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**THESIS**

**JUNIOR OFFICER ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE  
NAVY AND MARINE CORPS**

by

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June 2004

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**JUNIOR OFFICER ORAL COMMUNICATIONS IN THE NAVY AND  
MARINE CORPS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Communication is an essential skill for all military officers. Their jobs are accomplished through communication as they motivate soldiers and sailors, who in turn physically accomplish the diverse missions of the military. Junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps hold key and challenging positions in any ship or unit. While they rarely originate any major initiatives or missions, they almost always give the final order or direction. Therefore they must be able to accurately communicate both up and down the chain of command. While communicating comes easily to some junior officers, many struggle with it, and most have room for improvement.

The USNA recognizes the important role that it can play in developing junior officer communication abilities. One of the Academy's strategic initiatives is "Oral and Written Communications Excellence." The focus of this thesis is oral communications. This thesis will identify what type of oral communications are prevalent in the fleet, what the important communication skills are that a junior officer must master, and how the Naval Academy and other institutions can help develop these skills in the future leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PURPOSE

This master's thesis identifies and describes the role of oral communication in the daily professional lives of junior officers in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. The intended audiences are professors, instructors, and administrators, both military and civilian, who prepare future junior officers (JOs) for the fleet. As this thesis will explain, it is *vital* that educators have an accurate understanding of the oral communication environments in the fleet. This understanding is necessary if they are to provide future junior officers both reasonable expectations of their futures in the fleet and the tools to make their futures successful. A failure to do so could contribute significantly to cynicism among junior officers, organizational ineffectiveness, and resentment among sailors and Marines.

This thesis will address the following questions: *1)What is the communication role of a junior officer? 2)What is the nature of junior officer oral communication? 3)What oral communication knowledge, skills, or abilities are required for a successful junior officer? 4)What are the common oral communication weaknesses among junior officers? 5)What are the implications and recommendations for oral communication instruction at the USNA, ROTC, and OCS?*

There are two main facets to this research. The first is the academic literature review. This thesis surveys literature from communication education, organizational communication, organizational socialization, public speaking or rhetoric, and non-verbal communication, all with an eye towards junior officers in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps and the missions that they serve. The second facet of this research uses data to describe the current communications environment in the fleet. These data were collected from those with current knowledge of JOs in today's fleet: former junior officers and the senior enlisted who play a crucial role in their training and success. Their thoughts, together with academic research, are expected to provide specifics on what is required for communication excellence in the fleet today, and enable the administrators and educators of institutions such as the Naval Academy to better prepare future officers to succeed.

## **B. BACKGROUND**

The United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD has numerous strategic initiatives designed to better prepare midshipmen to become junior officers in the fleet. One strategic initiative is "Oral and Written Communications Excellence." A goal of this strategic initiative is to "develop more professional and confident public speakers and leaders" (Strategic Initiative: Oral and Written Communications Excellence, 2002). Initial research into the subject indicated that while there is an abundance of literature pertaining to all types of oral communication and communication-related fields, no one has specifically applied this existing body of knowledge to junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps. This thesis makes an attempt to do just that.

## **C. INTRODUCTION TO JUNIOR OFFICER ORAL COMMUNICATION**

Oral communication is a fundamental competency in many arenas such as politics, the corporate world, personal relationships, and education. The diverse jobs of an officer in the Navy and Marine Corps are no exception. When officers are directly involved in executing the mission of their unit: driving a ship, submerging a submarine, providing air defense, or moving troops on the ground; effective oral communication is critical. When officers are not directly involved in a warfare mission they are leading and managing one of the most diverse and complex organizations in the world. Here too, effective oral communication is essential. While this statement may sound trite, most of what people do during the day, regardless of their profession, is talk to other people. Effective oral communication is therefore critical in every profession, particularly so in the military because people's lives, and potentially the national security of the country, may be on the line.

Junior officers, in particular, hold key and difficult positions in the communications structure of any ship or unit. While they rarely originate any major initiatives or missions, they frequently give final orders or directions. A misstep on their part could undermine the mission and result in death or worse. Even when lives are not on the line, a junior officer touches people's lives in important and meaningful ways every day. Every officer is an official and highly visible representative of the military to the public. Junior officers are often called on to counsel soldiers and sailors if they experience a familial, financial, or legal crisis. Perhaps, most importantly, junior officers

are charged with the daily mental, moral, and physical well being of the soldiers and sailors in their charge. Poor communication in any one of these varied tasks can spell ruin for even the most well intended junior officer and can have very tangible and immediate consequences in the lives of their soldiers and sailors.

If one accepts the argument that oral communication is very important to a junior officer, then one would think that oral communication would be a major focus of a JO's training. At the United States Naval Academy (USNA) a strategic initiative specifically addresses "Oral and Written Communications Excellence." A goal of this strategic initiative is to "develop more professional and confident public speakers and leaders" (Strategic Initiative: Oral and Written Communications Excellence, 2002). But even at the Naval Academy, no one can seem to define concisely "oral communications excellence." Speaking occurs in every class in one form or another, but it is not clear if that speaking contributes to the midshipmen's communication abilities.

