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### **Leading with Connection: The Role of LMX in Marine Corps Leadership and Mentorship**

March 2024

**Capt Ian D. Bennett, USMC**

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

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory within the Marine Corps, employing a comparative analysis, gap analysis, and needs assessment to bridge the divide between the Marine Corps' established technical and tactical leadership training and the fostering of in-depth, personalized leader-member relationships prescribed by LMX. The comparative analysis reveals disparities in leader development processes and the principles of LMX theory, emphasizing the need for incorporating relationship-centered strategies within leadership programs. The gap analysis further highlights areas lacking alignment with LMX theory, such as the need for enhanced mentorship programs, improved recognition of individual talents, and more effective leader-follower reciprocal exchanges and advocates for actionable strategies to foster impactful leader-follower exchanges critical for operational effectiveness, unit cohesion, and the well-being of Marines. The needs assessment proposes specific recommendations to integrate LMX principles effectively, stressing the importance of cultural adaptation and institutional acceptance for successful implementation. By advocating for a strategic shift towards value-driven interactions between leaders and followers, this thesis proposes changes essential for the Marine Corps' adaptability and readiness in contemporary warfare, illustrating LMX theory's potential to cultivate a more engaged and resilient force ready to confront future challenges.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	After Action Report
CPG	Commandant's Planning Guidance
DON	Department of the Navy
FPC	Force Preservation Council
LMX	Leader Member Exchange
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MCMP	Marine Corps Mentorship Program
MCO	Marine Corps Order
MCS	Marine Corps Schools
MCU	Marine Corps University
MCWP	Marine Corps Warfighting Publication
MLD	Marine Leader Development
MOS	Marine Occupational Specialty
MSC	Major Subordinate Command
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
PME	Professional Military Education
SNCO	Staff Non-Commissioned Officer
TECOM	Training and Education Command
USMC	United States Marine Corps
UMAPIT	Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training
VDL	Vertical Dyad Linkage



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## I. INTRODUCTION

“I don’t run a democracy. I train troops to defend democracy and I happen to be their surrogate father and mother as well as their commanding general.”

—Major General Alfred M. Gray, (Otte, 2014, p. 7)

### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the realm of military operations, the importance of leadership cannot be overstated. Effective leadership serves as the cornerstone of any successful military organization, particularly in the Marine Corps, where the stakes are continuously high. The Marine Corps has long been celebrated for its rigorous emphasis on developing leaders who exemplify tactical and technical proficiency. These leaders are expected to navigate the complexities of the battlefield while making timely decisions under immense pressure. However, this traditional focus overlooks a crucial aspect of leadership: the development of interpersonal skills necessary for coaching, mentoring, and establishing high-quality relationships. Leadership within this context transcends the mere ability to issue commands in theatre and garrison but rather to cultivate a culture of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect among team members.

Marine Corps doctrine acknowledges that leadership exceeds the mere execution of duties; it involves cultivating an environment that nurtures every member’s potential, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth. This philosophy is encapsulated by the assertion that leadership and learning are fundamentally interconnected, underscoring the belief that “...leadership and learning are indispensable to each other” (USMC, 2020, p. 63). Reflecting this comprehensive view of leadership, General Alfred M. Gray, poignantly remarked, “I don’t run a democracy. I train troops to defend democracy and I happen to be their surrogate father and mother as well as their commanding general” (Otte, 2014, p. 7). This statement highlights the dual role leaders play in guiding their Marines through the rigors of military duty while also fostering a supportive and nurturing environment. Further emphasizing the Marine Corps’ dedication to its personnel, General Berger articulated a vision that goes beyond operational readiness to include comprehensive support for Marines and their families: “We should never ask our Marines to choose between being the best parent possible and the best Marine



possible...Our parental/maternity leave policies...will do everything possible to provide parents with opportunities to remain with their newborns for extended periods of time” (Berger, 2019, p. 7). This commitment reflects a broader intent to refine leadership beyond tactical and technical proficiency, advocating for an inclusive approach that values the well-being and success of every Marine and their family, thereby reinforcing the Marine Corps’ foundational strength and effectiveness.

The gap in the Marine Corps’ leadership development process lies in its failure to recognize the importance of relational dynamics, overlooking the critical role of interpersonal relationships, and heavily weighting leader development towards technical and tactical proficiencies. For example, a conspicuous gap exists in formalized training aimed at developing relational skills, which are critical for effective leadership. “Talent Management 2030” suggests that future military effectiveness will increasingly depend on the ability to leverage diverse talents, including strong relational competencies (Berger, 2023b). Similarly, Mannion (2015) identifies a critical need for the Marine Corps to expand its leadership development focus to include skills that enhance interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence, noting that these aspects are often overlooked in favor of more traditional military skills (Mannion, T. J., 2015). These observations underscore the urgent need for a recalibrated approach to leadership training that equally prioritizes relational skills, thereby ensuring Marine Corps leaders are fully equipped to navigate the complexities of modern military leadership with both tactical acumen and relational proficiency.

I call upon Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory to illustrate the foundational importance of relational dynamics within organizational structures, advocating for its integration into the Marine Corps’ leader development philosophy. To address the current shortfall in leadership development, this thesis will argue for a pivot towards incorporating structured training initiatives that emphasize skills directed at making competent coaches and mentors with the desired endstate of nurturing more high-quality relationships at all levels within the force. Based on existing literature, cultivating strong leader-follower bonds yields numerous positive outcomes for both the leader and follower, including improved problem-solving skills, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kisla & Yang, 2020). By prioritizing the leader-follower relationship within the institution’s leader



development cycle, the Marine Corps can make a critical investment in its future readiness and relevance. Preparing leaders and followers to effectively engage in mentoring and coaching ensures the Marine Corps can navigate 21st-century challenges with agility and insight, maintaining its global stature as a pinnacle of military leadership and effectiveness (DON, 2017).

## **B. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this thesis is to review the Marine Corps' leader development process, with a specific focus on understanding and addressing the gaps in its approach to developing and maintain high-quality relationship dynamics between leaders and followers. Utilizing the LMX theory as a theoretical framework, this research investigates its linkages with the Commandant's envisioned future of the force and the Marine Corps' leadership development ethos, as articulated in key doctrinal publications including MCDP-1 (Warfighting), MCDP-6 (Command and Control), MCDP-7 (Learning), and MCWP 6-10 (Leading Marines). This approach aims to provide an understanding of how LMX theory aligns with, and could potentially enhance, the Marine Corps' existing leadership frameworks. By examining the compatibility of LMX principles with the Corps' leadership development strategies, this thesis seeks to explore avenues through which the Marine Corps might refine its current curriculum. The goal is to better equip leaders with the relational competencies necessary for effective coaching, mentoring, and the cultivation of high-quality interpersonal relationships, in alignment with the Commandant's vision of the future force and with Marine Corps' doctrinal vision for leadership excellence.

## **C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Examining the landscape of leadership within the Marine Corps through the theoretical foundations of LMX theory, offers an attractive opportunity to examine military leadership dynamics. With its steadfast dedication to preserving its unique warrior culture, the Marine Corps places strong emphasis on interactions between its leaders and followers. However, disparities arise in the formalization of mentorship and development strategies, where LMX theory's nuanced approach to individualized leader-follower exchanges may differ from the Marine Corps' more rigid and standardized methodologies. These alignments and



discrepancies lay the groundwork for a detailed investigation, guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Marine Corps leadership doctrine and LMX theory align and differ in promoting leader-follower relationships?
2. What deficiencies are identified in Marine Corps mentorship practices when compared to the principles of LMX theory?
3. What recommendations can enhance Marine Corps leadership development to more effectively integrate LMX theory to strengthen leader-follower dynamics?

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis embarks on an in-depth examination of the Marine Corps' leadership development process, specifically applying a comparative analysis of Marine Corps doctrine against the principles of LMX theory. Additionally, this study conducts a Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment to identify deficiencies within the Marine Corps' existing leadership practices, particularly in the realm of mentorship and leader-follower relationship building. This dual approach not only scrutinizes the formal and informal mentorship structures within the Marine Corps, but also compares these practices against the relational leadership models suggested by LMX theory to uncover actionable insights from LMX theory that could be integrated into the Marine Corps' leadership framework to address identified gaps. Based on my analysis, I will present a series of recommendations designed to fortify the Marine Corps' mentorship and leadership development initiatives. By incorporating these findings, the thesis aims to furnish a blueprint for integrating LMX principles tailored to specific leaders within the operating force to better enhance leader-follower relationships, thereby equipping Marine leaders with the relational competencies necessary to meet the complex challenges requisite to their roles.



## II. BACKGROUND

“Know your Marines and look out for their welfare.”

—USMC Leadership Principle (USMC, 2019, p. 2-6)

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Marine Corps’ journey of leadership development is a story of evolution, adaptability, and commitment to excellence. This journey begins in the trenches and training grounds, where leadership was not merely instructed but exemplified. Works such as Lieutenant Colonel Clifford’s “Progress and Purpose” (1973) and William S. Lind’s “Maneuver Warfare Handbook” (2018) offer a glimpse into the past, illustrating how the Marine Corps along with other military leaders absorbed their roles and responsibilities through direct role modeling. This approach, prioritizing hands-on experience and leadership by example, set the stage for a foundational shift in how the Marine Corps approaches the cultivation of its leaders (Clifford, 1973; Lind, 2018). As the Marine Corps navigated through the aftermath of World War One, it found itself at a crossroads, applying the lessons learned in blood, and transitioning to a more formal educational process for promoting leadership development. This transformation was not an abandonment of traditional values but an expansion, seeking to integrate the lessons of the past with the complexities of the future.

The transition saw the establishment of the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico and the evolution of military education within the Marine Corps, signifying a deliberate move towards a comprehensive and standardized framework for leader development (Clifford, 1973). This era was marked by a concerted effort to distill the essence of military leadership into a curriculum that was both reflective of the Marine Corps’ unique identity and responsive to the demands of future battlefields. The introduction of maneuver warfare philosophy in the 1980s saw a similar transformation, establishing of the Marine Corps University to further prepare its students for the dynamic challenges of the future fight (Van Riper, 2006). The most recent developments in the Marine Corps’ focus on leader development is its adoption of formal and informal mentorship practices, tied to holistically



nurturing its Marines to better care for each Marine’s wellbeing while promoting unit readiness (MCO 1500.58, 2006; MCO 1500.60, 2016; MCO 1500.61, 2017).

As I explain the intricacies of the Marine Corps’ leadership development philosophy, it is essential to recognize this journey as a continuum, spanning from the informal mentorship of the early 20th century to the formal, structured approaches of today. This evolution reflects a holistic understanding of leadership that encompasses not just the tactical and operational skills essential for combat but also the moral and intellectual growth necessary for effective leadership in an ever-changing world. The sections that follow will explore the pivotal developments, philosophies, and programs that have shaped the Marine Corps’ approach to leadership development, illustrating how the Corps has remained steadfast in its commitment to forging leaders of honor, courage, and commitment.

## **B. CREATING A FORMAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY**

William S. Lind’s “Maneuver Warfare Handbook” (2018) draws on insights from a range of military leaders, including both seasoned veterans and inexperienced troops. Through his analysis, Lind describes how key ideas have sought to shape military thinking towards a more flexible, adaptive, and decentralized approach to military operations. Lind found that many soldiers absorbed the formative lessons of their required roles and responsibilities through direct role modeling rather than formal classroom training. This is evident in Lind’s handbook as he notes the importance of a technically proficient Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) corps for directing and handling routine tasks allowing officers to focus on more pressing operational concerns.<sup>1</sup> Lind’s work stresses the importance of leadership by example and provides anecdotes where instances of mentorship can be observed. One specific instance is seen in General Black’s anecdote on the importance of informal interactions with subordinate commanders.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lind, W. S. (2018). *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. p. 59. Through General Balck’s experiences, Lind illustrates the importance of informal interactions for genuine leadership and operational clarity, underscoring the limitations of formal communication.

<sup>2</sup> Lind, W. S. (2018). *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. p. 59.



“I said, “come with me tomorrow and I’ll show you something.” We went forward, had a meeting with some front line officers, asked our questions about some relevant matters, and got some answers. So then I said to the officers “Let’s go have lunch together.” During lunch we asked the same questions and completely different facts came to light... “You see why I go to eat with my people so often? Not because they cook so well, but because that’s when I find out the truth.” (Lind, 2018, p. 59)

Lind’s examples provide evidence that formal classroom training may not have been the primary means to convey crucial lessons in duty and leadership; Lind points out J. F. C Fuller’s observations of World War One communications on the front lines.<sup>3</sup>

“Nothing is more dreadful to witness than a chain of men, starting with a battalion commander and ending with an army commander, sitting in telephone boxes, improvised or actual, talking, talking, talking, in place of leading, leading, leading.” (Lind, 2018 p. 76)

Lind’s anecdotes illustrate how crucial personal engagement and hands-on leadership are in setting a powerful example for subordinates to follow.

Following World War One, the Marine Corps underwent a period of transformation in its approach to leader development. Leadership training transitioned from a foundation rooted in experiential mentorship to a more structured and formal educational process. Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Clifford’s comprehensive study shows the historical evolution of formal military education for officers within the Marine Corps. He emphasizes the pivotal role of the School of Application, established in 1891 (Clifford, 1973). By 1920, undergoing various name changes and a series of relocations, the institution evolved into the Marine Officers’ School, offering three distinct courses: the field officers’ course, the company officers’ course, and the basic course (Clifford, 1973).

During the 1920s, these educational institutions collectively referred to as Marine Corps Schools (MCS) at Quantico, Virginia exhibited a deliberate orientation towards Army’s curriculum, reflecting intentional alignment shaped by the recent experiences of World War I (Clifford, 1973). This curriculum, predominantly Army oriented, aimed to

<sup>3</sup> Lind, W. S. (2018). *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. p. 76. Citing J.F.C. Fuller, Lind critiques passive leadership styles that rely on distant communication, instead advocating for the commanders’ direct presence and involvement in the field.



incorporate lessons learned from World War One and provide a foundational understanding of military tactics and strategy. Notably, the education of Marine officers maintained a robust connection to the Army, with many senior Marine officers attending the Army War College or the Command and Staff College of the Army. This cross-pollination of military education posed challenges due to the inherent tailoring of the Army's schools to its own organization, training, equipment, and mission (Clifford, 1973).

This focus led to a shift away from an Army centric curriculum to an evolving course of study tailored specifically for the Marine Corps. A prime example of this shift away from Army doctrine is seen in Major Samuel M. Harrington's groundbreaking work on small wars, resulting in the creation of "The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars" in 1922. Over the years Harrington's contribution would be expounded on and later published as the "Small Wars Manual" in 1940 laying the groundwork for how the Marine Corps would conduct its warfighting operations. This marked a departure from traditional military education and toward a more mission focused and adaptive curriculum, ultimately shaping the Marine Corps' distinctive approach to warfare (Clifford, 1973). The Marine Corps Schools transformed their educational model, through an evolutionary process driven by war plans and joint collaboration. This evolution focused on pioneering studies, preparing officers to meet the challenges of diverse and unique missions that defined the Marine Corps' identity. Major Harrington's work on small wars exemplified this shift, reflecting a commitment to developing a course of study aligned with the Marine Corps' distinct responsibilities (Clifford, 1973).

