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Reinvigorating Maneuver Warfare: An Organizational Learning Analysis of A Failed Strategic  
Initiative

By

BP McCoy

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Of

Doctorate in Business Administration

In the Robinson College of Business

Of

Georgia State University

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
ROBINSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS  
2020

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the BRYAN PATRICK MCCOY Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University.

Richard Phillips, Dean

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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*Dr. Alana Nicastro*

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**“Body and spirit, I surrendered whole, to harsh instructors-and received a soul...”**

**-Rudyard Kipling**

My committee brought out the best academic in me through a perfect balance of demanding rigor, patience, compassion and unfailing support. My doctoral journey has been much more than the simple process of completing compulsory classes and assignments and accumulating knowledge. It was, for me, a transformative process of thinking that opened a whole new world of discovery and knowledge, a world with limitless horizons. I am forever in your debt for this gift.

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## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	After Action Review
CDT	Core Design Team
CMC	Commandant Marine Corps
COE	Center of Excellence
DOD	Department of Defense
IBP	Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield
FMFM	Fleet Marine Force Manual
FOE	Future Operating Environment
FRAGO	Fragmentary Order
FY	Fiscal Year
GCE	Ground Combat Element
GS	Government Service Employee
JOE	Joint Operating Environment
MDCP	Marine Doctrinal Publication
MCP	Marine Corps Planning Process
MCU	Marine Corps University
MCTOG	Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group
MOC	Marine Operating Concept
Mw	Maneuver Warfare
OL	Organizational Learning
SQ	Status Quo
TBS	The Basic School
TECOM	Training and Education Command
ToA	Theory of Action

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## **ABSTRACT**

Reinvigorating Maneuver Warfare: An Organizational Learning Analysis of a Failed Strategic Initiative.

by

BP McCoy

March 2020

Chair: Richard Baskerville

Major Academic Unit: Executive Doctorate in Business

The world is a dynamic and turbulent place. Organizations of all types regularly face the dual challenge of learning from the emerging realities of their environment and using that knowledge to accurately adapt to remain competitive. Often, the changes required to remain competitive demand a significant and irretrievable strategic investment of resources and changes in the status quo of how the organization will function going forward. Such strategic changes are often communicated in the form of mission or vision statements, campaign plans, or philosophies.

Considering the resources committed and the opportunity costs involved, strategic initiatives must be implemented with care and precision to succeed, as a failed implementation could pose an existential threat to the organization. This case study examines one organization's attempt and failure to sufficiently implement a strategic initiative. This study may be tailored and applied to any organization seeking the adaptive change necessary to succeed in the dynamic and contested environments of business or conflict. The study format is a cross-sectional single case study informed by the Theory of Action. The results of this study revealed five explanatory frames which serve to describe and explain the dynamics of the organization, and they illuminate the

influence Model I single-loop and Model II double-loop organizational learning systems have on the implementation of a strategic initiative. Captured within the explanatory frames was the discovery of a surprising anomaly, namely the presence of a *sub rosa* clan. The sub rosa clan's Model I behavioral control produced a *bête noires*<sup>1</sup> effect that countered the senior management's Model II learning efforts, sustained the status quo, and sunk the strategic initiative. This study contributes to the organizational learning, maneuver warfare, and control theory literature streams and offers managers potential corrective interventions that may be applied proactively and preemptively to enable the successful implementation of a strategic initiative.

**Keywords:** Organizational Learning, Theory of Action, Single-loop learning, Double-loop learning, Clans, Maneuver Warfare, Mission Command.

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<sup>1</sup> French; the literal translation is “black beast.” A *bête noires* is avoided by others. It may be a thing that is particularly dreadful.



## I INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the 29<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) General Alfred M. Gray led the seminal effort to publish FMFM-1 Warfighting (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a; USMC, 1989). This act represented a strategic initiative (Shivakumar, 2014) that officially changed the United States Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy from one of attrition to one of maneuver (Damian, 2001). The doctrinal change signaled a momentous shift in the Marine Corps' theory about war, how it prepares for war, and how it wages war (USMC, 1989). The shift from an attrition-focused philosophy to one focused on maneuver was strategic, as it determined the weapons the Marine Corps procured, how it organized its formations, and how it trained and educated its members (Brown, 2018; Shivakumar, 2014; Terriff, 2006a). Officially declaring the warfighting doctrine and philosophy for the Marine Corps and, therefore, the 'law of the land,' FMFM-1 Warfighting represented a seismic shift in the status quo throughout the organization that was not wholly embraced by all (Tucker, 1996). A schism simmered between the attritionists and the maneuverists (Anonymous, 2011) for nearly three decades.

In 2016, the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC General Robert B. Neller issued FRAGO-01/2016<sup>2</sup> as a call to action for the Marine Corps to 'reinvigorate Maneuver Warfare (Mw)' (USMC, 2016a). In turn, the Marine Corps' Training and Education Command (TECOM) held a series of three working group sessions over a two-year period in an effort to understand why the Marine Corps was not executing its foundational doctrine vigorously and how to reinvigorate the philosophy in practice (TECOM, 2016, 2017, 2018). One organization participating in the TECOM workshops was the

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<sup>2</sup> Fragmentary Orders extend or expand upon the original or base order. FRAGO-1 expanded on CMC's original planning guidance.

Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group (MCTOG). MCTOG, a formal schoolhouse and the Ground Combat Center of Excellence gamely responded to the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC's call to action by undertaking a strategic initiative of its own by issuing a long range campaign plan that restored Mw 'front and center' to its curriculum (MCTOG, 2018b). This study examines *in situ* MCTOG's attempt and the subsequent insufficient implementation of their strategic initiative to answer the research question: Why is it difficult for the Marine Corps to implement Mw despite 30 years of doctrine, training, and education efforts to do so? This study may be broadly adapted to any organization seeking the adaptive change necessary to succeed in the dynamic and contested environments of business or conflict as management challenges are not unique to one organization, rather they are created systemically and baked into organizational management (see Vaughan, 1996, p. 415), and aid in developing broader principles for implementing strategic initiatives (see Yin, 2009).

To provide full transparency and reveal to the reader my potential biases as a researcher, I will outline my personal background and involvement with the problem area. I am a retired Marine colonel who served during the time of the original implementation of FMFM-1 and the decades that followed. During my service, I experienced the transition to Mw from the perspective of the training and education continuum as a student in the first class to receive formal Mw instruction at Amphibious Warfare School (AWS) in 1991–1992. I also served as a tactics instructor at AWS and as the operations officer of TECOM, and I was well-versed on the levels of emphasis placed on Mw in the training and education continuum. From an operational perspective, I served as a company commander in the Gulf War in 1991, company commander from 1992 to 1995, and various operational staff positions. As an infantry battalion commander for two very kinetic tours in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, I gained a deep appreciation for the demands

that the reality of combat places on doctrine. Throughout all those experiences I encountered leaders and peers with varying degrees of understanding and commitment to Mw.

Currently, I am a contracted employee at MCTOG and provide curriculum development and delivery to newly selected ground combat battalion and regimental commanders. I also participated in the development of the MCTOG campaign plan. Due to my closeness to the problem area and my relationship to the members of MCTOG, I will break from the traditional third-person approach of academic writing and adopt a more transparent and authentic first-person approach for this study (Vita).

My steps to account for and mitigate any biases are addressed in Chapter III: Case Method, Chapter IV: Case Results, and Chapter V: Discussion, under the limitations section. While my bias is something I must acknowledge and mitigate, my up-close perspective of the problem area and the organization I conducted this study within also provided the foundation stone for discoveries. In the words of Root-Bernstein, sometimes the discoveries choose the discoverer. “What was found was always there but overlooked by habit, lack of interest or an untrained eye” (Root-Bernstein, 1989, p. 15, 66). Only when a subject is viewed through the lenses of various experiences and training, and by questioning what is known about a subject in a new way, can discoveries be unlocked. Root-Bernstein pointed to the heart of an inductive study through a quote attributed to Sir Francis Bacon, “the more ways you twist the lion’s tail, the more you make him roar.” While fully accounting for the bias my background may create, I also gain the ability as a researcher to dig deep into a stoic, devoted, and sometimes stiff-necked organization, and ask the hard questions.

Military organizations have particularly strong cultures and even stronger sub-cultures (Holmes-Eber, 2014b; Johnson, 2018; Kelly, 2008). These cultures are deeply intertwined with

traditions and artifacts, such as rituals and ceremonies (Builder, 1989; Hawkins, 2015; Johnson, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017) that create a Heideggerian *Dasein*<sup>3</sup> and define the organization's fundamental existence. Strong cultures, “while stable and lasting, are also hard to change” (Schein, 2017, p. 343), and, in a turbulent world, this might be a liability. Often, culture is seen as the issue holding organizations in the past and hindering change (Builder, 1989; Davidson, 2010; Hanson, 2001; Nielsen, 2014; Whiteley et al., 2013). Advancing organizations with strong cultures and subcultures forward into new contexts demands an adaptation not of their stable and lasting cultures, but through the adaptation of their organizational learning systems (Davidson, 2010). However, change must be an adaptation that is particularly coherent with the organizational being, i.e., its defining traditions and artifacts and values (Friesenborg, 2013; Schein, 1984). This study, informed by the Theory of Action (ToA) (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996), intends to investigate how organizational learning systems, not simply culture, impacted a military organization's efforts to adapt to and address future security challenges through the implementation of a strategic initiative to reinvigorate a warfighting philosophy.

### **I.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explain, through an qualitative, interpretive, cross-sectional, single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009), why there exists a gap between the espoused Mw theory held by a deeply traditional military organization and the actual theory in practice that is something short of Mw and perhaps remains attrition warfare. To inform this study, I applied

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger introduced the term *Dasein* (*in German being-there*) to describe how traditions can be so strong that they create a kind of collective—an experience of being that is peculiar to particular military organizations or branches.

ToA (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996) against a contemporary situation faced by a military organization as it attempted to effectuate a warfighting philosophy and meet the challenges created by an ever evolving operating environment and the changing character of war (USMC, 1997a, 2016c). More specifically, the organization in this study is seeking to adapt to the future operating environment (FOE) by evolving its training and education curriculum to reinvigorate the extant, if somewhat dormant, Mw warfighting philosophy (USMC, 1997a). The reinvigoration of Mw is seen by the Marine Corps as a critical enabler necessary to execute the *Marine Operating Concept* (MOC) (USMC, 2016b), a modern concept of operations necessary to cope with the FOE.

## **I.2 The Military and Organizational Learning**

Military organizations are some of the largest organizations in the world. According to the National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2020 published by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), the United States maintains approximately 1.3 million active duty personnel. Counting select National Guard, Reserves, and Department of Defense civilians, the end strength is over 2.2 million personnel, not including contractors (USD DOD, 2019, p. 260). The estimated US defense budget for FY2020 is \$718.3 billion (USD DOD, 2019, p. 1). These immense organizations share common management problems with other kinds of organizations (Augier et al., 2014) including leadership (Hawkins, 2015; Maltz, 1997), culture (Higbee, 2010; Tinoco & Arnaud, 2013), performance (Haeckel & Nolan, 1993; Parker & Parker, 2017; Szalma & Hancock, 2008), and learning (Clemons & Santamaria, 2002; Davidson, 2010; Shultz, 2012). Improving military organizations' ability to adapt to evolving security realities will not only provide more effective and efficient use of public resources worldwide, but it will also provide better national security and improve economic stability and peace in the community of nations.

### **I.3 The Need for Marine Corps Organizational Learning: Past and Present**

#### **I.3.1 *Past Organizational Learning: Breaking the Mold***

Specifically, the case at hand provides an excellent venue for exploring the learning adaptations of military organizations. In 1975, the United States ended its involvement in the Vietnam War. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) turned to address a new role in the defense of Western Europe at the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a, 2006b). The Soviet Union's army was massive, heavily armored, and tactically overmatched the relatively lightly equipped Marine Corps (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a). The USMC recognized two immediate needs to remain relevant: first, to carve out a niche in the national security plans; and second, to address how to survive in an ever-increasing lethal battlespace due to technological advances in target acquisition, precision guided munition (PGM) technology, and the sheer armored mass of the Soviet army. To address these needs, the 29<sup>th</sup> CMC determined the current doctrine of attrition warfare was obsolete and wholly insufficient for the task (Brown, 2018; Lind, 1985b; Osinga, 2007; Terriff, 2006a).

Attrition warfare is best characterized in the words of Osinga: "*Firepower as a destructive force is king. Protection (trenches, armor, dispersion etc.) is used to weaken or dilute the effects of enemy firepower... Measures of success are 'body count' and targets destroyed.*" (Osinga, 2007, p. 166). Clearly, any attempt by a light force to symmetrically confront the Soviet army in attrition warfare would be extremely costly and would more than likely fail (Terriff, 2006a). The USMC needed to learn and adapt to a new reality if it were to remain a useful institution to the nation, and survive both on the battlefield against the Soviet Union and in the budget wars of the Pentagon (Brown, 2018; Terriff, 2006a). However, attrition warfare was not only the Marine Corps' tacit doctrine for decades, it was woven throughout its values and norms.

Young Marine recruits are socialized into the Marine Corps with stories, bordering on folklore, of the Corps' greatest battles being contests of attrition: Belleau Wood, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, Khe Sahn, and Hue all resonate with Marines at a deeply personal level (Bartlett & Sweetman, 2008; Hough et al., 1958; MCA&F, 1960; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006c). Attrition warfare values leaders with physical courage and who are skilled in implementing processes, procedures, and control mechanisms to generate overwhelming mass and fires through synchronization while minimizing risks yet not shying away from casualties (Hanson, 2001; Johnson, 2018; Lind, 1985; Linn, 2002; Osinga, 2007; Weigley, 1977). Being process- and control-oriented, attrition warfare is designed for top-down hierarchical relationships and task-oriented objectives. While effective at using destruction to break an enemy's will and capacity to resist (Osinga, 2007), attrition warfare of the industrial age had been outpaced by the changing character of war in the information age, and any force practicing it was highly vulnerable to an array of modern-day adversaries exploiting the technology and lethality presented by technological advances in target acquisition PGMs (Damian, 2001; Terriff, 2007b; Weigley, 1977).

In response to the new operating environment, the Marine Corps sought future relevancy by evolving its doctrinal approach to warfare based on Col John Boyd's sense and respond theory, Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act (OODA-Loop) (Boyd, 1985; Brown, 2018; Osinga, 2007; Terriff, 2006a). In 1989 the USMC published FMFM-1 Warfighting as its keystone doctrinal publication. FMFM-1 Warfighting articulated the Marine Corps' philosophy of how it understands the nature and demands of war, its theory about war, and how it prepares for and wages war. This warfighting doctrine (FMFM-1 1989 and later updated to MCDP-1 in 1997) espouses a theory that Marines will operate and thrive in an environment described as the *"fog of*

*war*” (USMC, 1989, p. 6, 1997a, p. 7) characterized by friction, uncertainty, adversity, and ambiguity and rely on dispersion, surprise, and maneuver to offset enemy advantages en masse and mitigate their use of PGMs (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a). Additionally, Mw doctrine contrasts with attrition warfare values and norms in several ways: Mw values leaders who display initiative rather than dogged obedience to orders and eschews hierarchical command and control in favor of executing the intent of the commander two levels up (MAGTF Instructional Group, 2015; Reiter & Meek, 1999; USMC, 1997a). Mw views the acme of tactical prowess as attacking enemy weaknesses, achieving surprise, and defeating the enemy’s cohesion (Terriff, 2007b; USMC, 1997a, 1997c, 1997b) rather than attacking enemy strengths head on as in the celebrated battles of Belleau Wood, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa (Bartlett & Sweetman, 2008; Hough et al., 1958; Krulak, 1984; MCA&F, 1960).

Mw values junior leader decision making marked by initiative, boldness, and acceptance of risk and intent rather than simply executing ‘go-and-do’ orders-oriented terrain objectives (Brown, 2018; Lind, 1985b; MAGTF Instructional Group, 2015; USMC, 1996, 1997a, 1997c, 1997b). Attrition warfare held central to the aim of seizing and holding terrain and breaking the enemy’s will to resist through demoralizing attrition (Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006b). In summary, the Mw doctrine sharply contrasts with the legacy attrition warfare approach employed by the US military from the Civil War through Vietnam (Weigley, 1977). This contrast resulted in a schism within the Marine Corps between those that embraced Mw and those that embraced attrition warfare, with each side often derisively labeling each other as maneuverists or attritionists, respectively (Brown, 2018; Terriff, 2006c). While debates and diatribes raged within the USMC, in the end the decision process for organizational change was more teleological than it was dialectical (Van De Ven & Poole, 1995), as the 29<sup>th</sup> CMC signed FMFM-1 into effect with



the “with the force of a papal ‘bull’” (Lloyd, 1989). While there were open and spirited arguments made for the merits of attrition warfare as the so-called ‘Marine way of war, where we close with and kill the enemy’ (Robeson, 1989; Terriff, 2006c, p. 221; Tucker, 1996), and arguments made for how Mw seemed to eschew close quarters fighting and therefore was somehow un-Marine-like, in the end, the 29<sup>th</sup> CMC had the final say, and FMFM-1 Warfighting became the official cornerstone doctrine of the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps, perhaps more than any other service, has a tradition of vocalizing dissent, but once a decision is rendered the Corps tends to rally behind the direction set by the CMC (Builder, 1989; Johnson, 2018). However, after the 29<sup>th</sup> CMC’s decision to implement Mw, there was persistent grumbling amongst Marines, with the dull roar of a long-running narrative along the lines that Mw was a fad’ and was about ‘dazzling the enemy till they drop’ rather than being concerned with ‘real combat’ (Anonymous, 2011; Brown, 2018; Damian, 2001; Piscitelli, 2017; Robeson, 1989; Terriff, 2006a).

### ***I.3.2 The Present Need for Organizational Learning: The Say–Do Gap***

In 2016, nearly three decades and eight CMCs after the publication of FMFM-1, the Marine Corps was again winding down a counter-insurgency effort as the United States transitioned to supporting roles of indigenous forces in Iraq and Afghanistan (JFD, 2016; Johnson, 2018; USMC, 2016b). After 15 years of counter-insurgency operations against guerilla, terrorist, and proxy forces in the Global War on Terror, the Marine Corps faced a new, uncertain and much more lethal future operating environment. The emerging environment was described in the Joint Forces document titled the Joint Operating Environment 2035: The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World (JOE 2035; JFD, 2016). The JOE 2035 describes conflict against potential peer, near peer, and non-state organizations with state-like capabilities and presents a wide array

of national security challenges.

Facing uncertainty once again, the Marine Corps turned to Mw doctrine to chart a path forward. The 37<sup>th</sup> CMC, in *FRAGO-01/2016: Advance to Contact* (FRAGO-01/2016), issued a call to action for the Marine Corps to “reinvigorate a maneuver warfare mindset for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (USMC, 2016a, p. 8). The 37<sup>th</sup> CMC's call to action to reinvigorate Mw contends that at one time not only did the Marine Corps fully adopt and executed Mw, but it had done so ‘vigorously.’

Even after nearly 30 years, the schism between attritionists and maneuverists continued. The Marine Corps’ professional journal, *The Marine Corps Gazette*, had hosted in its pages the early debates surrounding Mw in the late 1970s and 1980s through to the publication of FMFM-1 in 1989. After the publication of FMFM-1, the journal featured arguments for and against Mw (Lloyd, 1989; Robeson, 1989; Tucker, 1996). Between 2010–2011, there were a series of 10 anonymous articles styled after the CS Lewis’ 1954 work *The Screwtape Letters*, titled *The Attritionists Letters*. In these letters, General Screwtape (an ardent ‘attritionist’) admonishes a young (Mw-curious) Captain Wormwood, against the misguided notions of Mw and berates him over the follies of Mw while extolling the virtues of attrition warfare (Anonymous, 2011). *The Attritionists Letters*, while anonymous in print, were recognized inside the Marine Corps as a muffled scream protest registered by a minority of pro-Mw officers against the lack of institutional commitment to Mw in actual practice. This series of articles speaks to the schism that remained between attritionists and maneuverists (Johnson, 2018). In other words, *The Attritionists Letters* signaled that Mw, after 22 years of practice by that time, was not wholly accepted in the Marine Corps. It is evident that the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC’s call to action to ‘reinvigorate Mw’ represents an acknowledgement of a ‘say–do gap’ between the institution's espoused theory

of Mw and the current theory-in-practice. It is also interesting to note that the authors of *The Attritionists Letters* were advocating for the espoused doctrine of Mw, yet they felt the need to remain anonymous. With that in hand, and while outside the scope of this dissertation, it may be fair to question if the Marine Corps ever practiced Mw, let alone vigorously.

Emblematic of the above described struggle to reinvigorate Mw is the challenge faced by MCTOG to adapt its organizational learning system and curricula to implement the long-range vision of the MCTOG 2018–2028 Campaign Plan (MCTOG, 2018b). That campaign plan aimed to put into action the results from the TECOM workshops and contribute to the reinvigoration of Mw, therefore enabling the implementation of the MOC (Nicastro, 2017, 2018; TECOM, 2016, 2018).

#### **I.4 The MCTOG Campaign Plan and the Bid to Reinvigorate Mw**

MCTOG is a uniquely situated organization within the Marine Corps that functions both as a formal schoolhouse in the training and education continuum and as a “Center of Excellence” (COE) representing the interests of the operating forces of the Marine Ground Combat Element (GCE). For the purpose of this study, GCE is defined as those elements of the Marine Corps specifically trained, manned, and equipped to engage enemy forces in direct ground combat. This unique positioning of MCTOG ensured it had two very different and powerful sets of stakeholders with significant demand signals.

First, as a formal schoolhouse, MCTOG conducts individual-level training and education of a critical segment of the force consisting of mid-grade officers and senior-grade enlisted Marines within the GCE. The Marines graduating from MCTOG are assigned to critical operations and intelligence positions in the operating forces and will be called upon to plan and execute a wide range of missions around the globe. These missions include the expeditionary

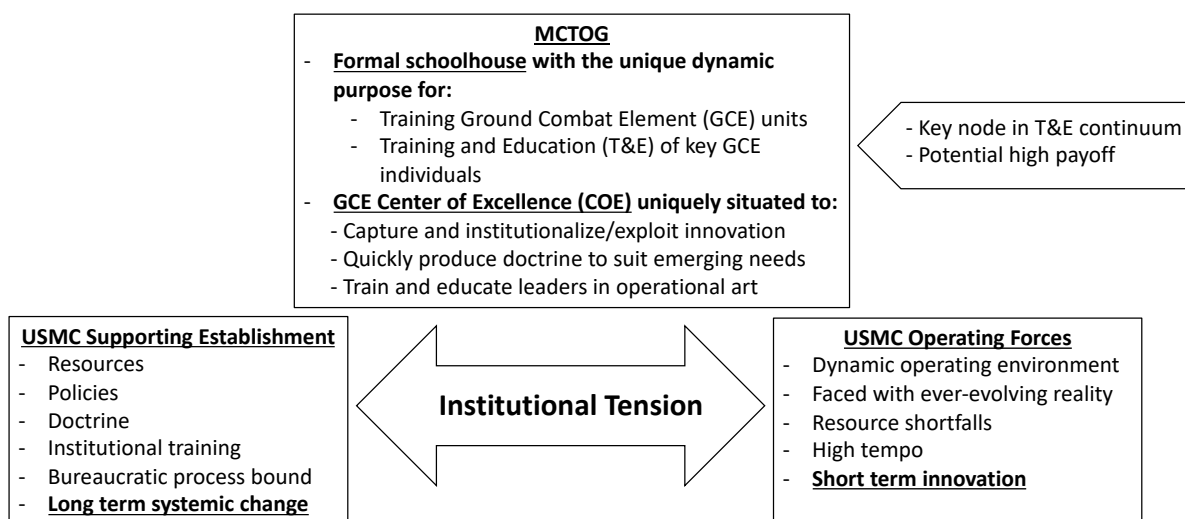
application of lethal and non-lethal capabilities across the spectrum of conflict, ranging from low-intensity counter insurgency operations to high-intensity combat against peer competitors. They also respond to humanitarian crises or the evacuation of American citizens from a conflict zone. Developing and delivering a cutting-edge curriculum that is both true to Mw and develops the skills and agility necessary to execute the MOC is firmly a MCTOG task. “Ensure we are developing Marines with the agility and perspective to manage uncertainty, think critically, and solve complex problems” (MCTOG, 2018a, p. 4; USMC, 2016b, p. 25). On request, MCTOG also provides collective training to GCE battalion and regimental battle staff to prepare them for worldwide operational deployments. Most often, the requests are to train battle staff on planning processes and procedures for operations, intelligence, and the employment of firepower.

Secondly, in addition to its individual and collective unit training missions in its role as a schoolhouse, the MCTOG functions as a COE. “The service [supporting establishment] looks to MCTOG to lend intellectual capacity and rigor to develop, refine and sustain emerging concepts and doctrine to ensure the operating forces are prepared” (MCTOG, 2018b, p. 2). The dual role of schoolhouse and COE and being situated at the nexus of two sets of stakeholders in tension, each with significant and differing demand signals, placed a tremendous strain on resources. (Fig. 1).

The MCTOG campaign plan recognizes it sits astride the institutional tension between the operating forces and the supporting establishment. “Systemic institutional change happens at the service level [supporting establishment] where responsibility resides to fulfil the responsibilities of Title 10 of the US Code; to conduct the training, manning, and equipping of the operating forces” (MCTOG, 2018b, p. 2). The weight and complexity of the supporting establishment’s responsibilities and the bureaucratic processes to execute them are deliberate and

slow. On the other side, there are the GCE operating forces. The “[GCE] operating forces find themselves at the nexus of tension and opportunity where meeting daily operational requirements and remaining ready to win... outstrip their resources. Operating forces’ focus on immediate challenges for readiness to fight and win today, limits their resources to focus on innovation to win tomorrow’s wars” (MCTOG, 2018b, p. 2). The MCTOG campaign plan seeks to embrace this unique position. *“But we can leverage this as a position of advantage to enable and sustain meaningful change as the GCE’s center of excellence”* (MCTOG, 2018b, p. 2) As Fig. 1 depicts, MCTOG is ideally situated for not only the conduct of this study by being on the front line of the reinvigoration of Mw effort, it is also ideally situated in the context of engaged scholarship, to leverage the findings from this study and help to reinvigorate Mw for both the supporting establishment and the GCE operating forces.

**Figure 1: MCTOG and Institutional Tension**



Finally, a major reason for conducting this research at MCTOG is the potentially influential position held by training and education institutions within the military. As Davidson's research explains, "*internal institutional process can prevent, promote, permit military learning through change... and act as a powerful counterweight to entrenched organizational culture*" (Davidson, 2010, p. 192).

The MCTOG campaign plan was an effort to address the Marine Corps' drive to reinvigorate its Mw philosophy and enable execution of the MOC. In doing so, MCTOG would be pivotal to the Marine Corps by providing a ready and relevant operating force to meet the national security challenges of the FOE.

The Marine Corps' Mw philosophy, and the reinvigoration thereof, is thoroughly embedded in the goals of the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028. However, the actual execution of the campaign plan at MCTOG fell completely flat. A full year after the Commanding Officer signed the campaign plan into effect, it had gone absolutely nowhere. In December 2018, MCTOG attempted an intervention in the form of a leadership offsite, an event many of the participants of this study attended. This study was conducted a year and a half after the campaign was signed into effect and nearly six months after the December 2018 leadership offsite. While visible progress was being made towards implementing the campaign plan at that point, the progress was slow and incomplete.

The MCTOG campaign plan was a failed strategic initiative intending to reinvigorate Mw and enable the MOC in order to meet the challenges of the FOE. By describing and explaining the root causes and dynamics of the say–do gap, this study may increase MCTOG's understanding of how and why the initiative failed and may inform potential corrective interventions.