A few years back, the Naval Academy attempted to answer the above question among others. In 1998 the Naval Academy sent the Curriculum 21 survey to the fleet. The purpose of this survey was to determine how well the Academy was preparing its graduates to succeed as junior officers. On the whole, the results were positive except in the field of written and oral communication. In response to the statement "List up to three Academic Strengths of USNA graduates," only 10% of the respondents chose "English Composition," and "Communication Skills" was not even mentioned in the top ten; therefore one can infer that less than 6% of respondents selected it (USNA Curriculum 21 Survey Results PowerPoint presentation, n.d.). When asked, "List up to three Academic Weaknesses of USNA graduates, 13% selected "Communication Skills," and an alarming 44% selected "English Composition."

In response to these survey results, the Naval Academy held a Communication Skills Colloquium in 1998. The stated objective of the colloquium was a broad review of both oral and written communication education at the Academy. A broad spectrum of faculty members participated (Fletcher, 1998). In the colloquium's final report, numerous suggestions were made to improve written communications: a writing-across-the-curriculum initiative, the suggestion of writing training for technical members of the

faculty, and a call for midshipmen writing abilities to be progressively improved and judged during their four years at the Academy. No mention was made, however, about oral communication (Fletcher, 1999).

One reason for the omission may be the lopsided nature of the survey results; written communications were much more frequently reported as being deficient than oral communications. Or perhaps oral communication skills are simply harder to nail down. Two scholars in the field of communications, Goffman (1973) and Kennedy (1989), offer particularly insightful thoughts on the matter:

All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify (Goffman, p. 72).

It is one thing to tell a student that he/she can't do calculus; it is much more threatening to suggest that he/she can't talk (Kennedy, p. 33).

These quotations illustrate that when we talk of improving oral communication, we are really confronting two separate challenges. The first is to teach students to become aware of the ways in which they already communicate, which is largely an unconscious act. The second is to explain to those students how or why the ways they are communicating are not 'correct,' and teach them 'better' ways to communicate. This thesis will attempt to address those challenges for junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps.

#### **D. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

This thesis is limited to oral communication for junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps in the following warfare communities: Naval Aviator, Surface Warfare, Submarine Warfare, Marine Ground, and Marine Aviators. While these warfare communities represent the vast majority of today's fleet, this limitation has two disadvantages: numerous warfare communities are excluded from this study, and various subcultures within each one of the five communities are not represented here.

There are also some limitations as a result of the study's methods. Most of the research and literature reviewed for this thesis was not focused on the military or junior officers. Most of the literature concerned either general oral communication, or oral communication in a commercial workplace environment. Data were collected for this thesis through focus groups with junior officers and interviews with senior enlisted.

From focus groups one gets self-reported strengths, weaknesses, and interpretations which are subject to error and bias. Senior officers were not interviewed for this study, and they may have a different impression of junior officer oral communication than senior enlisted or the junior officers themselves. Because of these limitations, it would be unreasonable to draw any comprehensive conclusions based on the data in this thesis alone.

#### **E. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY**

This study is organized as follows: Introduction, Background, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Analysis, and Conclusion and Recommendations. Within each of these chapters there is a brief introduction reinforcing that chapter's relevance to the thesis as a whole. This structure enables each chapter to stand on its own. Educators already familiar with the current attitudes in the fleet may wish to jump ahead to Conclusion and Recommendations. Individuals interested in what the current 'junior officer perspective' is should focus on Data Analysis. The Background chapter offers a brief summary of military organizations with regard to junior officers. The Literature Review chapter offers a survey of both the foundations and the latest research in the fields of business communications, rhetoric, and socialization, as well as a brief summary of military organizations and where junior officers fit in. Finally the Research Methodology chapter outlines how the data for this thesis were collected and analyzed.

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## **II. BACKGROUND: MISSION AND THE ROLE OF THE JUNIOR OFFICER**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will describe the missions of the various warfare communities--Marine Corps Ground, Marine Corps Aviation, Naval Aviation, Surface Warfare, and Submarine Warfare--are trying to accomplish. From there I will explain where junior officers fit into the organizations within these warfare communities, and what is expected of them. This information will benefit those unfamiliar with the fleet. More importantly, this information will establish the context of oral communication at the junior officer level. As this thesis will go on to explain, context is of particular importance to an understanding of a group's oral communication environment.

