

Leading the Way in Policy Implementation: An Examination of how the United States Marine Corps has Managed the Don't Ask Don't Tell Repeal

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This article examines implementation techniques, managerial methods, organizational culture, tools, and processes utilized by the United States Marine Corps (USMC) since December 2010 when President Barak Obama signed legislation that would lead to the eventual repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy. Over the past 18 months the Marine Corps has gone through the preparatory steps of implementing the repeal, which has included the review and revision of numerous orders, directives, and training programs; to the actual implementation phase of the repeal. During this time numerous outside entities have given their opinions and views on the issue, but what has eluded examination is how the actual process has been carried out. With an organization of over 200,000 individuals, the USMC has had a daunting task to train every Marine on the implementation of the policy repeal, but the more involved tasks are related to how leaders at the lowest levels have managed the reactions and initial issues related to the repeal.

Within the United States Marine Corps leaders from the highest levels of the organization have carefully and methodically sketched a plan to “lead the way” and step out in front to implement the repeal of DADT in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The processes and methods utilized since legislation was initiated that would lead to the eventual repeal have set the Marine Corps up for success to carry out orders from the Commander in Chief, and ensure all Marines regardless of sexual orientation are treated with dignity and respect.

The repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy was a monumental revolutionary change that has been followed by an evolutionary change currently transforming all services. This paper will focus specifically on the United States Marine Corps' actions, since December of 2010 until the present time, from the leadership and management perspective as the Corps has dealt with this major social change within its ranks. Some key questions to keep in mind are the following: What is the transformation that has truly occurred? Has the organization truly experienced a fundamental change? What does effective management look like in an organization like the Marine Corps? The aforementioned questions can be answered after examining the path the Marine Corps has taken since December 2010 in

leading the implementation of the DADT repeal.

Setting the Tone

In the immediate moments after pen struck paper and legislation was signed by President Obama on December 22, 2010 that would lead to the eventual repeal of DADT, the United States Marine Corps' highest ranking commander General James F. Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, published the following message to all Marines:

As Marines, we abide by the laws of our nation, and will implement the new policy in accordance with specific direction and implementing guidance from our chain of command. Until then, it remains DOD policy not to ask service members or recruit applicants about their sexual orientation – and in that view, there are no new changes to existing DOD or Marine Corps policies. We are Marines, first and foremost. Fidelity is the essence of who we are. Accordingly, we will faithfully execute this new law, and will continue to treat each other with dignity and respect. The Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and I will personally lead this effort. We expect Marines to step out smartly to implement the new policy. In doing so, we will further demonstrate to the American people the discipline and loyalty that have been the hallmark of our Corps for over 235 years. (ALMAR 047/10)

These comments set a clear tone: Marines would lead by example for all other services in implementing the DADT repeal. This tone laid the foundation for the groundwork that was going to commence in order to methodically and effectively lead the change that just 20 days earlier General Amos spoke out against. His sentiments just a few weeks earlier were to “recommend against the repealing of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ in Dec. 3 congressional testimony – a position at odds with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen.” (Mulrine, 2010) A man at odds with the repeal of the law could not have sounded more supportive of what occurred on 22 December. This is the essence of leadership.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) leads an organization of over 200,000 individuals, in corporate terms he is the Chief Executive Officer of one of the largest corporations in the country. Every individual within the Marine Corps is subordinate to him and is bound by law, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, to obey his orders or face disciplinary action up to courts martial. Just as every Marine is subject to the Commandant’s authority by law, the Commandant is subject to the same authority from the President of the United States acting as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Understanding his duty under the law, General Amos set the example and tone for all Marines to follow and emulate.