## I.5 The Importance of This Study: Blood and Treasure

Explicating the dynamics at play in the say–do gap between an espoused warfighting philosophy and the warfighting theory in practice is not a trivial matter for two reasons. Primarily, improvements in a military organization’s ability to adapt to dynamic and ambiguous operational environments have a dramatic potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of national security, which entails the better use of a large share of national resources in the form of both blood and treasure. Secondly, the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC has stated the importance of Mw doctrine in three major service planning documents: FRAGO-01/2016 (USMC, 2016a), the *Marine Operating Concept* (MOC) (USMC, 2016b), and the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC’s *Message to the Force: Seize the Initiative* (USMC, 2017). Each document underscores the criticality of Marines’ ability to execute Mw in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to operate within the complexity, adversity, and uncertainty of the FOE (JFD, 2016; USMC, 2016b). Most notable was the MOC, which boldly makes a statement on the importance of adapting to the FOE in articulating the central problem statement:

*“The Marine Corps is currently not organized, trained, or equipped to meet the demands of a future operating environment characterized by complex terrain, technology proliferation, information warfare, the need to shield and exploit signatures, and an increasingly non-permissive maritime domain.”* (USMC, 2016b, p. 8)

The document then goes on to describe the remedy to the central problem:

*“The MOC is the starting point to address this problem by reaffirming the primacy of maneuver warfare and combined arms for the 21st century and identifying the critical tasks to develop the future force.”* (USMC, 2016b, p. 8)

In fact, the MOC dedicates an entire chapter titled “The Primacy of Maneuver Warfare” to the topic and confirms that the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC and the institution are committed to Mw as the enduring doctrinal warfighting philosophy.

## **I.6 The Reinvigoration of Mw Gets Underway**

In FRAGO-01/2016, the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC directs TECOM to establish a working group to study and make recommendations on how Mw may be reinvigorated. This action strongly implies that the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC believes the Marine Corps’ current ability to execute Mw in the context of the FOE of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was insufficient. In response to this directive, TECOM hosted a series of three separate workshops, each with the same core facilitators but with different participants and subject matter experts.

The results of the first workshop conducted on October 25–27, 2016 focused on institutional structure and culture reform, namely in the form of changes to personnel management processes and the enculturation of Mw by reversing the bias for the science of warfare, the ‘attritionists’ approach, in favor of the art of warfare, the ‘maneuverists’ approach (TECOM, 2016). The most prominent point coming out of the first workshop session was this quote from the outbrief: “*The Marine Corps can talk about maneuver warfare but has not institutionalized an ability to do [sic] maneuver warfare*” (TECOM, 2016, p. 7). The reason for the lack of an ability to “do” Mw was attributed to a fixation on attrition in both the operating forces and in the training and education continuum (TECOM, 2016).

The results of the second workshop series conducted on June 20–22, 2017 focused on enabling Mw by strengthening tactical decision making rather than solely following technical processes and “improving the quality of instructors through dedicated instructor development” (Nicastro, 2017; TECOM, 2018, p. 13).



Responding to the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC's call to action to reinvigorate Mw and seeking to act on both FRAGO-01/2016 and the findings from the first two TECOM "Reinvigorate Maneuver Warfare" workshops, the MCTOG developed a long-range vision to restore Mw to primacy. This effort was captured in the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028 (MCTOG, 2018b). This document would be the vehicle for change in the Marine Corps. Its implementation is the focus of this study and will be discussed in detail later in this study.

The third workshop was conducted on April 24–25, 2018 and focused on reviewing the findings of the first two workshops and defining the training and education actions needed to effectuate Mw. I was invited to participate as a subject matter expert in this third workshop session and was present for the discussions. During the discussions concerning the efficacy of Mw, the general thrust of conversation regarding the need for a reinvigoration of Mw circled around how Marine units had become accustomed to the static and very procedural nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Johnson, 2018; West, 2011). In those theaters, Marines have encountered the leading edges of the FOE in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the situation is ambiguous and where the familiar command, control, and information flow is often irrelevant with high levels of uncertainty. The general consensus of the discussion was that Marine tactical leaders did not always adapt appropriately to ambiguity in tactical situations and often defaulted to becoming internally oriented, task-focused, and fixated on "go and do" orders, which was practically the opposite of what Mw emphasizes. The outcome is the opposite of what is required to execute the Mw doctrine and the concepts presented in the MOC.

Another key finding from the group is articulated in the post-workshop reflections provided by one workshop participant. "Participants acknowledged that executing maneuver warfare in the context of the MOC and FOE 'demands a higher standard' of understanding and

realizing of our warfighting philosophy” (Nicastro, 2018, p. 2). Finally, at the end of the workshop, one participant threw up his hands and said, “*I guess we [the Marine Corps] doesn’t have the culture to execute Mw*” as others nodded in agreement. Another participant offered, “*I don’t think people have a fundamental nor conceptual understanding of Maneuver Warfare.*” The latter comment prompted me to note that the effort to reinvigorate Mw may not be about culture or structure, as both were focus items from all three workshops. Instead, I was prompted by the statement to investigate the role an organizational learning system might have as an impediment or pathway to full effectuation of Mw.

Ignoring for a moment the persistent and open schism between attritionists and maneuverists, and assuming the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC premise is correct that at one time the Marine Corps vigorously practiced Mw, the Marine Corps’ current understanding and practice of Mw is insufficient to meet the demands of the FOE and execute the MOC. The two requirements necessary for the Marine Corps to remain a relevant and ready force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and effectively meet the demands of the FOE and the MOC, the Marine Corps must understand why and how its adoption of Mw has been insufficient thus far. The consequences of going to war with a force that espouses one theory of warfighting while in practice executes another theory of warfighting will be a dislocation of expectation, and the stakes are blood and treasure. While the TECOM workshops tended to focus on organizational structure and culture as the reasons for a lack of Mw efficacy, this study will address the issue from an organizational learning perspective (Davidson, 2010). The next chapter will investigate the pertinent literature streams surrounding this area of study. I cast my net widely among the literature in an effort to illuminate the research question from several angles and to build a theoretical framework for a study that will help me separate the discourse from the discord.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter II will discuss the relevant literature streams pertinent to this study. Chapter III will explain and justify the methodological research approach for this study. Chapter IV will detail the findings from the research work. Chapter V will discuss this study's contribution to the literature and managerial practice by detailing potential interventions to improve an organization's implementation of a strategic initiative to effect change.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin this study, I investigated five literature streams to inform and frame the problem and provide a theoretical framework to rigorously examine the problem of the failed strategic initiative in the form of the MCTOG campaign plan to reinvigorate Mw. The five literature streams are organizational learning, organizational learning and culture in a military setting, Mw, and the Marine Corps planning documents regarding the reinvigoration of Mw, and Control Theory as it applies to hierarchies and clans (Table 1). While not all inclusive, Table 1 illustrates the top 12 seminal or critically informative articles for the main literature stream and organizational learning and the top five seminal or critically informative works for each of the other literature streams. Working from left to right in Table 1, the first literature stream, organizational learning, captures articles firmly planted in the camp of scholarly research and largely situated in private sector organizations. The second literature stream contains scholarly articles and book chapters on organizational learning and culture situated in military organizations. The third and fourth literature streams, Mw and USMC planning documents, address the history and implementation real-world problem of adopting the espoused theory of Mw and firmly ground the discussion in the literature. During the course of the fieldwork, the data pointed to the phenomenon of clan activity within the MCTOG hierarchy. Accordingly, control theory was included in the literature review as the fifth literature stream.

**Table 1: Literature Review**

<b>Organizational Learning (OL)</b>		<b>Military Learning and Culture</b>	<b>Maneuver Warfare</b>	<b>USMC Planning Documents</b>	<b>Control Theory Hierarchies and Clans</b>
Theory in Practice, OL, OL II (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996)	Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning (March, 1991)	OL and The Marine Corps: The Counter Insurgency in Iraq (Schultz, 2012)	FMFM-1 Warfighting (USMC, 1989)* * Revised to MCDP-1 (USMC, 1997)	Marine Operating Concept (MOC) (USMC, 2016)	Integrating the Individual and the Organization (Argyris, 1964)
The Reflective Practitioner (Schön, 1983)	A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation (Nonaka, 1994)	Innovate or Die: OC and origins of Mw in the Marine Corps (Terriff 2006)	A New Conception of War (Brown, 2018)	MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018-2028 (USMC, 2017)	Markets, Bureaucracies and Clans. (Ouchi, 1980)
Reflective Systems Development (Mathiassen, 1998)	Exploration & Exploitation in Organizational Learning: A Critical Application of the 4I Model. (Nielsen et al., 2018)	Resistance to Organizational Cultural Change in the Military (Kelly, 2008)	Maneuver warfare: Can Modern Military Strategy Lead You to Victory? (Clemons & Santamaria, 2002)	FRAGO-01/2016: Advance to Contact. (USMC, 2016)	Hierarchies, Clans and Theory Z: A new Perspective on Org Development. (Ouchi & Price, 1978)
An OL Framework: From Institution to Institution (Crossan et al., 1999)	The Link Between Individual and Organizational Learning (Kim, 1993)	Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War (Davidson, 2011)	The US Army and Mission Command: Philosophy vs Practice (Matzenbacher, 2018)	USMC Science & Technology Strategic Plan (USMC, 2018)	Enacting Clan Control in Complex IT Projects: A Social Capital Perspective. (Chua et al., 2012)
Organizational Learning: The Contributing Processes and Literatures. (Huber, 1991)	Organizational Learning (Fiol & Lyles, 1985)	OL Mechanisms: A Structural and Cultural Approach to OL. (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998)	Innovate or die: Organizational culture and the origins of maneuver warfare in the United States Marine Corps. (Terriff, 2006)	CMC Message to the Force: Seize the Initiative (USMC, 2017)	Informing the Clan: Controlling Physicians' Costs and Outcomes. (Kohli & Kettinger, 2004)

## II.1 Organizational Learning

The past 45 years have witnessed an ever-increasing growth in organizational learning literature.

This growth is attributed to organizations' need to match the challenges in an ever more fluid,

turbulent, and volatile world (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). The ability of an organization to learn quickly and properly increases its ability to adapt and compete in a changing environment (Eisenberg et al., 2018). We now live in a world of disruptive change (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000) where organizations, whether military, government, or business, must innovate to remain relevant. In other words, “what got you here, won’t get you there,” and yesterday’s tried and true processes and procedures may be insufficient or perhaps even detrimental to an organization striving to meet the demands of tomorrow (Bontis et al., 2002). In the military, we know future operating environments will be disruptive, complex, and uncertain (USMC, 2016b), yet are we aware that an organization’s capacity to learn is touted as a fundamental strategic capability (Fiol & Lyles, 1985a). While it is a commonly accepted theme that organizations must adapt to and thrive in a disruptive world, is it is not a commonly accepted that they must know *how to* learn as an organization in order to adapt to and thrive. However, there is no clear agreement as to what organizational learning is, let alone how best to achieve it (Scott & Candidate, 2011).

While the literature generally agrees that organizational learning is important, there is considerable discussion on what organizational learning is exactly and how an organization goes about doing it. To begin, this review will seek to establish in the literature the key underpinnings of organizational learning, including defining learning, how organizations create knowledge, and organizational learning and outlining the levels of learning in an organization and the factors that influence organizational learning.

### **II.1.1 *Organizational Knowledge Creation***

Learning is a central theme running throughout the organizational literature stream. The notion of learning is often taken for granted, and rarely do we explore how it affects our daily lives.

Therefore, a specific definition of learning must be determined. There are two main camps in this debate surrounding the definition of learning. First, there is the cognitive process camp, which claims that organizational learning is a cognitive process that occurs when new insights are acquired (Fiol & Lyles, 1985a; Huber, 1991). Huber (1991) claimed that learning has occurred when one entity within an organization gains knowledge that may be put to use at some point in the future, as this new knowledge may be cause for reflection, adjusting assumptions, and/or building new mental models with which change occurs, even if it is not observable behavior (Huber, 1991).

Second, is the cognitive behavioral process camp, which claims that organizational learning is a cognitive behavioral process that happens only when new insights are accompanied by changes in behavior (Fiol & Lyles, 1985b; Popper & Lipshitz, 1998; Weick, 1991). The cognitive behavioral process camp (Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978, 1996; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999) acknowledges that while cognitive learning is important, learning does not occur until new insights, mental models, and assumptions result in new behavior. Argyris and Schön (1978) contended that an organization learns when it identifies and corrects errors, while Crossan (2003) asserted that learning is complete when one aligns one's insights with one's behaviors. From a cognitive process viewpoint, the Marine Corps met the requirement for organizational learning in that it recognized a need for change and wrote a new doctrine. However, the argument could be made by the cognitive behavioral process camp that organizational learning did not occur, as the new insights (doctrine) were not accompanied by changes in behavior.

The literature points to an ongoing discussion regarding organizational learning and whether an organization can actually learn. Some have contended that organizational learning is simply the sum of individual learning within the organization (Kim, 1993). Kim (1993) claimed

that only people can learn, and so the learning that takes place in an organization is restricted to what the individuals within the company have learned or by gaining a diversity of thinking in either new personnel coming into the organization or by the temporary injection of knowledge through consultants or collaborating with other organizations. Individual learning alone, however, does not account for how organizations can experience a complete turnover in personnel, as often happens in military units. In fact, military units and their service-supporting establishments are specifically designed to replace people as the organization lives on (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Hawkins, 2015; Kim, 1993). Therefore, an organization may experience a complete turnover of collective learning, yet the new people in the organization still behave the same way based on what the organization previously learned. As Hedberg articulated, “Members come and go and leadership changes but organizational memories [persist to establish and reinforce] norms, assumptions and preserve certain behaviors... norms and values over time” (Hedberg, 2003, p. 6). Levitt and March (1988) supported this notion of preserved memory by explaining that learning resides within the structure of an organization and contended that organizational learning is a compilation of experiences and operating rhythms such as processes, procedures, and organizational structure (Levitt & March, 1988). This dissertation will refer to two main types of knowledge: *explicit* and *tacit*. Gorman (2002) provided a taxonomy of knowledge most easily described as a spectrum running from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge would be describing the procedure for how to fix a flat on a bicycle, with a collection of steps set in sequence that can easily be written down and passed on in a lecture. At the other end of the spectrum is tacit knowledge, which would be trying to explain the procedure for how to ride a bike. How to ride a bike can be known experientially, but it is difficult to pass on by simply telling another person. Between the two ends of the spectrum

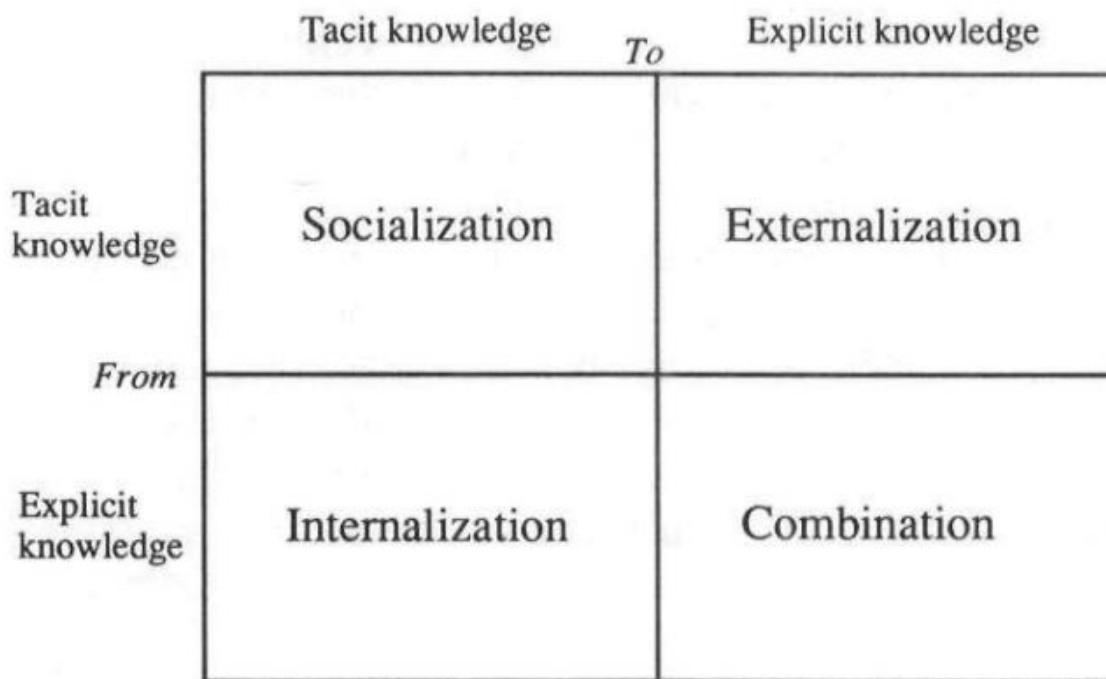


are degrees and types of knowledge. Starting on the explicit end are *declarative* ‘what’ knowledge, *procedural* ‘how’ knowledge, *judgement* ‘when’ knowledge, and finally, *wisdom* ‘why’ knowledge. We will find later in this study that teaching Mw is very much at the tacit end of the spectrum, while the methodical procedures most associated attrition warfare are at the explicit end of the spectrum.

As highlighted earlier, the literature on organizational learning focuses on individual learning and learning embedded in the structure of an organization. How learning and knowledge travel within an organization gave rise to the study of individual, group, and organization learning levels. Individual learning as described by Simon (1996) and Kim (1993) leads to an exchange of knowledge between individuals and groups of individuals. This exchange is held as the collective knowledge of the organization (Hedberg, 2003; Levitt & March, 1988). Collective knowledge was further explored in Nonaka’s (1994) study, which investigated the dynamic process of knowledge creation within an organization and developed an operational model. The model captures the interplay of tacit knowledge created by individuals and the role of the organization in contextualizing and amplifying that new knowledge in explicit form. In other words, it takes the tacit task of riding a bike, or employing Mw, and makes it more explicit and accessible to others internal or external to the organization. Nonaka’s (1994) 2 x 2 model (Fig. 2) organizes the creation of knowledge in the quadrants: *socialization*, *externalization*, *combination*, and *internalization*. Nonaka (1994) explained how each quadrant can create knowledge. For example, in the *socialization* quadrant, tacit knowledge can be created between two or more people interacting and exchanging that knowledge, like each relating how each learned to ride a bike and then melding those experiences. Likewise, explicit knowledge can be created between two or more people *combining* procedures, steps, and checklists, like two people

comparing their steps for fixing a flat on a bicycle and combining them to create a new process that can be taught in a lecture. The quadrants of *internalization* and *externalization* are where knowledge moves from explicit to tacit and tacit and explicit, respectively. With *internalization*, a person or group can move from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge by internally processing information and making connections to expand their understanding in a very experiential manner. To explain the *externalization* of knowledge from tacit to explicit, Nonaka (1994) offered that while “tacit knowledge held by individuals may lie at the heart of the knowledge creating process, realizing the practical benefits of that knowledge centers on its externalization and amplification through... a dynamic entangling of [all four quadrants]” (p. 20).

**Figure 2: Model of Knowledge Creation**



*Note:* (Nonaka, 1994, p. 19)

In the next section, I will address Argyris and Schön’s (1978) ToA and its greater implications on organizational learning.

### **II.1.2 *Organizational Learning***

Yanow (2000) proposed that the organizational learning process is rooted in organizational culture (Yanow, 2000). Thus, understanding organizational culture is critical to understanding the organizational learning process (Ando, 2002; Eisenberg et al., 2018; Friesenborg, 2013; Kohli & Kettinger, 2004; Nielsen, 2014; Schein, 1984; Skerlavaj et al., 2007; Wang & Rafiq, 2009; Whiteley et al., 2013). Schein (2017) complicated the role of organizational culture and learning by presenting the paradox of becoming a perpetual learner and the stabilizing influence of culture. He wrote that, “while strong cultures are desirable as a basis for lasting change, they are by definition stable and hard to change.... If the world is becoming more turbulent, requiring more flexibility and learning, does this not imply that strong cultures will increasingly become a liability” (Schein, 2017, p. 343). Not surprisingly, the USMC has a rich, storied history and culture of martial prowess formed over 244 years of national defense. This USMC, like all others, “must compete in and adapt to an ever-changing environment” (Eisenberg et al., 2018)—an environment characterized by fluidity, turbulence, and volatility (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

### **II.1.3 *Organizational Learning: Theory of Action (ToA)***

ToA was introduced in 1974 by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön and represents seminal work in the field of organizational learning. Their theory states that individuals and organizations hold two types of theories of action: (1) *espoused theories*, what they say they do; and (2) *theories-in-use*, what they really do. The space between these two theories in action represents a “say–do-gap.” Within the say–do-gap exists a complex interplay of norms, assumptions that define the atmosphere of a setting. There are also governing variables, which are the truths that people try to hold within a range of tolerance with various action strategies that are employed consciously or subconsciously. These action strategies, in turn, have consequences to relationships, learning,

and the self that influence how an organization behaves, either as a Model I or Model II type organization, and how it learns with either single-loop or double-loop learning. Each of these elements of ToA are detailed below.

**Theories of Action:** Argyris and Schön distinguished between two types of theories of action: espoused theories and theories-in-use.

**Espoused Theory:** Espoused theories embody the world view and values upon which people believe their behavior is based and what they believe about themselves, or, in the case of an organization, what it believes about itself. Espoused theories are known to all since they are proclaimed in both words, typically by individuals, and in writing, typically by organizations. Espoused theories are often at odds with actual behavior driven by governing variables, and thus a contradiction exists (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996; Schein, 1996).

**Theory-in-use:** Theories-in-use are signaled by individual and group behavior and are often unknown to the individual and or organization (Argyris & Schön 1974, 1978, 1991). They are described as either Model I or Model II (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996; Schein, 1996).

**Congruency and Incongruency:** Congruency occurs when one's espoused theory, what one says, matches one's theory-in-use, what one does. As stated by Argyris and Schön (1974), "inner feelings are expressed as action" (p. 23). Conversely, incongruency occurs when one's espoused theory, what one says, does not match one's theory-in-use and is a form of self-deception (Argyris & Schön, 1974). "Often times individuals [and groups] are blissfully unaware of this incongruency as their theory-in-use behaviors fell outside of the espoused theory...when people become aware of this gap they are often shocked" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. xiii). In this dissertation, I will refer to incongruency as the say-do-gap. Argyris and Schön (1974) were careful to note that congruency holds no virtue over incongruency. "An espoused theory that is

congruent with an insufficient theory-in-use is less valuable than an adequate espoused value that is out of congruence with an inadequate theory-in-use because the incongruence can be discovered and provide stimulus for change” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 23–24). This is an important point; this study does not make a value judgment on the effectiveness of the Marine Corps’ efforts to institute and subsequently reinvigorate Mw as the warfighting philosophy; rather, I aim only to investigate why the effort appears to be insufficient after 30 years.

**Norms:** Prevailing conditions and practices within an organization form a complex and tacit set of social rules (Argyle, 1990; Argyris & Schön, 1974) and set an atmospheric tone within an organization. Norms may appear as unwritten rules for “how things get done around here” (Hawkins, 2015), who holds power, how decisions really get made, what behavior gets rewarded, and who gets promoted (Jaeger, 1983).

**Assumptions:** Argyris and Schön (1974) discovered that assumptions are spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious, and frame a person’s perspective about self, others, the situation, and the connections between action, consequence, and a situation.

**Governing Variables:** Governing variables represent goals that a person is trying to keep within some acceptable range while trying to live up to the espoused values in a plan at the individual or organizational level (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Any action taken by an actor to keep one governing variable within an acceptable range will likely impact upon a one or more other governing variables and trigger a trade-off among governing variables<sup>4</sup> (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

**Action Strategies:** Action strategies are used by a person or organization, consciously or

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<sup>4</sup> In some works, Argyris and Schön used the terms “governing variables” and “governing values” interchangeably.

For this study, I will use the term governing variables exclusively to avoid confusion with Marine Corps core values.

unconsciously, to keep the governing variables within an acceptable range or tolerance level. These strategies, however, carry either intended or unintended consequences for learning and relationships (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996).

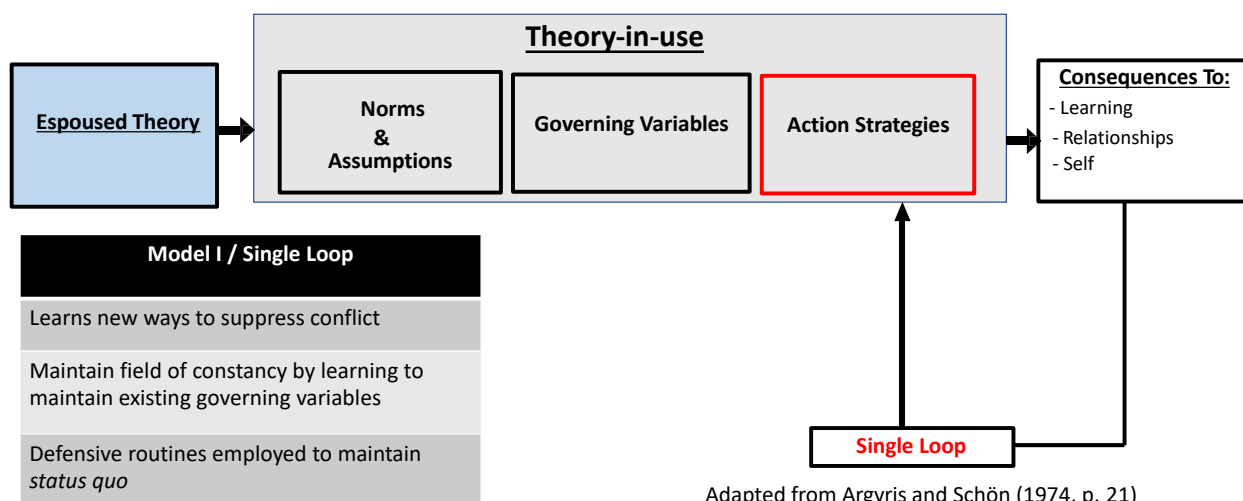
**Consequences:** When individuals, groups, and organizations employ action strategies to maintain governing variables within a range of tolerance, whether consciously or unconsciously, there are consequences for those actions. Argyris and Schön (1974) categorized the implications for the employment of action strategies as consequences to learning, relationships, and self.

**Model I and Model II:** Central to ToA are the Model I and Model II constructs. Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978, 1996) defined a Model I learning system as one where behavior is governed by the following values: achieving goals, maximizing winning and minimizing losing, minimizing the expression of negative feelings, and rationality. A Model I construct is likely to be more efficient in dealing with structured situations and routine problems and is associated with single-loop learning. A Model II construct defines learning system where behavior is governed by valid information, informed choice, and internal commitment (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996).

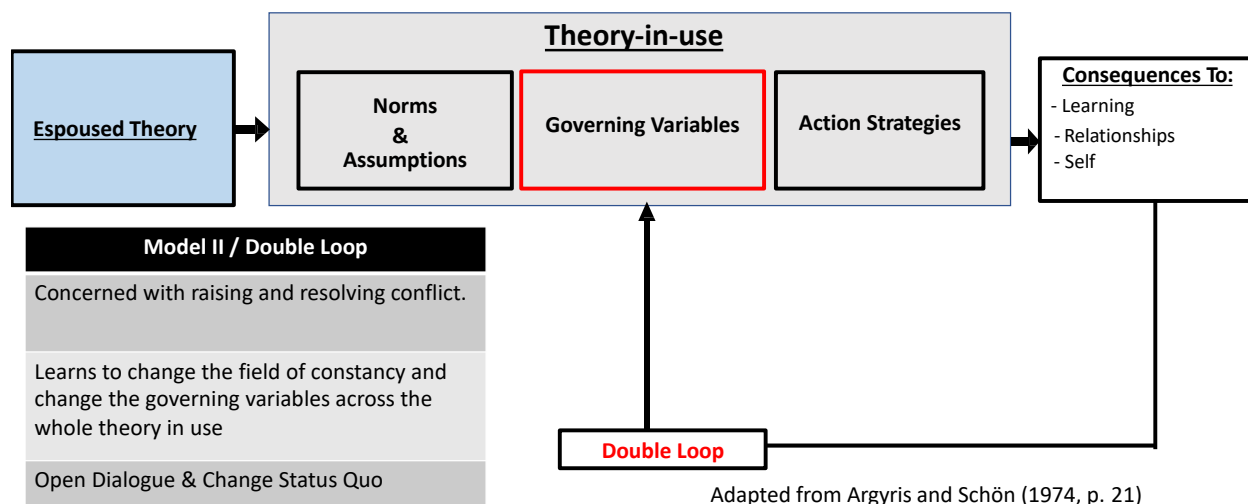
**Single-Loop Learning:** In single-loop learning, individuals, groups, and organizations modify their actions according to the difference between expected and reached outcomes. This produces incremental learning, which is necessary for the routine parts of doing business; however, there is no questioning of the premise or values of an activity, and the actor “learns to avoid or suppress conflict and satisfy existing governing values” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 19). As illustrated in Fig. 3, single-loop learning is the conduit for Model I organizational learning, wherein one’s underlying assumptions about values, self, and others are hidden (Friesenborg,

2013), and change is directed at one's action strategies to maintain governing variables within tolerant levels.