### **B. MISSION AND THE ROLE OF THE JUNIOR OFFICER**

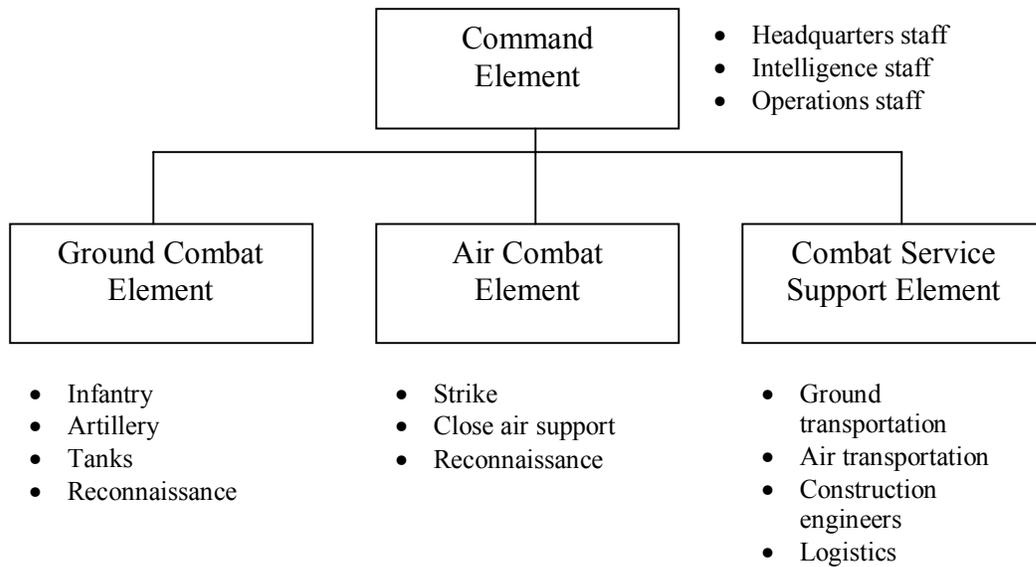
#### **1. Marine Corps Overview**

Most of us have probably heard the phrase "Every Marine a Rifleman: (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2000, p. 6). This saying exemplifies the heart of the Marine Corps. All Marine officers, regardless of what kind of vehicle or aircraft they drive, are on the same team, and that team is centered around the young Marine riflemen on the front line. Everyone is a warrior first, and everything in the Marine Corps is organized to promote "excellence in warfighting" (Commandant of the Marine Corps, n.d, p. 4). This interdisciplinary bond felt among all Marines, regardless of their specific warfare specialty, is great for fighting wars, but makes any type of organizational assessment messy and complicated. To understand how the Marine Corps is organized one must understand two organizational aspects of the Marine Corps: MAGTAFs: Marine Air-Ground Task Forces, and the parent units which MAGTAFs pull their forces from.

#### ***a. MAGTAFs: Marine Air-Ground Task Forces***

Marines fight as air-ground task forces--integrated organizations of air, ground, and logistics forces under a single commander. The MAGTAF commander fights a single battle that unites and enhances the capabilities of his force, whose whole is exponentially greater than the sum of its parts (Marine Corps Strategy 21, 2000).

When Marines deploy away from the United States, whether they are going to war, going to render humanitarian aid, or to provide security, they go as a MAGTAF. All MAGTAFs have the following four basic elements: a command element, a ground combat element, an air combat element, and a combat service support element. These four elements form a single comprehensive fighting unit that is largely self sufficient. Figure 1 shows the basic organization of a MAGTAF and examples of what type of equipment and what role each element has.



**Figure 1: MAGTAF Basic Orientation**

The Marine Corps Strategy 21 spells out the different kinds of MAGTAFs based on mission requirements (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2000). The largest type of MAGTAF is a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), designed to fight major wars. Marine Expeditionary Brigades (MEBs) are designed for smaller crises such as humanitarian assistance which require a large number of Marines, but are not all out war. Smaller Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) are designed to be the forward deployed and arrive at the scene of trouble quickly. Lastly there are Special Purpose MAGTAFs (SPMAGTAFs). These small forces can be quickly organized for specific missions such as disaster relief or fleet anti-terrorism security.

MEFs, MEBs, and MEUs are not dissolved when their mission is complete. To always be ready to quickly answer any call, the Marine Corps maintains standing MEF, MEB, and MEU command elements even when the MAGTAF is not deployed on a current mission. The units which make up the MAGTAF, however, usually return to their parent commands, making the MAGTAF a skeleton crew of command and control personnel.

***b. Parent Units***

When the Marine Corps is called upon by our nation's leaders to fight, they call upon an appropriate MAGTAF to accomplish a specific mission. The specific units that make up any MAGTAF, however, are units which exist on their own regardless of whether they are part of a MAGTAF. Examples include rifle companies, artillery batteries, aircraft squadrons, tank companies, logistics companies. These are the 'pieces' which make up a MAGTAF, and each has its own unit commander. Because ground forces are organized in a platoon-company-battalion structure, and air forces are organized into squadron-group-wing structure, each will be discussed separately.