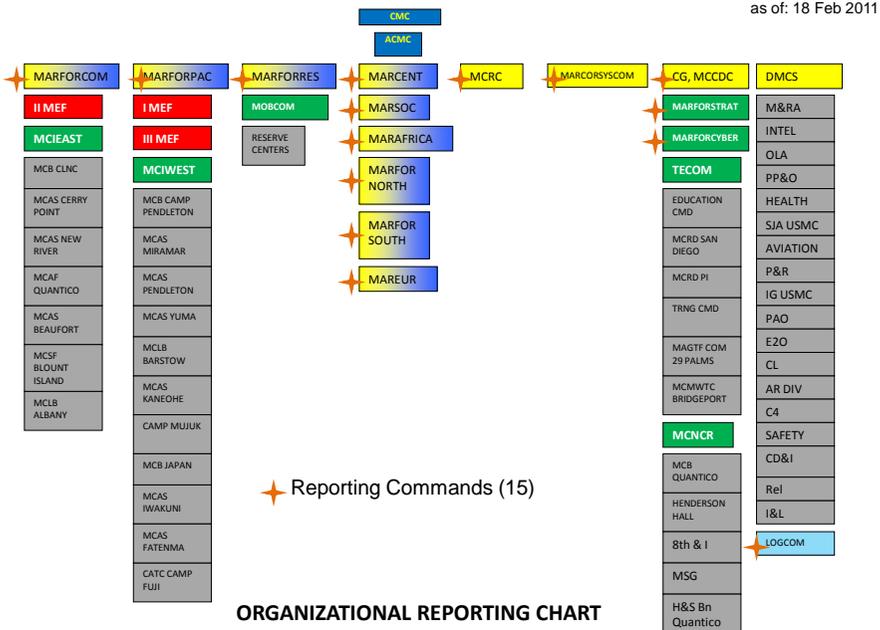
Marine Corps Organizational Structure and its Influence

With the tone set, General Amos’ guidance clear and concise, processes were put into motion that would train every Marine on DADT repeal implementation, and prepare the organization to effectively implement the new law. The organizational structure of the military was a catalyst for the effective and timely execution of major muscle movements to train every Marine on the DADT repeal implementation in order for the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) to certify to the President that the Military was ready to fully implement the repeal.

The organization structure of the military is hierarchal and in line with the

Weberian Model of bureaucratic structures. There is a distinct chain of command and there is no ambiguity as to who individuals report to via that chain of command. This structure is extremely conducive to speed and tempo in regard to communication across an organization of a vast size. In organization theory terms the Marine Corps can be described as Mechanistic or Theory X. (Singh, 1980, p.245) This stove piped and mechanistic structure of the Marine Corps was clearly evident in the guidance pushed out in relation to the reporting chain of command to the CMC for DADT training completion. Figure 1 illustrates this structure and displays how the Marine Corps methodically used its existing structure to report DADT training statistics.

Figure 1:



Source: https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page/portal/M_RA_HOME/DADT,DADT
 Organizational Reporting Chart Hyperlink, Retrieved August 20, 2012

All subordinate units under the CMC had a framework to funnel information up the chain of command in a timely manner, and CMC also leveraged this organizational structure to push information on repeal implementation down to his subordinate units. The Marine Corps structure enabled timely and efficient communication to occur during the training phase, and helped the CMC to effectively manage the training to meet reporting timelines to the SECDEF.

Leadership Matters Most

As stated by General Amos in his message to all Marines on 16 February 2011 with regards to the implementation of the DADT repeal, “Leaders at all levels must set the example to sustain unit effectiveness, readiness, and cohesion.” (MARADMIN 108/11) General Amos’

guidance on the execution of the repeal of DADT was clear: Leadership Matters Most. The Marine Corps has an overarching policy of giving commanders the discretion and authority to address individual concerns and issues that may arise due to the implementation of the DADT repeal. (manpower.usmc.mil) For instance, if a service member feels uncomfortable due to certain unforeseen circumstances evolving from co-habiting with an openly homosexual service member, it is up to the commander to investigate, discern, and make a final decision as to the validity of this claim. After making that decision, he or she has to make the judgment call as to whether it is in the best interest of both service members that they no longer live together in a barracks room. Leadership definitely does matter most, and Marine commanders are being trusted to address a vast array of situations in uncharted territory due to a lack of precedence associated with the implementation of the DADT repeal.