**Figure 3: Single-loop Learning**



**Double-Loop Learning:** In double-loop learning, people, organizations, or groups review actions in the framework of our operating assumptions and ask “what is going on here?” and “what are the patterns?” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 19). In contrast with single-loop learning, the actor in double-loop “learns to be concerned with the surfacing and resolution of conflict rather than suppressing it” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 19). Note that “double loop learning does not supersede single loop learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 19). As illustrated in Fig. 4, double-loop learning is the conduit for Model II organizational learning, where one’s underlying assumptions about values, governing variables, self, and others are publicly discussed and analyzed (Friesenborg, 2013). This public acknowledgment results in the questioning and adjustment of governing variables to bring one’s espoused theory into congruency with one’s theory-in-use.

**Figure 4: Double-loop Learning**

The next section addresses the military learning literature stream and the contextual influence of culture and how typically strong military cultures may influence organizational learning.

## II.2 Military Learning and Culture

According to Shultz (2012), there is only a small segment of scholarly literature in security studies that addresses the related subjects of military learning and innovation. Modern war is full of ambiguity, and military organizations must create an organizational learning environment to be effective. “The concept of critical thinking and organizational learning cannot be underestimated’ (Zacharakis & Van Der Werff, 2012). Learning, innovation, and change are difficult to achieve and maintain in larger organizations in general, and military organizations in particular (Builder, 1989; Davidson, 2010; Haynie, 2018; Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Johnson, 2018; O’Connor & Kotze, 2008; Shultz, 2012).



The USMC is both large and a military organization, and it is one with a deeply engrained culture rife with artifacts and rituals of past heroics that have often been elevated to near-mythical status (Brown, 2018; Davidson, 2010; Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006b, 2006a). As Schein (2017) stated, “while strong cultures are desirable as a basis for lasting change, they are by definition stable and hard to change” (p. 317). Zucker (1977), and later Schein (2017), concluded in their studies of awareness in organizational culture, there is a complex interview, observation, and joint-inquiry approach required to give the necessary attention to the opportunities and constraints that organizational culture provides. Here, it is evident that Schein’s (2017) recommended approach is quite similar to Argyris and Schön’s (1974, 1978, 1996) ToA, and a case study from the interpretive perspective may be very helpful in illuminating and deciphering the cultural context in organizational learning systems of military instructional institutions.

The Marine Corps has recognized the need to evolve and adapt its operating concepts for the future and has embarked on a self-described “campaign of learning” (MCCDC, 2018; USMC, 2016c) to prepare itself for the future. To this end, the USMC has published the Marine Operating Concept, which details how the force will be developed and employed the future (USMC, 2016c). A critical component of the USMC’s campaign of learning and the MOC is to reinvigorate the foundational Mw warfighting philosophy, which represents both an espoused theory and is also a doctrinal artifact. While it is deeply embedded in the organizational culture, there are various levels of understanding of and commitment to that philosophy. While it is recognized in the literature that there is a need to understand organizational learning in the military in order to deal with the ambiguity of the FOE (Davidson, 2010; Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Zacharakis & Van Der Werff, 2012), and despite the overwhelming amount of literature

concerning organizational learning in general, the literature has not consolidated any theory on organizational learning specifically in a military context. While Davidson (2010) illustrated the positive impact of education and learning institutions in the military dating to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Davidson concedes it was still insufficient. The literature has very little to offer specifically concerning the role of organizational learning systems when services attempt to adopt a new warfighting philosophy or doctrine (or ‘reinvigorate’ one), as with the Marine Corps and Mw and the US Army with Mission Command. The next section focuses on the Mw literature stream.

### **II.3 Maneuver Warfare**

In Chapter I above, I thoroughly discussed much of the Mw literature stream and provided a background on the foundations of Mw as warfighting philosophy headed by the seminal work FMFM-1/MCDP-1 Warfighting (USMC, 1989, 1997a). These documents capture the Marine Corps’ understanding of Mw and is descriptive in nature regarding the expected attitudes and behaviors of Marines necessary to execute Mw. Additionally, the literature stream provides the history spanning from Mw’s inception (Boyd, 1985; Brown, 2018; MAGTF Instructional Group, 2015; Osinga, 2007; Terriff, 2006c) to Mw becoming official Marine Corps doctrine (Brown, 2018; Damian, 2001; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a, 2006c). It also illustrates the difficulty the US Army has had in adopting its own version of Mw, which was coined Mission Command (Matzenbacher, 2018).

### **II.4 USMC Mw Planning Documents**

The USMC Mw planning documents literature stream detailed the Marine Corps’ institutional attempts to initiate the reinvigoration of Mw, beginning with the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC’s call to action in FRAGO-1/2016 and the TECOM ‘reinvigorate Mw’ workshops (TECOM, 2016, 2017; USMC,

2016a, 2017). These actions underscore the central role the Mw philosophy plays in preparing and employing the force for the FOE (USMC, 2016b, 2017). These documents also provide insight into the Mw values the institution espouses. The Mw literature discussed in Chapter I also introduced MCTOG's strategic initiative to reinvigorate Mw via its campaign plan (MCTOG, 2018b). As a result of the TECOM workshops, the various schoolhouses within the TECOM training and education continuum were tasked to explicate how Mw was being taught in their respective institutions (MCU, 2016, 2017). The responses were consolidated by Marine Corps University (MCU) and largely remained tabulated accounts of the number of classes and hours devoted to Mw curricula, with little on their efficacy in teaching or reinvigorating Mw. In the end, there is not an empirical observation or analysis of any concrete attempts to reinvigorate Mw.

## **II.5 Control Theory Hierarchies and Clans**

The fifth literature stream concerns control theory, specifically the role of "clan control" (Ouchi & Johnson, 1978; Ouchi & Price, 1978a; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) within a formal hierarchy. This literature stream was not addressed until after field work had been conducted. The first coding cycle revealed the potential of clan activity that may have had an impact on how MCTOG learned as an organization. Further research into the works of Ouchi (1980) and Ouchi and Price (1978) revealed how organizations function and achieve results through one of three methods of control: formal bureaucratic, market, and clan control. In the case of MCTOG and the Marine Corps, market control was not applicable due to the nature of the relationship between the individual and the organization. Each member of MCTOG is an employee versus a market actor seeking financial gain and generating capital (Ouchi, 1980). However, formal bureaucratic control is easily applicable. Clan control, especially operating within a formal hierarchy, was

revealing when applied to the Marine Corps in general and MCTOG specifically. Ouchi and Price (1978b) defined a clan as:

*“... a culturally homogenous organization, one in which most members share a common set of values or objectives plus beliefs about how to coordinate effort in order to reach common objectives... and draws informal control from peer monitoring and sanctions to promulgate shared values, beliefs and norms.”* (p. 64)

This definition describes the methods of informal control clans may wield and shed new light on the data corpus. Ouchi and Price (1978b) continued to explain how clans achieve control through a process of socialization, where the more complete the socialization, the stronger the control of the clan. They made a fascinating point that, *“a strong form of this complete socialization is seen in such total institutions as the Marine Corps and **some** [emphasis added] monasteries”* (Ouchi & Price, 1978a, p. 65). One interesting caveat to explain some of the tension within MCTOG between the hierarchical management and the clan emerging from the data is the claim that “clans merge individual goals with organizational ones and thus provide them the motivation to serve the organization” (Ouchi & Price, 1978b, p. 64). As the data will show later in the results section, this was not the case at MCTOG—the clan’s goals ran counter to the organization’s goals. Kohli and Kettinger (2004) discussed in their study how clans may be initially counter to hierarchical organizational goals, but they demonstrated how those two sets of goals may be aligned through intervention. Additionally, Chua et al. (2012) claimed that clan control is *“essential for complex multi-stake holder projects”* (p. 579) and described processes for enacting clan control with individuals who have strong social capital—those who are capable of building ties, sanctioning norms favorable to organizational goals, or censoring

norms that are counter to organizational norms.

## **II. 6 Framework of Theory of Action and Warfighting Philosophies**

The rigor of conducting a detailed literature review across the five literature streams provided a considerable depth of understanding to the complexity of the problem. Specifically, the literature review informed a synthesis of ToA and two warfighting philosophies, namely attrition warfare and Mw. Table 2 below represents an original contribution towards aligning organizational learning requirements with warfighting philosophies by indexing the main descriptors of the attrition warfare and Mw warfighting philosophies and the salient elements of ToA, specifically Model I single-loop and Model II double-loop organizational learning systems. The table provides a side-by-side compare-and-contrast view of Model I and Model II learning systems by units of analysis: governing variables; action strategies and consequences; for relationships, learning, and self. Additionally, Table 2 illustrates how the Marine Corps' espoused theory of Mw closely aligns with Model II organizations that are more likely to engage in double-loop learning, while the pre-1989 warfighting practice of attrition warfare is closely aligned with Model I organizations that are more likely to engage in single-loop learning.

An organization with a Model I learning system and action strategies leading to single-loop learning consequences will have significant difficulty achieving the espoused theory of Mw.

**Table 2: Framework of Theory of Action and Warfighting Philosophies**

	<b>Model I Learning System</b>	<b>Attrition Warfare: Theory-in-practice</b>	<b>Model II Learning System</b>	<b>Maneuver Warfare: Espoused Theory</b>
<b>Governing Variables</b>	Avoid Risk (not lose or lose face) Emphasize rationality	Control, Efficiency, Process, Hierarchy, Internal focus on “my lane”, Obedience to task	Free and informed choice, Internal commitment, Trust	Initiative, External focus on the enemy, Fluidity, Trust, Obedience to intent
<b>Action Strategies</b>	Control environment, centralized tasking Low teamwork Low risk	Internally task focused, “go-and-do” orders and procedures to minimize risk, maximize effects Process focused planning and top-down communication and decision making to achieve synchronization Must eliminate risk	Sharing control, Transparency, Surfacing conflicting views, Encouraging public testing of evaluations in design and implementation of action	Intent focused orders not bound by tasks to maximize flexibility Flexible inclusive planning, decision making, and communications to achieve intent Must accept risk
<b>Consequences/ Relationship</b>	Defensive relationships Low freedom of choice Reduced production of valid information Little public testing of ideas	Relationships tend to be more rigid and reflective of hierarchy with dialog and discussion about “how” High premium on obedience to orders Relationship trust is based on obedience	Minimally defensive relationships High freedom of choice	Relationships less rigid and more introspective with open dialog and discussions about “why” Relationship trust is built on understanding.
<b>Consequences/ Learning</b>	Single-loop learning Self-fulfilling	Learning is focused on better implementing procedures Increased likelihood of single-loop learning and fixation on low-risk internally focused tactics and decisions Learns that Risk $\neq$ Gain	Increased likelihood of double-loop learning.	Learning is focused on communication, trust, and relationships Increased likelihood of double-loop learning to innovate to solve complex problems Learns that Risk = Gain
<b>Consequence/ Self</b>	Individuals seek to minimize losing and maximize winning	Individuals seek assurance/security of reputation through strict application of processes and procedures	Individuals are minimally defensive in protecting reputation and will seek understanding of issues	Individuals are more likely to seek and accept personal risk of reputation for organizational goals

Understanding what type of organizational learning system MCTOG mostly resembles shed light on what has been, thus far, an unsuccessful struggle to implement its campaign plan. The Model II organizational learning system is dependent upon a workplace culture that encourages staff members at all levels of the organization to share ideas and insights. Perhaps that is the nature of a workplace culture where the adoption of Mw and the MCTOG campaign plan falls short (Eisenberg et al., 2018; Frost et al., 1985; Örténblad, 2004; Whiteley et al., 2013). Using ToA as the lens to view this problem would help explain whether the norms, assumptions, governing variables, and actions strategies within MCTOG are indicative of a Model I or Model II organization. It will also shed light on MCTOG's difficulty to execute their campaign plan and reinvigorate Mw.

The literature review was wide-ranging, with five separate streams considered, and did provide a perspective from several angles to better illuminate the multi-faceted problem of reinvigorating Mw. The literature review further helped to design the research method to best answer the presented research question.

### **III RESEARCH METHOD**

MCTOG is a complex and dynamic organization, and therefore choosing the appropriate research method was paramount to an effective study. The research approach needed to be pragmatic, flexible in nature, and capable of providing comprehensive in-depth understanding of how things actually work in the real world. A case study method would ensure a tightly bounded and engaged academic scholarship welcoming of diverse disciplines across all organizational levels. Argyris and Schön's (1974) recommended approach to ToA was one of joint inquiry, meaning the researcher becomes a participant observer, and therefore the research encounter is one of "engaged" scholarship (Mathiassen & Sandberg, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007). This research seeks to co-produce knowledge and enhance learning effectiveness with practitioners, specifically the Commanding Officer of MCTOG.

#### **III.1 Selecting the Case Study Approach**

A case study is a methodological approach that allows for in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex phenomena in their natural settings. This study employed Argyris and Schön's (Argyris & Schön, 1974; O'Connor & Kotze, 2008; Salner, 1999) ToA to explore how and why an organizational learning system impacted MCTOG's ability to effectuate the strategic initiative to reinvigorate Mw via the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028 (MCTOG, 2018b). To answer the research question, I deployed a cross-sectional, single case study method for the following reasons. First, this study was an empirical and exploratory effort to answer "how" and "why" questions about a "contemporary, complex social phenomenon situated in real life" (Yin, 2009, p. 13). Second, the study sought to provide an "analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii): the reinvigoration of Mw in MCTOG. Third, the six case study approaches to gathering data, "analyzing documents, interviews, direct observations, participant observation



and physical artifacts” (Yazan, 2015, p. 149; Yin, 2009) would provide a thorough understanding of the problem allowing the research to be full of thick, rich descriptive data and provide internal validity through triangulation among the individuals, the levels within the organization, and my interpretation of the data (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009).

### **III.2 Building the MCTOG Theoretical Framework**

As an interpretive single case study, I built the conceptual model as data was collected (Yin, 2009). The broad structural concept of the MCTOG theoretical framework (see Fig. 5) was drawn from the work of Argyris and Schön (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996; Argyris, 2000; Argyris, 2003). The key elements in the framework are espoused theory, theory-in-use, assumptions, norms, governing variables, action strategies, and consequences for learning. In keeping with Dubin’s (1969) theory-building approach, the specifics within the units of analysis were based on my observations of the real world. The MCTOG theoretical framework was inferred from the study’s secondary and primary data. The MCTOG Campaign Plan established the organization’s espoused theory, the TECOM workshops, and the internal MCTOG staff survey (MCTOG, 2019b; TECOM, 2016, 2018), which helped initially define the governing variables as Marine Corps values, both bureaucratic and Mw. Action strategies and consequences for learning were uncovered from the primary data created from the field work. For additional investigation in the role of assumptions and norms in learning, I turned to the works of Edgar Schein (1984). Schein’s (1984) approach was to dig deeper than the surface artifacts to uncover the underlying assumptions and norms of the organization, *“if we are to decipher a given organization’s culture [assumptions norms] derived from a dynamic model of learning and group dynamics, we must use a complex interview, observation and joint inquiry approach to uncover the unconscious assumptions that are hypothesized to be the essence of the culture*

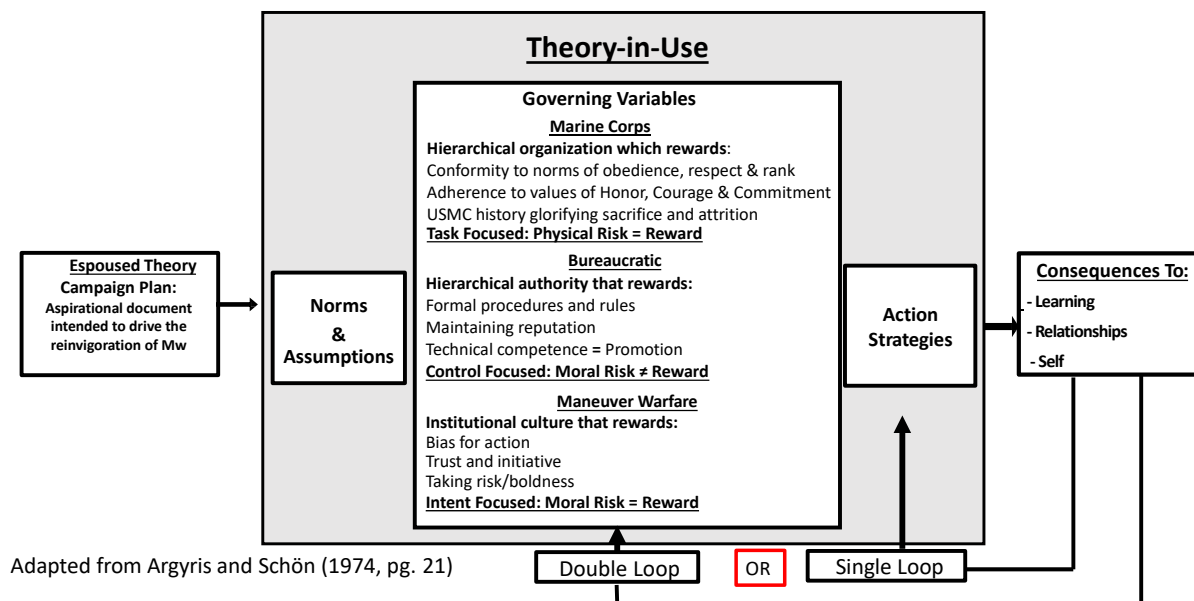
*[norms]*” (p. 14).

A single case study design analyzes an organizations’ practices by examining the actual practices of the faculty and staff members who comprise the organization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2009). For this study, MCTOG served as the single case, and the organization’s faculty and staff members served as the multiple subunits at the individual, group, and intergroup levels. As the engaged researcher, I wanted to understand each participating faculty and staff member at each level of interaction: as individuals, as members of homogenous groups (uniformed service members or government service employees), and as members of intergroups (MCTOG Core Design Team), in order to better perceive the entire organization’s learning system. This multi-level approach was intended to avoid an error inherent in single-case study design addressed by Yin (2009)—simply put, ‘not seeing the forest for the trees.’ This error occurs when researchers solely characterize the organization using individual-level data and neglect to aggregate the data of the groups and intergroups to best explain the case of the organization as a whole (Yin, 2009).

**MCTOG and a ToA Theoretical Framework:** Theories in use are complex. If all behavior were to be accounted for, the complexity would be overwhelming (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 7). Using ToA as the primary theoretical framework serves to both model and simplify the complexity of the MCTOG case study and capture data to indicate the impacts of the theory-in-use consequences on learning, relationships, and self and to influence either single-loop or double-loop learning. The framework also helps diagram the interplay between governing variables and the action strategies employed to hold one governing value within tolerance, perhaps at the expense of other governing variables. This should give us insight into the congruency or incongruency of the espoused theory and the theory-in-use.

To better illustrate MCTOG's use of espoused theory and theory-in-use, Fig. 5 presents an adaptation of Argyris and Schön's (1974) ToA that captures norms, assumptions, governing variables, and action strategies inferred from primary and secondary data and in the context of MCTOG's campaign plan as the espoused value. While single-loop and double-loop learning do not happen simultaneously, both are depicted in this framework for simplicity.

**Figure 5: MCTOG ToA Theoretical Framework**



**Governing Marine Corps Variable:** The Marine Corps' core values of "honor, courage, commitment" and "every Marine a rifleman" (Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Krulak, 1984; MCA&F, 1960; Terriff, 2007b) are woven into the ethos of the Marine Corps from recruit training (boot camp) and officer candidate school (OCS). Every Marine is thoroughly indoctrinated into a hierarchical organization that values and rewards behavior that conforms to norms, is instantaneously obedient, and respects rank. USMC values are captured in artifacts, such as doctrinal publications, customs and traditions, and throughout the training and education continuum. Ritualistic of rites of passage, such as the Crucible and The Basic School, reinforce

the Corps' values and anchor these desired behaviors in a Marine Corps history replete with acts of valor, toughness, obedience, and glorifying sacrifice to accomplish a task (Holmes-Eber, 2014a; Krulak, 1984; MCA&F, 1960; Terriff, 2007b). To sum up this description as an expression I inferred from the data: Task Focus + Obedience = Success + Promotion.

**Governing Bureaucratic Variable:** Values that reinforce hierarchical authority drive task specialization that favor formal procedures, rules, and roles and are impersonal and designed for optimal management and administration of an organization. Bureaucracies tend to reward technocrats, those that are best positioned through specialization qualifications (special certifications, program skills), and those that also have the political skills necessary to compete for resources within the organization. To sum up this description in an expression I inferred from the data: Technical Competence + Political Skill = Success + Promotion.

**Governing Maneuver Warfare Variable:** Values embedded into Marines' training and education continuum through doctrine and curricula create a culture that rewards an individual for initiative; a bold bias for action built on trust, communication, decentralized execution, and opportunity; and taking risks to achieve the desired intent. To sum up this description in an expression I inferred from the data: Intent Focus + Initiative + Risk Taking = Success + Promotion.

**Internal Consistency:** Governing variables have an acceptable range of behavior that exists when there is no self-contradiction, referred to as internal consistency (Argyris & Schön, 1974). If in an action strategy calls for one or more of the governing variables to fall out of tolerance, then there is internal inconsistency. For example, the governing variable maneuver warfare, which promotes bias for action and initiative, may be in tension with the bureaucratic governing variable that values and promotes process and procedure. If a theory-in-use employed

by an actor can keep those two governing variables in tolerance, then there is internal consistency. If one falls out of tolerance to accommodate the other, then there is internal inconsistency (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

### **III.3 Organizing Data Collection**

**Understanding the Research Setting:** The United States Marine Corps is an 187,000 strong, globally distributed organization. To focus this study, I narrowed the research setting to the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group (MCTOG). MCTOG is a formal school within the USMC training and education continuum providing advanced individual training to designated operations and intelligence personnel within the Ground Combat Element (GCE) and provide advanced collective training to operational units within the GCE. MCTOG is also the GCE Center of Excellence (COE), with the responsibility of leading GCE doctrine development and examining emerging concepts and technology to enhance GCE operational readiness (MCTOG, 2018b). Focusing on the GCE is important because, while the entirety of the Marine Corps, including aviation, logistics, and supporting establishment organizations, in principle operates under the Mw doctrine, the execution of the Mw doctrine at a level approaching espoused theory is most critical to the GCE that will actively seek close combat decisive engagements with the enemy in the FOE.

**Participant Screening:** Participant screening focused on those personnel assigned as faculty or staff at MCTOG and who had participated in the design, implementation, and delivery of instruction or who were members of the Core Design Team (CDT) for implementing the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028. Eliminated from participation in this study were government contractors who were not eligible due to the lengthy 4-5 months-long approval process required by the Human Research Protection Program Office, which would delay the

study beyond the period of time the CDT would be in session. This was not a detriment to the study, as contractors by law cannot make decisions for the government (US military) and are much more transient than GS or uniformed members. I specifically sought to recruit a holistic representation of MCTOG personnel to include uniformed military and government service employees. Of the uniformed military, I again sought a balanced representation between officers and enlisted Marines, and a cross section of occupational specialties with operations, intelligence, and aviation representation. Additionally, these participants had previously come to MCTOG from either the supporting establishment or various elements of the operating forces, thereby providing an indirect cross section of the Marine Corps. The participants were a mix between the more senior members of MCTOG, considered prime movers, who held leadership and decision-making roles and those with less time and influence at MCTOG but who filled important roles in executing the MCTOG mission.

**Participant Recruitment:** I recruited a total of 14 volunteers for this study: 10 uniformed military members and four government service employees spread across faculty and staff positions. Given the in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group-guided discussions, observation of the MCTOG working groups' internal interactions, and interactions with the commander, I assessed that this number of participants was adequate to produce rich, reliable data for analysis. The uniformed military participants ranged in rank from E-7 Gunnery Sergeant to O-5 Lieutenant Colonel, and the four government service employees ranged in grade from GS-11 to GS-14. All participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent form acknowledging their volunteer status, their expectation of confidentiality, and that there would be no compensation for participation. It is important to note that all participants seemed eager to engage in this academic study, and all were very cooperative and

generous with their time. Extraordinary care was taken during recruitment to avoid any appearance of command influence. Additionally, to avoid any optics that may influence a volunteer participant, I did not use my retired rank as a Marine colonel and ensured that all recruitment materials, emails, and scripts identified me as Mr. McCoy, a doctoral student in pursuit of my own academic objectives.

The uniformed military member population had been exposed to Mw doctrine during compulsory entry- and career-level training and education and have presumably practiced Mw in operational settings, including combat. A Marine from the faculty typically has 12–16 years of service and is responsible for teaching tactics and operations in the context of Mw. Per the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028, each faculty and staff member had a role in co-developing curricula to meet the rising conventional, unconventional, asymmetric, and hybrid threats of the FOE and to effectuate the goals of MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028 and the MOC (MCTOG, 2018b; USMC, 2016b, 2016a).

The government service (GS) employees varied in years of GS experience, and all had previous military experience. The GS participants held government service ratings ranging from GS 11–14 and will be roughly equivalent to their military counterpart participants in terms of rank. The GS population is responsible for co-developing curricula in support of Campaign Plan 2017–2027 to meet the rising conventional, unconventional, asymmetric, and hybrid threats of the FOE and to effectuate the goals of MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028.

#### **III.4 Collecting the Data**

In studying espoused theory versus theory-in-use, it is critical to compare what a subject professes in interviews with what behavior actually occurs at the individual, group, intergroup, and organizational levels (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). Primary data was collected

during a four-week-long field work period via in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with MCTOG faculty and staff participants. During these interviews, I was able to establish espoused theories at the individual level. I followed up the individual interviews with three separate homogenous focus group sessions to create the opportunity to observe any differences and tensions between individual espoused theories from the one-on-one interviews and theories-in-use that may emerge at the group level. Two focus groups consisted of uniformed military only. Due to the number of participants in this group I broke this group into two sessions to better accommodate participation with a smaller number of participants per session. The participants for these two sessions self-organized by their schedule availability for one group of six and one group of three. One uniformed participant was unavailable the group session due to a scheduling conflict. The third focus group session consisted of GS employees only. Due to scheduling availability, only three of the four GS participants were involved in the focus group session.

The in-situ observation of the MCTOG CDT provided me an opportunity to observe actual behavior (theories-in-use) for congruency with individual espoused theories at the intergroup level as well as to observe the consequences of the various action strategies on learning and relationships (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1991). Finally, observing in situ the MCTOG CDT interacting with the MCTOG senior management for the final outbrief provided the opportunity to observe all the above at the organizational level. Observing in situ interaction at various levels provided a vantage point to identify elements of the theories-in-use and their associated consequences for learning and the relationship to self and others to determine which actions are and are not conducive to organizational learning at MCTOG.

**Interviews and Focus Groups:** The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured



and discovery-oriented and employed interview and focus group protocols approved by the separate institutional review boards for Georgia State University and Training and Education Command (TECOM). Interview and focus group questions were aimed at establishing a baseline of each participant's understanding of Mw and the campaign plan and then discussing organizational learning concepts as they applied to MCTOG executing the campaign plan. To gather norms, assumptions and action strategies, how people communicate, and how conflict is resolved, the interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim using TEMI, an online transcription service with 90-95% accuracy. I then manually proofed each transcript while listening to the audio to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Following each interview, I recorded my reflections in a contact summary report (Miles et al., 2014), added explanations for acronyms, and noted shifts in the tone of voice and nonverbal communication.

