majority of Marines were 27XX linguist, a very particular job, the requirements for this job differ significantly from other



jobs within the Marine Corp which may not translate directly to the experiences of other career paths in the OPFOR.

The senior enlisted personnel provided insights on their perspectives as mentor and a mentee, but only 4 were available for an interview. Marine Officers were not interviewed for this study, due to the differences in their retention contracts. Although the sample was small, the qualitative data was rich and provided valuable insight on the mentorship program and insight into their respective retention decisions.

D. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should focus on replicating our work with a larger, more representative sample of Marines. Due to the low number of interviews and one single interview location limits generalizability. Future research can also focus on other functional areas that are listed in the MCLD order. Mentorship likely has an effect on all six functional areas, not just future, but this is conjecture that could be evaluated via empirical research.

The USMC should learn more about the effectiveness of mentorship in the other functional areas of the MCLD program: fighter, fidelity, fitness, family, and finance. Since these are the important factors for Marine development, it is important for the USMC to find out if mentorship can have a positive effect on all of the above functions. The USMC should also learn how to increase overall involvement in the program since the participants in this study mention that it had a positive effect on their careers. Lastly the USMC, should find out if the MCLD program actually increases career retention within the USMC.



APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note: As stated in the Methods section, some of the interview questions below are used from Kisla and Yang (2020).

1. Are you aware of the Marine Corps mentorship program (Post 2017) and its tenants or the six F's? If no, has you unit discussed the 6's or mentorship in general? Yes – What are your views on the program? No – Have you been mentored by anyone in the Marine Corps?
2. How was your mentorship relationship established? Were you assigned a mentor by your command? Have you been regularly counseled by your senior leaders? Frequency and topics?
3. Did you reach out and get your own mentor? Can you expound on those relationships?
4. Has you mentor provided guidance on career progression? If so, how has the guidance contributed to your success? How has you mentor relationship influenced your re-enlistment decision?
5. What are your future career plans in the Marine Corps? What was your mentors influence on that decision?

Senior Enlisted Advisors (E6 – E9)

6. What do you think is the purpose of mentoring? Why do you Mentor? What does mentoring mean to you?
7. Tell me about a time you mentored someone? Why did you mentor this person? How was the relationship established? What contributing factors made this a success or failing relationship?
8. Tell me about a time you were mentored? How was the relationship with the mentor?
9. How was the mentorship experience (positive/negative)?



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