As with any change, leaders will most certainly face resistance, however when change is imposed on individuals, meaning they don't have a choice, it is almost a "universal truth...that people resist that type of change." (Burke, 2008: 92) If a leader is serving as a change agent and they wish to be successful, then they must understand that "resistance is a natural human response, and like one's defense mechanisms, should be respected." (Burke, 2008: 93) A leader who understands this concept and is sensitive to the natural human behavior that results from imposed change can engage in meaningful dialogue about the various issues that individuals are experiencing due to the imposed change.

Training is Key to Success: What was the Process?

The realization of meaningful dialogue occurred in the early months of 2011 as the Marine Corps set in motion the training and education program utilized to certify that it was ready to fully implement the repeal. Marines from major and independent commands across the country were sent to various locations across the country in order to receive train the trainer courses on implementation of the DADT repeal. Once trained and equipped, they were entrusted by the CMC to go back to their units to train Marines, Senior Leaders, and Commanders on what repeal meant to the Marine Corps. Also, the training focused on how the organization was going to move forward.

Who trained the trainers? Colonels and Sergeants Majors with over 20 years in the organization and a vast array of experience were the personnel who had been specifically trained as Tier 1 Master Trainers. They were sent out to the various sites to create train the trainers in Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels. Tier 2 level training was geared towards Commanders and Senior Leaders, and Tier 3 level training for all other Marines. The training equipped Staff Non Commissioned Officers and Commissioned Officers to be able to speak intelligently to what the plan was going to be once the repeal went into effect. It also gave them the ability to cover the various orders and directives that needed to be revised with LGBT Marines openly serving in the Corps.

Once back to their units the trainers were required to teach the two tiers of training. During these sessions is where the most feedback and resistance came from the junior Marine level. The ensuing discussions were what led to an open discourse on the new change, and what it was going to mean for each Marine.

A formalized feedback form was submitted to higher headquarters from each command in order to give bottom up refinement and a consensus of how the training went at their respective units. This form is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2:

Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Implementation Training Report

- 1. Command: (name)
- 2. Date:
- 3. Total Marines Trained (all tiers):

	Marines Assigned	Marines Trained	Percent Trained
Active			
Reserve			
Total			

TIER 2 TRAINING STATEMENT (check one)

- Tier 2 training is on track to be completed by 15 March
- Tier 2 training is complete as of 15 March
- Tier 2 training is on track to be completed by _____

4. Comments

- a. Commander's Assessment:
- b. Reaction to Training:
- c. Policy Concerns:
- d. Incidents:

5. RUC/MCC reported on: (grouped by RUC)

Source: https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page/portal/M_RA_HOME/DADT, DADT Reporting Template Hyperlink, Retrieved August 20, 2012

This formalized form was the tool used for reporting training statistics to the Commandant of the Marine Corps for the eventual report to the Secretary of Defense and President of the United States that the Marine Corps was ready for full implementation. This was a part of the larger plan for the President to certify the repeal and put it into effect.

What is also contained in the formalized report is training feedback from the units. Whether the feedback was actually taken seriously is not quantifiable, but what can be quantified is the existence of feedback given from the training conducted. This leads to ownership of the change and a "voice" for the most subordinate Marines within the organization. This bottom up refinement was integral to the continued discourse and professional discussion moving forward after the repeal.

Management Theory Applied for Effectiveness

The examination of organizational communication lines illustrated in figure 1, and training feedback illustrated through figure 2, Management Theory can be applied through the "Top Down" and "Bottom Up" management principles. (Atkociuniene and Vaisnoraite, 2011) Effective implementation of the repeal is evident in the conduct of how the Marine Corps has deliberately or by structural chance, operated over the past 18 months.

Top down guidance and execution in relation to policy governing the training, education, and reporting requirements during the initial implementation stages was executed

through the CMC guidance in ALMAR 047/10, MARADMIN 108/11, and MARADMIN 143/11. You can also see the top down policy influence in the Senior Officer and Enlisted selection of Master Trainers to communicate the CMC guidance on how to “step out smartly to implement the new policy.” (ALMAR 047/10) Their participation as the higher echelon of managers within the Marine Corps gave credence to the concept that the Marine Corps has displayed “Top Down” principle of management.