The participants were asked a series of questions regarding their understanding of Mw in practice and what the espoused theory should look like in action. I also plumbed the participants' attitudes, assumptions, and perceived norms regarding working at MCTOG as it pertains to a learning environment. During the interviews, I wanted to explore the role of culture regarding governing values by asking questions that would illuminate Schein's (1984) levels of culture—artifacts and creations, values, and basic assumptions—and how those might interact to impact learning.

I followed up on the interviews and focus group sessions with in situ direct and participant observations of MCTOG CDT sessions, interactions in a leadership offsite session, and the final out briefing of the final town hall meeting where the commander announced the results of the CDT. These observations provided an opportunity to compare what was espoused in the interviews and focus group sessions with the observed behavior and action strategies put

into play during interactions at the intergroup and organizational levels. Specifically, I sought to observe how the participants responded to criticisms, differing views, perceived challenges, and the participant networks that form positive or negative consequences for learning and relationships.

Data collection occurred in three stages: establishing the espoused theory, data collection from interviews and focus groups, and data collection from the CDT. Stage 1 consisted of two steps and was intent on establishing espoused theory. Stage 1, Step 1 was the initial data collection and analysis of secondary data from documents to establish the espoused theory at the organizational level. Stage 1, Step 2 collected primary data from the interviews to establish the espoused theory at the individual level. Stage 2 collected primary data at the homogenous group level with the focus group sessions (all uniformed military or all GS). Stage 3 collected data from direct and participant observations and was intended to collect data on intergroup and organizational behaviors. Stage 3, Step 1 collected primary data via a participant observer of the CDT, a MCTOG Leadership Offsite at the heterogeneous groups level. State 3, Step 2 collected data via direct observation of organizational behavior. Each stage and step are detailed below.

**Stage 1: Initial Data Collection and Analysis:** The initial data collection and analysis consisted of two steps: establishing the espoused theory and analyzing MCTOG written artifacts. I collected and analyzed extant secondary data in the form of documents internal to MCTOG, including organizational goal documents, curricula, guidance, organizational charts, working group charters, and policy memoranda and artifacts. I also collected data external to MCTOG but central to the study, such as Marine Corps documents on doctrine, directives concerning Mw, and the TECOM workshops to reinvigorate Mw. Together, these documents, once analyzed, served as important artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) and provided an understanding of the

espoused theory of the organization (Schein, 1984, 2017). I assessed the quality of the documents and archival data according to four criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). The documents and artifacts helped triangulate the primary data collected from interviews, focus groups, and direct observations and participant observations.

The interviews produced the bulk of the primary data to determine espoused values at the individual level for this study. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of 10 uniformed military personnel and four government service employees that amounted to 19 hours and 29 minutes of digital audio recordings. The questions, per the interview protocol, were intended to spark deep narratives from each participant that, when woven together, gave shape to the experience composite at MCTOG and insight into the organizational learning system and how that system impacted the campaign plan implementation (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). The interview questions were open-ended and designed to uncover the unit of analysis beyond individual norms, assumptions, and governing values. Semi-structured interviews gave me the flexibility to redirect questions or probe into previously given answers. The interview protocol was designed to establish validity (Yin, 2009) and is noted in Appendix A, and the composite narrative is noted in Table 5.

**Stage 2: Focus Groups Primary Data:** The focus group sessions occurred with 12 of the 14 participants and produced five hours of digital audio recordings. The sessions produced the primary data used to determine the espoused values and action strategies at the group level and detect any movement in individual espoused values in a group setting. This stage consisted of establishing three focus groups, two consisting of uniformed military participants and the other consisting of GS employee participants. Each focus group participated in a discussion I

guided to determine how people interact within the MCTOG organization and how learning takes place. The data collected here were analyzed to gain an understanding of both the espoused values of each homogenous group (uniformed military members and GS employees) and to observe and detect governing values and action strategies by individuals (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). The focus group protocols for GS employees and uniformed military are provided in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively.

**Stage 3: Participant Observation and Direct Observation:** Myers (2009) made the distinction between observation, “watching from the outside and taking no part in the activities,” and participant observation, where the researcher not only observes but also interacts with the participants in an effort to understand what is happening from the inside. “Participant observation *in-situ*... where they are... will allow both intimate observation of parts of their behavior and reporting it in ways useful to social science” (Myers, 2013, p. 137). Per the research protocol, I did not use my rank of colonel; however, due to being known professionally by the participants and my previous involvement in the 2018 leadership offsite, I assessed that any attempt I made at being a pure observer in the background, taking no part in the activities of the working groups, would present to the participants as inauthentic and would likely dampen discussions. The approach of participant observer was more organic and allowed for deeper discussions and connections (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

In addition to the individual interviews and focus group sessions, the time period for the field work, running from May 20, 2019 to June 18, 2019, presented several opportunities to conduct direct and participant observation at all levels: individual, group, intergroup, and organization. Specifically, intergroup and organizational levels were observed during the Core Design Team workshops, the Building Citizenship and Care Leadership Offsite (Part II), and the

MCTOG Town Hall curriculum decision announcement.

**Participant Observation: Core Design Team (CDT):** Of the 14 total participants, eight were members of the CDT and met for three to four hours a day on May 21, 22, 23, 30, and 31, 2019 (MCTOG, 2019a). I attended these sessions as a participant observer and recorded by field note (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) over 17 hours of interaction and discussion. The CDT met to discuss the future of the curricula and pedagogy for the two main instructional courses offered by MCTOG. The intended outcome of the CDT was to merge the separate curricula redesign efforts from sub-working groups and a red team to create a continuous, integrated learning environment through an intentional design process that will accelerate learning, enable the intellectual advantage, and create the Learning and Maneuver Warfare Center for the GCE. Additionally, the CDT sought to develop a master narrative intended to knit together the learning outcomes for the various courses in the curricula (MCTOG, 2019a). These meetings involved roughly two dozen members from across MCTOG (officer, enlisted, and GS) on a rotating basis, with every day resulting in a different mix of attendees. This provided a venue for observing intergroup behavior in discussing the campaign plan and curricula changes.

**Participant Observation: Leadership Offsite:** Of the 14 participants, six had attended the December 2018 Campaign Plan Discussion Leadership Offsite, a two-and-a-half-day event that took place at San Diego State University. While this event preceded this study, it was discussed during the interviews and focus group sessions and provided keen insight into individual and group approaches to executing, or rather not executing, the campaign plan. I attended and presented at this conference as a member of MCTOG and had first-hand observations from its conduct. The sequel to that event was the 2019 Building Citizenship and Care Leadership Offsite (Part II). This event was observed as part of this study as well, and I

took on the participant observer role once again. The attendance of the latter event involved roughly 40 members of MCTOG, with 12 of the 14 participants of this study in attendance. This event was held at the Community Center aboard Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms California over the course of a single afternoon on June 10, 2019. While short in duration, this venue provided valuable insight into group, sub-group, and organizational behavior in wide-ranging discussions covering curricula and the identity of MCTOG.

**Direct Observation: Town Hall Decision Announcement:** The town hall event took place June 18, 2019, which was the final day of my field work period. This was an “all hands” event requiring the attendance of all MCTOG personnel; therefore, all study participants attended. The goal of the town hall meeting was for the Commanding Officer to announce the curricula decisions from the CDT workshops. The town hall was held aboard the MCTOG compound and lasted approximately 30 minutes, with a quick brief by the Commanding Officer and a short question and answer period. This venue also provided insight into individual, group, sub-group, and organizational behavior. I was strictly an observer for this event.

These three venues provided opportunities to observe how the mixed working groups interact at the intergroup level (uniformed and GS) and at the individual level when briefing the person with the most authority, namely the Commanding Officer of MCTOG.

**Capturing the Nonverbal Communication:** The participant observer approach was useful in allowing me to examine nonverbal communication, especially if there was a discrepancy between a verbal declaration accompanied by a nonverbal contradictory cue. Nonverbal communication is typically sent with intent (consciously or unconsciously) and used with regularity among members of a social community are generally interpreted as intentional (Argyle, 1990; Mandal, 2014). During my prior military service, I was trained in Human

Behavior Pattern Recognition and Analysis (HBPR&A). HBPR&A training provided observational skills to sense, make sense of, and establish a baseline of behavior in operational settings involving groups of people. The HBPR&A training enables one to detect behavioral anomalies that fall above or below a baseline. This training was invaluable reading on the nonverbal behavior of the organized working groups and briefings.

In HBPR&A, nonverbal communications are classified into six categories: *proxemics*, the push or pull effect of one person on another person or group that signal affiliations or rivalries; *geographics*, where people tend to anchor themselves in a social setting to establish security, dominance, or affiliation; *heuristics*, a prototypical match used by a person as a shortcut in assessing a situation, such as another's viewpoint or position, which is a tell for displaying one's assumptions about the self and others; *biometrics*, which are tell-tale biological responses to stress, anger, and anxiety that are impossible to mask, like the reddish skin tone from a histamine flush; *atmospherics*, the environmental cues or feel of the room as being an enjoyable or contested space; and kinesics, body language cues that betray underlying emotions and thoughts regardless of verbal communication.

Utilizing participant observation, direct observation techniques (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002), and HBPR&A training (Argyle, 1990; Mandal, 2014), I was able to observe and detect a range of behaviors at the individual, group, intergroup, and organizational levels that provided the opportunity to detect congruence or incongruence between the espoused theory and theories-in-use and to observe the consequences to learning, relationship with self and others, and the total sum impact on organizational performance.

### **III.5 Analyzing the Data and Addressing Bias**

The qualitative data analysis approach will be the double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1993; Myers,

2013). There are four reasons for this choice. First, the double hermeneutic enables a deep understanding of people in organizational settings and provides an approach to human understanding with a philosophical grounding for interpretivism (Myers, 2013). Second, in the double hermeneutics approach, the researcher studies the organization from the inside and must speak the language (Myers, 2000) and, in this case, understand the undercurrents of culture at the macro (USMC) and micro (MCOTG) levels. Third, all qualitative research from an interpretive perspective is subject to prejudiced opinion. In an attempt at full transparency, I acknowledge that my nearly three decades as a US Marine and possessing deep familiarity with MCTOG as a member of the organization and as a major contributor to the MCTOG Campaign Plan 2018–2028 could introduce bias into my data interpretations. As Klein and Myer (1999) explained, “hermeneutics recognizes that prejudice is the necessary starting point of our understanding” (Klein & Myers, 1999, p. 76). “The critical task of hermeneutics then becomes one of distinguishing between true prejudices, by which we understand, and false prejudices, by which we misunderstand” (Gadamer & Linge, 1976, p. 124). From a hermeneutics perspective, my previous experiences cannot be ignored and are best addressed with frank transparency. On the one hand, I must acknowledge and account for a level of conscience and unconscionable bias. On the other hand, my experience and exposure to the subject of Mw, the attempt to reinvigorate it, and my affinity for and loyalty to the Marine Corps and MCTOG provided the impetus for this study. With mitigating measures in place, my experience combined with academic rigor and research skills will lend a valuable perspective in making sense of what happened during the studied events and field work interviews. The fourth reason to employ hermeneutics is the prominent role of culture within the Marine Corps (Brown, 2018; Holmes-Eber, 2014c; TECOM, 2016; Terriff, 2006c). At MCTOG, hermeneutic philosophy was useful in interpreting the



cultural context to discover the meanings behind actions and dialogue (Frost et al., 1985) that affect the MCTOG organizational learning system at the individual, group, intergroup, and organizational levels.

**Memos, Codes, and NVivo:** Due to the large number of interviews and observations, procedural and analytical memo keeping was used to inform the bottom up approach. Documents and transcripts from secondary and primary data were uploaded into NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software tool for organizing, categorizing, and coding data captured from artifacts, interviews, focus group transcripts, and field notes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). While this software was very helpful for storing, sorting, coding, and developing themes, it was only a tool. The interpretive approach to this qualitative study demanded manual analysis to sift through and obtain the subtext nuances of pauses and inflections and emotional and kinesthetic emphasis used to amplify speech during an observation encounter.

The data analysis was a continuous and cyclical process. As data were collected, a preliminary analysis was conducted on the archival documents, transcribed digital audio recorded interviews, and focus group discussions, as well as the field notes taken during direct observation and participant observation of working groups at the offsite and town hall meetings and briefings. This study was exploratory in nature, so I employed a bottom up data analysis and allowed the concepts to emerge from a continued analysis of the data as it was collected and analyzed for further coding of keywords and phrases. According to Miles and Huberman (2014), “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 56). My approach to the first coding cycle was a blend of conceptual coding to describe and summarize the data collected in terms of ToA (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013). I also employed thematic coding and identified the thematic

contours of the qualitative data to capture the richness of MCTOG as a dynamic organization. The first coding cycle produced 14 parent nodes and 74 child nodes. From the first coding cycle, the story of the failed implementation of the campaign plan began to take shape. The second coding cycle was conceptional and focused on answering the research question and identifying where MCTOG attempted to engage in Model II double-loop learning system behaviors and Model I single-loop learning system behaviors and the impacts of those behaviors on the implementation of the campaign plan.

After every contact with the participants, I prepared a contact summary report to capture the atmospherics (tone, mood, nonverbal communication) from each contact and to refine future follow-up questions in the interview and focus group protocols and to discover emergent themes.

### **III.6 Sharing the Research in Real Time**

Congruent with engaged scholarship and the co-production of knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007), at the conclusion of the data collection, I periodically conducted updates in the form of analytical memos with the Commanding Officer of MCTOG, the most senior uniformed service member who *was not* a participant in the study, but who collaborated with me to focus the study.

Additionally, I conducted a final debriefing with both the Commanding Officer and the top GS in the organization, the Deputy of MCTOG, who *was* a participant in the study. The debriefing covered all aspects of the study to include the case results and discussion items—particularly those that bore implications for practice.

The debriefing was another element to check on observer bias, as it provided the opportunity for questions from senior members of MCTOG and to challenge the case results, conclusions, and recommendations. Questions asked during the debriefings were focused on expanding understanding of the discoveries detailed in the results section of this study and

discussing potential remedies. While there were no objections to the findings, there was a very productive discussion on what to do with the findings. Additionally, having a senior representative from both uniformed service members and GS members provided a valuable opportunity to communicate the findings to those capable of making systemic changes to the organization.

#### IV CASE RESULTS

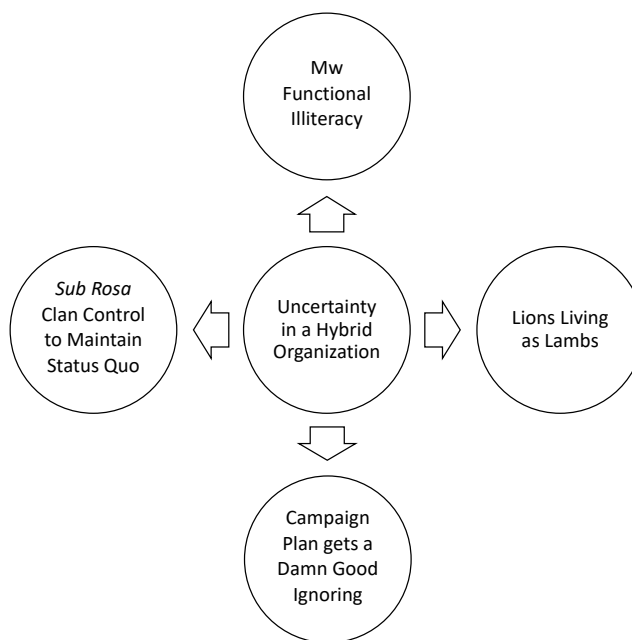
The fieldwork for this study yielded a daunting amount of unstructured data harvested from 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews, three focus groups, and field notes created from 21 hours of participant observations from group meetings and briefings. The method, combined with my roles within the organization as an employee, retired Marine colonel, and as a researcher, afforded a unique opportunity to study this organization as it implemented the campaign plan. This approach gave me a multi-faceted vantage point from which to observe an organization from both near and afar. From this vantage point and with tools and skills provided by academic rigor, I was able to unearth and make sense of explanatory frames throughout this case; those that would have eluded me in the past.

MCTOG was typically organized in a pyramidal hierarchy with lines of authority, roles, and responsibilities cleanly depicted in a line and block hierarchical graphic (MCTOG, 2017). MCTOG was well-led by experienced, intelligent, and earnest active-duty Marines and GS employees. The Commanding Officer's intent and guidance were clear and issued in writing and verbally disseminated. The leadership created and maintained a positive command climate; people wanted to be there (MCTOG, 2019b). MCTOG was primarily staffed by a roughly 150-strong intelligent, dedicated, and experienced hybrid workforce consisting of both active military and GS employees. The organization was not unwieldy, being neither large nor widely distributed and inhabiting a compound of less than one acre. The usual suspects contributing to a dysfunctional organization, including poor leadership and climate, improper organization, a workforce that is not up to the task, or an unwieldy size or being too widely distributed, were all absent. With so many positive aspects to the organization and so few of the negatives associated with a dysfunctional organization, why did the campaign plan implementation and realization of

the vision fail? Seeking to understand this phenomenon was the inspiration for this study.

The data unearthed five phenomena operating within MCTOG that provide an explanatory framework (Figure 6) for answering the research question: “Why was it difficult for the Marine Corps to implement the strategic initiative of Mw despite 30 years of training and education efforts to do so?” The power of the explanatory frames is that they provide a structure and lexicon to a set of unstructured, often hidden, and nameless dynamics at work within an organization. This framework provides ‘name it to tame it’ mechanism necessary for managers to make sense of a complex and dynamic situation. As a result, managers are more likely to actualize their strategic pursuits.

**Figure 6: The Five Explanatory Frames**



The five explanatory frames are: 1) “Uncertainty in a hybrid organization.” 2) “Mw functional illiteracy.” 3) “The campaign plan gets a damn good ignoring.” 4) “Lions living as lambs.” 5) “Sub rosa clan control to maintain the status quo.”

These five explanatory frames describe and explain the complex and nuanced behavior of

MCTOG's members that ultimately placed the bureaucratic governing variable at odds, and incompatible with the USMC and Mw governing variables. The behavior observed within the bureaucratic variable was a form of careerism that ran afoul of the traditionally held Marine Corps ethos of "honor, courage, and commitment" (Holmes-Eber, 2014b; Johnson, 2018).

Finally, the five explanatory frames revealed how a sub rosa clan operating within MCTOG's formal hierarchical structure to effectively countered MCTOG senior management's attempts to create a Model II, double-loop environment and implement a strategic initiative in the form of the campaign plan (Chua et al., 2012; Ouchi, 1980). The result of this complex interplay was that MCTOG's attempted intervention to implement the campaign plan and accomplish the mandate of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to reinvigorate Mw, ultimately fell short of its goal.

The five explanatory frames presented in this chapter provide the warp and weft of a storyline that examines one organization's attempt to adopt a new espoused theory in the form of the campaign plan. Running throughout this storyline is a *fil de guidage rouge*<sup>5</sup>, provided by the salient elements of ToA, which are espoused theory, theory-in-use, Model I and Model II organizational behaviors, governing variables, and single-loop and double-loop organizational learning. Together, the explanatory framework set against the theoretical ToA framework serves to answer the research question.

#### **IV.1 Explanatory Frame 1: Uncertainty in a Hybrid Organization**

MCTOG is a novel organization compared to most other Marine Corps organizations. As a result, what seems familiar from the outside to incoming uniformed members results in a

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<sup>5</sup> A red guiding thread running through a story or body of work

dislocation of expectations once they were inside the organization.

*“Okay, this place is interesting. I’ve never been to a command that has the dynamics of MCTOG. When I first got here, I thought it was the craziest command I have ever been to.”* (Faculty participant)

In 13 different interviews, participants referenced MCTOG’s unfamiliar hybrid organization 53 times. In many ways, the novelty of MCTOG rendered previous assumptions and norms held by the members from their previous experiences obsolete, requiring the discovery of new assumptions and norms. The discovery process was idiosyncratic to each member, as MCTOG lacked any form of socialization process to onboard new members and explicitly established norms, values, and expectations. Without a formal onboarding process, discovery took place on the job over the first year of their assignment and through interacting with other members. The lack of formal socialization to aid new members in assimilating into the unfamiliar structure created ambiguity in MCTOG’s purpose and created mixed messages and silos of communication organized around those with the highest rank among middle management.

*“You have three lieutenant colonels and a vast preponderance of the leadership who all have a different answer of what MCTOG [does], is indicative of the problem.”* (Faculty participant)

Explaining the atmospherics of what life at MCTOG was like for the participants provides a contextual understanding of how the environment may have contributed to the other explanatory frames discovered and that ultimately influenced organizational learning. There were three main dynamics forming the atmosphere for life at MCTOG. First was the dynamics created by a hybrid workforce of uniformed and GS employees. Second was the effect of many

of the uniformed members at a crossroads in their personal and professional lives while trying to establish a work–life balance. Third was the sense of uncertainty within the frenetic tempo at MCTOG.

One of the factors making MCTOG a novel organization that seemed alien to the uniformed members was how the structure and hierarchy at MCTOG differed from the operating force in two important ways. First, MCTOG was staffed with a high concentration of senior ranking uniformed members. Second, MCTOG had a significant presence of GS employees, which most uniformed members had never worked closely with.

The high concentration of senior uniformed members was due to the relatively high rank of the student population, which created a need for a faculty and staff that is atypically top-heavy in grade compared to the structure of the operating forces that is familiar to most Marines. MCTOG only had about 90 uniformed faculty and staff, yet the concentration of majors, lieutenant colonels, and master sergeants assigned to MCTOG would be equivalent to a typical Marine Corps organization five times that size. Such a concentration of seniority appeared to blur what usually are very clear lines of hierarchical authority familiar to Marines.

*“You have such a high number of ‘Alpha males,’ majors, lieutenant colonels, a colonel, master guns, a ton of master sergeants, it’s very disjointed, everyone is going in different directions, a thousand miles an hour, and it wasn’t cohesive.”*

(Faculty participant)

The high concentration of seniority also added to a level of isolation or “siloeing” between small sections led by relatively senior Marines. The impact of this concentration on communications across the command was referenced 40 times over 11 interviews.

*“So, the three instructors I had...none of them ever talked. They kept to*



*themselves, tried to do their own thing, and there was no crosstalk. No trying to help each other out.”* (Faculty participant)

Even in an organization as small and compact as MCTOG, the insulating effect of silos impacted even the most basic of relationships, facial recognition.

*“There's people that I know have worked for here for two years, I'm having a conversation with them, and someone walks by, and I'm like, who is that? They work here; they have a white badge. They have worked here at least six months because the badge-maker has been broken for at least that long. But they've [actually] worked here two years, and I've never seen that person. To me, that's a problem at any organization, especially one this small.”* (Faculty participant)

The other element of novelty about MCTOG was the presence of civilians in the command, including the number two position in the organization. Again, to most Marines, this was a completely different environment from the operating forces where civilians were not part of the workforce. Even though all GS civilians had significant prior military experience, there was a tension between the uniformed members and the GS employees. The GS employees perceived a lack of respect for their experience prior to and within MCTOG, and the uniformed perceived the GS employees to be entrenchment and resistant to change.

*“Yep, so that bridge gets burned, and the lack of communication is sometimes deliberate... There are some outstanding Americans here as GS that are professional all the time... there others that should have been fired years ago that are like a cancer holding this place back.”* (Faculty participant)

GS employees tended to be in the organization much longer than uniformed members. For example, two of the four GSs in this study had been at MCTOG for all 10 years of the

organization's existence. This longevity contrasted starkly with the uniformed members, whom at most will spend three years, and often less, at MCTOG before heading to their next assignment per normal Marine Corps personnel rotation policy. Often, the GS's tended to feel that the uniformed members did not appreciate their experience and that they were not listened to when the organization engaged in problem solving.

*"I've seen this problem three times now, and what you want to do just won't work."* (Staff participant)

Some participants voiced an undercurrent of resentment to the presence of civilians in a Marine organization. One GS employee with 20 plus years of service as a Marine, including combat tours, described his encounter with a senior enlisted Marine during his first week on the job at MCTOG.

*"I tried to have a conversation with a master sergeant, and we talked a little bit, and after a couple of days, he was like, 'why are you here? We don't need civilians; we Marines can do our jobs'."* (Staff participant)

Conversely, some uniformed members saw the GS employees as entrenched and rigid.

"People are comfortable; there are staff [GS] that have been here for a lot of years that have done things a certain way for a lot of years." (Faculty participant)

One GS participant expressed knowledge about this perception as well.

*"So, there is a perception, in my opinion, a false perception, you know some people have been here so long they need to leave 'cause [sic] they're stuck in their ways."* (Staff participant)

The novelty of MCTOG as a hybrid, top-heavy organization in and of itself created an atmosphere of uncertainty about where one fits in the organization and one's value to the

organization. Such uncertainty may sow the seeds fear and vulnerability, leading to a myriad of defensive routines individuals will employ to reduce their exposure to embarrassment.

**At the Crossroads of Life and Career:** In addition to the uncertainty that accompanies joining an unfamiliar and novel organization, many uniformed members found themselves arriving at MCTOG with 10–12 years of service and at a crossroads in their careers. For the first time in their careers, many contemplated the decision to either commit to getting to 20 years of service to become retirement eligible or to simply resign and start another career in the private sector. Adding to the context of life at MCTOG was a sense of tiredness among the uniformed members. Many participants had arrived at MCTOG after being in the operating forces for several years, where they had completed multiple overseas deployments. Typically, the OPTEMPO in the operating forces is incredibly high and exhausting, and many of the instructors hadn't taken leave<sup>6</sup> for over two years before arriving at MCTOG and being expected to get up to speed to instruct quickly.

*“I mean we had a majority of guys [at MCTOG] with 60 plus days of leave on the books that are coming off deployments... we had one guy last year, 90 some days... and they go right into that [instructing]. So, I think that... some folks just have different perspectives here, that kind of gets lost.”* (Faculty participant)

When I asked a different participant about the impact of the operational tempo at MCTOG on the faculty and staff the reply was as follows.

*“They've gotten beaten down... some are just tired of being in this profession [Marine Corps].”* (Faculty participant)

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<sup>6</sup> An active duty, uniformed member of the military earns 30 days of ‘leave’ or paid time off annually.

The other crossroads element encountered is that of finding a work–life balance.

*“One of the problems I see [is] a lot of competing interests for the instructors, whether it’s from trying to do their own service level [mandatory] professional military education [to remain competitive for promotion], learn aspects at MCTOG... you know the whole work, life, family balance.”* (Faculty participant)

Many participants freshly out of the deploying operational forces are seeking to spend more time with their families, which in their minds seemed to conflict with personally directed professional development necessary to teach at MCTOG.

*“The family/work balance is automatically, again, the first to suffer. But my wife also understands that I’m coming home every night for the first time in a decade that we’ve been together. So, she’s not terribly upset because I come home and we eat dinner as a family and she gets the kids ready for bed and I go upstairs and I got a stack of books on my desk I’m trying to read.”* (Faculty participant)

Often times, instructors adopted a passive approach to MCTOG’s passive DIY self-directed learning and focused instead on completing their tour and catching up on family time.

*“Hey, am I really going to invest my nights and weekends reading these publications when there is no real quality control mechanism? Or am I going to make some decisions on, I’m going to work for 12 hours... to accomplish the missions I’ve been given. But some nights and weekends I’m going to spend some time with my friends and family because I haven’t seen them in a couple of years?”*  
(Faculty participant)

**Uncertainty is a Given Certainty:** As previously discussed, the lack of a formal onboarding program at MCTOG that could communicate the organization's identity, norms, and

values left new members to come to their own conclusions for each. Although questions concerning uncertainty were not part of the interview protocol, a general feeling of uncertainty due to a lack of direction within MCTOG appeared as a common theme throughout the study, with 73 references over 13 interviews and in the two uniformed focus groups.

*“There’s no clear sense of who we are as an organization. What the hell exactly is it we’re doing... just this constant nebulous reactive world you live in, where nobody really understands what the hell they’re doing or where they fit into it.”*

Specifically, nine interviews produced 43 references pointing to a high OPTEMPO being responsible for an atmosphere of uncertainty.

*“But like [participant x] said, that’s your primary job on Monday, and then you’re shifted to a different effort on Tuesday, and then you’re doing something completely different on Wednesday, so most of us go into pure survival mode.”*  
(Faculty participant)

Adding to the frustration of being “in survival mode” was also the perception that the uncertainty and high OPTEMPO was self-generated within MCTOG.

