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## Complexity leadership theory: a United States Marine Corps historical overlay.

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**Abstract :** Following more than a decade of counterinsurgency operations (COIN), the US military is transitioning to new force structure, operating concepts, organization, resourcing, and threat forecasting. During such transitions, much discussion centers around each

service's ability to innovate across the gap between organizational resources and an uncertain and complex future operating environment. As the USMC resets the force and forges a path forward, the service must comprehensively leverage its best ideas from across the organization to effectively visualize, adapt, and act in the future operational environment. However, increasing globalization and interconnectedness make leading innovation in today's organizations progressively more complex and dynamic. Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) attempts to reconcile traditional bureaucratic and hierarchal leadership with approaches that incorporate the complex, adaptive, and systems characteristics found in information age organizations. This monograph overlays CLT on two periods of significant warfare innovation in the Marine Corps to evaluate the role of senior leadership in each event. The emergence of amphibious warfare in the 1920s and 1930s and helicopter warfare in the 1940s and 1950s not only transformed the Marine Corps, but changed broader warfare. In each case, the US and allied militaries relied on the innovation for the operating environment that immediately followed. The case studies indicate a legacy of Marine Corps' senior leadership fostering a culture with the capacity to circumvent bureaucracy, and effectively solicit and implement innovation from all levels of the organization. The nature of such senior leadership exhibits many of the characteristics of CLT that remain applicable for current, military leadership.

**Descriptors :** Leadership , amphibious operations , military organizations , marine corps , case studies , doctrine , combat operations , combat support , training , warfare , Marine Corps operations , MILITARY COMMANDERS

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