Bottom up refinement from the lowest levels of the Marine Corps is evident in the formalized feedback forms that were *required* for submission to CMC via the chain of command. This allowed the most junior Marines the ability to have a voice in change process, and to also have ownership in how the organization would move forward in managing the repeal. While Marines are outspoken in most cases, the actual structure of formalized feedback created a sense of perceived ownership not common in large organizations which experience revolutionary change.

Further evidence of sound practice in Management Theory is evident in a baseline definition of the purpose of management given by Verma and Jain (2001) that states “the primary purpose of management is to develop a system of planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling of an organization.” (p.484) They go on to say that “management is concerned with how certain important functions such as goal setting, organizing, staffing and control are performed in the organization.” (p.486) Each of these aforementioned functions can be quantified over the past 18 months with how the Marine Corps has managed the implementation of the DADT repeal.

The CMC set training goals to meet in order to certify to the SECDEF that his organization was prepared for repeal, the reporting structure displayed in Figure 1 shows the Marine Corps’ ability to organize to attain that goal, developing master trainers and train the trainers displayed the staffing function for implementation, and finally overall control of the program was exercised by the feedback forms directly sent back to the CMC via the chain of command.

Management theory clearly shows that the Marine Corps carefully and methodically thought through the entire process of how to execute the overall intent of carefully stepping out to lead the way in implementing the DADT repeal. While at present the organization has been successful in managing this change in policy it is still in the infancy stages with regards to the vast array of issues that could potentially arise over the lifetime of the organization.

Organizational Culture Influencing Successful Management of the Repeal Long Term

Analyzing the culture of the United States Marine Corps utilizing Cameron and Quinn’s competing values framework, researchers can build a model for the current culture of the Marine Corps. Through this model researchers can then make predictions about the different variables and influences that will affect the successful long term implementation of the DADT repeal. An assumption is that the key to effective change is through effective culture change as previously described. Although the Marine Corps is a highly traditional organization, they have been able to change their culture in an evolutionary manner in the past and should be able to again. With a similar type of change being implemented across the organization researchers have a rare opportunity to use a systematic framework to study how such an organization understands and manages this change.

The Marine Corps is a warrior culture characterized by commitment, decisiveness, and flexibility. This is the overarching culture of the organization, but utilizing Cameron and Quinn’s competing values framework we can identify two specific sub-cultures that

characterize and drive the Marine Corps on a daily basis. The Hierarchy Culture and the Clan Culture are sub cultures identified via Cameron and Quinn's theory of competing values framework. (Cameron and Quinn, 2006: 46) Characteristics of the hierarchy culture are, "a very formalized and structured place to work, leaders pride themselves on being good coordinators and organizers who are efficiently minded, and formal rules and policies hold the organization together." (Cameron, et al., 2006: 66) This type of culture is indicative of the senior officers and enlisted who run the day to day operations of the Marine Corps and subordinate units within their chain of command. In this instance they are the main decision makers, whose impact due to their decisions effect several thousand Marines at a time. This describes the General Officer level and in most instances full Colonels and their senior enlisted advisors.

When the hierarchy culture is further broken down by the competing values of leadership, effectiveness, and organizational theory the confirmation of this correlation is almost irrefutable. As shown by Cameron and Quinn:

Leader Types are: Coordinators, Monitors, Organizers

Value Drivers are: Efficiency, Timeliness, Consistency and Uniformity

Theory of Effectiveness is: Control and efficiency with capable processes produce effectiveness (2006: 46).

At the lowest levels of leadership within an organization as big as the United States Marine Corps the clan culture is alive and well. While members of the hierarchy were once members of the clan culture at an earlier time in their careers, there is no way to mesh the two cultures due to the unique hierarchy and behavior that the military rank structure fosters. The war-fighting philosophy of Marines and warrior mentality is what facilitates the tightly knit clan culture at the small unit level. Continual co-habitation of these two cultures within the Marine Corps as a whole will never cease to exist because of these reasons.

Predicted and Perceived Success after Implementation

With all of this stated we can predict that due to the Marine Corps' current culture, cultural framework, and application of management theory there will be success in how DADT repeal implementation is ultimately judged over time. The dynamic impact that this change will have on the combat arms military occupations, specifically infantry units, will most likely be the area of greatest concern for effectiveness.