*“I think it is definitely self-inflicted... we do it to ourselves, intentionally and unintentionally.”* (Staff participant)

Finally, the lack of socialization through an onboarding process made for a very insular or siloed organization where members of one department did not share information with members of another department. Worse, even in a small compound with only 150 employees, people didn’t know each other.

**Good Things About MCTOG:** For all the frustrations vented during the interviews, all participants expressed positive sentiments about MCTOG and thought they brought value to the

organization. They also expressed that MCTOG was positively assisting the operating forces.

*“I would say 99.9% of the people say they liked being a part of MCTOG.*

*There’re some negative comments... but everybody believes that what they do here not only makes a difference here at MCTOG but makes a difference across the OPFOR [operating forces].”* (Staff participant)

When asked to describe the impact of serving at MCTOG, one participant expressed a sense of professional growth stemming from his duty as an instructor.

*“Challenging, rewarding, frustrating... being in the classroom with the students, challenging but very rewarding right? That’s how I’m being developed.”* (Faculty participant)

The established MCTOG norms and assumptions of uncertainty, exhaustion, high operational tempo, and individuals facing personal and professional crossroads all combine to provide a rich description of life at MCTOG and provide the atmospheric context to the following four explanatory frames.

#### **IV.2 Explanatory Frame 2: Mw and Functional Illiteracy**

The original phenomenon that inspired this journey was the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC 's FRAGO-1/2016 call to action to reinvigorate Mw. FMFM-1 Warfighting was published in 1989 by then CMC General Al Gray and was vigorously implemented throughout the training and education continuum. However, some 27 years later and after 15 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC’s FRAGO-1/2016 indicated dissatisfaction with the emphasis being placed on Mw and sought an intervention to revive the cornerstone doctrine necessary for meeting the emerging challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. MCTOG was uniquely positioned to influence the reinvigoration of Mw and saw the requirement for its own internal intervention necessary in the form of the

campaign plan. But for MCTOG to reinvigorate Mw, its instructors must know the doctrine and be able to teach it to the student population at the tacit level.

**Teaching Mw at MCTOG was a Presumed Competency:** The data show that among the MCTOG faculty and staff, the knowledge and understanding of Mw and commitment to teaching the Mw doctrine was an espoused theory only. To examine Mw as an espoused theory, the interview protocol employed three questions intended to gauge a participant's understanding of Mw. For example, all participants were asked, "What is maneuver warfare and what does it look like in practice?" The answers provided revealed the gap between each participant's espousal that they understand and practice Mw and their actual understanding and ability to practice Mw, their theory-in-use. Additionally, during focus group discussions and during participant observer sessions, I was able to assess the overall understanding of Mw as a doctrine and philosophy from the answers given. While accounting for the fact that participants may be caught off guard trying to articulate what may be fairly described as an abstract philosophy, and might struggle a bit before getting around articulating the underlying principles and core concepts, most never did get around to it. Nine of 14 participants gave rambling explanations of Mw that seldom went beyond a few Mw buzzwords. For illustration, the Mw buzzwords are bolded in the quotes below.

*"All right, so, maneuver warfare, when I think of it, MCTOG is utilizing ideally **combined arms** to generate some **tempo** or at least to have the desired effect on your enemy. To make him bend to your **will**. That's – when I think of maneuver warfare, that's what comes to mind for me."* (Faculty participant)

Often, participants struggled to distinguish Mw from attrition warfare.

*"Um, first I'd say what maneuver warfare is to me, it would be, obviously, my*

*definition per se is, is obviously do the most damage to the enemy with the least amount of damage to yourself or your unit. When I say that to achieve, to achieve which you know, your endstate.”* (Faculty participant)

When pressed for more specific answers to define Mw, participants often conceded they could not articulate Mw as a concept in action.

*“I don’t know if we actually define maneuver warfare. It’s just one of those things that we just say, oh yeah, maneuver warfare, EABO, MCO [tactical operating concepts]. You know we just kind of throw it out there without really defining what it means.”* (Faculty participant)

One participant that had professed to be among the few career-long “maneuverists” struggled to describe maneuver warfare.

*“It’s one of those nebulous things where it’s – I don’t know, it’s a mindset. So that would, almost kind of be trying to define what a mindset looks like. And it’s one of those things where I know it when I see it, but I don’t know if I can tell you in practice what that actually is going to look like. Well, I don’t.”* (Staff participant)

Perhaps some of the difficulty in describing Mw lies in the deficit that exists among the MCTOG faculty in the deliberate study and effort necessary to render a tacit understanding of a concept into something more explicit for teaching students. This lack of study and understanding presented itself in two ways during the interviews. First, when questioned, the instructors that struggled with explaining Mw conceded they had not read the doctrine in a long while, some not since entry-level training that had occurred over a decade ago.

*“I’ve read it. It’s been a while since I’ve read it, but I know it defines conflict. It defines war, attrition, war of attrition, and maneuver warfare.”* (Faculty



participant)

In response to a follow-up to this question to another faculty member struggling to define Mw, “When was the last time you read MCDP-1?” The reply was illuminating.

*“Not [sic], I mean, not since TBS, at TBS<sup>7</sup>”* (Faculty participant)

In the preface of the original Mw publication Warfighting FMFM-1 and in the updated Mw publication Warfighting MCDP-1, the 29th CMC implored all Marines to “*read and reread*” MCDP-1 Warfighting (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; USMC, 1989, 1997d) saying, “*This manual, Warfighting, describes a philosophy for action which, in war and in peace, in the field and in the rear, dictates our approach to duty*” (USMC, 1989, p.1).

The lack of engagement by MCTOG faculty with the capstone doctrine of the Marine Corps is evidence the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC was correct in his FRAGO-1 call to action to reinvigorate the espoused theory of Mw. Furthermore, this is illustrative of the say-do-gap between the espoused theory of the campaign plan and the theory in use by MCTOG instructors. The data from this study shows that the 37<sup>th</sup> CMC call to action was well-founded, and the theory in use at MCTOG fell well short of the 29<sup>th</sup> CMC call to “*read and reread*” the doctrine.

The second manner in which the lack of study and understanding of Mw presented was how several participants confused the principles of Mw with elements of the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB). MCP and IPB are two highly structured and methodical planning and analysis processes closely aligned with attrition warfare and the staple tools of staff planning for tactical operations. The following two quotes from interviews with instructors speak to the emphasis placed on IPB and MCP and how

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<sup>7</sup> TBS is the “The Basic School,” a compulsorily six-month entry-level school for all new Marine officers.

they are conflated with Mw, in addition to the confusion between the IPB process and Mw philosophy and doctrine<sup>8</sup>.

*“Maneuver warfare practice I would say in today’s Corps is understanding the battlefield, understanding your organization’s capabilities, and as important if not more, is understanding the enemy in order to manipulate the terrain, whether it, whatever domain it may be in.”* (Faculty participant)

*“So, maneuver warfare in my words, I guess, is the evaluation of an adversary, understanding them as a system and then being able to **creatively** plan for and **adaptively** apply our capabilities in order to unwind theirs to **unhinge** their ability to actually fight on the battlefield.”* (Faculty participant)

As a former tactics instructor, operations officer, and commander of an infantry battalion for two combat tours in Iraq, I can attest that these statements are not fundamentally wrong. Understanding the enemy is, of course, always a good thing, as Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz would agree (Charles & Tzu, 2012; Howard, 1998). However, the descriptions offered do reveal a lack of understanding of the differences between Mw and the Marine Corps’ standard, linear planning processes. Further evidence of conflating the planning processes with Mw doctrine was the superficial sprinkling in of Mw terms such as “reconnaissance-pull” and “enemy vulnerability” when trying to define Mw.

*“I mean, for me, I’d say maneuver warfare is understanding your environment, understanding the adversary. You know, I kind of see it as a **recon pull** thing. So you use a little bit of understanding the enemy as a system and then going to see,*

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<sup>8</sup> Bolded words are for effect and to identify Mw vernacular.

*you know, where the adversary is vulnerable. And then from there supporting that, their **vulnerability**. It's not just straight-up attrition warfare to where you just – I've got more tanks than you, and we just keep going.”* (Faculty participant)

The above quotes are emblematic of the claim by some members of MCTOG that many other members were simply “*cocktail party dangerous*” when it came to truly understanding and teaching Mw. In a focus group of uniformed participants discussing the level of Mw proficiency among instructors at MCTOG, they arrived at the following consensus summed up by one of the participants:

*“I think 40% of us understand and know how to apply maneuver warfare within our MOS [military occupational specialty]. About 40% are just conversing in it, and 20% are probably cocktail party dangerous.”* (Faculty participant)

What is interesting about the consensus achieved in the focus group is that many of the participants of this focus group themselves struggled to provide cogent answers on Mw during their one-on-one interviews. Espousing their own knowledge of Mw and then pointing to others as not knowing Mw is a classic defensive routine (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). By engaging in this defensive routine, the participants maintain governing values within tolerance by avoiding the admission of their own lack of knowledge of Mw to preserve their self-image as a professional knowledgeable in Mw. This defensive routine ensured the foundational flaw, that the lack of sufficient understanding of the Mw capstone doctrine remained undiscussed within MCTOG.

Discovering this general acknowledgment among the MCTOG staff and instructors that there existed such a low level of knowledge regarding Mw was very surprising. While surprising, what made this discovery very interesting was the organizational defensive routines and skilled

unawareness necessary to prevent a significant defect in the organization from being surfaced publicly—especially an organization with an experienced faculty and staff set out to reinvigorate the Marine Corps' foundational doctrine. Taking the focus group's assessment and triangulating with and from interviews, observations, and participant observations of the working group's discussions, a form of *functional illiteracy* in Mw among MCTOG instructors emerged. I've extended the term functional illiteracy to frame the phenomenon of a large segment of MCTOG faculty and staff possessing a low-level understanding of Mw as a hindrance to the MCTOG mission. Just as inadequate reading and writing skills are a severe hindrance to an adult's contribution and functioning in a community, so goes the ~60% of MCTOG instructors that are unable to fluently articulate the basics of Mw to a level necessary to teach Mw and thereby contribute the MCTOG mission. The United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) defines functional illiteracy as “*a person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for the effective functioning of his group and community*” (UNESCO, 1978, p. 178). This definition fits the description rendered by the focus group and the instructors who are not literate in Mw doctrine and, therefore, cannot teach Mw and contribute to the group. Those deemed “*D + or cocktail party dangerous,*” roughly 60% of the instructor cadre, ultimately cannot sufficiently contribute to MCTOG's effort to reinvigorate Mw.

**Teaching Mw at MCTOG and Skilled Incompetence:** The data revealed a low understanding of Mw across the MCTOG faculty and staff, pointing to a hit or miss understanding of Mw that was dependent on each individual's self-study beyond TBS or other entry-level exposure to Mw. While the MCTOG campaign plan also claimed to develop a “world-class faculty” (MCTOG, 2017a, p. 5), the data revealed what on the surface appeared to

be MCTOG's presumption of Mw competence with its instructors. After further analysis, Mw functional illiteracy was more than a simple unexamined presumption: it was a functional illiteracy that was both undiscussed and undiscussable in an open forum at MCTOG. As one participant put it in a private interview:

*“I would say we have to stop assuming that officers and SNCOs that get orders here have the prerequisite knowledge or skills to be successful.”* (Faculty participant)

However, these sentiments were not voiced openly and addressed; instead, feelings were suppressed, and the status quo, unequal understanding of Mw, and unfair workloads were maintained. Maintaining the status quo meant MCTOG leaned heavily on those who arrived at MCTOG with the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience to be successful as instructors and carried the bulk of the instruction and workload. This core group of instructors self-identified as the “fire brigade.” The fire brigade consisted of officers and enlisted members and had the strongest grasp of Mw. The uneven distribution of work among instructors led to frustration and resentment, exhaustion, and in some cases burn-out amongst members of the fire brigade.

*“So, there are those who make that very mature, balanced decision [to do very little]. And then there are others [the fire brigade] that are extremists who do the twelve hours of work and then study at nights we do bottom-up like individual professional development, and then all they get in return is even more work. And then the twelve-hour day gets extended. Because they showed talent, they're going to get worked. Because at the end of the day, the face that MCTOG puts out is more important than what's going on under the hood.”* (Faculty participant)

The reliance by MCTOG management on the fire brigade to deliver the bulk of quality

instruction and maintain a high-quality MCTOG experience for the students created resentment amongst the more capable fire brigade instructors for shouldering what they perceived to be an unfair burden leading to burn out.

One instructor hinted at the old saw, “Never demonstrate a capability in the presence of a need.”

*“If you get singled out as being the expert, those in the middle and the bureaucracy know what happens to the racehorse, they get ridden until they die.”*

(Faculty participant)

One member of the fire brigade, when asked, “What do the non-fire brigade instructors do?” replied:

*“What is everybody doing? I really don't know; as a member of the fire brigade, I'm constantly going from one thing to another. I know the perception here is that the majority don't do a whole lot... [they] are very positive about working at MCTOG, especially if the tax they pay is low and the core group [fire brigade] is used and abused.”* (Faculty participant)

Marines reporting to MCTOG for instructor duty were drawn from across the Marine Corps operating forces and supporting establishments and represented several military occupational skill designations. What became clear during the study was that individuals possessed an uneven distribution of capabilities to instruct on operations, tactics, and Mw. The checkerboard of talent arriving at MCTOG indicates that the issue of low Mw competency observed at MCTOG possibly extends across the rest of the Marine Corps.

It was also clear that MCTOG did nothing to provide policies that benefitted everyone in the form of instructor development. Instead, pressured by a high operation tempo, the minority of

instructors that could instruct at a high level delivered the bulk of the instruction, and the rest participated in the margins. The dynamic reminded me of the plight of Boxer, the workhorse in George Orwell's 1945 classic, *Animal Farm*. This classic tale exposes the all-too-common inequalities in work environments through Boxers' efforts working to exhaustion and lameness on the farm while the other characters gladly let him do so, offering all assistance short of actual help. Boxer's reward for hard work was a trip to the glue factory.

While undiscussable in a public forum at MCTOG, the topic of insufficient or ineffective instructor development was referenced 135 times in 12 of 14 interviews and in all three focus groups. While there was instructor development available regarding the science of learning and best practices for classroom instruction and leading discussion, it was episodic, not progressive, and not mandatory. However, the MCTOG senior management assumed all instructors were participating and were surprised when I informed them otherwise, as one instructor put it:

*"So, initially, when it stood up last summer, we were all under the impression that it was going to be a mandatory thing. The way that shook out was that if an instructor didn't want to do it, they just didn't do it."* (Faculty participant)

Another instructor confirmed the optional nature of instructor development.

*"Yeah, nothing, [official direction] if it's mandatory, it's on paper only, and I haven't seen a piece of paper that says it's mandatory."* (Faculty participant)

Moreover, even if the extant instructor development program had been mandatory, it did not address the low levels of Mw understanding amongst most of the instructors. One participant said:

*"We don't have any instructor development focused on the philosophy of maneuver warfare at all... You know the analogy I've tried to use with people is, if*

*I'm teaching math, you can make me the best teacher in the world as far as my instructional technique. But if I don't know math, my students won't know math when they leave.*" (Faculty participant)

When it came to MCTOG instructors attaining a level of competency in Mw sufficient to teach it, the bid for success relied on instructors being autodidacts, an aspiration that was not uniform across the organization.

*"We all talk about maneuver warfare a lot. I'm not sure that everybody here is necessarily vested in developing an in-depth understanding of what that means to us individually and as a service, That, I think, is where we're lacking."* (Staff participant)

### **Resistance to Instructor Development, I'm Not Smart and You Can't Make Me:**

One unstated reason instructor development remained unformalized by the command and uncovered in the research was an unspoken resistance among the instructor cadre. This resistance appeared in two main narratives: *"I'm already an expert"* and *"We don't have time."* These narratives represent defensive routines aimed at preserving two elements of the bureaucratic governing variables: protecting one's reputation as a competent and experienced professional and protecting one's personal time.

The *"I'm already an expert"* narrative can be related to the unusually high concentration of senior Marines. Most of the senior enlisted Marines assigned to instructor duty had already served one or more tours of duty as instructors and had achieved a rating of *"Master Instructor."* The following quote is from a senior instructor paraphrasing other senior instructors.

*"And some [say] I'm already a master instructor, I don't need to learn anything else."* (Faculty participant)



While this is true, master instructor certifications were focused on basic entry-level training for the most junior Marines. The below quote is from an adult education subject matter expert on staff at MCTOG.

*“But look at the context in which they become master instructors, it was for specific task-based training, do this, then this, then this, if this happens then do this, the explicit piece, right?”* (Staff participant)

And this quote from a long-time member of MCTOG and faculty observer:

*“We have a very seasoned and senior staff, and having them go to something called the new instructor course gives them an instant turn-off. I’m a Master Sergeant, I am a LtCol, I am a Major... I don’t need to be told or instructed how to be an instructor.”* (Faculty participant)

Basic entry-level training programs are focused on behavioral tasks and are at the explicit end of the knowledge spectrum, focusing on declarative knowledge (what) and procedural knowledge (how) (Gorman, 2002). Teaching at the explicit end of the spectrum is sufficient for teaching the fundamentals and skills, IPB or MCPP. The explicit end of the spectrum was typically delivered didactically and followed the formal instruction document titled the Master Lesson File (MLF). The MLF is a very structured document that proscribes the elements for instructing on a subject to include formal lecture, typically following a script with pre-approved slides with no deviation from the instructor (MCTOG, 2018a). The MLF proscribed a didactic pedagogical approach for teaching, which was very familiar and comfortable to the instructors. By adhering to the MLF, there was little risk of an instructor ever being challenged or wrong; therefore, they avoided embarrassment and risk to their reputation. By sprinkling in a few Mw buzzwords, one could satisfy both Mw and bureaucratic governing variables and maintain the

status quo of the theory in use. However, this pedagogical approach is insufficient for teaching the art of Mw, tactics, and operations at the level of the campaign plan aspirations.

To reinvigorate Mw, the campaign plan envisioned a much more dynamic pedagogical approach focused on the more tacit end of the knowledge spectrum. Teaching Mw would require a departure from the familiar MLF didactic approach and would require a dynamic program of instruction (POI) that focused on *judgment* (when) and *wisdom* (why) (Gorman, 2002). This approach requires instructors to be fluent in Mw in order to facilitate discussion, discourse, and engaging the students in free-play wargames where they challenge and may be challenged by the students, and the instructor could be wrong. This was unsettling for much of the instructor cadre, as it threatened the bureaucratic governing variable by exposing them to embarrassment and loss of reputational status, and therefore upset the status quo of the Model I theory in use. This sentiment of vulnerability to embarrassment and loss of reputation is captured in this quote by an instructor:

*“So [the student] is like this guy [MCTOG instructor] has done some things, been some places, so he must be a true professional. Until you open your mouth and you're wrong, and when you're wrong, you've lost that credibility.”* (Faculty participant)

The instructor cadre was not the only element within MCTOG to resist the aims of the campaign plan and the effort to reinvigorate Mw. MCTOG management also exhibited a level of avoidance when it came to mandating instructor development. A quote from a senior manager at MCTOG underscores this reluctance.

*“Nobody wants to own that program [instructor development] because they're going to have to teach their peers, and that's difficult. Showing them that they're*

*wrong isn't always easy or the nice thing to do, but we have to adopt that because we're not going to get any better.”* (Staff participant)

The sentiment in the above quote speaks to a Model I organization seeking to maintain the status quo by not publicly surfacing defects, in this case, unprepared instructors. There was also what may be described as cultural resistance to anything labeled mandatory that places the MCTOG management in the position of making unpopular policy.

*“I know you're well aware right, in the Marine Corps, as soon as you put the word 'mandatory' in front of anything, it is automatically a turn-off for a lot of people.”* (Faculty participant)

### **IV.3 Explanatory Frame 3: The MCTOG Campaign Plan Gets a Damn Good Ignoring**

The third explanatory frame is the ineffective implementation of the MCTOG campaign plan. Despite MCTOG being in existence for 10 years, and the importance and complexity of its mission as a schoolhouse and COE, it never had an overarching strategic vision to guide its actions and activities and grow the scope of the organization. Consequently, resources and priorities were approached in a very reactionary manner, as evidenced by MCTOG conducting 10 internal reorganizations in 10 years and never establishing a clear identity as a schoolhouse or COE. Without a comprehensive long-range vision, MCTOG was reflexively responding to short-term and divergent stakeholder demands from the supporting establishment and operating forces. The combination of a robust task list from stakeholders, no clear identity as an organization and lack of a long-range vision, all contributed to the chaotic atmosphere and sense of uncertainty among the members. As an institution, MCTOG was underperforming in terms of its potential to contribute to the overall combat readiness of the Marine Corps.

In June of 2017, MCTOG embarked on an effort to answer CMC's FRAGO-1 call to

action and establish its long-range goals as an institution. This effort was in the form of a campaign plan outlining a 10-year (2017–2027) vision for the organization. Central to this vision was to reinvigorate Mw through training and educating operations and intelligence officers and senior enlisted Marines. MCTOG's role as a schoolhouse afforded an ideal platform to influence the key influencers across the GCE.

**The Campaign Plan as a Strategic Initiative:** The MCTOG 2018–2028 campaign plan (MCTOG, 2018b) was an aspirational and strategic document designed to chart the organization's path for the future, establish priorities, and restore Mw to primacy as the doctrinal underpinning all combat operations.

The MCTOG campaign plan was '*strategic*' in four ways (Shivakumar, 2014). First, the plan would provide a unifying vision for the training and education of key members of the Marine Corps' operating forces for the next decade (MCTOG, 2018b). Second, it aimed to reinvigorate Mw, a priority for the CMC (USMC, 2016a). Third, such a change would necessitate a large commitment of irretrievable resources, namely the time and effort to not only redesign the existing curricula but to reimagine it in an entirely new approach to teaching. Another significant commitment would be to formalize and resource a faculty development program to develop the "world-class faculty" (MCTOG, 2018a, p. 5) necessary to deliver the new curricula. Fourth, successful implementation of the MCTOG campaign plan was not a trivial matter (Pinfield, 2006). The potentially dire battlefield consequences resulting from the Marine Corps supporting establishment planning and equipping for war under the espoused theory of Mw (USMC, 2016c) while the operating forces were actually holding to an attrition warfare theory-in-practice presented a misalignment of preparation and execution. Such a misalignment would be exposed on the battlefield against a capable enemy, likely resulting in mission failure

and costing considerable blood and treasure.

In addition to the campaign plan being a strategic document, it served as an intervention by MCTOG senior management to stimulate the adaptive change necessary for MCTOG to address the chaotic and uncertain environment felt by its members and to gain relevance as an institution. However, as an intervention, it also represented a new espoused theory for the organization that would require members of MCTOG to change their approaches in instruction, organizational structure, and responsibilities. The campaign plan, as a new espoused theory, represented a threat to the status quo Model 1 theory-in-practice. This threat to the status quo encountered numerous defensive routines at the individual and group levels, the most common of which employed to maintain the status quo Model I theory in use were avoidance, inertia, and indifference.

A primary defensive routine employed within MCTOG by the faculty and staff was a conspicuous avoidance, inertia, and indifference to addressing the published campaign plan. The campaign plan was published in January 2018 and went exactly nowhere for nearly a year. As one of the major contributing authors to the campaign plan, I was invited to participate in an MCTOG leadership offsite in December of 2018 to help provide a framework for its implementation. In preparation for that offsite, the commander of MCTOG issued guidance for the attendees, consisting of division heads, senior instructors, both officers and enlisted, and key members of the staff, to read, reflect, and discuss the campaign plan implementation. I found evidence of avoidance as many of the leadership team in attendance had not even read the campaign plan, let alone internalized, analyzed, and discussed the implementation of it within their sub-organizations. During the offsite, it was clear that elementary discovery learning was going on with attendees engaging with the campaign plan, and each other, in a meaningful way

for the first time in a year since it was published.

*“When we finally looked at our campaign plan, and that was good exposure, good discussion... frank discussion, about what it is what the purpose is.”*

(Faculty participant)

Interestingly, the participants that complained of uncertainty and not knowing the direction MCTOG was headed did not read the campaign plan. When challenged about their disengagement, most cited being too busy and not having enough time. When I probed into the ‘not enough time’ avoidance defensive reasoning tactic, most all backed away from that excuse as indefensible. An example of abandoning the ‘not enough time’ defensive routine follows.

*“But so, let me rephrase that I believe we do have enough time, we got all the time in the world. It's just that we use that as a crutch to prevent us from going where we need to go. There is time; there is a ton of time.”* (Faculty participant)

Other participants avoidance of defensive reasoning focused on the concern that they would invest effort in an initiative that would end up changing anyway.

*“I don't know. People not caring, probably, people not caring enough. They know that stuff is going to change, so they're just oh yeah we got a campaign plan, Oh, I'll just wait until it changes.”* (Faculty participant)

This quote sums up the wait and see defensive reasoning to avoid the campaign plan.

*“I honestly thought at the offsite that we're going change it up a little bit. So, I didn't want to get too wrapped around it.”* (Faculty participant)

One participant, an intelligent, very capable, and well thought of instructor and member of the fire brigade, was at the end of his three-year tour at MCTOG and about to transfer to another duty station within days. In a way, our interview served as a very candid exit survey of

sorts. During the interview, we discussed his issues with, and opinions on, the campaign plan. The following exchange revealed a sequence of layered defensive routines as the participant employed one, and then abandoned it once challenged, quickly falling back on another before abandoning it as well in an inwardly collapsing perimeter of defensive routines. When asked about the campaign plan, the participant confirmed he had read it. When asked what it was about, his defensive routine was one of indifference, stating the campaign plan was too vague to be of much use.

*“What’s the campaign plan about? That’s a good question... I read it about eight months ago; I don’t feel the campaign plan gave enough granularity in the functional or even detail realm.”* (Faculty participant)

When pressed to give his opinion on some of the details the campaign plan lacked, he admitted he yet had not read the campaign plan in detail. He then added that the campaign plan had likely changed since it first came out, employing the “it’s going to change, so I won’t engage” avoidance defensive routine.

*“I mean, I have a feeling it has been updated three or four times since I’ve had a chance to see it.”* (Faculty participant)

I informed the participant that the campaign plan had been neither updated nor modified since it was published. Shifting in his seat, the participant then commented on senior management’s attempt to ‘roll-out’ the campaign plan in January 2018 and intimated that the rollout of the campaign plan was insufficient.

*“We had a one-day PME [professional military education] in Classroom 1 on the campaign plan... with the whole staff. Like, here’s where we’re going here’s what we’re doing. I didn’t understand it then. Well, we didn’t spend the whole day.”*

(Faculty participant)

I then presented to the participant the fact the MCTOG Commanding Officer had issued a directive for all personnel to read it and conduct a mission analysis within their sections and to discuss and determine the details necessary for executing the campaign plan. The participant fell back to the “we’re too busy” ‘inertia’ defensive routine. When asked what happened after the rollout of the campaign plan, the participant responded with this avoidance/inertia defensive routine.

*“You know, at the instructor level, not a whole lot to be honest with you. People got back to work in the trenches as far as what had to happen on a daily basis, working with the students, there wasn’t a lot of energy from the organization forced into the whole organization.”* (Faculty participant)

I explained how the campaign plan was a 10-year vision that provided goals, reasoning behind those goals, and lines of effort with waypoints to achieve those goals. The campaign plan was never intended to be a detailed checklist, and the commander's instruction was for the staff and instructors to engage with the campaign plan and bring the details to life. At this moment, the participant revealed what seemed to be his truest objection to the campaign plan, which was not having a say in drafting the campaign plan versus the campaign plan itself.