**2. Marine Corps Ground**

***a. Overview***

The Marine Corps ground community spans a number of different warfare specialties, or as the Marine Corps terms them, Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs). MOSs include infantry; field artillery; tank and amphibious assault vehicles; explosive ordnance and disposal (EOD); engineer, construction, facilities, and equipment; and intelligence (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2003). The common characteristic among these MOSs, is that they all share the same basic organizational size and structure.

The largest functional ground unit that this thesis is concerned with is the battalion. A battalion typically contains five companies and is commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol). Companies in turn typically contain four platoons, and are commanded by a captain. Platoons are the smallest functional unit commanded by an officer, and platoon commander is the first role for an officer coming from his or her initial training pipeline. Platoons will therefore be the focus of the rest of this discussion.

The first job of every new Marine ground officer will be that of platoon commander. A platoon is a unit with about 40 Marines. These marines will be divided

into about three squads, each led by an enlisted marine with about 5 years of experience. Every unit in the Marine Corps has a senior enlisted Marine that assists the unit commander, in the case of a platoon this is the platoon sergeant (SGT) (his or her title is always 'platoon SGT' even if their rank is staff SGT or gunnery SGT) Because a platoon is commanded by a new second lieutenant (2nd LT) on their first assignment, the platoon SGT is of crucial importance. As the senior enlisted soldier in the platoon, the platoon SGT is the voice of experience and is figuratively 'tied to the hip' of the platoon commander. In rank he or she is a SGT to a gunnery SGT who has 7 to 14 years of experience. A platoon SGT is not only expected to assist the platoon commander in leading the platoon but to also train the platoon commander. A positive platoon commander -- platoon SGT relationship is critical if the platoon is to succeed.

The platoon commander is trained to do most everything the Marines under his or her command know how to do. From field tactics to driving a tank, the platoon commander is expected to lead his Marines by his or her personal example in everything the platoon does. With the exception of a few items, such as heavy equipment maintenance, there are few skills that the enlisted Marines have that officer does not, and vice versa. In this way neither the enlisted Marines nor the officer are completely dependant on the other. If the officer were to get killed or seriously wounded, the senior enlisted Marine would be able to step up and lead the platoon. If the situation required the officer to fight alongside his or her troops, he or she would have the skills to do so. There is frequent, daily interaction between the platoon commander and every member of the platoon. Issues are handled through the platoon's chain of command: squad leader, platoon SGT, to the platoon commander. However, because of the small size of the platoon and the nature of what Marines do, not much will likely escape the platoon commander's direct observation.

Also crucial to a platoon's success are the relationships the platoon commander has with his or her superiors. While platoon commander is in *command*, and has a fair bit of autonomy as to how he or she runs the platoon, the platoon is still part of a larger company. In some MOSs, such as intelligence or reconnaissance (RECON), the platoons train and fight mostly as independent units. In other MOSs, such as infantry, most training and fighting occurs at the company level. Regardless of MOS, however,

platoon commanders report to their superiors at the company level on a daily basis. Most issues are handled by the company executive officer (XO), a first LT who has recently completed a tour as a platoon commander. While platoon commanders will typically see and talk with their company commander on a daily basis, orders and directives will always be received through the company XO. Platoon commander would rarely have much interaction, informally, but especially related to official platoon business, with any part of the chain of command above the company commander.

From organizational and communication standpoints officers usually have multiple collateral duties, and this includes platoon commanders. Collateral duties for Marine ground officers include a diverse range of jobs such as Drug and Alcohol Prevention Advisor (DAPA), adjutant, equal opportunity advisor, voting assistance officer. Some of these collateral duties will require frequent interactions with the chain of command at the battalion level and expose a young platoon commander to a level of the organization that he or she is otherwise shielded from.

In summary, a new marine officer, a second LT, whose MOS is in the Marine ground family will be a platoon commander for his or her first job. As a platoon commander they will have approximately 40 Marines under their command and a platoon SGT, a SGT to a gunnery SGT, as their principal advisor. They will be in command of one of about four platoons in a company and will report to the company commander, a captain, through the company XO, a first LT.

***b. MAGTAF Employment***

From the perspective of a platoon commander, when a Marine ground unit gets assigned, or 'chopped,' to a MAGTAF some things change and some things do not. For assignment to a MEF or a MEB, the largest MAGTAFs used for fighting wars, the entire company or even the battalion will be chopped, so the platoon commander will still be reporting to his or her same superiors at the company level. MEU's, however, are essentially an infantry battalion reinforced with additional platoons (such as tanks, reconnaissance, aircraft, and construction). Therefore for an infantry platoon commander, organizationally nothing has really changed. For other types of platoon commanders, they are no longer reporting to a company, and their platoon is considered a

battalion or MEU asset. They report to someone on the battalion staff or the MEU staff, usually an operations officer, a captain or a major.

