

Learning



U.S. Marine Corps

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
Headquarters United States Marine Corps
Washington, D.C. 20350-3000

20 February 2020

FOREWORD

The purpose of this publication is to describe the Marine Corps' learning philosophy and explain why learning is critically important to the profession of arms. While many of the concepts in this publication have been passed on by Marine leaders throughout our history, this publication seeks to formalize them and provide aspirational goals. Learning is an institutional priority and a professional expectation for all Marines. This mentality is key to the Marine Corps becoming a more effective learning organization.

The most important factor in this philosophy is the importance of continuous learning throughout our careers for warfighting. Continuous learning is essential to maneuver warfare because it enables Marines to quickly recognize changing conditions in the battlespace, adapt, and make timely decisions against a thinking enemy. These skills required in war must be learned, developed, and honed over time—if neglected, they quickly atrophy. Marines leverage the art and science of learning, technologies, and learning environments that reflect the changing operational environment to tailor learning and provide each other with constructive feedback. Leaders hold Marines to high professional standards of performance, conduct, and discipline—to include

learning. As Marines rise in rank and position, continuous learning and developing our professional skills are a professional expectation. We must make the most of every learning opportunity, fostering our subordinates' learning while continuing our own.

Continuous learning is important to Marines because of the fundamental nature of war and its ever-changing character. The nature of war carries a combination of fear, uncertainty, ambiguity, chance, horror and, above all, friction that Marines must prepare to counter. Marines must seek out education and training opportunities that simulate these conditions. We must train how we fight. As Marines, we must understand how important learning is and be committed to the principles laid out in this publication. Our professional responsibility—as Marines—is to engage in continuous learning so that we may best support our fellow Marines, our Corps, and our Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. H. Berger', with a stylized, cursive script.

D. H. BERGER
General. U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Publication Control Number: 142 000016 00

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release;
distribution is unlimited.

Learning

Chapter 1. The Nature of Learning

Learning and Competence—The Role of Learning in Warfighting—
Key Principles of Learning—The Human Dimension and Science
of Learning—Problem Solving as a Warfighting Capability—
The Mind as a Weapon—Continuous Learners—Conclusion

Chapter 2. The Culture of Learning

Organizational Culture—Areas of Responsibility—Professional
Expectations—Conclusion

Chapter 3. The Learning Environment

Learning Environments—Setting the Conditions for Success—
The Expeditionary Nature of Learning—A Learner-Centric Model—
Self-Directed Learning—The Role of the Instructor—Assessments
as Tools—Technology in Support of Learning—Conclusion

MCDP 7 Learning

Chapter 4. The Learning Leader

Foster and Encourage—Teaching and Leading—Humility—
Technical and Tactical Proficiency—Conclusion

Notes

Chapter 1

The Nature of Learning

“As a lifetime serial learner, I have found that ordinary people can do the extraordinary who are committed to experiential learning, are intellectually curious, and possess an unquenchable desire to acquire new knowledge . . . this may be our only advantage in the future fight.”¹

—Lorna M. Mahlock

“What you did isn’t as important as what you were thinking.”²

—Alfred M. Gray

“The most important six inches on the battlefield is between your ears.”³

—James N. Mattis

Warfighting is the most complex, challenging, violent, and dynamic human endeavor. The Marine Corps, as the Nation's force-in-readiness, must have the versatility and flexibility to effectively fight—and *succeed*—in any situation and at any intensity across the full spectrum of conflict, whenever and wherever the Nation calls. To meet these demands, it is critical that Marines recognize that learning has a direct impact on warfighting. Marines who understand the key learning principles and continuously seek opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and the proper attitudes throughout their careers will develop wisdom that enables success in battle. As Marines, we pass on our wisdom and experiences to the next generation of Marines. For the Marine Corps to remain the United States' force-in-readiness, it is critical that every Marine strengthen and value learning in all facets of Marine Corps culture, learning environments, and leadership development. Learning is a professional responsibility for all Marines at all levels. Marines must develop the habit of continuous learning early in their careers to set the conditions for success in increasing levels of responsibility.