The Marine Corps experienced a more profound shift in its approach to leadership development, coinciding with a significant evolution in its warfighting philosophy as the adoption of maneuver warfare gained traction in the 1980s. Influenced by military practitioners and theorists like Colonel John Boyd and William S. Lind, this shift represented a departure from the conventional attrition-based warfare mindset. Emphasizing speed and adaptability, the transition to maneuver warfare fundamentally altered the Marine Corps' approach to operational planning. This shift necessitated an overhaul in leadership training and education within Marine Corps institutions like The Basic School and the Command and Staff College (Marinus, 2020). The demands of





maneuver warfare emphasize the importance of intellectual agility, autonomy through decentralized command, and grasping the application of these principles to various tactical scenarios. This doctrinal evolution culminated in the publication of FMFM-1, Warfighting, further cementing the adoption of maneuver warfare doctrine and its impact on the Marine Corps (Berger, 2022). FMFM-1, later re-designated as MCDP-1, served not only as a doctrinal manual but also as a philosophy for leadership development, ensuring that future generations of Marines would be prepared to apply these concepts effectively in dynamic operational environments (Marinus, 2020).

A pivotal development during this period was the establishment of the Marine Corps University (MCU), playing a central role in this new era of leadership education. Created under the direction of the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred Gray, and significantly shaped by Lieutenant General (Lt. Gen) Paul Van Riper, who was appointed as its first president, MCU was designed to enrich the intellectual and professional capacity of all Marines (Van Riper, 2006). Targeting a broad audience within the defense community, MCU's admissions extended to U.S. Marine Corps personnel, including officers, enlisted Marines, other U.S. military branches, international military personnel, and Department of Defense civilians, creating a comprehensive understanding of joint and combined operations (Marine Corps University, 2021). Under Lt. Gen Van Riper's leadership, the university became instrumental in integrating historical perspectives and emerging technologies into leadership training (Van Riper, 2006). The University's role extended beyond formal education, through initiatives like professional reading programs and the encouragement of historical study. The University cultivated a culture of lifelong learning and mentorship, echoing Lt. Gen Van Riper's advocacy for a broad educational foundation for military leaders (Van Riper, 2006). This inclusive approach aimed at preparing its students for the complexities of modern warfare using the newly adopted maneuver warfare philosophy.

### **C. CURRENT PHILOSOPHY, LEADER DEVELOPMENT**

Contemporary leadership development within the Marine Corps is rooted in formal education, as outlined in MCO 1553.4B Professional Military Education (PME).



According to the Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1553.4B, the PME program is outlined with a specific focus on education as a foundational element for leadership development. The section titled “Commander’s Intent” in MCO 1553.4B outlines the Marine Corps’ philosophy on Professional Military Education (PME), highlighting education as a crucial process for acquiring knowledge (DON, 2008). This process is designed to enhance analytical skills and critical thinking, equipping Marines with the ability to quickly adapt in various situations (DON, 2008). PME, as defined in references (a, Officer PME policy) and (b, Enlisted PME policy) within the order, is characterized by its role in imparting a “broad body of knowledge and cultivating the habits of mind essential to a military professional’s expertise in the art and science of war.” This philosophy stresses that PME is a career-long study of the foundations of the military profession (DON, 2008). The framework of the PME order is designed to challenge Marines to develop their analytical skills, ensuring the Marine Corps is capable of confronting modern military problem with sound analytical practices.

The PME order (DON, 2008) presents a structured educational pipeline that progresses with a Marine’s career; it details the specific knowledge required at each grade and offers curricular guidance to PME institutions. This comprehensive program, seen as a fundamental expectation of the institution, encompasses a blend of resident instruction, distance learning and professional self-study like The Marine Corps Professional Reading Program (DON, 2008). Commanders at all levels are responsible for facilitating Marines’ access to and participation in the designated PME courses as outlined in the order (DON, 2008). MCO 1553.4B’s desired endstate is to develop “a professional cadre of Marine leaders who openly embrace the significant contribution of career-long education opportunities to their excellence in the profession of arms. This excellence is exemplified in sound military decision-making leading to improved warfighting acumen.” (DON, 2008).

The Marine Corps Order MCO 1553.4B (PME) effectively implements leadership development and mentorship through various concrete measures. The structured progressive learning system outlined in the order ensures that Marines receive targeted education based on their rank and responsibilities, facilitating a systematic development of



leadership skills. By specifying required knowledge at each career level, the order ensures that Marines are equipped with a comprehensive understanding of military principles tailored to their roles. The institutional expectation for participation in PME creates an environment conducive to mentorship, as seasoned Marines actively guide and support their junior counterparts through the educational process, often as instructors and guest lecturers. Moreover, the responsibility placed on commanders at every echelon to ensure access to PME courses stresses the commitment to mentorship and leadership development at every level. The concept of career-long education studying the foundations of the military profession promotes mentorship as experienced leaders continually engage in guiding and sharing insights with their peers and subordinates. Overall, the PME order (DON, 2008) demonstrates a robust leadership development and mentorship process in action by providing a framework that integrates education, experience, and guidance throughout a Marine's career.

#### **D. MENTORSHIP PHILOSOPHY AND EVOLUTION**

In 2006, the Marine Corps, under the guidance of the 34th Commandant General James Conway, initiated the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP), marking a formal acknowledgment of mentorship's pivotal role in leadership development, as outlined in MCO 1500.58 (DON, 2006). This program was crafted to reinforce leadership skills and foster unit cohesion by establishing a structured mentorship framework within the existing hierarchy of each unit (DON, 2006). Within this framework, senior Marines are entrusted with the responsibility of mentoring their junior counterparts, thereby creating an avenue for comprehensive personal and professional growth. Unlike previous counseling initiatives that focused primarily on job performance, the MCMP is designed to mentor the "whole Marine," catering to the various aspects of each Marine's life (DON, 2006). This holistic approach signifies the program's commitment to nurturing well-rounded leaders, leveraging the vast knowledge and experience within the ranks to strengthen the Corps' leadership capabilities, unit cohesion, and readiness (DON, 2006).

The foundation of the Marine Corps Mentorship Program, MCO 1500.58 requires the formal pairing of Marine mentors and mentees based on their chain of command



relationships. For example, a squad leader would typically mentor the junior fire team leaders under their charge. These partnerships are structured to facilitate open communication and transparency regarding professional development goals. Mentors have a responsibility to provide advice and personal perspectives to help mentees set achievable goals and choose logical steps to achieve them. Mentoring sessions dive into leadership capabilities, job skills, career planning, and even off-duty conduct or financial matters affecting performance.

The order states that mentors must meet with assigned mentees once per month (DON, 2006). Implementation is aided by the Leader's Mentoring Log worksheets which help guide discussions during sessions using directed questions and assessment tools (DON, 2006). Over time, the conversations are expected to build mutual understanding and unit cohesion from the bottom up. While the mentorship program does not replace corrective actions, the intent is that supportive guidance prevents minor issues from escalating while promoting advancement (DON, 2006). Ultimately, the Marine Corps views effective mentoring as a two way street, relying on engaged participation from both mentors and mentees. Mentors must seek to truly understand their mentees' goals and challenges if they are to provide helpful perspective. Meanwhile, mentees must demonstrate initiative to grow and change by implementing their mentors' career advice. In essence, the Marine Corps Mentorship Program highlights that a commitment to the personal development of individual Marines ultimately enhances the overall strength of the Corps.

In July 2016, the Marine Corps recognized the importance of formally integrating aspects of their mentorship program into their risk management process to guide the planning and decision-making process, identifying and allocating resources to mitigate potential risks. The result was the creation of the Force Preservation Council (FPC) program formally published as MCO 1500.60. This initiative was designed to standardize Major Subordinate Commanders' approach to personnel safety, emphasizing a proactive and comprehensive review of each Marines' well-being (DON, 2016). The order mandates monthly evaluations of potential risk factors, geared toward ensuring that leaders are fully aware of their Marines' various circumstances, facilitating early intervention (DON, 2016).



Originating in response to overlooked warning signs before incidents, the FPC's holistic approach aims at identifying stressors early on, thereby allowing for the implementation of mitigation strategies tailored to each Marine's circumstances (DON, 2016). It is crucial to understand that these structured risk reviews and intervention plans facilitated by the FPC program are essential for addressing immediate short-term risks, but they do not constitute mentorship. They do, however, leverage the mentee-mentor relationship to gain insight into the Marine's individual circumstances. This approach must be handled delicately, as a mentee might view this sharing of their circumstances with the command as a breach of trust with their mentor, potentially degrading the relationship.

In line with the Marine Corps' leadership principle, "know your Marines and look out for their welfare," (USMC, 2019b) this concept integrates risk management methodology. Marines undergo monthly assessments in five key domains: off-duty activities, personal relationships, financial status, physical/mental health, and job performance. Risks within each domain are assigned probability and severity levels, resulting in color-coded risk codes from red (high risk), to green (low risk). The individual's historical data, mentoring discussions, and commander observations inform the commander in their assignment so they can identify and allocate the appropriate resources based on the individual's level of risk. Higher risk Marines often require focused mitigation plans, followed by ongoing assessments after implementing controls.

The attractiveness to the FPC approach is evident in its ability to pinpoint issues that, when neglected, may disrupt both personal lives and unit cohesion. Engaged leadership with a thorough understanding of each individual Marine's circumstances places significant emphasis on the comprehensive care and well-being of every individual. This strategic approach holds significance for the Marine Corps, as mitigating risks for individual Marines collectively enhances overall unit readiness. In essence, the FPC showcases how a proactive and empathetic dedication to personnel needs on the part of Commanders can yield a more capable and resilient force.

The Marine Corps Mentorship and FPC programs have complementary yet distinct goals and approaches to mentor Marines. The Mentorship Program focuses on pairing junior Marines with senior mentors within their immediate chain of command, facilitating



ongoing professional growth through regular mentoring exchanges. On the other hand, the FPC offers targeted counseling to individuals at risk, tailored to their specific circumstances. However, the emergence of the FPC program underscores a notable deficiency within the Mentorship Program, as it necessitates senior leaders' intervention without direct interaction with Marines facing difficulties. This departure from the traditional mentorship model, described by the MCMP as a "wise adviser, teacher, and guardian," (DON, 2007, p. 5) indicates a disconnect between the Mentorship Program's intended purpose and its practical implementation.

The FPC program focuses narrowly on assessing immediate near-term risks across key aspects of a Marine's life. Structured risk reviews assist in early detection to identify problems so they can be addressed before worsening. The FPC's role is more targeted intervention, triaging acute issues for immediate resolution versus the long-term development of the Mentorship Program. Consistent mentorship builds abilities like self-awareness over time through open sharing of knowledge and experiences. The Mentorship Program develops a Marine's capabilities whereas the FPC Program responds to crisis. Together they provide developmental relationships and risk management to optimize Marines' development.

Shortly after the implementation of the FPC, the Marine Corps revised its mentorship program, cancelling the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCO 1500.58) and publishing Marine Leader Development (MCO 1500.61) program in July of 2017 (DON, 2017). The new program keeps many of the same characteristics as its predecessor but makes a distinct shift back to an informal structure, no longer assigning mentees with mentors. Although the MLD order specifies that "While a formalized, structured approach to mentoring is no longer prescribed, mentoring remains an important component of developing Marines" (DON, 2017, p. 1), the expectation is that all Marine Corps commands will implement the MLD guidance into operations and training. Meanwhile, the FPC remains as the driving force to ensure Commanders know their Marines and their individual circumstances. The MLD program still acknowledges the importance of mentoring in leader development, but views mentoring as a voluntary developmental



relationship that is more effective when mentors and mentees organically develop relationships through mutual interests (DON, 2017).

MCO 1500.61 (MLD) provides guidance by identifying and defining four key approaches that include: teaching, coaching, counseling, and mentoring. The order emphasizes decentralized command, directing small unit leaders to take a holistic and engaged approach to grow their Marines across six functional areas: fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finances, and future. This shift from a mandated formal structure leverages small unit leaders to incorporate aspects of mentorship into daily leadership actions characterized by voluntary connections that develop mutual respect and trust. This approach effectively implements mentorship through teaching, coaching, and counseling rather than through an administratively dense program like its predecessor, Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCO 1500.58).

In contrast, the FPC system (MCO 1500.60) allows commanders to systematically assess near-term risks and provide coordinated assistance to Marines facing challenges, by leverage the relationships of small unit leaders to identify potential risks amongst their subordinate Marines. While decentralized mentorship builds capabilities over time, the FPC order offers a formal structure, particularly beneficial in urgent crisis situations. The order empowers commanders to take a direct and immediate approach to support their Marines through stressful life events. Both informal mentorship and the formal FPC systems are deemed essential components of holistic force preservation to maintain the readiness of each Marine and the overall operating force.

## **E. SUMMARY**

The evolution of leadership development within the Marine Corps reflects a dynamic integration of mentorship, formal education, and risk management strategies that are continuously adapting to meet modern challenges. Initially, mentorship in the Marine Corps was characterized by informal interactions and leadership by example, with NCOs playing a pivotal role in imparting essential skills to inexperienced troops and officers. This form of experiential learning, emphasized in William S. Lind’s “Maneuver Warfare



Handbook,” (2018) highlights the value of direct role modeling in lieu of formal classroom instruction in the development of military leaders (Lind, 2018).

As the Marine Corps moved into the 20th century, it began to formalize its approach to leader development. The early 1920s saw the establishment of educational institutions at Quantico, Virginia, collectively known as Marine Corps Schools. These institutions initially adopted an Army-oriented curriculum, influenced by experiences from World War One, aiming to integrate comprehensive military tactics and strategy into the education of Marine officers (Clifford, 1973). This period marked a significant shift towards a more structured and academic framework for leadership training within the Corps. During the interwar period, the Marine Corps made a deliberate shift away from the Army-centric curriculum towards developing a course of study tailored specifically for their role in the execution of “small wars” (Clifford, 1973). This evolution was partly driven by Major Samuel M. Harrington’s pioneering work on small wars, which laid the groundwork for the “Small Wars Manual,” published in 1940. This manual departed from traditional military education at the time, prioritizing the Marine Corps’ unique operational needs as an expeditionary naval force. Major Samuel M. Harrington’s studies on small wars not only shaped the manual but also provided reflection and analysis on the Marine Corps’ role in expeditionary operations, setting a precedent that would be emulated in the future (Clifford, 1973).

The adoption of maneuver warfare in the 1980s, under the visionary leadership of General Alred Gray, fundamentally transformed the Marine Corps’ approach to leadership development and operational strategy. Influential thinkers like William S. Lind and Colonel John Boyd contributed key ideas that emphasized speed, adaptability, and decentralized command, aligning closely with General Gray’s foresight in operational and training approach. This doctrinal evolution necessitated significant changes in leadership training and education to foster intellectual agility and a comprehensive understanding of maneuver warfare’s principles (Marinus, 2020; Van Riper, 2006). General Gray’s instrumental role in this shift was not only in advocating for these innovative tactics but also in implementing organizational mechanisms to promote and refine these concepts within the Marine Corps, preparing a force that was more adaptive, innovative, and capable





of facing the complexities of modern combat (Barrett et al., 2021; Augier & Barrett, 2019). Key milestones in this transformative period included the establishment of the Marine Corps University and the publication of FMFM-1, Warfighting, which cemented the impact of maneuver warfare on the Marine Corps' doctrine and culture (Augier & Barrett, 2019; Berger, 2022; Barrett et al., 2021). These efforts collectively show the pivotal shift towards a culture of continuous improvement and intellectual development, ensuring Marine leaders were not only tactically proficient but also strategically competent.