For most MOSs, assignment to a MEU is a chance for the platoon commander to work for someone new and have more independence. In the case of a major conflict where a MEF or a MEB is deployed, the entire chain of command relevant to the platoon commander will be chopped, and there is little change from an organizational standpoint.

### **3. Marine Corps Aviation**

#### ***a. Overview***

It almost goes without saying that Marine Corps Aviation exists to support the Marines on the ground. Whether delivering equipment and supplies, transporting troops into battle, evacuating wounded, or providing close air support firepower, Marine aviation serves their customers on the ground with whatever they might need (Deputy Commandant for Aviation, n.d.). Marine Corps aviation assets include fixed wing strike fighters, electronic warfare fighters, and transport aircraft. The Marine Corps also operates a significant number of rotary wing aircraft including attack, reconnaissance, transport, and assault helicopters.

The smallest functional unit for aviation is a squadron, which includes several of hundred enlisted personnel who serve as aircrew and repair personnel, about 15-20 first tour aviators, and about five to 10 senior aviators. A squadron is commanded by a LtCol. Most squadrons operate only one type of aircraft. Four to five squadrons make up the next largest functional unit, a group. A Marine Air Group (MAG) will typically contain a variety of assault, transport, and attack squadrons, as well as a squadron dedicated to logistics and repair. Approximately four groups make up an air wing, the largest unit this thesis is concerned with. An air wing is a massive organization which contains squadrons of nearly every type of aircraft the Marine Corps operates, as well as a logistics and repair support group, and an air control and air defense support group.

First tour Marine aviators could almost be considered as having two separate jobs, their job in the air flying, and their job on the ground in the squadron.

While on the ground, Marine aviators lead Marines in a different context than Marine ground officers. Squadrons have two sides: operations, and maintenance, and first tour pilots have positions in both sides. They will have an assignment in operations as a scheduling officer or an assistant operations officer, or they will be assigned to lead a shop of Marines in the maintenance department. For those assigned to the operations department, they are primarily working with other officers on the flight schedule and will typically have only about five Marines working for them. Their primary duty is the construction of the flight schedule based on mission or training requirements, status of aircraft, and personnel availability. They work for and report to the operations officer, a major, but their work with the flight schedule brings them into contact with all the officers at the squadron, including the CO.

In the maintenance department the Marine aviators will have a shop of anywhere from 15 to 45 Marines, and they will have a staff Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) (a staff SGT or a Gunnery SGT) assisting them. But unlike their ground counterparts, Marine aviators are not trained in all the intricacies of what their Marines do. When it comes to aircraft maintenance and repair, Marine aviators must trust the reports they get about the status of an aircraft, because they are not usually qualified to make an individual assessment or repair themselves. Due to this difference in skill sets, and because Marine aviators spend a considerable amount of time flying, they can not practically be involved in the 'nuts and bolts' of the day-to-day operations of their shops. They report to the maintenance officer, a major.

In the air, first tour Marine aviators again find themselves in a different leadership situation than their counterparts in the ground forces. Most aircraft have more than one aviator onboard, and the aviator in command of the aircraft is called the aircraft commander. Depending on the type of aircraft, new Marine aviators may arrive at their squadron qualified as aircraft commander. If not, pursuing this qualification will be their top priority upon arrival. Aircraft commander is an extremely important position because regardless of anyone's rank in the aircraft, the aircraft commander has ultimate authority over everything and everyone onboard. This authority is similar to the captain of a ship at sea: his or her word is law. All of the aviators in the squadron fly, both as aircraft commander and as co-pilot. In this regard, young Marine aviators will find themselves in

situations where they are the aircraft commander, and there is another aviator onboard, such as the XO or even the CO, as the co-pilot whom they temporarily have positional authority over. For aircraft that fly with an enlisted Marine aircrew onboard, they are not trained as pilots and so they are completely dependant on the officers onboard. This independent, all-encompassing, command authority while serving as aircraft commander comes at an early rank for Marine aviators, and surpasses the authority their Marine ground counterparts have at the same rank.

In summary, first tour Marine aviators find themselves in fairly different leadership roles in the air than on the ground. In the air, rank is subordinate to position, and the aircraft commander truly has command over everything and everyone in the aircraft, even over officers senior in rank and position. On the ground, they are forced to be somewhat disconnected from the Marines they lead due to a busy flight schedule, and the lack of detailed training in the repair and maintenance of aircraft.

***b. MAGTAF Employment***

As was discussed before, air support is an integral component of all MAGTAFs. For a major conflict where the MAGTAF takes the form of a MEF or a MEB, an entire air wing or a MAG will be chopped respectively, and at the junior officer's level of the organization, nothing really changes. A MEU however will typically be assigned a composite squadron consisting of all the aircraft the MEU will need. The composite squadron will take approximately half a dozen aircraft of each type it needs from their parent squadrons and unify them under one chain of command. For a first tour Marine aviator, therefore, assignment to a MEU exposes them to new personnel and missions. The organization of a composite squadron is the same as a parent squadron, so the young aviators will still be working in either the maintenance or operations department while attached to the MEU, albeit for a different maintenance officer (AMO) or operations officer (OPS), and possibly be leading Marines from other parent squadrons.