Utilizing the Critical Managerial Competencies via Cameron and Quinn's competing values framework, one can conjecture that the Marine Corps is culturally set up to effectively implement any change, but specifically the DADT repeal. Before further discussion we must lay out this specific model to back up this conjecture. Critical Managerial Competencies as set forth by Cameron and Quinn for the hierarchy and clan culture are as follows:

Clan Skills

Managing Team – facilitating effective, cohesive, smooth-functioning, high-performing teamwork

Managing Interpersonal Relationships – facilitating effective interpersonal relationships, including supportive feedback, listening, and resolution of interpersonal problems.

Managing the development of others – helping individuals improve their performance, expand their competencies, and obtain personal

development opportunities.

Hierarchy Skills

Managing acculturation – helping individuals become clear about what is expected of them, what the culture and standards of the organization are, and how they can best fit into the work setting

Managing the control system – ensuring that procedures, measurements, and monitoring systems are in place to keep processes and performance under control

Managing coordination – fostering coordination within the organization as well as with external units and managers and sharing information across boundaries (2006: 120).

The highest levels of the organization have already displayed the characteristics of hierarchy skills of management with the early phases of the implementation stage to present. General Amos has managed acculturation through telling every Marine, on the day the repeal was signed as legislation, what was expected of them and how the standards of the Marine Corps will be upheld during implementation. Processes have been managed at the highest levels to ensure proper training on implementation is conducted and administered to the lowest levels, and coordination is evident in the open communication up and down the chain of command with regards to the reaction and sentiments towards the initial training.

At the lowest level small unit leaders across the Marine Corps have the framework of the clan culture's managerial competencies, but it remains to be seen how that will truly affect the cultural change that needs to occur for successful implementation of the repeal. Managing interpersonal relationships is the only managerial competency that has been applied in the initial training phase of the implementation stage. The clan culture is where the change will be managed in the most personal manner. It is this culture that will offer the most resistance to change initially, due to the family environment and deep commitment to the group's values. Leaders will have the toughest time at this level managing change and dealing with human behavior on a day to day basis.

However a recent article shows that the initial resistance that was expected may never be a reality. According to an article written by David Crary on September 16, 2012 he stated "the Pentagon says repeal has gone smoothly, with no adverse effect on morale, recruitment and readiness...the clear consensus is that repeal has produced far more joy and relief than dismay and indignation." (www.marinecorpstimes.com) This article written almost exactly 1 year after repeal was officially signed into law may show that the change has stuck much quicker than expected. Nonetheless, the Marine Corps has shown through proven performance, implemented processes, and organizational culture that they are more than equipped to continue to effectively manage this policy change over time.

Conclusion

The repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy was without argument a monumental revolutionary change followed by an evolutionary change currently transforming the Marine Corps. This paper focused specifically on the United States Marine Corps' actions since December of 2010 until the present time from the leadership and management perspective as the Corps has dealt with this major social change within its ranks. The key questions asked at the beginning were: What is the transformation that has truly occurred? Has the organization truly experienced a fundamental change? What does effective management of

major change look like in an organization like the Marine Corps?

The transformation that has occurred is in the social construct of the Marine Corps as an organization. This paper has shown that the organization structure, culture, and applied management theory were all well established prior to the DADT repeal. This allowed the Marine Corps to effectively manage the social change within its ranks. It can be said that Marine Corps as an organization has only been changed internally from external influences, and has fundamentally remained the same as an operational entity which answers the second question. A fundamental change in social terms has occurred, but not in regard to organization structure.

Effective management in the Marine Corps can be summed up in the “Top Down, Bottom Up” principles of management theory. It has displayed as an organization the ability to effectively communicate guidance from the highest levels while receiving feedback from the most junior person within the organization. The evidence of an effective management model within the United States Marine Corps has been displayed through the material covered in this article. Continual monitoring of issues related to the repeal will judge the long term effectiveness of the Marine Corps’ management model, but short term success has been realized.

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