In 2006, the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP) was initiated under General James Conway's guidance, formalizing mentorship structures within the Corps and emphasizing the holistic development of Marines (DON, 2006). This program was later succeeded by the Marine Leader Development (MLD) program in 2017, which shifted towards a more informal mentorship approach, encouraging the organic development of mentor-mentee relationships through mutual interests and shared experiences (DON, 2017). Parallel to these developments, the Force Preservation Council (FPC) program was established in 2016, by enabling Commanders to proactively tie risk management techniques to help identify and address potential risks Marines' might face to better look after their well-being (DON, 2016). This program complements the existing mentorship framework by leveraging the relationships within the unit to enhance both individual and unit readiness. The Marine Corps' leadership development strategy and mentorship approach has evolved over time, transitioning from informal mentorship and direct role modeling to a formalized education. The Marine Corps' leadership strategy has undergone significant evolution, iterating between formal and informal mentoring practices and refining formalized education. Many of these changes in strategy have coincided with doctrinal shifts. This suggests that the current doctrinal shift proposed by General Berger in his Force Design and Planning Guidance initiatives may necessitate a reevaluation of the leader development process to incorporate newer theories and practices.



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### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

“The relation between officers and enlisted men should in no sense be that of superior and inferior nor that of master and servant, but rather that of teacher and scholar. In fact, it should partake of the nature of the relation between father and son, to the extent that officers, especially commanders, are responsible for the physical, mental, and moral welfare as well as the discipline and military training of the men under their command who are serving the Nation in the Marine Corps.”

—Major General John A Lejeune, (USMC, 2019b, p. 2-2)

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Today’s leaders, military and civilian, bear the responsibility for steering their organizations through global shifts and uncertainties that demand agility, visionary thinking, and an empathetic approach to leadership. Traditional leadership development programs, as critiqued by Passarelli et al. (2017), often remain anchored in a model that prioritizes technical expertise and scientific rigor, at the expense of cultivating the adaptive and interpersonal skills that are sought after by contemporary professional environments. This misalignment not only creates a gap between academic preparation and the multifaceted challenges leaders face but also creates a missed opportunity for integrating relational skills and practical experience into their leadership curriculum. The consequence is leaders who may be analytically competent but are less prepared for the human dimensions of leadership. Recognizing this gap, organizations are now taking action to create their own leader development programs. This literature review advocates for a shift towards holistic leader development processes that embraces a more integrative approach and balances both analytical and relational skills. By explicitly reviewing LMX theory as a potential solution, I emphasize the importance of developing leaders who are not just technically proficient but also skilled in fostering quality interactions with their followers. The LMX framework is instrumental in developing leaders that are experienced in building trust, mutual respect, and a sense of obligation with their followers, thereby equipping them to adapt to changing environments and address the complex demands of their roles. Through this approach, the organizations can cultivate leaders who possess not only



technical proficiency but also the emotional intelligence and adaptability required to excel in the modern workplace.

## **B. LEADERSHIP DOMAINS AND FRAMEWORKS**

Leadership theories like transformational,<sup>4</sup> transactional,<sup>5</sup> servant,<sup>6</sup> ethical,<sup>7</sup> and authentic leadership<sup>8</sup> offer distinct frameworks, often focusing either on leader or follower development. Some emphasize traits, behaviors, or styles of effective leaders, while others explore follower dynamics and responses to leadership. The Marine Corps does not adhere exclusively to any single leadership theory. Instead, it emphasizes a framework centered on fourteen leadership traits and eleven leadership principles. By focusing on cultivating a set of core traits and principles, the USMC ensures that its leadership philosophy is grounded in the qualities it deems as essential for effective leadership within a military context (USMC, 1998). Despite this diversity, the objective of these leadership frameworks is to reveal the complexities of the follower-leader relationship and its organizational impacts.

<sup>4</sup>Transformational leadership augments transactional leadership by focusing on inspiring and motivating followers beyond expectations. It includes charismatic, inspirational, and visionary aspects, promoting a shift from traditional transactional models to new-genre leadership theories that emphasize the transformative impact of leadership on followers' performance and organizational outcomes (Graen, G.B., & Uhl-Bien, M.,1995; Avolio et al., 2008).

<sup>5</sup>Transactional leadership is characterized by the exchange process between leaders and followers, where followers are rewarded for achieving agreed-upon objectives. This leadership style focuses on material exchanges and is considered a starting point in LMX theory, which evolves into a more transformational social exchange as relationships mature (Graen, G.B., & Uhl-Bien, M.,1995; Avolio et al., 2008).

<sup>6</sup>Servant leadership is rooted in outcome based ethics, prioritizing the needs and growth of multiple stakeholders, including employees and the community. It embodies a servant-first mentality, aiming to foster growth, autonomy, and success of those served, extending moral responsibility beyond organizational success to all organizational stakeholders (Coetzer et al., 2017; Lemoine et al., 2019).

<sup>7</sup>Ethical leadership emphasizes adherence to normative standards and rules, focusing on the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through actions and relationships. It involves being a moral person and manager, promoting fairness, honesty, and the use of rewards and punishments to ensure compliance with ethical standards (Lemoine et al., 2019).

<sup>8</sup>Authentic leadership focuses on the genuineness and integrity of the leader, emphasizing the importance of being true to one's values and beliefs. It involves leaders being self-aware, transparent, ethical, and driven by moral standards. Authentic leaders foster trust and credibility with followers, promoting higher levels of engagement and organizational commitment (Avolio et al., 2008; Lemoine et al., 2019).



The Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) theory, developed by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975), theorizes that leadership within organizations is not a one-size-fits-all process but rather occurs within unique, dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates. This approach challenges traditional leadership models, suggesting that leaders form distinct connections with each member of their team, resulting in a dynamic interplay of role negotiation over time (Dansereau et al., 1975). According to VDL, leaders grant varying degrees of negotiating power to different subordinates, which influences the depth and quality of their interactions. This dyadic perspective unveils the presence of “in-groups” as relationships characterized by high trust, mutual respect, and strong reciprocal obligations and “out-groups” as relationships defined by more formal interactions and limited personal investment within the same team, where leadership and supervision methods coexist but are applied distinctly across individual relationships (Dansereau et al., 1975). The VDL theory recognizes the complexity of leadership processes, showing the significance of tailored leader-member exchanges in achieving effective leadership and positive organizational outcomes (Dansereau et al., 1975).

The nuanced exploration of “in-groups” and “out-groups” stresses a shift towards more inclusive leadership strategies. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) propose the “Leadership Making” process, aimed at broadening the distribution of high-quality relationships by cultivating these exchanges with all team members, moving beyond the conventional division between “in-groups” and “out-groups.” In simpler terms, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) suggest a new approach which encourages leaders to build strong, supportive relationships with all their team members, not just a few favorites. This approach is about making sure the positive experiences and support usually given to a select few are shared with everyone on the team, aiming for a fairer and more inclusive way of leading (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Le Blanc and González-Romá (2012) and Harris et al. (2014) delve into how the variation in leadership relationships impacts teams and individual members, focusing on the consequences of “in-group” and “out-group” formations. Le Blanc and González-Romá (2012) find that diverse leader-member relationships can improve team commitment and performance, especially in settings where the overall quality of these exchanges is



relatively low. Their research suggests that teams might benefit from this variation when the average level of connection with the leader isn't particularly strong, highlighting the positive role of differentiation in specific contexts. On the other hand, Harris et al. (2014) link differences in leader-member exchange quality to higher organizational citizenship behavior and lower turnover intentions, showcasing how "in-group" and "out-group" distinctions can significantly affect organizational outcomes. These findings emphasize the importance of considering the context in leadership strategies and suggest that inclusively managing the spectrum of leader-member relationships is crucial for boosting individual job satisfaction and team effectiveness.

Building upon the foundational principles of VDL as conceptualized by Dansereau et al., (1975), leadership dynamics have been expanded into a framework comprising three interrelated domains: Leader,<sup>9</sup> Follower,<sup>10</sup> and Relationship.<sup>11</sup> This evolution reflects a deeper understanding of leadership as a multidimensional process, influenced by the individual characteristics of leaders and followers, as well as the quality of their interactions (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Graen & Uhl-Bien's (1995) Three Domains of Leadership model was further elaborated, identifying additional traits influencing the leader-follower-relationship dynamics.

The Six Domains of Leadership framework, detailed by Sitkin et al. (2009), presents a comprehensive approach to understanding and exercising effective leadership. The framework is structured around six key areas, each representing distinct aspects of leadership action and its impact on followers. These domains are designed to encompass

<sup>9</sup> Leader Domain: Originating from VDL's focus on leadership behavior and characteristics, this domain focuses on the attributes and actions of the leader. It encompasses the leader's personal traits, decision-making styles, ability to inspire, and influence tactics, emphasizing the leader's crucial role in shaping the organization's vision, culture, and strategic direction (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Follower Domain: This domain extends the VDL theory by concentrating on the followers within the leadership equation, recognizing them as active participants whose engagement is vital for achieving organizational goals. It includes followers' motivations, competencies, and their alignment with the leader's vision, highlighting the importance of followers' perceptions and contributions to the leadership dynamic (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Relationship Domain: Building on VDL's identification of differentiated leader-follower relationships. It explores how mutual trust, respect, and obligation between leaders and followers influence organizational outcomes, including effectiveness, satisfaction, and commitment. This domain underscores the significance of the interaction between leaders and followers, moving beyond individual characteristics to include the quality of their relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).



the full spectrum of leadership behaviors, skills, and effects, providing a roadmap for developing leadership capabilities. Sitkin et al. (2009) identifies the following leadership domains in their model: Personal,<sup>12</sup> Relational,<sup>13</sup> Contextual,<sup>14</sup> Inspirational,<sup>15</sup> Supportive,<sup>16</sup> and Responsible<sup>17</sup> leadership. The Six Domains of Leadership framework proposes that these domains are interrelated, forming a pyramid, with personal, relational, and contextual leadership forming the foundational elements necessary for the successful execution of inspirational, supportive, and responsible leadership. This approach to leadership acknowledges and draws distinct similarities to Graen & Uhl-Bien's (1995) Three Domain's model as the foundational base. However, Sitkin et al. (2009) provide more detail on how leadership involves a wide range of skills and actions, from personal authenticity and relationship-building to inspiring others and making responsible decisions. It provides a structured way for individuals to assess their strengths and weaknesses across these domains and to develop a well-rounded leadership style (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Personal Leadership: Focuses on the leader's own character, values, and authenticity. Leaders must be credible and genuine, building their leadership style on their personality. This domain emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, personal values, and the projection of one's leadership persona. (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Relational Leadership: Stresses the importance of building strong, trust-based relationships with followers. It involves showing genuine concern for others, respecting individuals regardless of their position, and fostering mutual understanding and fairness (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Contextual Leadership: Concerns the leader's ability to create a sense of community and belonging, providing clarity about the team's identity, purpose, and the broader organizational environment. It involves building team coherence and ensuring that everyone understands their role within the larger mission (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Inspirational Leadership: Involves motivating and inspiring others to achieve excellence, raising expectations, and fostering an environment that encourages innovation and the pursuit of ambitious goals. This domain is about energizing the team and fostering a belief in the team's capability to achieve great things (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Supportive Leadership: Focuses on providing the necessary support and resources to enable followers to feel secure in their roles and confident in their abilities. It includes ensuring team members have the training, resources, and encouragement needed to succeed, as well as controlling the tendency to assign blame when challenges arise (Sitkin et al., 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Responsible Leadership: Highlights the leader's role as a steward of the organization, emphasizing ethical conduct, balancing competing interests, and embodying the organization's values. Leaders must make decisions that reflect a commitment to the greater good and model ethical behavior (Sitkin et al., 2009).



### C. LMX: WHAT IS IT?

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory dives into the nuanced interactions that occur between leaders and their individual followers, setting itself apart from conventional leadership models that typically emphasize the individual attributes or actions of leaders. At the heart of LMX is the conviction that the quality of each leader-follower relationship or dyad is critical, from highly-quality to distinctly less engaged, low-quality relationships. These dyadic exchanges are not uniform and can vary greatly within a team or organization. High-quality LMX relationships are distinguished by several traits, but specifically by high levels of mutual trust, respect, and a sense of obligation that vastly exceeds the basic expectations of the workplace. Such relationships cultivate an environment where leaders and followers are not only more invested and committed but also more inclined to exceed their role requirements (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The emphasis on individualized interactions distinguishes LMX as a unique perspective for examining organizational leadership dynamics, suggesting that the depth and quality of these relationships can significantly influence both personal and organizational outcomes. High-quality LMX is seen as a conduit for improving employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance, indicating its pivotal role in shaping organizational culture and effectiveness (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The following table depicts some of the more common distinguishable traits found in high-quality LMX relationships.





Table 1. Core Principles of High-Quality LMX Relationships

LMX Principle	Working Definition	Select Quote
Differential Relationship Development	The process by which leaders form unique relationships of varying quality with each of their subordinates.	“Leaders and followers develop dyadic relationships that can vary from high to low quality.” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 227)
Quality of LMX Relationships	Reflects the depth of trust, respect, and mutual obligation characterizing the exchange between leaders and subordinates.	“the quality of the LMX relationship is indicated by the extent to which superiors allow subordinates to negotiate job-related matters. Greater negotiation latitude suggests leadership rather than supervision, marking a higher-quality LMX relationship” (Dansereau et al., 1975, p. 51).
Mutual Respect, Trust, Affection, and Obligation	Core elements that define the strength of LMX relationships, essential for positive outcomes.	“High-quality LMX relationships are characterized by deep exchanges of work-related contributions, fostering mutual trust, respect, and obligation, and encouraging followers towards greater responsibility” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 233).
LMX Differentiation	The extent to which there is variability in the quality of LMX relationships within a team or group.	“LMX differentiation occurs when leaders form varying quality relationships with members of their team.” (Harris et al., 2014, p. 317)
Equity and Equality in Resource Distribution	The balance between distributing resources based on contribution and distributing them equally among team members.	“Leaders must balance the equity and equality in distributing resources to manage team dynamics effectively.” (Xie et al., 2019, p. 167).

### 1. History of LMX: How Did It Come to Fruition and Evolve over Time?

LMX theory has undergone significant evolution since its inception, shaping our understanding of the dynamics between leaders and followers within organizational settings. Prior to Dansereau, Graen, and Haga’s VDL model in 1975, leadership theories



largely embraced an “average leadership style” (Martin et al., 2017) perspective, where it was assumed leaders applied a uniform set of strategies and behaviors across all followers, disregarding the individual nuances of each leader-follower interaction. The VDL model and LMX theory challenged the prevailing one-size-fits-all approach to leadership. This foundational work suggests that the effectiveness of leadership could not be fully understood without considering these individualized leader-follower interactions. The model stressed the importance of recognizing and nurturing these unique relationships, as they were seen to directly impact team dynamics and overall organizational performance (Martin et al., 2017). As the theory developed, researchers began to explore the characteristics of mutual trust, respect, and sense of obligation that defined high-quality LMX relationships. These characteristics not only define the depth and quality of the leader-follower interactions but also significantly influence positive organizational outcomes, such as enhanced job satisfaction, improved performance, and greater organizational commitment (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995; Harris et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2021; Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012; Martin et al., 2017). This shift in focus highlighted the critical role these leader-follower exchanges play in fostering an environment where leaders and followers are more engaged, committed, and motivated to surpass their traditionally defined roles.