**4. Navy Overview**

No longer confined to battles between ships in the deep ocean, the focus of today's Navy is power projection ashore from forward deployed ships and submarines

controlling the littoral waters of a hostile nation. Sea Power 21 is the current vision for the Navy, the components of which are described by Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark:

Three fundamental concepts lie at the heart of the Navy's continued operational effectiveness: Sea Strike, Sea Shield, and Sea Basing. Sea Strike is the ability to project precise and persistent offensive power from the sea; Sea Shield extends defensive assurance throughout the world; and Sea Basing enhances operational independence and support for the joint force (Chief of Naval Operations, 2002).

The overall strategy of the Navy is too complex to discuss here, but needless to say the Navy, as well as the other branches of the military, does not work in isolation. Every campaign or battle is a 'joint' battle in which all forces work together to achieve total battle-space dominance to protect our forces and effectively accomplish whatever mission is at hand. There is no one unit that does it all, each has but a small piece of a large and complex puzzle.

For war fighting purposes, the Navy organizes its forces in three main ways. A Carrier Strike Group (CSG) with an embarked Carrier Air Wing is undoubtedly the largest, most powerful fighting force to ever sail the seas. Centered on an aircraft carrier are two cruisers, three destroyers, a frigate, two attack submarines, and a collection of support and supply ships. These ships and submarines provide more than enough firepower to dominate the air, sea, and littoral shore area anywhere the CSG goes (Carrier Strike Group, 2003). A Carrier Air Wing contains a full complement of Navy aircraft to protect the CSG and project its power hundreds of miles ashore. Typically made up of 8 squadrons, the wing will have everything from air combat, ground strike, electronic warfare, reconnaissance, early warning, and anti-submarine aircraft. An Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) is the Navy's other means to bring forces into a theater en-masse. Centered on Amphibious Assault ships, loaded with a full MEU, their landing craft and aircraft are a cruiser, destroyer, frigate, and an attack submarine. An ESG can serve to re-supply and reinforce Marines already ashore or land Marines ashore in a large scale amphibious assault.

At any given time the Navy also has dozens of ships and submarines operating independently or in small groups throughout the world. Missions include homeland

defense, humanitarian assistance, counter drug operations, intelligence gathering, or training. Typically every ship, submarine, and squadron will rotate between these different assignments over the years. A common rotation is a three-year cycle from operations with a battle group, to operations stateside, to independent operations, and then back to operations stateside with an intensive maintenance period. When CSGs, ESGs, and ships and subs on independent missions leave the States for an extended period, it is called a deployment, and they will typically be gone from six to nine months.

## **5. Naval Aviation**

Ever since World War II, aviation has been an integral part of the Navy. From an organizational standpoint, Naval aviation is very similar to Marine Corps aviation and is sometimes considered the parent of Marine Corps aviation. The two share the same initial flight school, operate many of the same aircraft, and the Navy also organizes their aviators in squadrons and wings (the Navy does not have aircraft groups). Navy squadrons each have a home base of operations ashore where they conduct their training and repair operations. The squadron is again divided into an operations department and a maintenance department, and first tour aviators will have positions in one of those departments similar to their Marine counterparts. In the air there is also an aircraft commander whose responsibilities and independent authority are the same that were described for the Marine Corps.

When it comes time to deploy aircraft on ships at sea, there are two approaches. In some aircraft communities the entire squadron will pack up shop and move to a carrier. This is common among the tactical fixed wing aircraft that can only take off and land on a carrier. Other communities detach, or DET, two to five aircraft, half a dozen or so pilots, and approximately 40 enlisted aircrew and repairmen to a specific ship or the battle group. This is common among most of the rotary wing squadrons. When a group of aircraft DET from a squadron the group is usually led by a lieutenant commander (LCDR), a second tour aviator from the squadron called the Officer In Charge (OIC). All the aviators on the DET work for the OIC, and he or she serves as the liaison between the aviators and the ship. For a first tour aviator a DET is a significant experience, for they will be working for an OIC independent from the rules and culture of the squadron

ashore. Regardless of whether an aviator goes to sea as a squadron or as a DET, there is also the change of living on a ship at sea, and being away from home for an extended period of time.

In summary, Navy aviators lead sailors in the air and on the ground from essentially the same organizational standpoint discussed for Marine aviators.