The Marine Corps' learning philosophy seeks to create a culture of continuous learning and professional competence that yields adaptive leaders capable of successfully conducting maneuver warfare in complex, uncertain, and chaotic environments. *Learning* is developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes through study, experience, or instruction. *Learning* includes both training and education.

LEARNING AND COMPETENCE

Learning is developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes through study, experience, or instruction. It is a never-ending progression that includes understanding *why* something is important—the intent of learning. Learning is much more than gathering information or reciting facts; it includes cognitive, physical, social, emotional, ethical, and cultural components. Learning occurs in formal settings (e.g., a schoolhouse or training exercise) and informal settings, such as social, experiential, self-directed, and other ways outside of the classroom. The developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes interact to influence how Marines think, respond, and act.

Learning encompasses both training and education, which are equally important and complementary. A simple explanation of the differences between training and education is that training prepares Marines to deal with the known factors of war (e.g., the importance of good marksmanship), while education prepares Marines to deal with the unknown factors (e.g., effective decision-making in changing circumstances). Training and education are accomplished in different ways, but they are both required—working together—to instill the learning that results in readiness and effectiveness.

The complexity of the modern battlefield and increasing rate of change requires a highly educated force. While different, education and training are inextricably linked. Education denotes study and intellectual development. Training is primarily learning-by-doing. We will not train without the

presence of education; we must not educate without the complementary execution of well-conceived training.⁴

Marines must always seek better ways to learn throughout the entire continuum of training and education. Throughout this publication, the term, *learning* is emphasized; *training* and *education* are used when specifically referring to one or the other. Learning is the overall intended outcome of both training and education.

Marines continuously learn to be ready for the constantly changing and increasing demands of warfare, and the range of missions. As Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 6, *Command and Control*, explains, “We earn the trust of others by demonstrating competence, a sense of responsibility, loyalty, and self-discipline.”⁵ *Competence* is having sufficient knowledge, judgment, and skills to perform a particular duty, job, or function. Marines improve competencies through formal and informal learning opportunities that develop the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Marines learn to address complex problems and develop teamwork wherever they may be, whether in garrison, deployed, or in formal learning centers. Learning enables Marines to think critically, develop judgment, and cultivate a bias for action without waiting to be told what to do. A Marine with knowledge and skills who lacks judgment requires close supervision, which may not be possible in combat conditions. Our Marine Corps ethos demands competence, responsibility, loyalty, and self-discipline as military professionals charged with the defense of the Nation. Learning prepares Marines to exercise initiative within the commander’s intent—constantly seeking to improve, develop mental agility, and deal with changing situations.

THE ROLE OF LEARNING IN WARFIGHTING

Maneuver warfare requires intelligent leaders at all levels who possess a bias for intelligent action.⁶ Success in warfare depends on Marines developing an *intellectual edge* to accurately recognize cues, quickly make sense of information, and respond effectively. This intellectual edge is based on developed knowledge and experience that allows Marines to shape conditions and events to their advantage. Developing fundamental cognitive competencies such as problem framing, mental imaging, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, reasoning, and problem solving enables Marines to make effective decisions more quickly in time-constrained operational environments, when they often have incomplete, inaccurate, or even contradictory information.⁷

A central tenet of maneuver warfare is attacking the enemy's ability to make decisions and to shift the mental aspects of warfare to the Marines' advantage.⁸ In short, Marines develop an intellectual edge by learning cognitive skills and competencies that enable them to move through the *observe, orient, decide, and act* cycle, often referred to as the OODA loop,⁹ more quickly and effectively than the enemy. The warfighter who recognizes what is happening, adapts to the situation, and then makes effective decisions in the shortest amount of time will typically have an advantage. The OODA loop decision-making cycle is even more important in preparation for future conflicts because as new technologies emerge the rate of change will continue to increase. Therefore, Marines must continuously improve their knowledge and skills by leveraging technology—but never depend upon technology alone as the solution. Marines should *observe*