Subsequent refinements and research expanded the scope of LMX theory, emphasizing its relevance and applicability across various organizational contexts. Studies by scholars like Le Blanc and Gonzalez-Roma (2012), and Kim et al. (2021), further explained the impact of LMX on team commitment, performance, and the differentiation in leader-member exchanges within teams. Le Blanc and González-Romá (2012) demonstrated that LMX differentiation within teams can either positively or negatively impact team commitment and performance, depending on the overall level of LMX quality in the team, illustrating the complex role of individual leader-member relationships in shaping team dynamics. Additionally, Kim et al. (2021) provided evidence that high-quality LMX relationships enhance team performance by fostering a sense of empowerment and mutual support among team members, showcasing the direct benefits of effective leader-member exchanges on team outcomes. This body of work illustrates



how the depth and quality of LMX relationships can lead to significant variations in team dynamics and organizational culture, reinforcing the theory's premise that effective leadership is fundamentally relational. The contributions of Avolio et al. (2008) and Burns & Otte (1999) were instrumental in broadening the theoretical underpinnings of LMX, linking it to leadership development and strategic human resource management practices. Their research emphasized LMX's role in building social capital for competitive advantage and highlighted the theory's implications for fostering leadership that is adaptive, innovative, and capable of navigating the complexities of the modern organizational landscape. Through continuous exploration, LMX theory has come to represent a cornerstone of leadership research, offering a sophisticated framework for examining the nuanced interplay between leaders and followers. It advocates for the cultivation of high-quality exchanges as a strategic approach to enhancing organizational effectiveness, employee engagement, and fostering a positive organizational culture. The evolution of LMX theory from the VDL model to its current status underscores its enduring significance in leadership studies, providing valuable insights for both academic analysis and practical leadership approaches.

## **2. Importance of LMX: Why Is It Important, Why Should the USMC Care about LMX?**

LMX theory emphasizes the importance of strong, dynamic, relationships between leaders and followers. The Marine Corps is renowned for its organizational culture that is deeply rooted in advocating for its leaders to adopt characteristics that build mutual respect, trust, and understanding. These same traits are the center of gravity for developing effective, individualized leader-follower exchanges. LMX theory's relevance within the Marine Corps is exemplified through many of the Marine Corps' most prominent leaders. The leadership philosophies of General John A. Lejeune, General Alfred M. Gray, and Lieutenant General Lewis "Chesty" Puller, all closely align with LMX theory's emphasis on the significance of individualized leader-follower relationships. General John A. Lejeune's quote that opens this chapter, which captures his belief in a nurturing, paternalistic approach to leadership, resonates strongly with the principles of LMX.



During his tenure, General Gray further emphasized the value of communication and trust in building effective leader-follower dynamics, principles that are central to the LMX framework. An illustration of this approach is summarized in the reflections of Colonel John Bicknas, USMC (Retired), who shared his insights on what he learned from General Gray:

“What did I learn from General Gray? Leadership by walking around, especially unannounced, talking to all the Marines, finding out what they know, what they have been told and how much latitude they have to do their job, will tell you volumes about the small unit leaders under you. And when stopping to talk to a Marine, talk to him like there is no one else there and let him know that you are very interested in what he is doing and why” (Otte, 2014, p. 48).

Similarly, Lieutenant General Puller’s hands-on leadership approach and his legendary commitment to his troops exemplify the LMX theory’s focus on mutual respect and trust as foundational elements of effective leadership. Major Quintrall (1997) provides a compelling illustration of Puller’s leadership, noting:

“Historical accounts indicate Puller’s ‘inward eye’ revealed a special understanding of his men, team-building, setting a courageous example, and treating his troops with respect, sprinkled with the right measure of discipline. The unit cohesion Puller created, and his commanding presence on the battlefield was described by his superiors as incredible” (Quintrall, 1997, p. 10).

This account captures how Puller’s leadership practices fostered strong personal connections with his Marines, emphasizing respect, judiciously applying discipline that enhanced team cohesion, operational readiness, and overall effectiveness. Chesty’s ability to understand and motivate his men, demonstrate the tangible benefits of LMX in a military context.

Research underscores the tangible benefits of strong LMX relationships, demonstrating that teams anchored in these relationships tend to achieve higher performance levels, exhibit greater satisfaction, and maintain superior team dynamics (Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012). These outcomes are particularly significant within the demanding and often unpredictable operational environments faced by Marines deployed across the globe, where the strength and quality of each leader-follower link can be pivotal.



Supporting this, the study by Kim et al. (2021) further illuminates the role of peer mentoring in enhancing the efficacy of LMX relationships, showing that the interplay between leader-member exchange as well as peer mentoring within teams not only fosters a positive team environment but also indirectly contributes to superior team performance. This combined effect between vertical and horizontal team dynamics is crucial in military contexts, where adaptability, cohesion, and mutual support are essential for operational success (Kim et al., 2021). By creating an environment where peer mentoring complements robust leader-member relationships, the Marine Corps can fully leverage the benefits of high-quality LMX. This, in turn, could have other positive externalities correlating to morale, unit cohesion, and mission effectiveness.

The integration of LMX principles within the Marine Corps, as advocated by these historical figures, underscores the theory's significant potential in shaping military leadership development. The focus on nurturing personalized, high-quality relationships between leaders and followers resonates deeply with the Marine Corps' leadership traits and principles. This supports the importance of trust-based relationships for operational success, stressing how LMX principles can strengthen the Marine Corps' culture of adaptability, resilience, and excellence. Adopting an LMX-informed approach allows the Marine Corps to uphold its legacy and remain effective in various scenarios, from peacetime to conflict. The experiences and insights of Generals Lejeune, Gray, and Puller, when viewed through the lens of LMX, highlight the indispensable role of dynamic, principle-driven leader-follower relationships in securing mission success and perpetuating the Marine Corps' esteemed tradition of leadership excellence.

### **3. Outcomes of LMX**

Integrating LMX into a leader development strategy has been shown to significantly enhance organizational outcomes, including team performance, employee engagement, and job satisfaction (Kim et al. 2021). The concept of LMX differentiation is pivotal, particularly in teams with lower quality LMX (Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012). The deliberate cultivation of diverse leader-member relationships, spanning both high and low quality, is particularly beneficial in such contexts. This strategy not only promotes an



adaptable team atmosphere but also significantly increases team cohesiveness and strengthens members' dedication to their common objectives. According to Le Blanc and Gonzalez-Roma (2012), in teams where the overall quality of LMX is lower, effectively navigating LMX differentiation is key to improving team performance and relational commitment. This approach promotes the cultivation of strong, quality leader-follower relationships as essential for organizational success. High-quality social exchange relationships, a foundational element of LMX theory, are directly connected to key organizational benefits such as reduced turnover, indicative of a supportive environment that values employee contributions (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), enhanced performance evaluations resulting from increased resource access and leadership support (Harris et al., 2014), and a boost in organizational commitment, seen in employees' deepened loyalty and readiness to exceed their job responsibilities (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Prioritizing the cultivation of strong relationships between leaders and members transforms LMX into a critical facet of leadership development strategies, enhancing team cohesion, employee contentment, and overall performance outcomes. This strategic focus on relationship quality not only fortifies the organizational culture but also aligns with the aims of leadership effectiveness and organizational success (Amagoh, 2008; Avolio et al., 2008; Burns & Otte, 1999), indicating a movement towards leadership methodologies that prioritize relational and individualized approaches. For example, the study conducted by Francis Amagoh (2008) underscores the tangible organizational benefits seen by implementing LMX theory, demonstrating that organizations engaging in leadership development programs with a focus on LMX see marked improvements in performance and productivity. These initiatives are essential for nurturing leaders capable of effectively addressing challenges and leading organizations to sustained high performance.

#### **D. LMX AND MENTORING**

The integration of LMX theory into the structure of mentorship programs represents a strategic move towards enhancing the mentorship experience within organizations. LMX, which focuses on the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers, suggests that the nature of these relationships significantly influences various outcomes for both the individual and the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). By emphasizing high-quality



LMX relationships characterized by trust, respect, and mutual commitment, mentorship programs can transcend traditional boundaries, facilitating a more personalized and impactful developmental journey for mentees. This approach ensures that mentorship is not merely transactional but a transformative process that fosters deep personal and professional growth (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It aligns mentorship initiatives with broader organizational goals, such as improving employee engagement, performance, and talent retention. Importantly, the LMX framework encourages mentors to tailor their guidance and support according to the unique needs, aspirations, and circumstances of each mentee, thereby maximizing the mentorship's relevance and effectiveness (Harris et al., 2014). This individualized attention not only enriches the mentee's learning experience but also bolsters their confidence and motivation to pursue ambitious goals.

The role of LMX in mentorship encompasses not just the initial development of trust and mutual respect but also extends to managing LMX differentiation within the mentor-mentee dynamics. LMX differentiation requires deliberate management to ensure equitable support and engagement across all mentor-mentee pairs. High-quality LMX relationships characterized by significant trust and mutual commitment not only facilitate a supportive environment for open communication, feedback, and constructive criticism (Kim et al., 2021) but also highlight the need for mentors to address LMX differentiation actively. By doing so, mentors can guarantee that each mentee feels equally valued and supported, encouraging active participation in their own development process, free expression of concerns and aspirations, and initiative in their personal growth (Kim et al., 2021). This focus on the development of high-quality LMX relationships and attentive management of LMX differentiation cultivates a continuous learning culture, motivating mentees to tackle challenges and perceive setbacks as growth opportunities (Holt et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2021). This approach enhances mentees' psychological well-being and resilience, equipping them to handle the complexities of their career paths (Holt et al., 2016). Aligning mentorship practices with LMX principles, including deliberate efforts to manage LMX differentiation, not only reinforces organizational values and objectives but also promotes a stronger sense of belonging and commitment among mentees, creating a supportive and inclusive organizational atmosphere (Amagoh, 2008).



However, the principle of LMX differentiation introduces an additional layer of complexity to the mentorship landscape. LMX differentiation refers to the variation in the quality of LMX relationships that a leader might have with different members within the same team or organization (Harris et al., 2014). While a certain degree of differentiation is inevitable due to the dyadic nature of LMX relationships, significant disparities can lead to perceptions of inequity, favoritism, or exclusion, potentially undermining the positive impacts of mentorship programs (Harris et al., 2014; Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012; Xie et al., 2019). Specifically, for Marine leaders LMX differentiation could appear as unequal support, communication, or opportunities, favoring those with closer relationships. This unevenness in treatment, access to training or recognition risks impacting morale and performance among Marines with a lower-quality relationship. These perceptions can adversely affect team cohesion, morale, and the overall mentorship climate within the organization. Because of this, leaders and mentors face the challenge of managing LMX differentiation effectively, ensuring that all team members feel valued and have equitable access to mentorship and development opportunities. Strategies to mitigate the negative effects of LMX differentiation include fostering transparent communication about mentorship practices (Harris et al., 2014), ensuring consistency in mentorship opportunities, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and mutual support (Xie et al., 2019). By addressing the challenges associated with LMX differentiation, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of their mentorship programs, ensuring that they contribute positively to both individual and organizational development (Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012).

## **E. CREATING HIGH QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS**

Integrating the mentorship process with the LMX theory's framework reveals a shared life cycle approach to developing high-quality relationships, which evolve from initial stages into mature, deeply connected partnerships. The Leadership Making Model (Figure 1), conceptualized by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), serves as a foundational framework that parallels the mentorship journey, illustrating the transformation of leader-member relationships through three phases "Stranger," "Acquaintance," and "Maturity." This progression underscores the importance of structured evolving interactions that





facilitate growth, performance, and increased satisfaction for both parties involved, aligning closely with mentorship practices emphasized by Allen, Eby, & Lentz (2007), which stress the importance of voluntary participation, compatibility in matching, and fostering meaningful interactions.

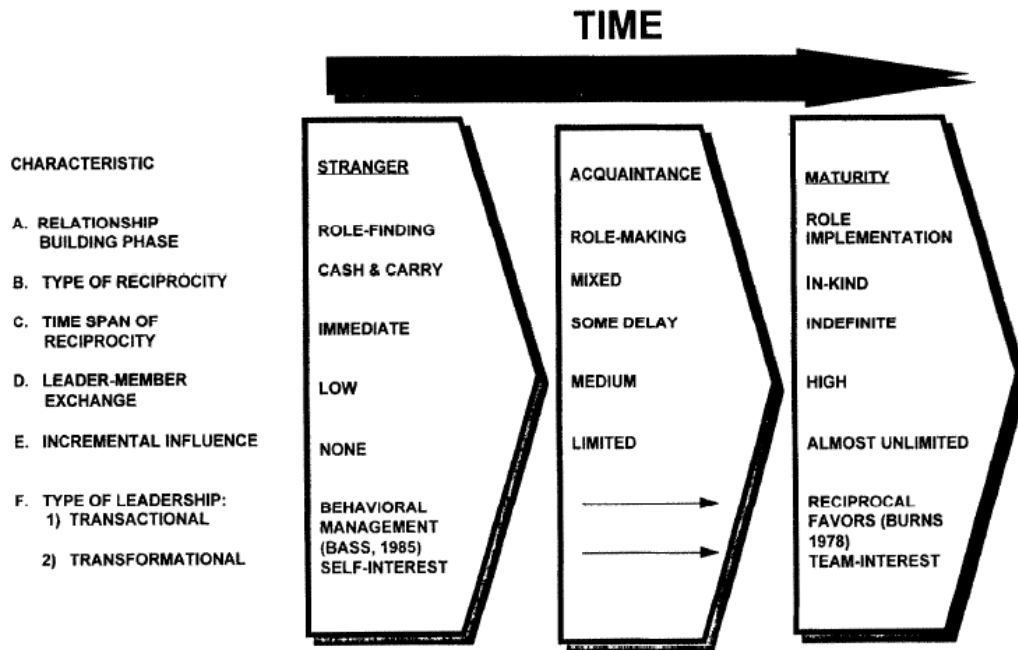


Figure 1. Leadership Making Model. Source: Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995).

The Leadership Making Model begins with the “Relationship Building Phase,” where initial “Strangers” navigate role-finding, where leaders and members establish a groundwork for interactions and set expectations. This phase emphasizes the transactional nature of early exchanges, characterized by “Cash & Carry” reciprocity, where direct and immediate transactions exist (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As relationships evolve into the “Acquaintance” phase, the dynamic shifts towards “Role-making,” marked by a richer negotiation process with feedback mechanisms that cultivate trust and develop understanding. Here, the “Type of Reciprocity” evolves into a “Mix” of transactional and relational exchanges, signifying a pivotal shift towards more personalized and impactful

interactions that acknowledge broader contributions beyond basic tasks (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Entering the “Maturity” phase, relationships achieve “Role-implementation,” which is characterized by the practical application of defined roles and a deep mutual commitment. This phase is where the “Time Span of Reciprocity” becomes “Indefinite,” reflecting a matured trust that allows for extended support and collaboration beyond immediate exchanges. The “Leader-Member Exchange” quality also peaks, signifying high-quality, mature interactions strengthened by mutual respect and a shared commitment to individual and organizational goals (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The “Incremental Influence” during this phase describes the transformational impact leaders and members exert on each other, evolving to “Almost Unlimited” as they share a vision and collaboratively navigate challenges, truly embodying transformational leadership dynamics (Graen-Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The culmination of this model into a mature partnership demonstrates the transformation towards deep, reciprocal exchanges that surpass traditional work roles, reflecting Burns & Otte’s (1999) conceptualization of transformational leadership as a move beyond self-interests to larger, mutual interests. This creates a peer-like dynamic, challenging hierarchical norms and creating an environment where leaders and members engage in “In-Kind” exchanges aimed at mutual growth and development (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Burns & Otte, 1999). This detailed integration of Graen & Uhl-Bien’s (1995) Leadership Making Model with mentorship practices highlights the universal principles of trust, mutual respect, and tailored interactions as foundational to building effective, high-quality relationships in leadership and mentorship contexts. Through structured, evolving interactions, these frameworks advocate for a developmental journey that not only enhances individual and organizational growth but also aligns closely with the goals of leadership effectiveness and organizational excellence.