## **6. Surface Warfare**

The surface warfare community has always been at the heart of Navy. As the Navy at large has shifted its focus from the blue waters of the deep ocean to projecting power over land from littoral waters, so has the surface warfare community. The CNO's surface warfare directorate succinctly summarizes what today's surface warfare community does: "We protect the fleet--We protect the Force--We provide assured access anywhere, anytime" (CNO Surface Warfare Directorate, 2003). Today's surface force consists of extremely fast and agile cruisers, destroyers, and frigates. (Carriers are considered an air warfare asset, and amphibious assault ships are considered amphibious force assets.) Their weapons include powerful radar systems and ground-to-air missiles to control the skies; long-range guns and cruise missiles to project power ashore; and torpedoes and helicopters to protect themselves from submarines.

First tour junior officers reporting to their first ship will find that there is a lot expected of them. At first, overshadowing everything that he or she does will be their qualifications. Officers must learn, in detail, about every aspect of the ship. Commonly, a qualified officer will be able to draw from memory a diagram of every system on the ship. Beyond a technical knowledge of the ship, an officer must become fully versed in all the ship's procedures and memorize the immediate actions for all casualty procedures. These qualifications are achieved by completing 'check-outs,' which are essentially interviews with a qualified and experienced officer or sailor. Once these fundamental qualifications are complete, a young officer will start working on qualifying the specific watch stations that he or she will stand. There are numerous watch stations but foremost among them is Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW), the officer that oversees the propulsion train of the ship, and Officer Of the Deck (OOD), the officer who is driving the ship and has responsibility for the *entire* ship during his or her watch. These qualifications also involve completing check-outs, but are primarily accomplished by

standing under instruction (U/I) watches with the qualified, experienced officers. Once these watch station qualifications are complete, an officer is ready for their final qualification, that of surface warfare officer. This is where the young officer must demonstrate that he or she knows how to fight the ship in a combat situation. This qualification usually involves a comprehensive board administered by the CO and the senior officers onboard. All told it will probably take an officer a year or more to complete all these qualifications and earn their surface warfare pin.

At the same time all of these qualifications are going on, a new officer will be assigned as a division officer, the lowest position in the chain of command for an officer, and the first job for all surface warfare officers. In fact, an officer's first tour is referred to as his or hers "division officer tour." A division is all the sailors onboard of a given specialty, or rating, such as electricians, mechanics, electronics technicians, sonarmen, or boson's mates. Divisions range in size from 10 to about 50 sailors. It includes all the sailors of a rating from the most junior Seaman apprentice to the NCO chief, senior chief, or master chief. A typical division will only have one NCO, and the NCO will hold the position of divisional Leading Chief Petty Officer (LCPO). Like the platoon SGT, the LCPO is the voice of experience, and the division officer's principal assistant in all matters relating to the division. The next step up in the organization of the ship is departments, which contain all the divisions with a particular function, such as engineering, combat systems, or navigation. Departments are run by Department Heads (DHs), a LT or a LCDR. Division officers report directly to their DH. Beyond DH there is only the XO and the CO.

In summary a new surface warfare officer will report to his or her first ship and be assigned as a division officer. They will report directly to one of the department heads and have a LCPO training/helping them run the division. In addition to divisional responsibilities a new officer is working on qualifications. These are accomplished by completing a long series of checkouts, U/I watches, and finally a board conducted by the CO and other senior officers.

## **7. Submarine Warfare**

Nuclear-powered submarines are one of the most cost-effective weapons in the Nation's arsenal and have unique capabilities America can't afford to be without (CNO Submarine Warfare Division, 2001, ¶ 4).

Today's submarine force has an aggressive forward deployed presence that is at the forefront of some of the Navy's most important missions: peacetime engagement, surveillance/intelligence/reconnaissance, special operations, precision strike, sea denial, and deterrence (CNO Submarine Warfare Division, Submarine Force Multi-Mission Roles, n.d.). Currently the Navy has two main categories of submarines, nuclear fast attack submarines (SSNs), and nuclear strategic ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). SSBNs are both our country's largest strategic force and the most survivable part of the nuclear triad (land-based Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), air-launched strategic weapons, and sea-launched ICBMs), which upholds a credible strategic deterrent to all would be foes (CNO Submarine Warfare Division, Submarine Themes: Force Structure, n.d.). Strategic deterrence is the only mission of SSBNs, and they are used for nothing else. SSN's make up the majority of the submarine force and fulfill the rest of the missions. Like most ships, a SSN will rotate between CSG and ESG support, independent missions, training stateside, and maintenance periods.

Regardless of whether new submarine officers are reporting to an SSN or an SSBN for their first tour, they will encounter essentially the same organizational structure. Like their counterparts in the surface Navy, they will be assigned a division (again the first tour is referred to as one's division officer tour in the submarine force) and will have to complete the same type of qualifications: EOOW, OOD, and ultimately submarine warfare. A submarine also has a LCPO for each division, LTs and LCDRs as department heads, and there is only the XO and CO above the department heads. Because of the complexities of nuclear power it usually takes longer for a JO to complete his qualifications (the submarine force is all male).