*“I think some of this was unintentional, but part of it, you know, was intentional. At least what I’ve seen in the past three years. Things are closely guarded, walled off, then like a big unveiling, like, bam, here’s where we’re going. It’s like man, where did this come from? Turns out, a small group of people decided that what we’re going to do. Some of it’s good, yeah.”* (Faculty participant)



This final defensive routine, a feeling of indifference due to disenfranchisement, was interesting and felt like something closer to the actual reason for resisting any action on the campaign plan. What was more interesting is that the MCTOG senior management clearly gave direction to middle management to solicit feedback from their sections and even required middle management to provide that feedback to senior management. Despite these efforts from senior management, middle management provided very little if any feedback. The participant above, as a mid-grade instructor near the bottom of the hierarchy, had felt he was never given the opportunity to contribute to the campaign plan's development. While senior management gave direction for vigorous discussion and feedback from across the command, that wasn't translated by the middle management to the instructor cadre. This point will resurface in the following two explanatory frames concerning a tension between governing variables and clan activity.

#### **IV.4 Explanatory Frame 4: Lions Living as Lambs**

MCTOG is a relatively high performing organization that is well-led and populated by intelligent, energetic individuals in and out of uniform. All but one of the participants had one or more tours of combat, and as Marines, all would jump on a grenade if asked. Interestingly, during the course of interviewing the participants, I frequently came upon the theme of fear. "Fear" was the word the participants used in the context of the "fear of looking bad" and was referenced 42 times in 12 interviews. In the interviews, I probed for but did not detect any fear at all from the chain of command, taking punitive action, withholding support, or any other form of coercive action. Digging deeper into the data, I was looking for the driving factors behind this curious sense of fear in the organization. I found, embedded in the bureaucratic governing variable (the drive to have a successful career and advance upwards through the bureaucracy), typical defensive routine behaviors. Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978, 1996) define defensive

routines as “maximize winning and minimize losing.” Defensive routines are used by individuals to protect themselves and others from embarrassment and suppress defects or errors in the status quo.

**Reputation and Saving Face:** The Marine Corps is small, and one’s reputation precedes them like a shot from duty station to duty station for the length of their career and beyond. As one participant stated:

*“I can tell you from someone who's been here for four, five, six years, a person's (reputation) can be misperceived, distorted, and then turned into the folklore of how that person is or isn't. Without actually getting to know that person... The perception is don't go to him because you know, he's whatever, angry, grumpy, mad.”* (Staff participant)

The above quote speaks to the social capital one’s reputation provides not just in terms of being competent but in conforming to the norms of being a team player and not rocking the boat. It also hints at the need to curate one’s reputation in a positive light. In addition to not protecting one's reputation, staying in the middle ground of the system is important in the Marine Corps, as “individuals that fail to conform to the norm, buck the system or challenge the system are likely not to be promoted” (Holmes-Eber, 2014, p. 37).

*“I don't think they wake up, 'like how am I going to hide and slide today?' I think it's like learned behavior and the Marine Corps makes it well known that they don't like extremist on either end. So, it's safe. That's what the institution is telling them.”* (Faculty participant)

Maintaining one's reputation is, therefore, important, even existential for one's career, seemingly more so in the senior ranks as the bureaucratic pyramid narrows and competition for

promotion stiffens. Maintaining one's professional reputation as a competent warfighter was indispensable for promotion and thus closely guarded. One participant and member of the fire brigade made this observation about curating one's outward persona into order to conform to the norm.

*“That very conservative middle of the road, the way they wear their hair, the way they dress, what they read, how they talk, it's the very conservative middle of the bureaucratic road. And it's safe. If you take either of USMC or Mw variables to the extreme, it is no longer safe for you even to question some of the bureaucratic values or effectiveness of maintaining the status quo, especially in combat.”*

(Faculty participant)

The active-duty Marines serving in middle management or as senior instructors had built their reputations in the operating forces during combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Over 15 years of combat, the theater of operations had matured, become more static, and evolved into very structured, rigid, procedure-oriented operations. A signature feature of the rigid procedure-oriented characteristics of these deployments was the Battle Update Assessment (BUA). With access to nearly limitless data and the bandwidth for transmitting terabits of information, the BUA had evolved into a very stylized Kabuki theater with staff officers displaying artful PowerPoint slides and spreadsheets crunching data from past encounters and publishing future combat schedules. This phenomenon is aptly captured by Vietnam veteran and former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Mr. Bing West. West spent many months on the front lines in both Iraq and Afghanistan and became a keen observer of all levels of command in those theaters. In his book *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way Out of Afghanistan*, West (2011) made this observation of the BUA:

*“Headquarters staffs convened daily for a Battlefield Update Assessment or BUA. In operations centers across Afghanistan, rows upon rows of midlevel officers sat in front of laptop computers looking, as though in a movie theater, at huge screens that displayed colored maps and spreadsheets of data. The center screen showed the gigantic image of the senior general chairing the meeting. He presided like a deity, while one after another, junior officers walked to a microphone to gravely report statistics on personnel, operations, logistics, electric power, fuel, news, weather, and the latest engagements, from a few shots fired in the north to a bomb explosion in the south. After each set of data was displayed, the staff awaited the general's oracular pronouncement.” (p. 151)*

The BUA practice described by West, and the behavior it created, represents the very antithesis to Mw. Becoming very good at this mechanistic approach is what many of the instructors at MCTOG had built their combat reputations on, and this carried over into their approach to teaching their experiences and sticking to what they know—MCPP and IPB.

*“Right, you will not be judged for your failure, because you used the prescribed process. The problem with MCPP is it has become a high religion in the Marine Corps... you run the process, and it poops out this two-inch thick order that I'm going to execute step-by-step-by-step, and if it fails, oh, I used the right processes, and we did everything by the book.” (Staff participant)*

The planning processes and BUA techniques and procedures lent themselves to instruction at the explicit end of the spectrum and therefore, within the comfort zone for many instructors. As discussed earlier, with Mw as a presumed competency section, teaching Mw at the tacit level was something uncomfortable, if not threatening, to many instructors.

*“What I’ve picked up on is people come in as unprepared [in instruct at the tacit level], and they don’t want to be identified as unprepared.”* (Faculty participant)

The need to protect one's reputation, combined with combat experiences that were not relevant to Mw and the direction MCTOG was headed with the campaign plan, created angst among many of the instructor cadre who responded with defensive routines to suppress this defect. These behaviors showed up throughout the data in various forms but were all connected by fear of looking bad theme. Together, these behaviors formed an impressive panoply of defensive routines conforming to Model I behaviors. The panoply of defensive routines consisted of the following.

The first defensive routine to avoid embarrassment, individuals employed a “faking the funk” routine to feign knowledge or competency in order to preserve their reputation. One participant articulated the motivation behind “faking the funk” this way:

*“And like, oh, you’ve been in 17 years and can’t explain it, [Mw] shame on you.”*

(Faculty participant)

During a Core Design Team (CDT) session, the Deputy of MCTOG wrote on the whiteboard a statement about creating *battalion systems* as a goal for curriculum development to support the campaign plan. As a participant-observer, I did not understand what the Deputy meant by this term but kept silent to observe the others. I noticed blank expressions. After several more minutes of the Deputy talking and the working group being superficially engaged, the Deputy began to move on to another topic, so I interrupted and asked what he meant by the battalion system. This question was answered, and a meaningful discussion then took place to define it further and the implications it held for the curriculum. In follow-up interviews, I asked a participant who had been present in that session why nobody asked for clarification to the term

and just passively sat there. His response clearly spoke to the “faking the funk” defensive routine.

*“I think that’s usually it [on why to fake the funk]. People are afraid that they’ll look dumb in front of peers or subordinates or seniors.”* (Faculty participant)

Illustrating that this observation was prevalent across MCTOG, another participant extended my observation to include instructors and students in the classroom.

*“If we had an audience of 10 or 20 people, everybody would just do this [nodding head up and down]. They would nod their heads north and south and say ‘we get it’. But if that instructor or guest facilitator started to have a dialogue with the group, they won’t be able to have a conversation.”* (Staff participant)

The second defensive routine data unearthed a defensive routine of “*nay-saying*” and claiming “*not enough of...*” to deflect responsibility for acting or achieving results. This defensive routine was a claim of a paucity of one resource or another to account for one's inaction. This appeared in a few forms, such as not enough information, not enough time, not the right people (students and instructors), not the right structure and finally, not enough institutional buy-in. I likened the employment of the “not enough of...” routine to a tactical aircraft's countermeasures of chaff and flares to decoy enemy-guided missiles away and protect the aircraft. This defensive routine was referenced 76 times over 13 interviews. One staff member commented on the weighting of the curricula to the explicit end as:

*“I think from explicit learning [perspective], they're rock stars, ready to the next level. But, then we have a bunch that is coming in, and I don't know, I could probably make an argument that there is a failure of the system, as an*

*organization writ large, the way we look at training and education is a little warped.” (Staff participant)*

MCTOG had never collected any data to gauge the level of knowledge for an incoming student, so subjective assessments by the instructors were made that tended to reflect low expectations for student preparedness. For example, the following was said from an instructor at the end of a three-year tour.

*“So, the assumption is that we have students starting at a certain level [gestures one hand low], and we aspire to get them to this level [gestures the other hand high]. At the instructor level our experience has been that students are actually starting down here [gestures the low hand even lower] but we still aspire to get them at least to there [gestures the top hand somewhere in the middle].” (Faculty participant)*

Another variation of low student preparedness as a reason for the curricula to remain at the explicit level was a lack of student motivation.

*“Our students that show up at MCTOG ... and it’s like one-on-one, we have to go back to the very basics of certain tactics and here’s what MCPP stands for [Marine Corps Planning Process], we spend so much time on that we don’t get to the deep levels. Another thing is people can’t fail [no academic attrition] when they come through here.” (Faculty participant)*

Another instructor and member of the fire brigade at the end of his three-year tour at MCTOG saw the issue differently and made this observation regarding the claim of low student preparedness as the justification for instruction remaining at the explicit end of the spectrum.

*“There was a longstanding mentality here that because the students came in with*

*a below-average understanding of [Mw] the [instructors] had to maintain explicit knowledge to get them up to speed. I don't think that was actually true. Knowing a lot of the students coming through here, I think it became a coping mechanism [for the instructors] to maintain the status quo of what we did. Labeling the students as not where they need to be so we can harp on the [explicit] brilliance in the basics. "I think that reflected I'm only comfortable teaching the basics. Therefore, I'm going to shape my environment to justify my staying basic, explicit." (Faculty participant)*

In the cases where Mw instruction engaged the students more experientially with Kriegsspiel (a student vs. student manual wargame), decision-forcing cases (DFC), and tactical decision games (TDGs) and experientially taught Mw at the tacit end of the spectrum, student engagement was remarkably different.

*"It's almost like they teach themselves. They don't get a lot of time so they use every single minute of it and they do their plan much better now, the students and instructors both. It's like 10 times better since I've been here." (Faculty participant)*

The MCTOG middle management often claimed the reason for keeping the curriculum at the explicit end was that the Marines assigned to MCTOG as instructors who were not capable of teaching Mw at the tacit level.

*"If we want a world-class organization, [referring to MCTOG campaign plan] we need to do better as far as our vetting for who gets in here. It needs to be a priority for higher [Marine Corps supporting establishment], that's the first step. Due to the lack of [supporting establishment]) buy-in the recruiting, the [right]*



*people coming in here.” (Faculty participant)*

There is more than a thread of truth to the claim of not having a talented enough instructor cadre. Some of those assigned to MCTOG for instructor duty had never performed as an operations or intelligence officer of a unit in the operating forces, yet they were being asked to train operations and intelligence officers from the operating forces. However, one key senior middle manager with the position and authority to address instructor development was a proponent of the “just stick to the basics” defensive routine and identified a lack of support from the Marine Corps-supporting establishment for the shortage of capable instructors at MCTOG.

*“Oh yeah, the right people, the first thing is we don’t have the right people because we don’t have [supporting establishment] buy-in to this place, we don’t have the right people. So, it makes your instructor development program even more imperative because you don’t recruit the right people to start with, with the right qualities, background, and experience.” (Faculty participant)*

When I followed up with a question on what he was doing about the imperative of instructor development, he replied with the following:

*“Due to the lack of [supporting establishment and operational force] buy-in, people are coming in and right away, having to; they’re teaching. There’s no depth to the current model; it’s not like you could have a dedicated instructor development program; well, it would be second or third [priority] to their daily duties.” (Faculty participant)*

When I followed up again with the question if he himself was one of the right people, he replied:

*“Um, yes, and no. Okay, Um, and why I say that, I say on a scale of 1-10, I’m a 6. As a [states military occupational specialty], I know my [job]. Um, some of the*

*things where I was deficient, which, [is] still not an excuse, because we don't need, to focus on, you know regular infantry, it had been quite some time since doing it in nature. So, I had to go back and think through the basics and through my experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan at higher levels [of staff]. So yes, in that respect, yes.” (Faculty participant)*

A senior member of MCTOG management saw the resistance to developing the faculty to teach Mw and operations at the tacit end of the spectrum as being less about institutional support and more about avoiding the effort required to change the status quo.

*“So, it’s a paradigm shift, but so what? You know where the pain come[s] from? It’s a massive amount of work because quite frankly, if you go to this model [teaching Mw at the tacit level as the campaign plan calls for], your one little PowerPoint class that you just read slide for slide, isn’t going to cut it. That’s where the hurt feelings [resistance] come from.” (Staff participant)*

The data show there was a common acknowledgment that MCTOG needed to do more to gain supporting establishment support to bring in instructors with the requisite backgrounds. However, the action MCTOG could have done to address the issue of competency within their span of control was conducting the instructor development necessary to deliver a curriculum to teach Mw at the tacit end of the spectrum. Instead, the “not enough of...” defensive routines, motivated by the desire to avoid embarrassment, prevent damage to one's reputation, and to suppress conflict, ultimately reinforced a Model I learning system and retarded the Model II learning system necessary for the implementation of the campaign plan.

#### **IV.5 Explanatory Frame 5: Sub Rosa Clan Control to Maintain the Status Quo**

During discussions, interviews, focus groups, and observation of working groups, the members

of MCTOG occasionally referenced tribes, or being tribal. The reference to tribes was not surprising. From my own experience, Marines considered themselves to be the strongest tribe among the warring tribes of the Al Anbar Province in Iraq (West, 2008). Merging this tribal reference observation with the previously addressed explanatory frames contributing to the failed implementation of the campaign plan provided me another perspective on the case. From this new tribal perspective, a fifth explanatory frame was revealed. Emerging from the data was the existence of a *sub rosa*<sup>9</sup> clan operating within the formal hierarchical organization. I researched this further, looking at the works of Ouchi (1980), Kohli and Kettinger (2004), Chua et al. (2012), and Eng et al. (2017). Ouchi and Price's (1978) definition of a clan as a "*culturally homogenous group where members share common values, beliefs, and norms, and draws informal control from peer monitoring and sanctions to promulgate shared values, beliefs and norms*" (p. 64) adequately described the dynamic I was observing at MCTOG. This definition described the actions of an influential group of middle management and seasoned instructors at MCTOG that resisted the campaign plan, instructor development, and teaching Mw at the tacit level. In short, this clan acted against the MCTOG senior management's directives in order to maintain the status quo and used Model 1 behaviors to do so.

**Informal Control Exerted by the Status Quo Clan:** The above status quo clan (SQ clan) employed different approaches to encourage the behavior to maintain the status quo. For example, newer instructors not yet socialized to the clan's norms or those capable of teaching Mw at the tacit end of the spectrum (due to experience or self-education) were sanctioned by being called out for going off script or cutting corners, not following the didactic master lesson

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<sup>9</sup> Sub rosa is a Latin phrase translated literally as "under the rose," meaning, out of sight, in secrecy or private.

file to the letter. An eyebrow-raising example of this was mentioned in three separate interviews. One participant who witnessed this event first-hand described it this way:

*“Like we had Master Sergeant X getting into with a Major Y outside of the classroom about him [the major] not using the prescribed PowerPoint and 'doing things his own way and cutting corners.' Well, he wasn't [cutting corners] he was going above and beyond [teaching at the tacit end of the spectrum.]”* (Faculty participant)

The witness described the master sergeant’s likely motive.

*“Yeah, he's one of the closed-minded. I mean, he's really not open to new things because he knows what he knows. He knows the steps and sub-steps of everything, [MCP and IPB] and he sticks strictly to that. If they missed one thing, they fail.”* (Faculty participant)

This exchange is eyebrow-raising because the enlisted Marine was yelling at an officer, which indicates the scope of the SQ clan's desire to maintain the status quo. The master sergeant in this story was in his third year, and the major was in his first year of being an instructor at MCTOG. This indicates that regardless of rank, the SQ clan was rooted to “time in MCTOG” and censored the behavior of newcomers for upsetting the status quo.

*“It got [sic] into a yelling match, and I was the one that stopped it. I said this had gone far enough. You're not going to talk to a major like that; as a matter of fact, he could charge you right now. 'But, he's wrong.' [the master sergeant responded]. I'm like no, what you think you know is wrong.”* (Faculty participant)

Further indicative of the value the SQ clan placed on time in was relayed by an instructor at MCTOG.

*“So, the culture right now is, and it's a lot of the old guard [on their third year at MCTOG], is that you don't get a say unless you've been here for a year, and even then, you get a minimal say. You're not really an instructor until you've been here for two years, and then you're leaving again.”* (Faculty participant)

One member of the fire brigade at the end of his tour described the SQ clan promulgating their world view.

*“These individuals want to maintain the status quo, the loudest voice with the highest rank wins.”* (Faculty participant)

Model I SQ clan control had impacts on learning within MCTOG for both faculty and students. A key moment for learning occurs at the end of a tactical exercise or decision-making problem when the after-action review (AAR) is conducted. By surfacing and openly discussing mistakes, both the students and faculty learn from the exercise not only from their own mistakes but also the mistakes of others. This process is only effective if people feel safe to raise mistakes and discuss them. The following exchange from an interview with a highly competent and earnest first-year faculty member showed more open AAR formats than what he encountered at MCTOG. The participant relayed an incident from an AAR where a key debrief point concerning the capability of a reconnaissance system was egregiously glossed over to the point that false capabilities were being taught and negative learning occurring for both faculty and students.

Interviewer: *“So when this incident was debriefed, why didn't you stand up and say anything?”*

Faculty participant: *“I think it would have been seen as rude.”*

Interviewer: *“Why would it have been rude? This is a learning institution.”*

Faculty participant: *“It’s a learning institution, but this-it’s not how-it’s never happened before... in a mass debrief like that.”*

Interviewer: *“So in a mass debrief, the norm is to just keep your peace?”*

Faculty participant: *“I would feel so yes... I think that debrief [critical feedback] happens privately, but I’ve not seen that... I think it [a public correction] would have come off as rude.”*

Interviewer: *“So calling that out would have produced some sort of conflict or tension, and the norm is to suppress that?”*

Faculty participant: *“I think I would have been reprimanded by [omitted] had I done that.”*

When pressed further on why superficial debriefs occur across the faculty, the participant replied:

*“I think it’s either not to ruffle feathers, or you know, they don’t think they have the political clout to do that [critical feedback], you know.”* (Faculty participant)

When I raised the topic of superficial debriefs and discussing how touchy subjects are handled with another instructor, he replied:

*“They’re [touchy subjects] not [handled]. I think it’s a hierarchy thing...if there’s any conflict they’ll disengage, and after that, talk behind each other’s back, to prove they’re right I guess...you’ve just got to maintain the status quo.”* (Faculty participant)

The above exchange provides a sharp contrast to the example provided by Popper and Lipshitz (1998) when discussing organizational learning that takes place within the Israeli Defense Force Air Force, widely considered a world-class organization, during training and operational flight

debriefings. The debriefings are described as “fiercely competitive... no stone is left unturned, yet are open, cordial and democratic... and knowledge gained at one particular subunit are shared throughout the air force” (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998, p. 168). In terms of organizational learning, Popper and Lipshitz (1998) called debriefs that are open and honest “high quality because they force participants to confront their errors” (p. 169). Conversely, the authors equated “low quality debriefs as those that allow participants to go through the motions of learning” (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998, p. 169). The authors attributed a thorough socialization, a form of clan control, as the key enabler to high-quality debriefs where participants seek to surface and correct defects in a Model II learning system. In the case of MCTOG, clan control reinforces a Model I single-loop learning system where conflict is suppressed and therefore low quality debriefs are conducted and the participants go through the motions of learning.

Another control tactic employed by the SQ clan was by virtue of their middle management role. Their positioning within the formal hierarchy enabled a mediating of communications between the MCTOG senior management and the rest of MCTOG. In mediating the message, they would water down guidance and intent from MCTOG senior management. Watering down was an action strategy motivated by trying to satisfy the bureaucratic variable, preserving one's reputation, and getting promoted by maintaining the status quo. However, the approaches used to satisfy the bureaucratic governing variable by maintaining the status quo ran directly counter to the USMC's and Mw's governing variables.

**Behavior Running Counter to USMC Governing Variables:** The data revealed 41 references across 14 interviews where participants related to bureaucratic variables trumping USMC values in order to enact SQ clan control. It is an axiom of Marine Corps leadership to “issue every order as if it were your own, especially if it is a difficult or unpopular order.” This

means taking ownership of a decision, even if you personally do not agree with it. An example of watering down the commander's guidance in order to maintain the status quo was described below.

*“There’s a tendency around here that if they don’t like the decision, to not go out there and own it. We will use the name of the decider, if you will, as the excuse, and say the Deputy, or the Commander, or the OPSO said.”* (Staff participant)

When asked why middle management leaders with 12–20 plus years of service would go against USMC core values, he replied:

*“I think it’s because they’re more concerned about being liked, I think it goes, you know, they’re looking out for their own self, their own self-interest, how they are seen.”* (Faculty participant)

**Behavior Running Counter to Mw Governing Variables:** The data also revealed 84 references across all 14 interviews and all three focus groups instances where behaviors are favoring the goals of bureaucratic governing variables over Mw governing variables. Mw is an intent-based form of direction. The commander's intent is the vision for the outcome of an effort. It provides the underpinning why for the organization and provides subordinates with ample latitude in the ‘how’ of the desired outcome. The commander’s intent is threaded through every element of the Marine Corps’ series of doctrinal publications. The Mw doctrine and the commander’s intent is to be practiced in combat, training, or garrison and is expected to be communicated two levels up and two levels down (USMC, 1997a, 1997d, 1997c, 2001).

*“It’s interesting to watch it play out sometimes. I know that everybody in Trailer 1, [MCTOG senior management] when they pass guidance and intent and taskings, they explain the ‘why’. Somewhere in the midlevel management, that*



*gets lost and falls by the wayside.*” (Faculty participant)

Typically, intent or guidance from Trailer 1 was either translated into a simplistic “go and do” order (typically associated with attrition warfare) without context or was altogether ignored through inertia or avoidance. In the quote below, avoidance was referred to as a “skewing” of intent and “just follow orders” and then inappropriately contextualized as Mw, thus illustrating an incomplete understanding the role of intent in Mw.

*“Yep, it [intent] gets skewed. Just do it; follow orders. And that's ok sometimes, right? From a maneuver warfare perspective, I want to understand why. So, if your tactical task and mission don't work, I still know what I need to get done.”*

(Staff participant)

Under Mw, doctrine intent is never “skewed.” Rather, it is the bedrock of the Marine Corps’ warfighting philosophy. MCDP-1 Warfighting dedicates an entire chapter to the commander's intent, as in this key passage: *“Understanding the intent of our commanders [two levels up] allows us to exercise initiative in harmony with the commander's desires”* (USMC, 1997 p. 89).

The defensive routine employed by SQ clan members in justifying these actions was the claim of uncertainty in mission or priority. The claim of uncertainty rang hollow, however. The commander of MCTOG directed all hands, as individuals and as leaders of sub-groups within MCTOG, to read, internalize, and discuss the campaign plan with their sub-groups. The data shows in 31 references over 10 interviews and in all three focus groups that faculty and staff admitted to having never made a serious effort to either understand the campaign plan or discuss it internally.

**The 8-Ball Chart, Misery Loves Company and a Cry for Help:** Through all the

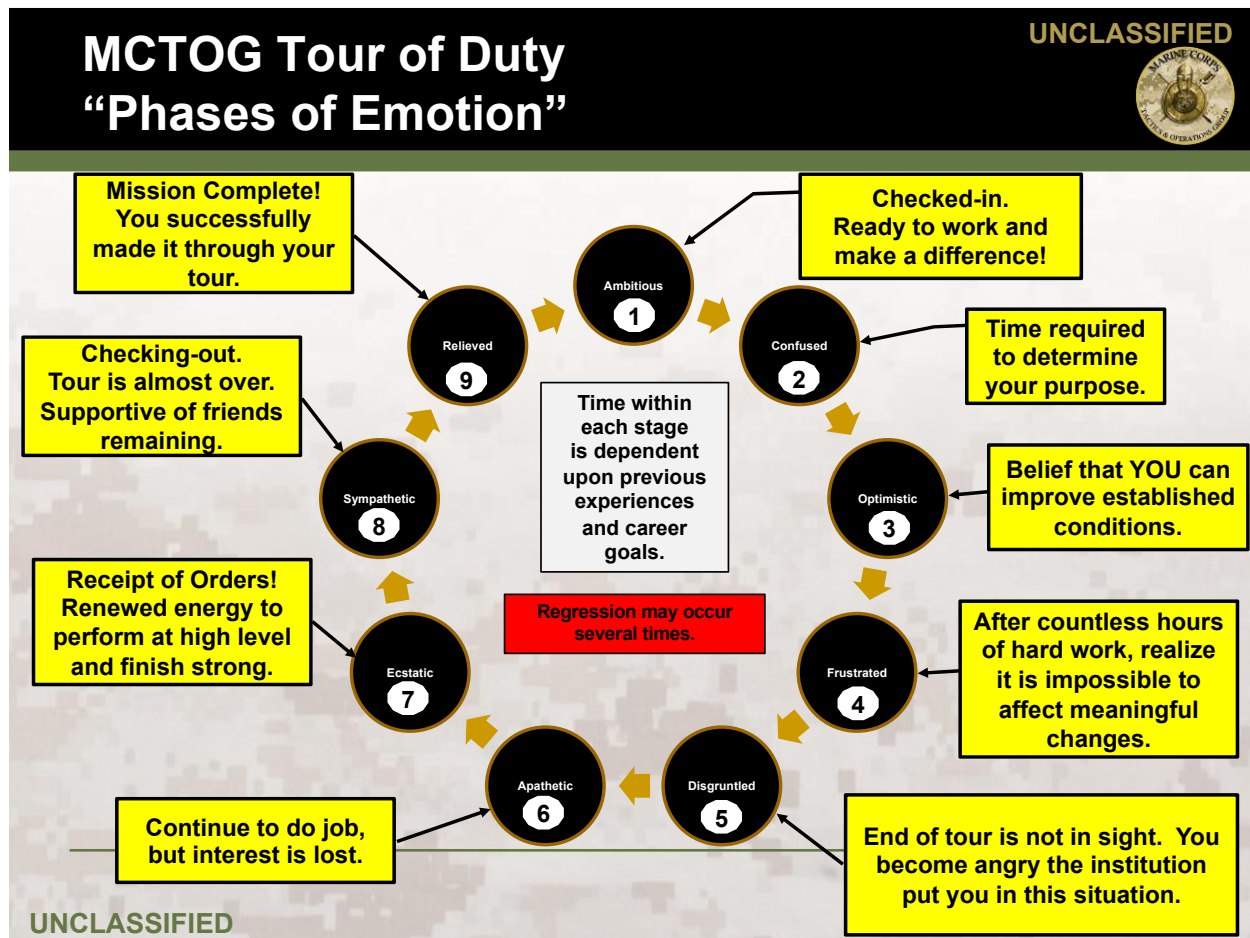
explanatory frames discussed above, a pattern of well-worn defensive routines employed by members of MCTOG was unearthed. Also examined was the tension between satisfying both the USMC and Mw governing variables and the bureaucratic governing variable, with the latter winning out over the two former governing variables. In other words, MCTOG members opted to employ defensive routines in order to conform to norms, suppress conflict, and protect their reputation, resulting in a form of careerism at the expense of USMC and Mw variables. If I had explained this observation to the participants, I have no doubt they would have protested the blasphemy of careerism being attributed to them. This makes sense, however, as individuals simply do not accept responsibility for defensive routines (see Argyris & Schon, 1996).