## **F. BEYOND BASICS WITH LMX INTEGRATION**

Incorporating the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and the principles of the Leader Making Model into organizational mentorship necessitates a nuanced strategy



that nurtures deep, individualized connections between leaders and team members. This approach entails a commitment to open and transparent communication, essential for crafting a dynamic filled with authentic and impactful interactions, thereby establishing a strong foundation of mutual respect and understanding (Harris et al., 2014), a core principle highlighted by Graen & Uhl-Bien's (1995) Leader Making Model. It is vital that mentorship be custom-tailored, respecting each member's distinctive skills and career ambitions, thereby aligning with the Leader Making Model's emphasis on role evolution from role-finding and role-making to role-implementation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), thus demonstrating a vested interest in each individual's progression and enhancing the mentorship experience's impact (Allen et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014). Furthermore, providing team members with adequate resources and support demonstrates the leader's commitment to their success, reinforcing trust and respect crucial for the deepening of leader-member relationships as advocated by the Leader Making Model (Allen et al., 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kim et al., 2021). By weaving together these strategic elements with the Leader Making Model, organizations can effectively develop mentorship relationships that not only support individual growth but also expand their perspective to strengthen organizational culture.

Transitioning from individual interactions to broader organizational impact, leaders must cultivate an inclusive team culture that values diversity and ensures everyone feels an integral part of the group's success, thus fostering a sense of belonging and community (Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012). Acknowledging and appreciating the individual contributions within the team not only boosts morale but also solidifies each person's value to the organization (Kim et al., 2021). By effectively integrating these LMX principles into mentorship practices, leaders can significantly improve mentorship quality and foster an environment where high-quality LMX relationships thrive, ensuring team members feel valued, supported, and empowered (Allen et al., 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Harris et al., 2014). This deliberate application of LMX principles promotes a culture of mutual support, continuous learning, and collective achievement, which is critical for nurturing lasting, high-quality leader-member connections and overall team dynamics and performance.



## **G. SUSTAINING THE TRANSFORMATION**

To encourage the evolution of lower-quality relationships into high-quality relationships between leaders and team members, organizations should invest in targeted training programs. These programs are vital for improving leaders' and mentors' understanding of developmental dynamics (Allen et al., 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). By clearly defining mentorship goals, setting transparent expectations for each participant's role, and underscoring their significance in advancing both organizational and individual growth, these initiatives play a pivotal role (Allen et al., 2007). Such strategic endeavors not only facilitate the transition towards meaningful and reciprocal relationships but also mitigate the risk of reverting to superficial, transactional interactions (Graen, G.B., & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This transformation is critical for fostering a culture that values sustained engagement and strategic insights in nurturing relationships, thereby preventing the degradation of relational quality. Enhanced understanding of group dynamics and individual roles within these relationships can lead to more effective mentorship and leadership practices, ultimately contributing to the establishment of high-quality LMX relationships (Harris et al., 2014; Hoye, 2004).



## IV. ANALYSIS

“Leadership must be based on good-will. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to the helping followers. We are tired of leaders we fear, tired of leaders we love, and most tired of leaders who let us take liberties with them. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away.”

—Admiral James Stockdale (1980, pp. 87–88)

### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with an examination of key pieces of Marine Corps doctrine including the Commandant’s Planning Guidance, MCDP 1 Warfighting, MCDP 6 Command and Control, MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines, MCDP 7 Learning, the Commandant’s vision for Training and Education Command (TECOM) 2030, and TECOMs Vision and Strategy for 21st Century Learning. The aim is to explore these foundational documents looking for insights into the Marine Corps’ approach to developing leader-follower relationships, a core tenet of LMX theory. These selected documents are pivotal, as they capture the spirit of Marine Corps leadership, command, and operational philosophies, serving as rich sources for identifying parallels and discrepancies with LMX theory. The objective of this analysis is to highlight occurrences where LMX principles align with Marine Corps doctrine, revealing both inherent compatibility with current leadership practices and opportunities for LMX theory’s integration with Marine Corps leadership development and mentorship initiatives.

This approach not only underscores the potential for LMX theory to enhance the Marine Corps’ leadership development strategies but also sets the stage to perform a gap analysis and needs assessment. Gap analysis involves identifying the discrepancies between the current state of Marine Corps leadership development practices and the desired state as informed by LMX theory, whereas the needs assessment focuses on identifying specific requirements and conditions necessary for bridging these identified gaps. Methodically building from a detailed doctrinal analysis to a strategic assessment, this



chapter lays a comprehensive foundation for evaluating the effective integration of LMX theory into Marine Corps' leader development strategies. This progression encourages a nuanced understanding of LMX theory's potential impact on organizational leadership within the Marine Corps, highlighting a path forward for leadership enhancement.

## **B. COMPARATIVE-ANALYSIS TABLES**

This section conducts a comparative analysis focusing on pivotal Marine Corps documents selected based on specific criteria: their articulation of the Marine Corps' vision for the immediate future, their frequent citation in Marine Corps leader development literature, and their status as institutional doctrine. The documents being reviewed were chosen for their significant influence for shaping the Marine Corps' leadership ethos, development practices, and operational strategies, these documents have been examined to identify instances of LMX principles such as mutual trust, respect, and reciprocal leader-follower influence. Through this analysis, the subsequent tables illustrate the compatibility between LMX theory and the institutionalized leadership ideals of the Marine Corps, setting the stage for practical recommendations to improve leadership training and development across the Marine Corps.

### **1. Commandant's Planning Guidance**

The CPG, in its strategic vision, presents a blueprint for an organization that thrives on personalized, strength-based relationships. This document's strategic vision aligns with LMX principles showing how LMX theory could help shape the Marine Corps in an era that needs more high-quality leader-member exchanges to meet its intent. The table below shows the alignment of LMX principles and the Marine Corps' strategic vision for the future as outline in the CPG. For example, the CPG's directive to "be an active participant in decision-making within HQMC, without expecting to make all the decisions" (Berger, 2019) echoes LMX's principle of mutual respect and trust. Additionally, the CPG emphasizes the importance of the individual Marine and their significance to the Marine Corps' mission, stressing LMX's focus on leader-member relationships and their organizational impact. The CPG's commitment to "taking care of Marines, includes holding Marines to high professional standards..." (Berger, 2019) exemplifies the



Leadership Making Model’s progression from role-finding to role-making, and ultimately role-implementation, central to LMX theory (Berger, 2019; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This approach not only reflects the transparent communication of expectations foundational to LMX but also illustrates how leaders guide members through the developmental stages of their roles.

The CPG also mentions the vision for reforming talent management and performance evaluation systems to better recognize individual contributions (Berger, 2019). This vision aligns with LMX’s tenet of nurturing member capabilities through high-quality exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Lastly, the CPG’s vision to prioritization of “people over systems in the command and control process” (Berger, 2019) reflects the LMX principle that robust leader-member exchanges are critical to organizational effectiveness (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The CPG echoes the principles of LMX theory within its future vision for the Marine Corps. It articulates a vision where the caliber of leader-member interactions is paramount, advocating for a culture rich in mutual trust and respect.

Table 2. LMX Alignment: Commandant’s Planning Guidance

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019	Executive Decision Making	“I intend to be an active participant in decision-making within HQMC but do not expect to make all decisions...” (Berger, 2019)	Demonstrates <b>mutual trust</b> and distributed decision-making, a hallmark of <b>high-quality LMX relationships</b> .
Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019	People	“Everything starts and ends with the individual Marine...” (Berger, 2019)	Emphasizes the importance of individual Marines, reflecting LMX’s focus on the <b>dyadic relationships</b> and their organizational impact.
Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019	Taking Care of Marines	““Taking care of Marines’ includes holding Marines to high professional standards...” (Berger, 2019)	Clear <b>open communication of performance expectations</b> to maintain high professional standards within LMX relationships.
Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019	Talent Management	“The essence of all manpower systems is to encourage those you need and want to stay and separate who are not performing to standards...” (Berger, 2019)	Reflects LMX theory by emphasizing the importance of retaining high performers through <b>quality leader-member exchanges</b> and <b>LMX Differentiation</b> .



Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
Commandant's Planning Guidance 2019	Fitness Reports	"Despite a major reform effort in 1996, there are major shortcomings in our current Performance Evaluation System..." (Berger, 2019)	Focus on reforming evaluations to recognize individual contributions aligns with LMX's emphasis on <b>recognizing and developing member capabilities.</b>
Commandant's Planning Guidance 2019	Command and Control	"Our command and control processes and systems must reflect our maneuver warfare philosophy...We will always focus on people over systems in the command and control process." (Berger, 2019)	Emphasizes the importance of prioritizing people over systems, reflecting LMX theory's focus on <b>the quality of leader-member exchanges</b> for organizational effectiveness.

## 2. Training and Education 2030

The Commandant's "Training and Education 2030" (Berger, 2023) document outlines a visionary strategy for evolving the Marine Corps' training and education, aligning closely with his Planning Guidance and LMX theory. It advocates for adaptability, continuous learning, and leadership development to meet future military challenges, with a focus on enhancing the enlisted PME system and transforming instructor talent management. This approach aims to cultivate individual strengths for the collective benefit of the Corps, a core principle of LMX theory, emphasizing the importance of high-quality, trust-based leader-follower relationships. The introduction of advanced technology in training, such as the Live Virtual and Constructive-Training Environment (LVC-TE), signifies a shift towards using innovation for personalized and adaptive learning experiences. These efforts reflect the Commandant's directives for a technologically skilled, adaptable Marine Corps prepared for modern warfare's uncertainties. The document's strategic vision for training and education, which promotes differentiated leader-follower exchanges, not only resonates with LMX theory but also aligns with the Commandant's vision for military readiness and excellence. This holistic approach mirrors the interconnectedness of leadership dynamics and educational practices, setting a benchmark for preparing Marines to navigate the complexities of the 21st century's tactical and strategic environments. By fostering a culture of perpetual learning and quality





leadership development, the Marine Corps is poised to enhance its operational agility and resilience, ensuring its future success in an ever-changing global landscape.

The table below shows a few key aspects of the “Training and Education 2030” document, detailing specific sections, direct quotes, and their alignment with LMX theory. This table exemplifies how the document’s provisions support its overarching goals, highlighting the interconnectedness of leadership development, technology integration, and continuous learning in shaping the future of Marine Corps training and education.

Table 3. LMX Alignment: Training and Education 2030

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
Training and Education 2030	Purpose and Mission of TECOM	“Preparing the Fleet Marine Forces for war...enabling the exercise and evaluation of naval expeditionary forces at all echelons.” (Berger, 2023, p. 3)	Demonstrates commitment to preparing leaders and members for complex challenges, aligning with LMX emphasis on <b>developing effective leader-member exchanges in dynamic environments.</b>
Training and Education 2030	Shift to Information Age Learning	“Moving away from the industrial age model towards leveraging adult learning theories and human performance science.” (Berger, 2023, p. 5)	This shift reflects LMX principles by acknowledging <b>individual roles</b> and providing tailored development resources, emphasizing the value of <b>unique leader-member interactions.</b>
Training and Education 2030	Strategic Vision and Focus Areas	“Training and education that supports naval expeditionary warfare...and develops a competency-based approach to learning.” (Berger, 2023, p. 7)	Aligns with LMX by promoting a competency-based approach provide <b>equitable resources</b> and <b>opportunities</b> for every members <b>unique abilities</b> and <b>needs.</b>
Training and Education 2030	Developing Adaptive, Decisive Marines	“Develop Marines capable of operating in contested maritime spaces...through professional military education (PME) and continuous learning.” (Berger, 2023, p. 9)	Emphasizes <b>continuous learning and adaptability</b> , core to LMX, ensuring leaders and members can effectively respond to evolving operational contexts.
Training and Education 2030	Expanding Integrated Training in EWTG	“TECOM (in coordination with Naval Education and Training Command and fleet commanders) will develop a roadmap for leveraging the EWTGs and EOTGs to expand standards-based integrated naval training and education. (Berger, 2023, p. 11)	Reflects LMX principles by planning for increased <b>collaboration and role clarity</b> among leaders and members across branches.



The strategic vision articulated in “Training and Education 2030” sets the stage for a more detailed and specific roadmap presented in the “TECOM Vision & Strategy for 21st Century Learning.” Transitioning from the overarching goals and directives of the Commandant, it becomes even more important to dive into how these objectives will be operationalized within the training and education ecosystem of the Marine Corps. The “TECOM Vision & Strategy for 21st Century Learning” document serves as a crucial link in translating the broad, visionary goals of enhancing adaptability, leveraging technology, and fostering continuous learning into actions. This nested document provides a granular view of the initiatives and methodologies that TECOM plans to employ moving forward, ensuring that the principles and ambitions outlined in “Training and Education 2030” are systematically implemented to achieve a future-ready force. It elaborates on the use of advanced technologies, adaptive learning environments, and a learner-centered approach, emphasizing the development of critical thinking and decision-making skills. This transition underscores the interconnectedness of strategic guidance and operational execution, highlighting the Marine Corps’ commitment to a holistic and forward-looking approach to training and education.

### **3. Vision and Strategy For 21st Century Learning**

The “Training and Education Command (TECOM) Vision & Strategy for 21st Century Learning” (Mullen, 2020) document outlines a transformative approach to preparing the Marine Corps for the complexities of modern warfare, aligning closely with LMX theory principles. It underscores the necessity of evolving from an industrial to an information age learning model, emphasizing adaptive leadership and individualized development pathways. This transformation is pivotal for fostering high-quality, trust-based leader-member relationships, a core aspect of LMX theory. The strategy’s focus on developing Marines’ judgment and adaptability highlights the importance of continuous learning and the tailoring of educational experiences to individual needs and operational roles. TECOM’s vision for institutionalizing a modernized learning model encapsulates the LMX theory’s emphasis on enhancing operational effectiveness through perpetual learning and leadership development. By advocating for a culture that prioritizes personalized training and education, TECOM’s vision reflects a commitment to strengthening leader-



member exchanges, thereby ensuring the Marine Corps’ agility and resilience in facing future challenges.

Table 4. LMX Alignment: TECOM’s Vision and Strategy for 21st Century Learning

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
TECOM Vision & Strategy	Strategic Vision	“Our vision is...to transition our training and education system from an industrial age model to an information age learning model.” (Mullen 2020, p.3)	Reflects leadership’s intention to drive organizational change towards modernized learning, emphasizing <b>high-quality leader-member exchanges</b> in adapting to new challenges.
TECOM Vision & Strategy	Naval Orientation	“Strengthen the Corps’ naval orientation...to sustain a naval education program that deepens every Marine’s understanding of naval theory and tactics.” (Mullen 2020, p.4)	Demonstrates leadership’s role in fostering specialized knowledge and alignment with naval principles, crucial in LMX for <b>mutual understanding</b> and goal achievement.
TECOM Vision & Strategy	Competency-Based Learning	“Shift towards a competency-based approach that enables Marines to maximize their warfighting capabilities...in the most efficient manner.” (Mullen 2020, p.5)	Aligns with LMX theory by emphasizing <b>individualized development paths</b> and <b>recognizing distinct competencies</b> within leader-member dynamics.
TECOM Vision & Strategy	Live Virtual Constructive (LVC) Training Environments	“Employing emerging simulation technologies...to apply warfighting skills...in increasingly complex, dynamic environments.” (Mullen 2020, p.6)	Illustrates how leadership can create environments that foster member <b>growth</b> and <b>adaptability</b> , key aspects of strong LMX relationships.
TECOM Vision & Strategy	Professional Military Education (PME)	“PME is...essential to maintaining the intellectual edge necessary for victory in battle...throughout a Marine’s career.” Mullen 2020, p.7)	Highlights the continuous commitment to developing leadership and expertise within the ranks, resonating with LMX’s focus on career-long learning and <b>leader-member development</b> .

#### 4. MCDP-1 Warfighting

The integration of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory with the strategic tenets outlined in MCDP-1 Warfighting reveals a compelling narrative about the Marine Corps’ leadership and operational concepts. This analysis not only bridges military



doctrine with leadership theories but also highlights the significance of LMX principles within the Marine Corps' doctrine. By dissecting MCDP-1 Warfighting through the LMX lens, I am able to find the symbiotic relationship between the Corps' emphasis on decentralized command, the continuous evolution of training, the importance of professional military education, the nuanced approach to personnel management, and the importance of adaptable organizational structures necessary for expeditionary operations. These elements are closely connected to the principles of LMX theory, showcasing a deep compatibility that extends beyond conventional military leadership. This melding of ideas not only validates the Marine Corps' forward thinking approach to nurturing leadership and operational efficiency but also serves as a blueprint for embedding LMX theory within military practices. The table entries that follow underscore the practical application of LMX principles in enhancing military readiness, adaptability, and the effectiveness of Marine Corps operations. This narrative not only sheds light on the intrinsic value of integrating leadership theories with military doctrine but also underscores the dynamic interplay between strategic planning and the cultivation of effective leader-member exchanges, positioning these principles as pivotal to the operational success and organizational resilience of the U.S. Marine Corps. This comprehensive approach shows the potential of LMX theory to inform and enrich military leadership models, offering insights into achieving strategic objectives through effective leader-member relationships.



Table 5. LMX Alignment: MCDP-1 Warfighting

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
MCDP-1 Warfighting	Philosophy of Command	“It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we fight...command and control must be decentralized.” (USMC, 1997, p. 9)	Emphasizes decentralized command, reflecting LMX’s advocacy for <b>autonomy</b> and <b>trust</b> in leader-member relationships, enabling subordinates to make decisions based on their understanding of the commander’s intent.
MCDP-1 Warfighting	Training	“Training should not stop with the commencement of war; training must continue during war to adapt to the lessons of combat.” (USMC 1997, p. 7-8)	Highlights the ongoing development of Marines, aligning with LMX’s focus on <b>continuous growth</b> and <b>adaptation</b> within leader-member exchanges.
MCDP-1 Warfighting	Professional Military Education	“Professional military education is designed to develop creative thinking leaders...a continuous progressive process of development.” (USMC 1997, p. 10-11)	Reflects LMX’s emphasis on the <b>development and empowerment of individuals</b> , fostering leadership qualities that enhance the quality of leader-member exchanges.
MCDP-1 Warfighting	Personnel Management	“We should recognize that all Marines...are not interchangeable and should assign people to billets based on specific ability and temperament.” (USMC 1997, p. 13)	Aligns with LMX theory by recognizing the importance of <b>matching individual capabilities and characteristics with specific roles</b> , enhancing the effectiveness of leader-member exchanges.
MCDP-1 Warfighting	Organizing for War	“The operating forces must be organized to provide forward deployed or rapidly deployable forces capable of conducting expeditionary operations in any environment.” (USMC 1997, p. 4)	Demonstrates an understanding of the need for adaptable and flexible organizational structures, a principle that can be extended to the dynamic and <b>differentiated nature of leader-member relationships</b> in LMX theory.

## 5. MCDP-6 Command and Control

The analysis of MCDP-6 “Command and Control” through the LMX lens reveals a profound alignment between the Marine Corps’ doctrines and the principles of effective leadership. This synergy emphasizes a deep appreciation for nuanced leadership dynamics, emphasizing decentralized decision-making, individual initiative, and trust-based leader-follower relationships. Central to MCDP-6 is the mission command and control philosophy, advocating for subordinate empowerment and autonomy, resonating with



LMX theory's emphasis on high-quality exchanges and the pivotal role of initiative in operational success. The document champions low-level subordinate initiative, aligning with LMX's focus on proactive behavior and individual agency, thereby fostering an environment where Marines are encouraged to act decisively in alignment with the commander's intent. Furthermore, MCDP-6's emphasis on mutual trust and clear communication of the commander's intent mirrors LMX's principles, highlighting the importance of mutual respect and confidence in the capabilities of team members. This analysis not only showcases the compatibility between military command doctrines and LMX theory but also highlights the Marine Corps' modern leadership approaches in navigating the evolution of modern warfare. By integrating LMX principles within its command and control strategies, the Corps exemplifies a leadership model that values adaptability, trust, and empowerment, ensuring its continued efficacy and integrity as a modern military force. The below analysis table succinctly captures the core alignments between MCDP-6 and LMX theory, illustrating the forward-thinking approach of the Marine Corps in embedding modern leadership principles into its operational ethos.



Table 6. LMX Alignment: MCDP-6 Command and Control

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
MCDP-6 Command and Control	Mission Command and Control	“Mission command and control relies on the use of mission tactics...leaving subordinates as free as possible to choose the manner of accomplishment.” (USMC 2018, p. 3-6)	Highlights <b>autonomy and empowerment</b> , akin to LMX’s focus on <b>trust in subordinates’ decision-making</b> abilities.
MCDP-6 Command and Control	Mutual Trust	“Mission command and control demands mutual trust...confidence in the abilities and judgment of subordinates, peers, and seniors.” (USMC 2018, p. 3-10 )	Reflects the LMX principle of building effective relationships based on <b>mutual trust and respect</b> .
MCDP-6 Command and Control	Commander’s Intent	“A commander’s intent, expressed clearly before the evolution begins, is an essential part of command and control.” (USMC 2018, p. 1-5)	Echoes LMX’s concept of aligning organizational goals through <b>clear communication</b> .
MCDP-6 Command and Control	Low-Level Initiative	“Initiative is an essential element of mission command and control since subordinates must be able to act without instructions.” (USMC 2018, p. 3-7)	Aligns with LMX’s emphasis on <b>proactive behavior</b> and <b>responsibility among team members</b> .
MCDP-6 Command and Control	Leadership	“Another important role of leadership will be to create a close-knit sense of team which is essential to developing trust and understanding within the organization.” (USMC 2018, p. 3-18)	Highlights the importance of leadership in <b>building trust and cohesion</b> , foundational to effective LMX relationships.

## 6. MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines

The analysis of MCWP 6-10, Leading Marines, through the lens of LMX theory, reveals a profound interaction between the Marines’ core principles and the foundational aspects of LMX. This connection emphasizes the importance of developing and focusing on the quality of the relationship between leaders and their teams. The text advocates for a leadership style that encourages high standards alongside supportive growth environments, mirroring LMX’s focus on reciprocal respect and responsibility. It also highlights the importance of leader competence, self-awareness, and the ability to understand and cater to the unique needs and motivations of each Marine, championing a philosophy that values growth, job satisfaction, and effective communication. Moreover, the emphasis on discipline, setting the example, moral courage, adaptability, innovation, and decentralization in MCWP 6-10 resonates with LMX’s principles, advocating for a



leadership approach that fosters respect, trust, and autonomy, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of leader-member exchanges. This analysis, presented in the following LMX comparative-analysis table, illustrates the deep alignment between the Marines’ leadership practices and LMX theory, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of effective leadership within the Marine Corps.

Table 7. LMX Alignment: MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines	The Relationship Between Leaders and Their Marines	“The relation between officers and enlisted men should in no sense be that of superior to inferior... but rather that of teacher to scholar or better still of father to son.” (USMC 2019, p. 1-2)	Demonstrates LMX’s emphasis on <b>differentiated, high-quality relationships</b> , paralleling the dynamic of a <b>nurturing relationship</b> such as parent-child or teacher-student.
MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines	Knowing Who We Are and What We Represent	“The spirit of the Corps... is found in the hearts... of all Marines.” (USMC 2019, p. 1-23)	Highlights the importance of <b>shared identity and spirit</b> , aligning with LMX by underlining how effective leader-member exchanges are grounded by a <b>common sense of purpose</b> .
MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines	Leadership Principles	“Know your Marines and look out for their welfare” (USMC 2019, p. 2-7)	Aligns with LMX’s principle of <b>building individualized relationships</b> based on a <b>deep understanding of each member’s needs and motivations</b> .
MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines	Discipline	“The foundation of discipline is respect... True discipline does not stem from fear of punishment but from personal pride in the unit and loyalty to comrades.” (USMC 2019, p. 2-12)	Reflects LMX’s focus on <b>mutual respect and loyalty</b> as foundational to effective leadership, indicating discipline is most effectively achieved through a strong leader-member bond.
MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines	Decentralization	“Decentralization is simply authorizing subordinates to act.” (USMC 2019, p. 3-27)	Demonstrates LMX’s emphasis on <b>autonomy and trust</b> , key for effective decentralized decision-making and fostering high-quality leader-member exchanges.





## 7. MCDP-7 Learning

The analysis of MCDP-7, Learning through the LMX theory lens further demonstrate the seamless alignment between the Marine Corps' dedication to continuous learning and the foundational principles of LMX. This profound alignment is evident in the Corps' philosophy that views the development of the mind as a crucial, career-long journey, mirroring LMX's advocacy for the continuous growth and development of followers within high-quality, leader-follower relationships. MCDP-7 champions the concept of the "Learning Leader," (MCDP-7, Ch. 4, p. 4-3) one who values open discussion and mutual respect, reflecting LMX's focus on reciprocal learning and influence, thereby enhancing leader-member exchanges. Additionally, the emphasis on creating learning environments that replicate combat scenarios aligns with LMX principles of fostering supportive contexts for development, tailored to organizational and individual needs. The strategic advantage gained from cultivating a learning-focused culture mirrors LMX's focus of mutual growth that helps foster a lifelong intellectual curiosity. The accompanying analysis table not only reveals the integration of LMX principles into the Marine Corps' educational frameworks but also underscores the Corps' advanced leadership and teaching methodologies. By weaving leadership and learning together, MCDP-7 Learning enriches the understanding of LMX theory, demonstrating its applicability in enhancing operational success and organizational resilience. The Marine Corps' commitment to a leadership model that prioritizes adaptability, mutual trust, empowerment, and a supportive learning culture ensures its standing as a formidable and effective modern military force. This commitment not only reflects the essence of LMX theory but also underscores the deep interconnection between dynamic leadership strategies and comprehensive educational practices.



Table 8. LMX Alignment: MCDP-7 Learning

Publication Name	Section Title	Direct Quote from Publication	Key Point/Concept Aligning to LMX
MCDP-7 Learning	Continuous Learners	“Developing the mind as a weapon is a career-long process. Marines are continuous learners...” (USMC 2020, p. 1-19)	Highlights the LMX emphasis on <b>continuous development</b> and <b>learning</b> in leadership.
MCDP-7 Learning	The Learning Leader	“Leaders encourage open discussion...and learn from anyone at any time in any place.” (USMC 2020 p. 4-11)	Reflects LMX’s focus on <b>mutual respect</b> and <b>reciprocal learning exchanges</b> between leaders and members.
MCDP-7 Learning	The Role of Learning in Warfighting	“Success in warfare depends on Marines developing an intellectual edge...” (USMC 2020, p. 1-6)	Aligns with LMX theory by emphasizing the strategic advantage of <b>adaptive and educated leaders</b> and followers.
MCDP-7 Learning	Learning Environments	“Marines create and foster learning environments that mirror the ways they fight...” (USMC 2020, p. 3-4)	Demonstrates the LMX principle of <b>creating supportive environments</b> for <b>growth and development</b> .
MCDP-7 Learning	Organizational Culture	“The Marine Corps’ culture of learning instills these beliefs and values beginning with turning civilians into Marines...” (USMC 2020, p. 2-3)	Illustrates how the Marine Corps’ learning culture embodies LMX’s focus on <b>shared values</b> and <b>mutual development</b> .

### C. GAP ANALYSIS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR LMX IMPLEMENTATION

As the Marine Corps shifts its focus inward, restructuring its forces to become more agile and better equipped to address pacing threats, the integration of LMX theory emerges as a strategic asset in achieving these critical goals (Berger, 2019). This recalibration towards a more nimble and responsive force structure necessitates a deep dive into the dynamics of leader-follower relationships within the Marine Corps. Such a shift stresses the importance for developing interpersonal connections, where the core principles of LMX theory can provide a framework for developing trust-based, empowering relationships that are pivotal in high-stakes environments. By prioritizing the quality of these individual interactions, the Corps stands to not only elevate the effectiveness of its leadership but also to foster a culture where every Marine is recognized for their unique contributions, thereby enhancing unit cohesion and operational adaptability. In this landscape of transformation, LMX theory does not just serve as a theoretical model but as



a practical tool in sculpting a force that is as relationally proficient as it is tactically and technically skilled, marking a significant evolution in the Corps' approach to leadership and team dynamics.

## **1. Current State of LMX**

Within the Marine Corps, the principles of LMX theory are not formally recognized within official leadership doctrine, though I have argued they are intrinsically practiced and interwoven into its leadership culture. This informal alignment with LMX principles is observed in the Marine Corps' foundational ideals, philosophies, and doctrines, which emphasize the cultivation of leaders who excel not only in tactical and technical proficiency but also in inspiring, understanding, and guiding their Marines through complex operational environments. The Marine Corps' forward-looking vision stresses this integration of LMX principles, advocating for modernized training and operational frameworks that prioritize adaptability, innovation, and the recognition of each Marine's unique abilities and potential. This approach mirrors LMX's focus on enhancing the quality of leader-member exchanges, aiming to create an environment where leaders are equipped for meaningful interactions that bolster unit cohesion, morale, and effectiveness. The informal yet foundational presence of LMX in the Marine Corps' leadership practices signals a readiness to formally integrate LMX principles more explicitly into its leadership development frameworks.

## **2. Desired State of LMX**

The envisioned strategic integration of LMX theory into the Marine Corps' leadership development process represents a pivotal shift, formalizing and embedding LMX principles within Marine Corps leadership doctrine to place relational skills alongside technical and tactical prowess. By incorporating LMX into leadership training, the Marine Corps aims to furnish leaders with the necessary tools to build trust-based relationships, crucial for enhancing team cohesion, morale, and operational effectiveness. This approach, emphasizing a balance between relational skill-building and combat readiness through scenario-based training, aligns with the Corps' commitment to a holistic leadership development strategy. It underscores the importance of excelling in human



dimensions of leadership, nurturing effective leader-member relationships as strategic assets for developing an adaptable, cohesive, and resilient force ready to confront modern and future conflicts. This integration reflects the Marine Corps' adaptive strategy to maintain its legacy of excellence in an evolving military landscape, ensuring Marines are equipped for contemporary operational complexities while preserving the Marine Corps' storied traditions of honor, courage, and commitment. Through modernized frameworks that prioritize adaptability, innovation, and recognizing each Marine's unique potential, the deliberate emphasis on LMX principles signals a progressive step towards bolstering the Corps' maximizing the leadership potential of every Marine within its ranks.

### **3. Identified Gaps**

In examining the alignment of LMX theory with the current Marine Corps doctrine and future vision, there are distinct areas that call for improvement. While the Marine Corps' doctrine rightly values the relational dynamics fundamental to leadership, the practical application of these concepts reveals several gaps. Addressing these discrepancies is crucial to fully realize the potential of LMX theory within the Marine Corps' leader development processes. The following are key gaps identified within the analysis:

#### ***a. Direct Alignment with LMX***

LMX theory emphasizes cultivating high-quality, individualized relationships between leaders and followers, which aligns closely with the principles outlined in Marine Corps doctrine. However, a notable gap exists: while the doctrine implicitly supports the relational dynamics central to LMX, it does not explicitly recognize or adopt LMX terminology or methodologies. Marine Corps doctrine does not explicitly endorse any single leadership theory; instead, it provides a practical framework focused on developing leadership qualities the Marine Corps believes to be required. This oversight limits the doctrine's potential to fully embrace and operationalize the relational aspects of leadership, focusing instead on continuing to develop technical and tactical proficiencies. First steps to integrating LMX theory into the Marine Corps' leadership practices begins with raising awareness and disseminating its principles among those involved in leader development. This essential first step paves the way for a more direct incorporation of LMX theory,



bridging the current gap by emphasizing the importance of personalized leader-follower exchanges alongside traditional skill sets. Such integration aims to enhance leadership effectiveness within the Marine Corps, marrying the established collective ethos with a deeper focus on individual relationship-building. This approach fosters a more adaptive and responsive leadership culture, aligning with both the Marine Corps' operational demands and its foundational values.