One action strategy employed by the SQ clan to avoid facing the responsibility for creating the conditions for careerism is following the first rule of misery, which is that misery loves company. In this case, “company” was achieved through co-opting others into the SQ clan using a graphic tool to help diffuse responsibility for personal actions to the faceless “institution.” The graphic tool used was a PowerPoint slide titled “MCTOG Tour of Duty Phases of Emotion,” most commonly referred to as the 8-Ball Chart.

The 8-Ball Chart (Figure 7) depicts the emotional progression of an MCTOG member throughout their tour. This chart was sometimes tacked up in a cubical or in a desk drawer. All participants were aware of it, though not all retained a copy of it. Many of the MCTOG senior management saw the 8-Ball Chart as unprofessional and a form of insubordination. Such unaccountable and victim-like behavior is not expected of Marines and GS civilians, especially as senior as those at MCTOG. I must admit, when I first encountered this chart, I initially reacted as a Marine colonel and shared the sentiments of the MCTOG senior management. I was able to acknowledge this initial reaction and check my bias, though, by asking the question a researcher

should ask, “What’s going on here?”

Figure 7: The 8-Ball Chart



In the data and the literature, I found the answers to that question. The chart was used as a tool to both diffuse personal responsibility for the defensive routines employed by the SQ clan, (Argyris, 1996; Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1996b) and as a tool to co-opt others, typically those in the first year of their tour, into the SQ clan by normalizing clan attitudes and expectations (Ouchi, 1980; Ouchi & Price, 1978a) that ran counter to Marine Corps core values. One MCTOG member recounted their introduction to the chart.

*“I will share my experience with this chart [pointing to the 8-Ball Chart]. So, I think I was here about maybe three months, and I went to go home. I won't say who, there were a couple of people in the room. They pulled out this [8-Ball*

*Chart] and said, you're right here [pointing to #4 frustrated]. I was at step four. Yeah, I'm frustrated every day, but I don't stay frustrated. I didn't realize after three months here, that was something people actually had on the desk or under a calendar or pinned up and referred back to on occasion. That prevents us in some aspects, not all, from projecting forwards.” (Staff participant)*

The experience relayed above likely played out in one form or another for all members of MCTOG. As mentioned earlier, MCTOG experienced a 40% or greater turn over in uniformed personnel every year. Still, there was always a senior member with a connection to the past that reinforced old norms, values, objectives, and defensive routines to maintain a Model I status quo theory-in-use.

Again, checking my bias as a Marine colonel, I began to see the 8-Ball Chart less as an act of insubordination and more of a cry for help. The 8-Ball Chart represented a reaction to the uncertainty surrounding MCTOG as a hybrid organization and the threat of the campaign plan as a new espoused theory that threatened the status quo. The SQ clan sought to use the 8-Ball Chart to normalize their behavior and recruit others to diffuse the pain of the internal incompatibility of their defensive routines that fell outside the Marine Corps values of honor, courage, and commitment. The Chart was alternatively used to censure and recruit those trying to operate outside the SQ clan’s values, beliefs, and norms. In this cry for help vein I found a rival to the SQ clan – a very loosely formed clan among those that were later in their tours and who, while frustrated, had not joined the SQ clan. This clan, which I’ll call the Mw clan, is composed of those Marines who are well-versed in Mw and capable of teaching at the explicit or tacit levels and still held on to an appropriate balance of the governing variables. The Mw clan was generally junior to MCTOG middle management, who were often the SQ clan “elders.” While

Mw clan members had resisted the informal control of the dominate SQ clan, they were still under the hierarchical control of the more senior middle management (the highest rank with the loudest voice in the room) of the SQ clan. This dynamic was captured in this quote from an Mw clan member at the end of his three-year tour.

*“So, it’s those that have a year or less under their belt, regardless of rank, are really excited. They’re really perceptive and they’re really willing to bring up observations that could potentially evolve the organization in the right direction. What I’ve seen year after year, they kind of get beaten down either by exhaustion or by the loudest voice in the room to where they rarely speak up again. They rarely bring up insights anymore. I know [Trailer 1 senior management] doesn’t like this, but the MCTOG tour of duty phases of emotion [8-Ball Chart] are very real here. And then once you get to a certain phase, you’re just, I just want to survive the rest of my tour, nothing’s going to change.”* (Faculty participant)

The impacts of the SQ clan Model I behavior and clan control can be traced through every aspect of MCTOG and all five explanatory frames. With regards to learning at MCTOG, the data revealed Model I behaviors produced negative consequences to learning with 121 references overall in 14 interviews and three focus group sessions. The Model I SQ clan control also created consequences to behavior within MCTOG members, with 58 references over 12 interviews or focus groups, stifling communications and trust—the essential ingredients of Model II behavior.

The next chapter answers the research question and makes the arguments for this study’s contributions to the literature streams and contributions to practice.

## V      DISCUSSION

*“There are two kinds of people when it comes to change. Those that don’t like it, and those that really hate it.” -Anonymous*

This study set out to answer the following research question: “Why is it difficult for the Marine Corps to implement Mw despite 30 years of training and education efforts to do so?” To answer that question, the study began by casting the net widely over the literature streams of organizational learning, organizational culture, and learning in the military; Mw; and the Marine Corps planning documents regarding the reinvigoration of Mw. A review of these literature streams illuminated a general area of concern surrounding organizational learning as it implements strategic change, as well as a specific problem area concerning the adoption of a warfighting philosophy within a military organization. A final literature stream was included after the field work was complete, when the data analysis revealed the presence of clan activity. The review process also identified where contributions might be made by extending the literature.

The qualitative case study and interpretive approach to answering this “why” question concerning an emotional and existential topic created a tremendous amount of both structured and unstructured data. Making sense of the unstructured data was the biggest, yet most rewarding challenge of this study. Unstructured data is more elusive and requires time-intensive contextual analysis to give it meaning. The data were organized into five explanatory frames: uncertainty within MCTOG as a hybrid organization, functional illiteracy in Mw among the faculty, the faculty and staff ignoring the campaign plan, lions living as lambs, and the phenomenon of an informal clan operating sub rosa within the MCTOG hierarchy.

Applying the academic rigor of ToA to these five explanatory frames provided a *fil de guidage rouge* that lifted the discourse above the chatter—the noise of opinion and conjecture. It allowed the unstructured data to be noticed and structured into meaning. The five explanatory frames woven together with ToA answer the research question and produce contributions to both literature and practice.

### **V.1 Answering the Research Question**

The results of this study illustrate that the Marine Corps' difficulty in implementing Mw is not restricted to organizational structure or culture. Rather, the reinvigoration of Mw, embodied in the strategic initiative of the MCTOG campaign plan, failed due to a persistent Model I single-loop organizational learning system. This system was made persistent by the actions of the SQ clan operating in sub rosa fashion, which exerted informal clan control over many of the members. The SQ clan Model I behaviors created a *bête noires* effect that subdued attempts by MCTOG senior management to engage in Model II double-loop organizational learning. Table 3 and Table 4 identify the attempts made by MCTOG senior management to engage in Model II double-loop learning and the ways in which the SQ clan countered those attempts with Model I behaviors and the outcomes of those interactions. Table 5 synthesizes the attempted Model II learning cycles and Model I counter-cycles, with the five explanatory frames, to fully illustrate the impact of Model I clan behavior on the failed initiative to reinvigorate Mw.

**Identified Attempted Model II Double-Loop Learning Cycles:** The campaign plan was an intervention by MCTOG senior leadership to move the organization towards a strategic vision and initiate change that would require members of the organization to engage in double-loop learning; to question assumptions, norms, and governing variables; and to take a risk to move away from the familiar status quo. The campaign plan introduced a new espoused theory.

To fully implement the campaign plan, MCTOG required Model II double-loop organizational learning to take place in order to align the status quo with the new espoused theory. Argyris and Schön (1996) offers four variables typically present within an organization for Model II double-loop learning to occur, namely, “valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment to the goal, and constant monitoring” (p. 87). MCTOG senior leadership made attempts to effectuate each of these four factors. Table 3 below identifies four attempts by MCTOG senior management to engage in Model II double-loop learning, describes what happened, and lists the impact on Model II double-loop learning.

**Table 3: Identified Attempted Model II Double-loop Learning Cycles**

Cycle	Description of Attempted Cycle	What Happened	Impact
1	Management attempted to communicate valid information and provide free and informed choice through the opportunity to provide feedback and contribute to campaign plan implementation.	SQ Clan muted this opportunity for all by defensive routines of not communicating this opportunity and gave passive, false, or no feedback.	<b>Model II double-loop learning not achieved.</b> Passive resistance to the campaign plan characterized by defensive routines of avoidance, inertia, and indifference.
2	Management attempts to establish instructor development program to build world-class faculty.	No evidence of strong internal commitment and monitoring management to make it mandatory.	<b>Model II double-loop learning not achieved.</b> The lack of demonstrated internal commitment allowed the SQ Clan to ignore the initiative as optional.
3	Management held a Leadership Offsite (Dec 18) to openly discuss problems with implementing the campaign plan.	Valid information was exchanged with minimal defensive routines present.	<b>Model II double-loop learning is temporarily achieved</b> at the offsite. However, once back at MCTOG, SQ clan began defensive routines thwarting commitment to execution.
4	Management formed the core design team to implement campaign plan.	This was a cross-section of faculty and staff; valid information was not exchanged, and high amounts of defensive routines were present. Most had not read the campaign plan and passively participated.	<b>Model II double-loop learning not achieved.</b> Management makes unilateral decisions to press forward with its implementation of the campaign plan. SQ Clan continues the defensive routine of inertia.



In successful Model II double-loop learning cycles, members will sense a decrease in defensiveness in others and will reciprocate in turn, thereby, producing a reduction in the overwhelming and stifling presence of “the fear of looking bad” and risking their reputation and chances of promotion. In double-loop learning, the bureaucratic governing variable would have been examined, and participants would have realized that the defensive routines employed to maintain the status quo were not necessary to have a viable career, and therefore, altered the bureaucratic governing variable to be more within tolerance of the remaining governing variables. In other words, one can have a viable career while also upholding Marine Corps core and Mw values.

Double-loop learning did not take place in cycle numbers 1, 2, and 4 because of the action strategies employed by the SQ clan to keep the bureaucratic governing variable within tolerance, resulting in an increasing level of incongruency with the Marine Corps’ core values and Mw governing variables. In cycle number 3, MCTOG achieved a near miss as a temporary environment of low defensiveness, and an exchange of valid information occurred. However, it was short-term and ended once the actors returned to the physical MCTOG location. Without a change to the bureaucratic governing variables and the Model I defensive routines, double-loop learning could not occur.

**Identified Model I Single-Loop Learning Counter-Cycles:** Single-loop learning is appropriate in many cases. The process of error detection and correction is completely appropriate for incremental learning and maintaining a status quo. Single-loop learning also maintains and does not question the governing variables. When the espoused theory of an individual, group, or organization matches the theory-in-use, the governing variables are compatible. However, when the espoused theory and the theory-in-use do not match, dilemmas

develop between governing variables and behavior. Single-loop learning is then engaged to find various ways to suppress conflict through action strategies and defensive routines to bring governing variables back into tolerance without ever questioning the appropriateness of the governing variable. In the case of MCTOG, the bureaucratic governing variables in a Model I environment, the fear of looking bad and protecting one's reputation, and by extension one's career, was out of tolerance with the other two.

For Model I single-loop learning to occur, four variables are typically in place: "define goals and manage the environment to achieve them, maximize winning, minimize losing, minimize expressing negative feelings, and be rational" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 68–69). Table 4 below captures identified SQ clan Model I single-loop actions and activities which severed as "counter-learning cycles" that retarded MCTOG's senior management efforts to engage in Model II double-loop learning cycles, and effectively, preserved the status quo.

**Table 4: Identified Model I Single-loop Counter Cycles**

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Description of Model I Counter Cycle</b>	<b>What Happened</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>1</b>	The SQ Clan countered MCTOG management Model II efforts by redefining the goals of MCTOG management by teaching the MCPP, IPB basics and remaining at the explicit end of the knowledge spectrum.	The SQ Clan engaged in defensive routines of avoidance, inertia, and indifference to the campaign plan and blaming low student and instructor quality as the reason for remaining at the explicit end of the teaching spectrum for maintaining the status quo.	<b>Status quo maintained.</b> Campaign plan was not effectively implemented for more than 18 months.
<b>2</b>	The SQ clan countered MCTOG management Model II efforts with Model I to maximize winning and minimize losing by falsely taking responsibility for making change.	The SQ Clan publicly agreed with MCTOG management but in private complained of lack of clarity, direction, and resources. SQ clan enacted clan control over other MCTOG instructors to maintain the status quo by keeping instruction of classes explicit.	<b>Status quo maintained.</b> Campaign plan was not effectively implemented for more than 18 months.
<b>3</b>	SQ clan countered MCTOG management Model II efforts by minimizing the expression of negative feelings to protect self and others.	When publicly asked about the campaign plan by Management, the SQ Clan nodded “north and south” in agreement to avoid conflict with management and preserve one’s reputation and therefore get promoted. Holiday leave pointed to for “loss of momentum” on campaign plan changes.	<b>Status quo maintained.</b> Other than the “near miss” at the Dec 18 leadership offsite, issues with the campaign plan never publicly surfaced. Instead, new defensive routines were engaged.
<b>4</b>	SQ clan countered MCTOG management Model II efforts with the “be rational to protect others” approach by withholding or distorting communication from MCTOG management to faculty and staff and by censoring behavior.	This was a classic SQ clan activity. The clan censored information by not conveying intent and guidance from the commander. It also sanctioned behavior through the 8-Ball Chart and keeping people in line by teaching only at the explicit level. Rational defensive routines included blaming a lack of resources (time, talent, guidance) as the reason to maintain the status quo.	<b>Status quo maintained.</b> Very low internal commitment to the campaign plan and overall success of MCTOG as an organization.

**The Impact of a Model I Single-Loop Learning System:** The data showed that the impact of a Model I single-loop system at MCTOG countered and retarded any efforts by the

MCTOG senior management to implement the campaign plan. The middle management and senior instructors of MCTOG that generally comprised most of the SQ clan became quite adept at employing defensive routines. In fact, in my interviews, I observed a reflexive use of these routines, and if I challenged one, then another was instantly deployed. How this well-used panoply of defensive routines ran across each Model II learning attempt made by MCTOG senior management, along with each of the explanatory frames, is captured in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Explanatory Frames by Model II Learning Cycles & Model I Counter-Cycles**

Cycles and Counter-Cycles				
	1	2	3	4
<b>MCTOG Management Model II Attempt</b>	Opportunity to shape the campaign plan (Free and Informed Choice)	Establish Instructor Development Program (Internal Commitment)	Leadership Offsite I December 18, 2018 (Valid information)	Establish Core Design Team to Implement Campaign Plan (Valid information)
<b>SQ Clan Model I Reinforcement and Counter Cycle</b>	SQ Clan Attempt to Re-define MCTOG Goals	SQ Clan Attempt to Maximize Winning and Minimize Losing	SQ Clan Minimizes the Expression of Negative Feelings to Protect Self	SQ Clan Attempt to Appear Rational While Controlling Communication from MCTOG Senior Management to Faculty and Staff and by Censoring Behavior.
<b>Explanatory Frames</b>				
Uncertainty in a Hybrid Organization	<p>“These individuals want to maintain the status quo, the loudest voice with the highest rank.”</p> <p>“Some people, you’ll see them get shut down in discussion, someone will ask a probing question and won’t continue.” #07</p>	<p>“So, there are individuals on the staff doing everything they can...in an underhanded way, return us to the explicit state at MCTOG.” #04</p>	<p>“So, the culture right now is, and it’s a lot of the old guard, is that you don’t get a say unless you’ve been here for a year. You’re not really an instructor until you’ve been here for two years.” #14</p>	<p>“I think they’d rather just shut up and color, go with the flow, don’t cause a ripple, ask a question. They’re not being told to shut up and color...what they want to do doesn’t fit with MCTOG’s adult learning approach.” #03</p>

Cycles and Counter-Cycles				
	1	2	3	4
<b>MCTOG Management Model II Attempt</b>	Opportunity to shape the campaign plan (Free and Informed Choice)	Establish Instructor Development Program (Internal Commitment)	Leadership Offsite I December 18, 2018 (Valid information)	Establish Core Design Team to Implement Campaign Plan (Valid information)
<b>SQ Clan Model I Reinforcement and Counter Cycle</b>	SQ Clan Attempt to Re-define MCTOG Goals	SQ Clan Attempt to Maximize Winning and Minimize Losing	SQ Clan Minimizes the Expression of Negative Feelings to Protect Self	SQ Clan Attempt to Appear Rational While Controlling Communication from MCTOG Senior Management to Faculty and Staff and by Censoring Behavior.
<b>Explanatory Frames</b>				
Maneuver Warfare Functional Illiteracy	"Labeling the students as not where they need to be so we can harp on the [explicit] 'brilliance in the basics.' I think that reflected "I'm only comfortable teaching the basics; therefore, I'm going to shape my environment to justify staying explicit." #04	"If we had 10 or 20 people, everybody would just nod their heads north and south and say 'we get it'. But they won't be able to have a conversation [on Mw]. What I've picked up on is people come in as unprepared, and they don't want to be identified as unprepared." #01	"Yep, It, [commander's intent] gets skewed. Just do it; follow orders. And that's ok sometimes, right? From a maneuver warfare perspective." #03	"So initially we did [the campaign plan] working groups, then the [CDT] stood up. It became the Deputy's working group; he has a vision; this was propaganda to sell us his vision. My personal opinion, I'd like to hear more commander's guidance." #08
Lions Living as Lambs	Oh yeah, the right people, the first thing is we don't have the right people because we don't have [HQMC] buy-in to this place, we don't have the right people. #08	"There's a reluctance to put themselves in a vulnerable position...exposing yourself to judgment, we talk about [MCTOG] as graduate level, it's not, most of what we do here is entry-level." #13	"I honestly thought at the offsite that we're going change it up a little bit. So, I didn't want to get too wrapped around it." #05	"We don't want to have uncomfortable discussions; it's undiscussable. But you know, we'll focus on discussions about how we're going to support ITX [exercise] all day long. #02
Sub Rosa Clan Control to Maintain Status Quo	"You know, at the instructor level, not a whole lot to be honest with you. People got back to work; there wasn't a lot of energy from the organization." #12	"Like we had Master Sergeant X getting into with a Major Y outside of the classroom about him [the major] not using the prescribed PowerPoint and 'doing things his own way and cutting corners.'" #05	"It's interesting to watch. I know (management) passes guidance and intent, they explain the 'why.' Somewhere in the midlevel management that gets lost and falls by the wayside." #09	"The CO was frustrated; he was like 'What is going on? Why isn't the information getting down to the lowest echelon, you all come here and make notes, it is going in one ear and out the other, and you're not giving it to your Marines.'" #11

Note: # = participant

In effect, the SQ clan Model I behavior and their negative socialization influences employed to exert informal control over other members to MCTOG effectively neutralized the Model II learning attempts and preserved the status quo. With the SQ clan active and operating in sub rosa fashion, the MCTOG campaign plan and the reinvigoration of Mw within MCTOG were destined for stagnation. The data showed that a congruence of goals between the SQ clan and senior management at MCTOG did occur, but only episodically and only under duress. One instance of episodic congruence occurred when MCTOG was required to lend critical support to an external and highly visible requirement from its higher headquarters. The requirement impacted the daily tasks and priorities of MCTOGs' members eliciting the defensive routines of nay-saying, inertia, and resource blaming to avoid the task. In the eleventh hour, with a deadline looming and failure approaching, the groups came together and "pulled it off," a feat recounted by one participant with some pride. The driving factor for congruence was that the bureaucratic governing variables, specifically personal reputations, was held in extremis, as failure would have splashed on the reputations of the SQ clan and senior management alike. Even then, change was spasmodic and in the form of short-term cooperation lasting only until the crisis passed.

Additional evidence of this short-term convergence occurred after my onsite fieldwork concerning the campaign plan. In this instance, the Commanding Officer dropped his attempts to gain buy-in to a change in the curriculum to teach Mw at the tacit level and directed via executive fiat a significant change to the core academic course. The new course featured a heavy focus on teaching Mw at the tacit level, and MCTOG would execute the first course in three months. The name of the new course, interestingly enough, was the Advanced Maneuver Warfare Course (AMWC). The faculty and staff, regardless of clan and previous views, were goaded by necessity and fear of failure to pull together, develop the curriculum, and initiate an

internal instructor development course to prepare instructors to deliver the curriculum. Three months after the field work was complete, the inaugural AMWC course was successfully executed; however, it remains to be seen how long the cooperation and instructor development will last.

The remainder of this chapter will highlight the study's contribution to the literature and to the related field of practice. It will also provide an overview of each explanatory frame and detail its impact on organizational learning and offer potential corrective interventions. The results expose the many nuances of the interplay between organizational learning and clan control and provide a wealth of insight for managers and leaders alike who are contemplating, or have undertaken, organizational change.

## **V.2 Contributions to Literature**

The findings in this study contribute to the literature on organizational learning, specifically ToA, and to the literature on Mw. Additionally, and unexpectedly, this study also examined the interconnectedness between organizational learning theory and control theory. The role of clans operating within hierarchical organizational structures are every present, and managers and leaders must learn how to identify and manage them (Ouchi, 1980; Ouchi & Price, 1978a).

### ***V.2.1 Organizational Learning***

This study extends the extant literature on organizational learning by situating the study within a large military organization attempting to reinvigorate a warfighting philosophy through implementing a strategic initiative. What is unique to this study is that the strategic initiative of the MCTOG campaign plan essentially imposed a new espoused theory on the organization. Ironically, this new espoused theory in and of itself upset and threatened the status quo theory-in-use by requiring faculty to teach Mw at the tacit end of the knowledge spectrum, a most-lacked

capability that put reputations at risk.

The risk to reputation placed the governing variables of Marine Corps core values and Mw core values in conflict with the bureaucratic governing variable of preserving one's reputation and being promoted. This conflict, in turn, created a state of incongruency among the governing variables that required many members to use action strategies to maintain the bureaucratic variable within tolerance and sustain the status quo.

The organizational learning literature was further extended by examining how organizations can look to organizational learning systems to address the challenges of difficult organizational change that accompany strategic initiatives. Frequently, when organizations attempt to adapt to new and emerging realities in their environments, the methods of adaptation often focus on deficiencies in structure and culture (Bate et al., 2000; Holmes-Eber, 2014b; Matzenbacher, 2018; Schein, 2017; Terriff, 2007a). The Marine Corps' "Reinvigorate Mw" workshops hosted by TECOM also produced recommendations focused on changing both structure and culture (TECOM, 2016, 2017, 2018). As seen in this study, members at MCTOG readily claimed deficiencies in resources, "not the right people," and deficiencies in institutional support from external organizations lack of buy-in (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) as reasons to not implement the campaign plan or teach Mw at the tacit level. Given the deeply embedded nature of military organizational culture (Hawkins, 2015; Piscitelli, 2017), there is a great, if not overwhelming, difficulty in changing it (Kelly, 2008; Schein, 2017). This study illustrated how an *organizational learning system*, not structure or culture, was the principal issue opposing change. Contrary to the TECOM workshop claims of culture as the culprit, the Marine Corps culture is one of adaptation and innovation (Augier & Barrett, 2019; Davidson, 2010; Krulak, 1984; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a) and is as well-suited as any military culture to employ Mw.



In a contemporary and parallel case, the United States Army's attempt to effectuate and reinvigorate their version of Mw, Mission Command, has focused largely on the need for a cultural shift for an organization of over 2 million active and reserve soldiers (Matzenbacher, 2018; Townsend et al., 2019a, 2019b). This study could further inform and reshape the United States Army's approach to include a review of extant organizational learning systems as a pivot to reinvigorate Mission Command.

This study also confirmed that Model I single-loop learning systems are extremely effective at maintaining the status quo. Despite documented attempts by MCTOG senior management to engage in double-loop learning cycles, Model I single-loop learning system behaviors were successful in blunting those initiatives. The study also corroborated Argyris and Schön's (1996b) claim that Model II double-loop organizational learning systems are rare. The Model I inhibiting behaviors detailed in the explanatory frames created a level of skilled incompetence within the faculty and staff and was sustained by the senior management's skilled unawareness (Argyris & Schön, 1996b, p. 217). Even though the MCTOG senior management genuinely attempted double-loop learning, the study documented an unconscious level of skilled unawareness surrounding the explanatory frames, with a self-defeating effect.

### **V.2.2 *Maneuver Warfare***

This study appears to be the first empirical examination of why the Marine Corps' recent efforts to reinvigorate Mw have failed within the training and education continuum. To this point, the literature on Mw has primarily centered on three main themes: (1) the inception and initial adoption of Mw; (2) the implementation of Mw in practice; and (3) the discussions surrounding the need for the reinvigoration of Mw. This study adds the latest chapter to the story arc of the Mw literature stream that begins with the strategic Cold War threat that provided the impetuous

behind the Marine Corps' movement to Mw (Brown, 2018; Piscitelli, 2017; Terriff, 2006a). The literature continues with a backwards look at the inception of Mw as a warfighting philosophy and details the Marine Corps' initial efforts 31 years ago to adopt Mw as the Marine Corps' fundamental warfighting philosophy (Brown, 2018; Damian, 2001). The story arc then focused on explicating Mw as a doctrine with in-depth explanations of Mw theory (Osinga, 2007), operational examples of the implementation of Mw (Piscitelli, 2017) and how-to manuals (Lind, 1985a), and examples of the transferability of Mw philosophy to civilian companies (Clemons & Santamaria, 2002). The Mw literature stream includes discourse concerning the utility of Mw (Robeson, 1989; Tucker, 1996) and dissatisfaction with the Marine Corps' commitment to Mw (Anonymous, 2011). The story arc culminates with the Marine Corps' strategic initiative to reinvigorate Mw through the 37th CMC's strategic initiatives and TECOM workshops that advocated for structure and culture remedies to reinvigorate Mw. This study continues the story arc of Mw literature with an empirical account of MCTOGs' efforts to reinvigorate Mw by implementing a campaign plan and leveraging its unique position as a schoolhouse and COE (MCTOG, 2018b; Nicastro, 2017, 2018).

This contribution to literature turns the focus of the remedy from structure and culture to a discussion surrounding how to reinvigorate Mw to include organizational learning systems for serious consideration. This research also exposed the essential role clans played in determining the outcome of the reinvigoration of Mw effort within the TECOM training and education continuum.

### **V.2.3 *Control Theory***

Ouchi and Price (1978), Jaeger (1983), and Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) all thoroughly investigated the impact of informal clan control within organizations. Kohli and Kettinger (2001), Chua et al.

(2012), and Myers (2013) investigated the role of social capital in clans and how management may engage to influence clans with social control and negotiated order to achieve congruence between the clan and the organization's goals. Their research was limited to clans operating explicitly within an organization. This study extends the literature in two important ways. First, this study identified a previously undetected clan operating in sub rosa fashion and counter to the organization's goals. Second, this study further explored and documented the impact of how sub rosa informal clan control, striving to maintain the status quo, effectively resisted MCTOG senior management's attempts to engage in the Model II double-loop organizational learning necessary to implement the campaign plan.

Ouchi (1980) attributed organizational control to three factors: markets, bureaucracies, and clans. Ouchi and Price (1978a) provided a widely accepted definition of a clan as being a group "culturally homogenous with common values, beliefs, and norms and draws informal control from peer monitoring" (p. 64). In his writings, Ouchi (1980) described clans as operating explicitly to reinforce the organization's goals by employing "social mechanisms [to] reduce differences between individual and organizational goals" (Ouchi, 1980, p. 136). Wilkins and Ouchi (1983), in their research, described the adaptive nature of clans and how members use the clan structure to deal with considerable change within an organization, so long as there is congruence between the clan and the organization's goals (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983, p. 479). Kohli and Kettinger (2004) examined how clan goals and organizational goals may be brought into congruence, even in cases when the organization's management does not possess the power to impose conformity. In these cases, congruence was achieved when management created a common cause with key clan members through transparency of information (Kohli & Kettinger, 2004). However, for congruency to occur, the existence of a clan and its goals must be explicit.

Chua et al. (2012) discussed ways in which existing clans may be deliberately leveraged or “enacted” through clan empowerment and claimed that “clan control is often essential for complex multi-stakeholder project success” (p. 577). Their literature thoroughly discusses the positives and negatives of clan control when operating explicitly and the steps to bring congruency to clan and organizational goals. Where this study extends the literature is in addressing the impact of a clan whose goals have fallen out of congruence with the organization and which then proceeds to operate in a sub rosa fashion within the formal hierarchy. While clans are remarkably adaptive (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983), the impact of the campaign plan as a strategic initiative to reinvigorate Mw by teaching at the tacit level threatened the status quo and its clan members’ professional reputations. At this point, the clan and the organization experienced divergent and incongruent goals and began to operate sub rosa. The result was an organization that appeared mired in a status quo that was insufficient for the mission to reinvigorate Mw.

### **V.3 Contributions to Practice**

This study focused on describing and explaining MCTOG’s attempt and failure to sufficiently implement a strategic initiative to achieve a desired outcome. Regardless of business or conflict domains, the findings in this study are transferable to any military or non-military organization (Augier et al., 2014; Tinoco & Arnaud, 2013). This study may benefit and inform managers and leaders who face the need to implement a strategic initiative to adapt to a dynamic and contested environment in two ways. The first potential benefit is taking a deliberate approach to understanding one’s organizational learning system and recognizing it as a competitive advantage (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; March, 1991a; Teece et al., 1997). The second potential benefit is understanding that strategic initiatives that upset the status quo may foment sub rosa clan

activity incongruent with organizational goals. These clan activities will hamper the strategic change initiative from within, create turmoil, and result in the loss of time and committed resources.

Focusing for a moment on specific contributions to practice in a military organization, let us consider the strategic initiative in question, the MCTOG 2017-2027 Campaign Plan. This document articulated a 10-year vision that would alter how the organization would conduct business internally, its role in the larger community of interest, and its relationships with external stakeholders. It held the potential to create significant and positive gains for the institution it served. Understanding and explaining why a “say-do-gap” existed between the espoused theory and theory-in-use is not a trivial matter—in fact, it is imperative to the change process, as blood and treasure are at stake in the event of war (Davidson, 2010; Kelly, 2008; Shultz, 2012). To open the aperture of this study, let us consider the contributions to practice in a non-military organization. Whether a commercial enterprise, public service, or non-profit, any organization attempting to adapt to a dynamic or contested environment can benefit from this research. Often, when significant adaptation to a dynamic environment is required, it involves strategic changes to how the organization does business, its relationships, and its commitment of resources to a particular goal (Shivakumar, 2014). The prudent manager and leader should understand how an extant organizational learning system may influence their strategic initiatives and dynamics within their organization.

The data coding process revealed five phenomena operating within MCTOG that, when viewed through the theoretical lens of ToA (Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978, 1996), produced a framework of five explanatory frames. Each explanatory frame carried with it consequences to organizational learning as detailed in the previous chapter. Additional insight for each

explanatory frame is noted below, along with recommended corrective interventions that managers and leaders may wish to consider.

### ***V.3.1 Explanatory Frame 1: Uncertainty in a Hybrid Organization***

MCTOG's personnel composition created a dynamic of external pressures influencing internal priorities that resulted in members feeling pulled in many directions. MCTOG was also unusually top-heavy in rank due to the mid-grade ranks of the students and the presence of GS civilian co-workers, an absolute novelty for many Marines. Such a high density of senior Marines and the presence of GS civilians, often in senior- or middle-management positions, disrupted the normal pecking order to which military members are accustomed. What became apparent in the study was that MCTOG members had not been formally informed or socialized to the new reality of their role in MCTOG. Socialization instead transpired informally and took on as many forms as there were members.

In many cases, the vacuum of socialization to MCTOG was filled by the SQ clan. The data revealed a common theme of not knowing the corporate identity of MCTOG. The campaign plan addressed MCTOG's mission as a schoolhouse and COE and the dynamic space it occupied astride institutional tension. However, the lack of engagement with the campaign plan and the negative socialization exhibited by the SQ clan sustained and perpetuated the uncertainty surrounding MCTOG's identity.

**Potential Corrective Interventions:** The uncertainty induced by a lack of formal socialization to this hybrid organization produced a dislocation of expectation for members, which induced an ill-defined sense of purpose across the organization and resulted in defensive routines to protect reputations. Members' defensive routines were intended to reduce the potential for conflict and embarrassment and to "just survive this tour." The defensive routines

also restricted communications into silos with little cross-talk, underwhelming after-action reviews, and the avoidance of critical conversations, resulting in superficial learning (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998). The weight of uncertainty alone created by the absence of a formal socialization process reinforced the elements of a Model I learning organization system.

A formal socialization process for all incoming members that leverages the formal authority of MCTOG senior management will reduce uncertainty and provide legitimacy to a new expectation and set norms and assumptions with a level of intentionality. While formal socialization alone will not turn a Model I single-loop organizational learning system into a Model II organizational learning system, it will reduce uncertainty by assuring members of their role within the organization and the goals of the organization. Additionally, a clan operating explicitly, and with goals generally congruent with the organization, can be a powerful ally to management. These clans, when enabled by resources and the legitimate authority of the senior management, can establish positive behaviors favorable to the organizations' strategic initiative.

### ***V.3.2 Explanatory Frame 2: Mw and Functional Illiteracy***

The data show that among the MCTOG faculty and staff, the knowledge and understanding of Mw and commitment to teaching Mw doctrine was an espoused theory only. The combination of a significant level of Mw functional illiteracy, combined with a campaign plan that emphasized teaching Mw at the tacit end of the spectrum, presented a threat to faculty. Faculty seeking to preserve their professional reputations created an array of defensive reasoning for not teaching Mw at the tacit level. Over time, the defensive reasoning produced a condition of "skilled incompetence" among instructors.

The "skilled incompetence" displayed by faculty was enabled by a condition of "skilled unawareness" displayed by senior management to avoid the difficult work and take the apparent

but unpopular remedy of a mandatory, formal, and progressive instructor development plan. The default action instead relied on the autodidact faculty members to perform the bulk of tacit-level instruction. Lacking sufficient knowledge and competency in Mw among the faculty was certainly a hindrance to reinvigorating Mw. Moreover, the combination of skilled incompetence of middle management and skilled unawareness of senior management ensured a Model I single-loop organizational learning system would persist despite the Model II aspirations noted in the campaign plan.

**Potential Corrective Interventions:** It is axiomatic that a formal instructor development program in Mw would be a significant remedy to the issue experienced at MCTOG. The large issue is, for managers at any organization, to not presume the competence of its members in core functions. To do so is an act of omission that hinders organizational learning by placing members in the position of suppressing defects in their preparedness with Model I behaviors. If members are presumed competent and are asked to perform a task that exceeds their abilities, there are very good reasons members will develop an array of defensive routines to camouflage their shortcomings to avoid embarrassment and damage to their reputation. Managers initiating a strategic initiative should consider conducting an intervention that sets a non-threatening expectation of transparent competency and provides a path to achieve said competency. Doing so will likely reduce the reliance on defensive routines to hide a deficiency in skill and set the conditions for a Model II learning system.

### ***V.3.3 Explanatory Frame 3: The Campaign Plan Gets a Damn Good Ignoring***

The MCTOG campaign plan was a strategic document meant to serve as an intervention to stimulate the adaptive change necessary to realize its role and reinvigorate Mw. However, it also represented a new espoused theory for the organization impacting approaches in instruction,



organizational structure, and responsibilities. The new espoused theory was injected into the MCTOG dynamics and represented a direct threat to the status quo, a Model I theory in practice. Combined with the uncertainty extending from a lack of intentional socialization and an insufficient capacity to teach Mw, the campaign plan encountered multiple Model I behavior defensive routines—namely avoidance, inertia, and indifference—at the individual and group levels, which ensured the campaign plan went exactly nowhere.

**Potential Corrective Interventions:** Managers attempting to implement a strategic initiative should consider the impact on the current status quo theory-in-use. Even if a strategic initiative is specifically intended to disrupt the status quo, one should understand a sub rosa clan's potential consequences to organizational learning and incidental development.

#### ***V.3.4 Explanatory Frame 4: Lions Living as Lambs***

MCTOG is a well-led organization with active senior management, and the workforce is comprised of intelligent, competent Marines and GS employees, most of whom had served as active duty Marines. Nearly all participants had served operationally overseas and had been in harm's way for one or several combat tours. Given this picture of MCTOG and its members, it was surprising to me that the data revealed fear, specifically “fear of looking bad,” as one of the most dominant themes. The socialization of Marines upon entry into the service is intense and comprehensive. Marines are indelibly stamped with the Marine Corps core values of “honor, courage, commitment” and the Marine Corps ethos of martial prowess, tenacity, “can-do” obedience, and subordinating oneself to the good of the unit and mission. A Marine's personal reputation is built upon those core values and ethos. The Marine Corps is also the smallest of the services, and one's reputation is not only lasting, but it precedes them a shot to their next duty station. Protecting reputation is important.

The campaign plan required teaching Mw at the tacit level and required a level of Mw competency that most of the faculty did not possess. The prospect of trying to teach Mw at the tacit level with insufficient literacy in Mw posed a direct threat to those instructors' reputations for martial prowess. In their study, Staw et al. (1981) examined how, in the presence of threat and fear, individuals, groups, and organizations will respond with *rigidity*. Threat and fear produce "...a reliance on a tried and true mode of operating. As a result, threat is often more associated with inertia, protection of the status quo, and sometimes inaction – the deer in the headlights syndrome" (Ancona, 2009, p. 12). Threat and fear induced by the campaign plan manifested within MCTOG as defensive routines that locked in a Model I single-loop learning system. The prospect of executing the campaign plan and teaching Mw at the tacit level threatened the professional reputation and, therefore, the careers of the majority of the faculty. The fear of looking bad induced Model I behaviors at the individual and group levels to maintain the status quo and effectively counter senior managements' attempts to engage in Model II double-loop organizational learning.

**Potential Corrective Interventions:** Managers seeking to install a strategic initiative should carefully consider how the initiative will impact the members of the organization. Understanding what elements of a strategic initiative may be perceived as a threat and what elements may create uncertainty among the workforce is the first step. Proactively, preemptively, and explicitly addressing threat perceptions and uncertainty through clarity, consistency, and connection in their communications will help managers achieve the organization's goals. Clarity of communication requires a dialogue that ensures the message and expectations are not ambiguous or vague and that understanding is positively confirmed. Consistency of management actions and behaviors refers to the golden rule that actions speak louder than words. Managers

and leaders must ensure there is not a “say-do-gap” between their words and deeds. Finally, managers and leaders must work to establish a connection between the organizations’ goals and the goals of its members to allow a congruency among them to develop. This requires a great deal of effort. Clarity of expectations and providing a pathway to achieve the skills to function within a new system will reduce the fear of looking bad across an organization. Managers and leaders need to see that clarity, consistency, and connection requires the necessary spadework to engage in Model II double-loop organizational learning.

### ***V.3.5 Explanatory Frame 5: Sub Rosa Clan and Control to Maintain Status Quo***

The literature concerning clan behavior within organizations mainly portrays clans as operating explicitly and in some form of congruence with the organization it is in. The findings of this study demonstrate the opposite. The data revealed the surprising existence of a *sub rosa* SQ clan operating within the hierarchical structure and counter to the organizations’ goals of implementing the campaign plan. The actions of the SQ clan contributed to the ineffective implementation of the plan and, ultimately, the efforts to reinvigorate Mw.

It is not the intent of this study to paint the SQ clan as the villain of the story. The SQ clan did exert informal control in the form of Model I behaviors to counter senior managements’ attempts to implement the plan. However, in many ways, the SQ clan was responding to the uncertainty and fear induced by the insufficiently communicated campaign plan and was protecting its members from looking bad. The SQ clan reacted to the organization's failure to provide clarity, consistency, and connection of purpose and provide a path to goal congruence between the SQ clan and the organization. The impact of informal SQ clan control resulted in not only the failed implementation of the campaign plan, but it also ensured through censure of its members, that learning would remain superficial and rooted in rote memorization of the

processes and procedures.

The attempt to install a new espoused theory (Mw/campaign plan) was senior management's bid for Model II double-loop organizational learning. The unintended outcome was that the new espoused theory created ambiguity, uncertainty, and fear and threatened the status quo. The response was the rise of the SQ clan—those who maintained the status quo through Model I behaviors and informal clan control. These conditions resulted in an undiscussable *détente* between the skilled incompetence of the SQ clan and the skilled unawareness of the senior management, ultimately preserving a Model I single-loop learning system and the status quo.

**Potential Corrective Interventions:** Informal clan control and formal hierarchal control need not operate exclusively, as clans and organizational hierarchies inside of MCTOG can work through common cause to achieve goal congruence. Hierarchical organizations typically possess significant influence, authority, and resources that may be applied to influence clans and shape congruency between clan and organizational goals. Managers and leaders can proactively and preemptively shape clan behaviors through the “clarity, consistency, and connection” spadework addressed previously. However, before a common cause may be achieved, managers must first be aware of the clan’s presence, whether explicit or sub rosa, and they must be aware of the clan's goals. Once managers have diagramed the internal clan structure, they may thoughtfully employ their legitimate control, influence, and resources to enable informal clan control that is a common cause with the organization.

When management lacks the legitimacy to impose control, the common cause may be achieved by empowering the clan to legitimize the message. What was discovered in the case of MCTOG was the need to ‘flip’ a sub rosa clan to achieve congruency between clan and

organizational goals. Flipping a clan that harbors goals incongruent with the organizations' goals requires a Damascene conversion of the existing clan leader. Such a leader, whom already possesses sufficient social capital to be influential within the organization, may potentially be 'flipped' through thoughtful, empathetic, and transparent dialogue with senior management. Such an engagement can bring clan and organizational goals into congruence. Once congruence is achieved the clan leader may operate explicitly and as a sort of Apostle Paul, who then carries the message of the new espoused theory to the clan. Alternatively, the organization may enable an outsider with sufficient social capital to make the clans' activities explicit and work to gain congruency of goals. With congruency of goals, the reasons for sub rosa activity are known in advance and uncertainty and fear are neutralized. The spadework for a Model II organizational learning system may now begin.

#### **V.4 Limitations**

The Marine Corps is a 185,000-person strong, globally distributed organization. This study is limited to one organization within that structure, and admittedly a small one. This fact is mitigated by selecting an organization that is situated at the nexus of the major elements inside of the Marine Corps. The Fleet Marine Force and the supporting establishments each have a stake in the MCTOG mission. Additionally, MCTOG was one of the few organizations to aggressively pursue the call to reinvigorate Mw and was uniquely situated as a schoolhouse and COE to effect that change. Members of MCTOG are drawn from both major elements and include officers and enlisted Marines who possess backgrounds in ground combat, combat support, combat service support, as well as aviation. This diversity of rank and occupational specialties, while not fully complete, provides a cross-sectional representation of the Marine Corps. The transferability of this study to the rest of the Marine Corps is not universal, however. Operational units and

functional areas of the supporting establishment will not find as much utility as will organizations within the TECOM training and education continuum. That said, any organization seeking to effect change through a strategic initiative or struggling in the midst of one could use the explanatory framework findings of this study to examine their organizational learning system.

This study was a cross-sectional case study conducted in situ and therefore captures a snapshot in time of a very dynamic organization. If this study were conducted again today, many of the findings would be different. Some of the differences would likely be a result of this study's engaged scholarship approach. I partnered closely with the Commanding Officer of MCTOG in the co-production of knowledge by sharing analytical memos and the interim case summary. In some instances, the Commanding Officer acted on the real-time disclosure of the research findings. Specifically, the power in naming a hidden and complex dynamic appropriately and effectively prompted the formalized and mandated instructor development program, with the Commanding Officer giving full-throttle support.

One challenge of case studies is to recruit participants with enough diversity to ensure a complete view from several aspects within the Marine Corps. This challenge was mitigated by recruiting participants who were at the beginning, middle, and end of their tours. Additionally, there was a proportional representation among uniformed military, both officer and enlisted, and GS employees with representation among senior management, middle management, and the instructor cadre. All participants were generous with their time. They were open, honest, and eager to participate.

Self-reported data from interviews and focus groups may threaten the data validity, and participant observation is subject to researcher bias (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). These issues

were mitigated through triangularization of interviews, focus groups, participant/observer activity in workshops and meetings, and direct observations. These methods allowed me to check participants' self-reported data against actual behavior and other participants' comments. Having the time to thoroughly absorb the data provided insight into participant agendas, attempts at deception, and to check statements against facts and secondary evidence.

## **V.5 Future Research**

The data show where Model II double-loop learning was attempted at MCTOG, but failed to take root, due to an overwhelming presence of inhibiting Model I behaviors in the organization. MCTOG's senior management exhibited several attempts of Model II double-loop learning by soliciting input on the campaign plan from its members and its attempts to engage at two leadership offsite events. Many participants received these Model II overtures enthusiastically, yet they were suppressed by SQ clan informal control, suggesting that an organizational learning system may not be monolithic when an organization possesses one particular learning system at the exclusion of the other. Future research could investigate the presence of both Model I and Model II organizational learning systems and the relational dynamics that enable one over the other. As the presence of a sub rosa clan operating within the hierarchal structure and at a counter-purpose with senior management was as a surprise, future research could be conducted to help managers and leaders diagnose clan presence and diagram the boundaries of informal clan control, allowing organizational influencers to conduct more precise and mindful interventions in enabling positive clan attributes and inhibiting negative clan attributes.

## VI CONCLUSION

Organizations invest billions and risk their very existence in attempts to implement change through strategic initiatives. Managers who understand their organizational learning systems and how those systems and people will respond to changes in the status quo will make better informed decisions regarding implementation. This study captures the story of one organization's attempt and failure to sufficiently implement a strategic initiative. This story may be broadly fitted to any organization seeking the adaptive change necessary to succeed in the dynamic and contested environments of business or conflict. The strategic initiative, in the form of a campaign plan, was a 10-year vision that would alter how the organization would conduct business internally, its role in the larger community of interest, and its relationships with external stakeholders and held the potential to create significant and positive gains for the institution it served. The dynamics of an SQ clan operating sub rosa within the hierarchical structure of MCTOG exerted informal clan control that countered senior management implementation efforts. The SQ clan consisted of middle management and those with greater time in the organization and was primarily concerned with maintaining the status quo and their individual reputations. The SQ clan unconsciously acted with fear-inspired defensive routines establishing and sustaining a Model I organizational learning environment that muted the more junior and less tenured members through censure and, in effect, blunted the MCTOG senior management's efforts at change. The result was the campaign plan going absolutely nowhere.

This study was an engaged scholarship effort and offered a penetrating look into the subtle, yet impactful interplay between organizational learning and control theory. The interplay between these two social phenomena ultimately muted the organization's effort to implement a strategic initiative. The explanatory framework provided a structure and lexicon to a set of



unstructured, often hidden, and nameless dynamics at work within an organization. Also revealed was how the SQ clan, while acting without nefarious intent, responded to organizational uncertainty and employed its collective social capital in the form of middle management positions, seniority and an array of Model I defensive routines to enforce status quo norms. Ultimately, the actions of the SQ served as the *bêtes noires* to senior management attempts to engage the in the Model II organizational learning activities necessary to implement the strategic initiative and reinvigorate Mw.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

#### Dissertation Research

BP McCoy

Georgia State University

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Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Name: BP McCoy

Date of Interview:

Time Interview Started:

Time Interview Concluded:

Location of Interview:

Length of Service:

Length of Time at MCTOG:

Rank/Rate:

Assigned Working Group:

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***Instructions:*** The interviewer will ask the numbered interview questions. At their discretion, the interviewer will use the lettered questions as probes to elicit data-rich, narrative responses. As a semi-structured interview, the interviewer should ask additional follow-up questions beyond this protocol in order to clarify the participant's response or probe further into the qualitative data

*provided in the open-ended responses.*

*Note that special instructions are in italics and should not be read aloud. The interviews are audio-recorded, in order for the interviewer to later analyze the verbatim interview responses. Throughout the course of the interview, the interviewer should record, in writing, nonverbal communication as it is observed or immediately following the interview.*

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Thank you for meeting with me today and participating in this research study. My research involves organizational, philosophies, how people interact within organizations, and how organizations learn. I will ask you broad questions about what it's like to work here in order to get a sense of the organization's norms, commonly held assumptions, and the ways people interact. Also, thank you for signing the informed consent. Do you have any questions about it or the study in general before we get started?

I appreciate the time you've agreed to commit, so I'll set a timer to ensure we do not exceed the agreed-upon 90 minutes. As mentioned in the informed consent, I will be recording this interview so that I may have a verbatim transcript and capture everything accurately. Is this still ok with you?

*The interviewer should ensure the participant gives a clear response.*

As detailed in the informed consent form, the transcript will not contain any information that could identify you, and your comments will be assigned a randomly generated code, such as "Participant #XX."

I am the lone investigator on this study project and commit to preserving confidentiality for you and all other participants. In the interest of confidentiality for you and all those involved and not

involved in this study, I must remind you to not use the names, initials, rank, or other identifying information of other people in the course of our interview. Do you have any questions?

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—

This is a semi-structured interview, there are no right or wrong answers, so please answer frankly.

**Questions Regarding Maneuver Warfare and Learning:**

1. How would you describe Maneuver Warfare in practice? What does it look like?
  - a. What does it look like operationally?
  - b. What does it look like in garrison or in the schoolhouse?
  - c. How are the tenants of Maneuver Warfare applied at MCTOG?
  - d. What is the role of risk in Maneuver Warfare?
  - e. Is risk rewarded? Under what circumstances?
2. Given MCTOG's mission as both a schoolhouse and a center of excellence and the aspirations of the campaign plan, in which areas does the organization need to excel?
  - a. In other words, given MCTOG's mission and goals, what do you need to be really good at to succeed, and what does the organization need to learn in order to succeed?
3. In terms of learning, what new insights and behaviors are required at the individual level in this command to achieve the goals of the campaign plan?
4. In terms of learning, what new insights and behaviors are required and the group or community level to achieve the campaign plan?
5. Given the required insights and behaviors identified for the individual, groups, and organizational levels, how can MCTOG facilitate that learning?
  - a. Is the knowledge MCTOG is seeking to develop more explicit or tacit in nature?
  - b. How does that type of explicit knowledge development shape your learning approach?
  - c. How does that type of tacit knowledge development shape your learning approach?
  - d. How does learning happen now?
  - e. How do you go about your job as it applies to facilitating learning?

6. What are your underlying assumptions about the complexity and adaptability of the environment here at MCTOG?
  - a. Internal complexity and adaptability?
  - b. External complexity and adaptability?
7. What mental models or framework do you use to guide your decisions?
8. How do these assumptions influence our learning styles?
9. How do we test the viability of our assumptions and approaches?
10. Given MCTOGs agenda, what's the required speed, depth, and breadth of the learning required to achieve the goals of the campaign plan?
  - a. How can MCTOG support the transfer of learning throughout the organization?

**Questions Regarding Organizational Norms, Culture, and Learning:**

11. What is it like to work here?
  - a. How does everyone get along here?
  - b. What is the interaction like?
  - c. What are the unwritten rules here about how things get done around here?
  - d. How well do people work as a team?
  - e. At MCTOG, how does the faculty learn?
  - f. At MCTOG how does the staff learn?
12. What happens when there is disagreement?
  - a. How do members communicate during disagreement?
  - b. When there is disagreement, what is the atmosphere like?
  - c. Are there subjects that are touchy or to be avoided?
  - d. When members disagree, how is your work affected?
13. In what ways is the following statement accurate or inaccurate? "At MCTOG, my talents and thinking is valued."
  - a. What does "my talents and thinking are valued" look like?
  - b. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? "When members at MCTOG have a difference of opinion there is frank and professional discussion about it."
  - c. What does the idea of an "frank and professional discussion" look like for you?

14. When conflicts occur at MCTOG, how is that conflict resolved?
  - a. What does the idea of “resolving conflict” look like for you?
15. In what ways is the following statement accurate or inaccurate? “When people disagree at MCTOG, it is resolved and the organization learns and makes improvements.”
  - a. What does the concept of “organizational learning” look like for you at MCTOG?
16. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement? “I trust those I work with here at MCTOG.”
  - a. What does the concept of “trust” look like for you here at MCTOG?
17. Do you have anything else to share with me about the MCTOG culture or the way things get done or how members conduct themselves?

## Appendix B: Government Service Employee Focus Group Protocol

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Participant Codes:

Interviewer Name:

Date of Focus Group:

Time Focus Group Started:

Time Focus Group Concluded:

Location of Focus Group Discussion:

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*Instructions: Gather a group of government service employee staff -members to form a focus group. Ask the questions to the group.*

*Note that special instructions are noted in italics and should not be read aloud. The focus group will not be audio-recorded. The interviewer should record, in writing, both verbal and non-verbal communication as it is observed during the focus group.*

---

Introduction: Thank you for meeting with me today and participating in this focus group. My research involves how people interact within organizations and how organizations learn. During

this focus group, I will ask you questions as a group about the learning environment.

<i>Focus Group Questions</i>	<i>Interviewer Observations on Qualitative Responses from Participants</i>
1. How do people learn on the job at MCTOG?	
2. In what ways does MCTOG provide (or fail to provide) a supportive learning environment?	
3. In what ways does the leadership at MCTOG promote (or fail to promote) learning by welcoming input and listening?	
4. In what ways does MCTOG provide (or fail to provide) the opportunity to learn as you work by experimenting and sharing ideas with each other?	



### Appendix C: Uniformed Military Focus Group Protocol

Participant Name:

Interviewer Name:

Date of Focus Group:

Time Focus Group Started:

Time Focus Group Concluded:

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*Instructions: Gather a group of uniformed faculty members to form a focus group. Ask the questions to the group.*

*Note that special instructions are noted in italics and should not be read aloud. The focus group will not be audio-recorded. The interviewer should record, in writing, both verbal and non-verbal communication as it is observed during the focus group.*

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Introduction: Thank you for meeting with me today and participating in this focus group. My research involves how people interact within organizations and how organizations learn. During this focus group, I will ask you questions as a group about the learning environment.

<i>Focus Group Questions</i>	<i>Interviewer Observations on Qualitative Responses from Participants</i>
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1. How do people learn on the job at MCTOG?	
2. In what ways does MCTOG provide (or fail to provide) a supportive learning environment?	
3. In what ways does the leadership at MCTOG promote (or fail to promote) learning by welcoming input and listening?	
4. In what ways does MCTOG provide (or fail to provide) the opportunity to learn as you work by experimenting and sharing ideas with others?	

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## VITA

BP McCoy served as a Marine for 28 years in a variety of infantry and light armor reconnaissance units. Most notably, he was the Commanding Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment through two combat tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). During OIF I, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Marines spearheaded the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division's entry into Baghdad and toppled the Saddam Husain Statue in Firdos Square on April 9, 2003. One year later, BP led the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Marines through counter-insurgency operations throughout the Al Anbar Province to include the brutal house-to-house fight in the first battle for Fallujah. BP served in a variety of operations and special activities positions and was the US Central Command's crisis action team leader for the rescue of Captain Phillips aboard the cargo ship MV Maersk Alabama and several other counter-terrorism operations. BP rounded out his career with a 15-month tour in Afghanistan, serving consecutively as the Operations Director for the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan and as the Executive Officer/Military Assistant to Commander, International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan.

BP founded Xiphos Initiatives LLC, a company that provides strategy and leadership solutions and helps organizations bring their mission and vision statements to life. Since 2017, BP has developed and delivered the curriculum for new Marine Corps ground combat commanders, an effort that impacts 25,000 Marines every year. To feed his soul, BP is a field instructor for the National Outdoor Leadership School and develops future civilian and military leaders by teaching and mentoring students during multi-week "off the grid" mountain expeditions as they experientially learn leadership, decision making, communications, and risk management in austere wilderness environments and in situations that bear very real consequences. He is a published author of the book *Passion of Command: The Moral Imperative*

*of Leadership*. Throughout his career, BP has been awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat “V” for valor with Gold Star in lieu of second award, the Bronze Star with Combat “V” for valor with Gold Star in lieu of second award, the Purple Heart for wounds received in action, and the 2002 Navy League John A. Lejeune Inspirational Leadership award.