***b. Operationalization of Relational Dynamics***

The Marine Corps' doctrine rightly emphasizes the critical role of trust, respect, and mutual understanding in effective leadership, yet it stops short of detailing specific strategies for cultivating these elements within its leader development programs. Although the doctrine recognizes the value of strong leader-follower relationships and suggests shared experiences and challenges as foundational to building trust-based relationships, the practical application of these principles often overlooks the diverse operational contexts of various MOSs. Many MOSs, not being combat arms, operate in environments far removed from traditional combat challenges, facing distinct sets of obstacles. For support roles, the shared experiences and adversities differ significantly, necessitating tailored strategies to foster relational dynamics effectively. This gap highlights the need for a more nuanced approach in the doctrine, one that acknowledges the varied operational realities across the Marine Corps and provide specific guidance on developing high-quality leader-member relationships within these diverse contexts.

***c. Differentiation in Leader-Follower Relationships***

The examination of LMX theory within the Marine Corps doctrine reveals a critical gap: the lack of explicit recognition and management of differentiation in leader-follower relationships. While the doctrine underscores the necessity for leaders to cultivate strong, trust-based relationships characterized by mutual respect and open communication, it overlooks the reality of the natural emergence of “in-group” and “out-group” dynamics central to LMX theory. This oversight is consequential; doctrinal emphasis on uniform leader-follower bonds does not extend to strategies for addressing the variations in these relationships, nor does it contemplate the repercussions of perceived favoritism that



differentiation might foster. Without direct guidance on navigating these complexities, leaders are left without a roadmap, potentially impacting unit cohesion and morale. Addressing this gap is pivotal for upholding the integrity of leadership within the Marine Corps and ensuring equitable and effective management of all leader-follower dynamics, emphasized by a commitment to the principles of equity and equality in resource distribution. This approach is vital for fostering high-quality LMX that ensure fair treatment and access to opportunities for every member, enhancing overall team cohesion and performance.

#### **4. Needs Assessment**

In assessing the integration of LMX theory within the Marine Corps' leadership framework, it becomes evident that certain gaps hinder the full realization of its potential to enhance leader-follower dynamics. This needs assessment aims to identify specific areas where the doctrine can evolve to more closely align with LMX principles, ensuring leaders at all levels are equipped to foster effective, individualized relationships. Addressing these needs will not only bridge the existing gaps but also strengthen the Corps' leadership culture, promoting a more adaptive and responsive approach to leadership.

##### ***a. Need for Explicit LMX Integration into Marine Corps Leader Development***

The integration of LMX theory into Marine Corps leadership practices necessitates a direct and explicit alignment with LMX principles, beyond the implicit acknowledgment currently found in the doctrine. This deliberate alignment entails the comprehensive development and systematic integration into existing training programs designed to educate Marine Corps leaders on the importance and transformative potential of nurturing high-quality, individualized relationships with their followers. Such relationships are foundational to building a cohesive and resilient force. This integration process also demands the establishment of robust assessment and feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of these leader-follower exchanges comprehensively, providing a structured approach to measure and enhance the relational dynamics that are central to LMX theory. Implementing these mechanisms is vital for



reinforcing and continually refining the quality of interactions between leaders and followers, ensuring that the Marine Corps' leadership culture is both adaptive and aligned with contemporary leadership practices. This strategic focus on relational dynamics represents a significant evolution in leadership development, positioning the Marine Corps to fully leverage the benefits of LMX theory in fostering an environment where every Marine feels valued, understood, and motivated to achieve their highest potential.

***b. Need for a Strategic Framework to Enhance Relational Dynamics***

To operationalize the relational dynamics of trust, respect, and mutual understanding effectively, the Marine Corps requires a structured approach that caters to the diverse operational contexts of its various MOSs. The doctrine should acknowledge the differences and various challenges faced by across the Marine Corps and develop a unique framework to better develop the leaders within each niche specialty. This strategic framework should delineate clear, actionable steps for leaders to engage with their team members on a deeper level. It could include methodologies for identifying and leveraging individual strengths, acknowledging and addressing team members' concerns, and facilitating open, honest communication. Tailored leadership strategies might involve structured mentorship programs, leadership workshops focused on developing relational skills like conflict resolution, and incorporate regular team-building exercises designed to simulate shared challenges and achievements. Furthermore, this framework should emphasize the importance of flexibility and adaptability in leadership approaches, encouraging leaders to customize their strategies to fit the unique needs and dynamics of their MOS. For non-combat roles, where the shared experiences of hardship and danger are less common, the framework could suggest alternative avenues for fostering unity and camaraderie, such as collaborative problem-solving tasks, joint professional development initiatives, and community service projects. The development and implementation of this strategic framework would signal a significant commitment by the Marine Corps to enhancing the quality of leader-follower interactions across the board. By providing leaders with the resources and guidance needed to navigate the complexities of relational dynamics within their specific operational contexts, the Marine Corps can enhance leadership



effectiveness, improve morale, and strengthen the overall cohesion and readiness of its units.

*c. Need to Acknowledge and Manage Differentiation*

Addressing the gap in managing differentiation in leader-follower relationships within the Marine Corps doctrine is critical for maintaining the integrity of its leadership. The lack of explicit guidance on navigating “in-group” and “out-group” dynamics could undermine unit cohesion and morale. The development of clear, actionable guidance that specifically address the management of these relational dynamics is a fundamental step towards mitigating potential negative impacts. Such guidance should outline procedures for recognizing and minimizing biases, ensuring all team members feel equally valued, irrespective of their proximity to leadership. Additionally, revising existing leadership training programs should not only raise awareness about the existence and effects of “in-group” and “out-group” dynamics but also arm leaders with practical strategies to foster a culture of inclusion and mutual respect. Training topics might include effective communication techniques, the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse contributions, and methods for actively engaging all team members in leadership activities and decision-making processes.

**D. CONCLUSION OF ANALYSIS**

The Marine Corps has, tacitly and historically, woven the principles of LMX theory into the fabric of its foundational doctrines. This implicit integration of LMX principles is reflective of the Corps’ commitment to excellence, adaptability, and the development of strong, reciprocal relationships between leaders and their Marines. As the Marine Corps continues to refine its vision and strategies to confront the complexities of future military operations, the deliberate and more explicit incorporation of LMX theory into its leadership development processes becomes essential. Recognizing and directly naming LMX as a core component of leadership within the Marine Corps will facilitate a direct and concerted effort to further embed these principles across various development initiatives. By formally acknowledging the role of LMX in enhancing operational readiness, decision-making, and unit cohesion, the Marines can more effectively leverage this theory to guide the refinement





of training programs, mentorship models, and organizational culture. This strategic emphasis on LMX not only reaffirms the Corps' dedication to fostering high-quality leader-member exchanges but also sets the stage for a more adaptive, resilient, and effective force, ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century with unparalleled leadership and unity.



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## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Too many companies believe people are interchangeable. Truly gifted people never are. They have unique talents. Such people cannot be forced into roles they are not suited for, nor should they be. Effective leaders allow great people to do the work they were born to do.”

—Warren Bennis (Bennis & Biederman, 1998, p. 210)

### A. SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

In concluding this thesis, it's essential to reflect upon the journey undertaken from its inception through the comprehensive exploration of leadership development within the Marine Corps. Initiated with the intent to examine the Corps' leader development process, this study specifically scrutinized the role of mentorship and the imperative of evolving leaders into effective coaches and mentors. The investigation identified a prevailing focus on the tactical and technical proficiency of leaders and followers, revealing a significant gap in the development of interpersonal skills between them. By highlighting this discrepancy, this thesis aims to pivot the conversation towards embracing modern leadership development theories like LMX, which emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills like coaching, mentoring, and relationship-building. These skills are increasingly recognized as crucial for operational effectiveness, cohesion, and effective team management.

Through rigorous analysis, including a review of Marine Corps doctrine and alongside a review of research studies with civilian organizations, this work demonstrates that the Marine Corps possesses the foundational elements and culture conducive to the principles of LMX theory. Moreover, the current institutional climate, characterized by an eagerness to experiment and innovate, provides a unique opportunity to integrate LMX theory as a cornerstone of leadership development within the Marine Corps. This shift aligns closely with the Commandant's vision for the future force and with TECOM's 21st Century Learning initiative, which advocate for a more personalized, agile, adaptive, and forward-thinking leadership cadre. By adopting LMX theory, the Marine Corps can leverage its existing cultural strengths to enhance leadership effectiveness, foster deeper



mentorship relationships, and drive the realization of the Commandant's objectives and TECOM's educational strategies to their desired endstate. This adoption not only promises to bolster the Corps' operational capabilities but also to cultivate a generation of leaders who are as competent in interpersonal dynamics as they are in tactical and technical operations. In essence, this thesis advocates for a reimagined approach to leadership development, one that places a premium on the relational aspects of leadership, thereby ensuring the Marine Corps remains at the forefront of military excellence.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

Beginning as an inquiry into the broader realm of leadership development within the Marine Corps, this study initially sought to understand how the Marine Corps develops its leaders, focusing on progression and balance between technical skills at the start of their career through a much more generalist strategy that promotes continued learning and education through various PME courses. It was through this broad examination that the LMX theory emerged as a particularly relevant framework, offering insights into the potential for enhancing leadership effectiveness through the nurturing of interpersonal dynamics, mentorship, and soft skills. The unexpected alignment of LMX with the Corps' existing values and culture prompted a focused investigation into its merits and applicability. The findings, which are structured around the original research questions, reveal a detailed understanding of the Marine Corps' leadership development strategies and their intersection with modern leadership theories.

### **1. How Do Marine Corps Leadership Doctrine and LMX Theory Align and Differ in Promoting Leader-Follower Relationships?**

Exploring the relationship between the Marine Corps' leadership doctrine and LMX theory reveals a shared value and significance of leader-follower dynamics, yet they diverge in their application and emphasis. The Marine Corps, with its strong developmental focus on individual tactical and technical proficiencies, acknowledges the importance of relational dynamics but tends to leave their development to chance, offering no formal or standardized education on the subject matter. On the other hand, LMX theory prioritizes the cultivation of high-quality, personal relationships between leaders and followers as the



cornerstone of effective leadership, highlighting the direct impact of such relationships on outcomes like performance and job satisfaction (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The shift in the Marine Corps' approach, from the structured Marine Corps Mentorship Program to the more flexible Marine Leader Development Program, reflects a growing appreciation for the voluntary, organic nature of mentorship interactions, aligning more closely with LMX's emphasis on quality exchanges. However, despite this progression, there remains a notable gap in fully embracing the deliberate cultivation of high-quality exchanges as envisioned by LMX theory. General Berger's Planning Guidance and envisioned reform to modernize TECOM's methodology indicates another strong shift towards LMX principles, seeking to leverage the existing strengths of individual Marines by fostering a culture of continuous learning, adaptive leadership, and personalized development. This approach emphasizes the importance of recognizing and nurturing the unique capabilities and aspirations of each Marine, thereby ensuring that mentorship and training are not only more relevant and engaging but also aligned with the dynamic demands of modern operational environments.

## **2. What Deficiencies Are Identified in Marine Corps Mentorship Practices When Compared to the Principles of LMX Theory?**

Marine Corps mentorship practices, as outlined in the Marine Leader Development (MLD) policy (DON, 2017) and doctrinal publications, demonstrate significant discrepancies when compared with LMX theory's emphasis on personalized, high-quality leader-follower reciprocal exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Despite the Marine Corps' leadership traits and principles resonating with LMX's focus on mutual trust, respect, and individualized interactions, current practices often fall short of fostering the depth of dynamic relationships that LMX deems crucial for effective leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Harris et al., 2014). This discrepancy underscores an opportunity for the Marine Corps to transition from its traditional focus on leaderships traits and principles geared towards developing technical and tactical proficiency towards a more relationship-centered approach, as advocated in LMX theory. This potential shift, subtly indicated by the Marine Corps' adoption of more flexible mentorship protocols, acknowledges the



increasing recognition of the importance of organic, quality relationships for leadership effectiveness.

The MLD policy's hierarchical and structured approach may inhibit the formation of the reciprocal, dynamic relationships at the heart of LMX, with its role-based leadership development model typically confining interactions within the immediate chain of command. This structure limits the opportunities for the trust-based exchanges essential for leadership effectiveness and follower development that LMX champions. Integrating LMX principles into the Marine Corps' leadership development programs, by revising the MLD policy and Marine Corps doctrine to encourage mentorship beyond conventional boundaries and cultivating a culture of personalized, meaningful interactions, could address this misalignment (Harris et al., 2014). Implementing such strategic adjustments promises to significantly improve the Marine Corps' mentorship efficacy, better aligning with LMX theory to foster a more adaptable and cohesive force.

### **3. What Recommendations Can Enhance Marine Corps Leadership Development to More Effectively Integrate LMX Theory to Strengthen Leader-Follower Dynamics?**

To significantly enhance Marine Corps leadership development and seamlessly integrate LMX theory there must be an official acceptance within the Marine Corps to initiate the allocation of resources to develop formal training centered on the principles of LMX within the existing leadership development frameworks. This foundational step towards cultivating high-quality, trust-based relationships between leaders and followers echoes espoused sentiments by many of the most touted leaders forged from within the Marine Corps. This training will equip leaders with the relational skills to develop trust, active listening, conflict resolution, and empathy are necessary skills to effectively nurture leader-follower interactions, advancing toward a leadership model that is more inclusive and responsive to the individual needs of each Marine.

Complementing this, I recommend the promotion of cross-hierarchical mentorship opportunities, aligning with Berger's (2019) vision for adaptive leadership. This initiative aims to harness the wide array of experiences and perspectives within the Corps, enriching the depth of leader-follower relationships and steering the organizational culture towards



more dynamic and effective leadership practices. This cross pollination of ideas further establishes a culture that emphasizes continuous feedback and open communication. By leveraging this cross-organizational conversations, workshops, and illustrative success stories, the Corps can underscore how LMX-based practices enhance leadership effectiveness, foster follower satisfaction, and improve overall unit performance (Avolio et al. (2008). These concerted efforts, embodying a forward-thinking approach to leadership development, promising to not only align the Marine Corps' foundational values but also ensures its readiness and resilience in confronting the complexities of modern and future military challenges.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the findings and insights gathered from this research, the following recommendations provide a strategic implementation plan designed to bridge the identified relational-gaps of current leader development initiatives in order to improve leadership competencies throughout the Marine Corps. These recommendations aim to integrate modern leadership theories into the Corps' existing infrastructure, focusing on interpersonal skills and mentorship to reach the desired endstate of nurturing more high-quality leader-follower relationships. Through these suggestions, I envision a leadership landscape where the development emphasis shifts away from individual traits and towards relational aspects of leadership, resulting in a development strategy where relational aspects are given equal precedence alongside tactical and technical proficiency, thus preparing Marine leaders at all levels to effectively confront the many multifaceted challenges of the next fight.

#### **1. Squad Level Implementation**

At the squad level, the focus shifts to cultivating high-quality leader-member relationships at the individual level developing mutual trust and respect, as highlighted by Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995). These principles are foundational in developing deep, individualized connections between leaders and followers, emphasizing the recognition and respect of each team member's unique needs and



potential. This stage is pivotal for establishing trust-based relationships, crucial for both unit cohesion and operational effectiveness.

- **Guided Discussions, Building Competency in Relational Skills**

The first recommendation is to launch small unit leader-led discussions aimed at fostering relational skills among team members. By encouraging first-line leaders to proactively build a solid foundation with their Marines, these discussions can significantly enhance open communication, conflict resolution, collaborative problem-solving, and empathy at the grassroots level. This approach empowers leaders to establish strong, trust-based connections with their Marines.

- **Integrate Relational Skill Development into Existing Training Infrastructure**

Developing these relational skills can be more formally developed and integrated within well-established programs, creating a standardized process to help incorporate into other facets and training programs. By threading these conversations through established training vessels, such as the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR), Uniformed Victim Advocate (UVA), and Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training (UMAPIT) sessions, Marines leading the discussion can tailor specific topics to the unique needs and experiences of their units. This customization allows for a deeper exploration of relational dynamics, emphasizing how these skills can enhance team cohesion, improve conflict resolution, and contribute to a more supportive leadership climate that places a premium on relational dynamics.

## **2. Platoon Level Implementation**

My second recommendation is to acknowledge the existence of LMX differentiation, this is designed for platoon leadership (Platoon Commander and Platoon Sergeant) to deepen their understanding of LMX differentiation and its practical implications. The focus is on equipping these leaders with the knowledge and tools to customize their approach for each Marine, aiming to develop high-quality exchanges, enhance unit cohesion and performance, and ultimately help create a leadership climate





that where all members feel valued and understood. It is important to note that this training should be done in a format conducive to open dialog, much like a guided discussion or symposium with other Platoon Command teams present to share their experiences. These core principles are listed below.

**Core Components:**

- **Understanding LMX Differentiation:** An introduction to the concept of LMX differentiation, highlighting how diverse leader-follower relationships can impact team dynamics.
- **Customized Leadership Strategies:** Training on assessing individual Marines' strengths, needs, and aspirations to tailor leadership approaches effectively.
- **Fostering High-Quality Exchanges:** Techniques for building trust, open communication, and mutual respect to elevate the quality of leader-follower interactions.
- **Enhancing Unit Cohesion and Performance:** Strategies for leveraging LMX differentiation to improve overall team functionality and operational success.
- **Creating an Inclusive Environment:** Best practices for ensuring all Marines feel included and appreciated, regardless of their role or relationship with leadership.

The below strategies are to help implement these principles and to better manage diverse relationship and leverage individual differences in order to develop the platoon's overall performance (Le Blanc & Gonzalez-Roma, 2012; Kim et al., 2021).

- **After-Action Reviews (AARs):** Integrating LMX differentiation insights into AARs, encouraging leaders and Marines to reflect on the effectiveness of **leader-follower interactions** and their impact on mission outcomes.



- **Reflection Practices:** Promoting the use of personal and guided reflections to internalize lessons learned from training and operational experiences, focusing on continuous improvement in leadership approaches.

By institutionalizing this Platoon Command team symposium, the Marine Corps can systematically enhance the leadership capabilities of its Platoon Commanders and Sergeants, ensuring they are prepared to navigate the complexities of LMX differentiation. The ultimate goal is to cultivate a leadership culture that values personalized engagement and recognizes the unique contributions of each Marine, thereby driving the effectiveness and resilience of Marine Corps units.

### 3. Company Level Implementation

My recommendation is a continued training module that targets leaders at the company staff level, focusing on “LMX Differentiation and Its Implications” to enhance leadership effectiveness within larger groups. At this level the focus is to equip Company Commanders and their staff with strategies to balance high-quality exchanges with group cohesion, emphasizing communication, empathy, and fairness. Leaders should learn how to reinforce transparency and develop a collective team identity through developing shared goals and values, maintaining unity despite the natural variance to the many relationships within the company. Again, this training format should be along a similar guided discussion or leader symposium format where Company Command teams gather to discuss their experiences.

#### Core Components:

- **Balancing Individual and Group Dynamics:** Strategies for maintaining high-quality exchanges without compromising group cohesion, focusing on key skills such as communication, empathy, and fairness.
- **Mitigating Perceptions of Favoritism:** Techniques for ensuring all members feel equally valued and engaged, fostering an environment where inclusivity is prioritized.



- **Cultivating Team Identity:** Methods to reinforce transparency, regular check-ins, and a collective identity through shared goals and values, aiming to preserve unity across the company.

**Practical Application Strategies:**

- **Cross-Training Initiatives:** Implementing structured cross-training to provide Marines with a broad understanding of different roles and responsibilities, enhancing team versatility, and operational readiness.
- **Operational Planning Inclusion:** Actively involving Marines in the operational planning process, leveraging diverse perspectives to enrich planning outcomes and create a sense of ownership.
- **Mentorship and Coaching Circles:** Establishing forums for open dialogue, experience sharing, and addressing leadership challenges, supporting leadership development and relational dynamics within the Company.

By integrating this training module at the company staff level, the Marine Corps can equip its leaders with the necessary tools to skillfully manage LMX differentiation. Leaders will be prepared to foster individualized relationships that contribute to the unit's operational effectiveness while ensuring that the principles of unity and inclusivity remain at the forefront of their leadership approach. This comprehensive strategy supports the development of adaptable, resilient leaders capable of enhancing both individual and team performance within the company.

**4. Organizational Level Implementation**

My recommendation for LMX integration at the organizational level, specifically within Battalion and Regimental commands is to establish a culture that values high-quality leader-follower relationships, developing opportunities for the implementation of feedback mechanisms throughout their organization that enables subordinate command teams to



learn from each other's experiences on how to better implement and manage relational skills as a means to bolster morale, unit cohesion, and operational effectiveness.

**Implementation Actions:**

- **Strategic Leadership Seminars:** Organizing seminars at the Battalion and Regimental levels to discuss the integration of LMX principles into leadership practices. These seminars would serve as platforms for commanders to engage in open dialogues, sharing insights and strategies for applying LMX theory effectively.
- **Cross-Unit Mentorship Programs:** Initiating mentorship programs that pair leaders from different units, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices. This cross-unit collaboration aims to broaden the application of LMX principles and reinforce the roles each unit has within the organization thus building lateral relationship for a more cohesive organization.

By adopting these strategies, Battalion and Regimental commands can ensure that leaders at all level develop relational skills that permeate throughout the Marine Corps. This approach not only strengthens the foundational relationships within unit but also enhances the Marine Corps' ability to navigate the complexities of modern warfare as a formidable, united force. The Marine Corps aims to foster a leadership culture that recognizes the invaluable contributions and potential of every Marine.

## 5. Summary

This comprehensive approach to integrating LMX principles, from the individual to the organizational level is deeply rooted in both classic and more modern research. The foundational studies by Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) have established the critical importance of high-quality leader-member relationships, a concept further explored and validated by Harris et al. (2014) and Xie et al. (2019), among others. These studies collectively underscore the versatility and applicability of LMX theory within various organizational contexts, including the Marine Corps. By adopting these



principles, the Marine Corps can reorient its leadership training program that is both holistic and adaptable, catering to the distinct needs of each Marine at every command level. This approach enhances the effectiveness of leadership interactions, fostering an environment of trust, respect, and mutual support that is pivotal for operational success. The strategic application of LMX theory across the Corps not only aligns with the organization's goals of readiness and adaptability but also promotes a culture where continuous learning and innovation are paramount. Consequently, this integration effort positions the Marine Corps as a resilient and cohesive force, capable of overcoming the complexities of modern warfare and poised to address future challenges with confidence and strategic foresight.

#### **D. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This exploration into LMX theory and its applicability and integration into the Marine Corps' leadership development framework is limited by several factors that warrant further examination. These challenges span from the alignment of LMX principles within existing initial training and PME curricula, to the variability in theory application due to the Corps' diverse organizational structure across ranks and MOSs. Additionally, the undertaking to scale and sustain LMX practices across the Corps is met with operational and structural hurdles that impact the theory's integration and effectiveness. These areas are pivotal to understanding the scope and impact of LMX theory within military leadership development and present unique opportunities for in-depth research. By addressing these limitations, future efforts can aim to refine the Corps' approach to leadership training, ensuring it is both comprehensive and conducive to refining our leadership development practices.

##### **1. Limitations Pertaining to Initial Training and Existing PME Curriculum for LMX Integration**

This research identifies a notable limitation of the Marine Corps' initial training and PME curriculum, primarily focused on the overarching process of leader development without diving into specific TECOM-approved instruction for potential alignment with LMX theory. Despite the comprehensive nature of existing curricula, such as Lance



Corporal Seminar, Sergeants Course, and Expeditionary Warfare School, designed to offer extensive leadership training across various career stages, they may not explicitly incorporate LMX principles and should be reviewed for congruencies. The absence of explicit LMX principles in leadership training programs could be indicative of organizational inertia, particularly insight inertia, where organizations are slow to recognize the need for change, and psychological inertia, which reflects resistance to altering established ways of operating due to comfort with the status quo or fear of the unknown (Huang et al., 2013). These aspects of organizational inertia both contribute to skepticism or hesitancy towards adopting new leader development approaches like LMX theory. These potential gaps not only emphasize a broader skepticism or hesitancy towards adopting new leadership models but also identify an opportunity for future research. A detailed examination of these courses could uncover essential gaps or commonalities with the core tenets of LMX theory, thereby providing a pathway to overcoming organizational inertia and enhancing leadership development within the Marine Corps.

Furthermore, this limitation may be exacerbated by concerns over the allocation of resources, with the explicit incorporation of LMX principles possibly perceived as necessitating significant investment in training and development, thereby risking the diversion of funds or attention from other established programs. Addressing this challenge calls for an in-depth review of existing PME curricula in comparison with LMX theory to locate areas suitable for adaptation. By engaging directly with curriculum developers, instructors, and course participants, future research can gain insights into the practical challenges and opportunities for fully integrating LMX principles into the Marine Corps' leadership development efforts. Such comprehensive exploration would not only enrich our understanding of the current state of leadership training within the Marine Corps but also inform targeted recommendations for more closely aligning the PME curriculum with LMX theory. Ultimately, this would contribute to strengthening the Marine Corps' leadership training framework, ensuring it is aligned with contemporary leadership practices and adequately prepares Marines for the complexities of modern military leadership, while carefully navigating the balance between innovative model adoption and the judicious allocation of resources.



## **2. Limitations to LMX Integration across Diverse Units and MOSs**

The organizational nuance within the various MOSs and across the Marine Corps presents a significant limitation to the research of this study. This study did not account for the various cultures that exist when reviewing the integration of LMX theory into the Marine Corps. The diverse nature of units creates unique leadership challenges, training needs, and various cultural norms across units and MOSs only adds to the complexity of the development and universal application for integrating LMX principles. This variability suggests that LMX integration efforts may need to be customized to address the unique operational roles, mission objectives, and sub-culture considerations inherent within the Marine Corps. Consequently, assessing the effectiveness of LMX principles in such a varied organizational landscape poses additional challenges, requiring nuanced evaluation strategies to capture the theory's impact accurately. This limitation identifies a valuable opportunity for future research to explore and develop a customized LMX integration strategy that acknowledges the distinct characteristics of various units and MOSs. Future studies could focus on conducting pilot program development and implementation in select units, developing MOS-specific guidelines for LMX to address cultural norms, and engaging in comprehensive dialogues with personnel across the Marine Corps to ensure the relevance and efficacy of LMX-based leadership practices. Future studies could focus on developing tailored approaches for LMX implementation to the unique contexts of various units and MOSs, aimed at overcoming cultural resistance developed from the cultural norms and leadership styles within various units. Such research endeavors would not only contribute to a more adaptable and effective leadership development framework but also enhance our understanding of how LMX theory can be operationalized within a complex and diverse organization.

## **3. Limitation to Uniform LMX Implementation**

The differential impact of LMX theory integration across ranks within the Marine Corps presents a challenge to uniformly enhancing leadership development. Junior Marines and senior officers engage in fundamentally different types of leadership responsibilities and interactions, suggesting that the benefits derived from LMX theory



could vary widely across the organizational hierarchy. Junior Marines, often at the receiving end of leadership, might benefit more from aspects of LMX that focus on mentorship and direct support, while senior officers may find value in LMX's emphasis on delegation, trust-building, and developing leadership within their ranks. This variability poses a limitation in forming broad conclusions about LMX's effectiveness Corps-wide, necessitating future research to explore how LMX principles can be adapted and applied to meet the distinct needs and challenges faced by Marines at various ranks. Tailoring LMX training and development initiatives to address the specific dynamics at each level of leadership could ensure that all Marines benefit from high-quality leader-member exchanges, enhancing overall leadership effectiveness and unit cohesion.

The integration of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory across all ranks within the Marine Corps faces other significant challenges due to the transient nature of personnel rotating to various units, as well as mustering Marines from various units to deploy for specific mission requirements for extended periods of time, which could hinder the development of stable, long-term relationships essential for LMX's success. This challenge is compounded by the Marine Corps' diverse array of units MOSs, introducing a level of variability in the application of LMX principles that can lead to inconsistent leadership practices and outcomes across different operational contexts. Such diversity within the organizational structure means the benefits derived from LMX theory could significantly vary across the organizational hierarchy, with junior Marines potentially gaining more from mentorship and direct support aspects of LMX, while senior officers might leverage the theory more for delegation, trust-building, and nurturing leadership qualities within their ranks. This rank-specific variability, along with the operational challenges and personnel dynamics of the Marine Corps, complicates the ability to draw broad, Corps-wide conclusions about LMX's effectiveness, highlighting the need for future research to carefully adapt and apply LMX principles to meet the unique needs and challenges faced by Marines at different levels of leadership.





#### **4. Limitations of Scalability and Sustainability**

The integration of LMX theory within the Marine Corps faces significant scalability and sustainability challenges due to the organization's broad reach, diverse roles, and the intense operational demands placed upon its personnel. These challenges are exacerbated by financial constraints and competing priorities for resources, which may result in the deprioritization of crucial investments in LMX training and development. Such financial limitations pose a risk to the consistent application and long-term impact of LMX principles across the Marine Corps' varied missions and operational settings. Additionally, the differential impact of LMX across ranks further complicates the uniform implementation of a leadership development strategy that is sensitive to the unique dynamics at each level of leadership, from junior Marines to senior officers.

The dynamic nature of military operations, characterized by frequent deployments and high personnel turnover, threatens the stability and continuity of LMX-focused behaviors, potentially diluting their effectiveness over time. This variability within the Corps underscores the necessity for future research to devise robust strategies that can accommodate the complexities of LMX integration, ensuring its scalability and sustainability even in the face of such challenges. Developing these strategies is essential for embedding LMX principles deeply into the Marine Corps' leadership culture, allowing for a flexible yet durable approach that can withstand the pressures of military demands. Such efforts are crucial for leveraging the full potential of LMX theory, ensuring that it translates into lasting and impactful concepts within the Marine Corps' leadership framework and contributes to the continued success of the organization.

#### **E. CLOSING STATEMENT**

Based on the preceding analysis, it is evident that the journey of enhancing leadership development in the Marine Corps through the lens of LMX is both necessary and complex. The exploration of LMX's potential to enrich the Marine Corps' leadership culture has outlined a new direction towards a more interconnected, effective, and empathetic military leadership model. By addressing the identified limitations and embracing the opportunities for integration, the Marine Corps stands on the line of



departure to begin a transformative shift in leadership development. This shift promises not only to elevate the operational effectiveness and cohesion of the Corps but also to ensure its enduring legacy of excellence. Looking towards the future, the continued pursuit of innovative leadership practices, guided by Leader-Member Exchange principles, will be pivotal in preparing the Marine Corps to navigate the challenges of an ever-evolving global landscape. The integration of LMX within the Marine Corps exemplifies a commitment to advancing leadership capabilities that resonate with the core values of honor, courage, and commitment, ensuring that every Marine is not only a warrior but also a leader equipped to thrive in any clime or place.



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