In summary a new submarine warfare officer will report to his first ship and be assigned as a division officer for a division of 10-20 sailors. They will report directly to one of the department heads, and have a LCPO training/helping them run the division. In addition to divisional responsibilities, a new officer is working on qualifications.

Because of the complexities of nuclear power, qualifications are quite extensive. They are accomplished by completing a long series of checkouts, U/I watches, and finally a board conducted by the CO and other senior officers.

### **C. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has shown how junior officers in each warfare specialty occupy positions in which oral communication abilities are essential to their overall success. They must be able to speak effectively to both their superiors and their subordinates on a public and a personal level. In many ways junior officers among the different warfare communities are alike. They are given a great deal of responsibilities early on, but they have their peers and their senior enlisted to lean on for support. In other ways, the different warfare communities place very different demands on their junior officers. The aviation communities are relatively distinct from the ship oriented submarine and surface warfare communities, and the Marine ground community is relatively distinct from both groups. These differences and how they may affect junior officer oral communication are explored in detail in subsequent chapters. In conclusion, the nature of the different warfare communities and the role of junior officers within the communities are of significant importance to junior officer oral communication.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Oral communication is an exhaustive subject to research, and one quickly realizes that the field is too broad to study as a whole. For the purpose of this thesis I have focused my literature review on the following fields related to oral communication: 1) communication education 2) organizational communication 3) organizational socialization 4) public speaking or rhetoric 5) non-verbal communication. In all of these fields I have, for the most part, limited my studies to professional peer-reviewed journals and well established textbooks. My intent is not to provide a comprehensive review of these fields, but to present an analysis of the information that I found relevant to junior officer oral communication.

I will discuss how oral communication is an integral part of an organization, and how it has an important role in the socialization of newcomers. Next I will discuss the different theories showing how oral communication can be taught. Finally I will discuss different ways in which oral communication can be judged, as well as different thoughts on what is considered “effective” oral communication. Throughout I will make reference to how the theories specifically relate to junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps.

#### **B. SOCIALIZATION OF NEW MEMBERS TO AN ORGANIZATION**

Young officers rotate in with new ideas; old chiefs remain aboard to argue for tradition and experience. The resulting dynamic can be the source of some confusion and uncertainty at times, but at its best leads to a constant scrutiny and rescrutiny of every detail... (Rochlin, LaPorte, & Roberts, 1987, p.6).

We tend to assume that we are all referring to the same thing when we say "boss," "a good report," "a viable alternative," and "a workable solution," but most likely we are not (McCaskey, 1999, p. 123).

When anyone joins an organization there is a period of socialization, particularly for an inexperienced individual reporting to his or her first job. First tour junior officers fall into this category, so it would be useful to understand what is known about the socialization process, particularly as it pertains to oral communication.

Jablin (2001) describes the organizational entry phase as a period typically lasting between three to six months, and "a time for learning 'pivotal' behaviors, values, and beliefs associated with their job and organization" (p. 756). The entry phase is often a period of upheaval because the new members will be confronting differences between their expectations and the reality of the organization. An excessive amount of negative differences will cause a newcomer to become disillusioned and cynical. Socialization itself comprises both formal and informal mechanisms. (Jablin, 2001; Katz, part II, 1998; McCaskey, 1999; Rochlin et al., 1987). Formal mechanisms include assigned mentors, coauthoring initial assignments with more experienced personnel, and training in the organization's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Informal mechanisms are where one really sees how socialization is relevant to oral communication. Seeing how superiors talk to one another, learning the labels that 'insiders' use for actions or objects, hearing the metaphors people use, seeing the gestures and other nonverbal cues used in conversations, these occurrences are simple but they are *central* to how a newcomer learns to function in an organization (Jablin & Sias, 2001; Katz, part II, 1998; McCaskey, 1999; Rochlin et al., 1987). Oral communication is the medium for almost all informal socialization mechanisms.

Socialization occurs to newcomers at every organization, from a new teller at Bank of America to a new JO taking command of a Marine Corps rifle platoon. Research suggests that the mechanisms of socialization are largely the same regardless of the type of organization. The oral communication habits of organizational 'insiders,' particularly the metaphors and labels they use, are perhaps the main driving force behind socialization. In closing, socialization is going to occur regardless of whether a JO is conscious of these mechanisms or not. Logically one can conclude that a JO would be better off if he or she were aware of them before hand.

### **C. COMPONENTS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION**

...[E]ncounters are dynamic systems in which participants create their own interactional rules and meanings. Rules of relevance...become part of the participants definition of the situation. ...the definition of a situation is not a stable feature set at the beginning of an encounter, but a dynamic feature negotiated in the process of interaction (Erickson, 1975, p. 49).

In the quotation above, researcher Frederick Erickson talks about interaction in counseling encounters, but his observations apply to all conversations. Oral communication is not a stable thing with fixed rules. It pervades every situation and defines every situation as much as the situation defines it. There are many ways to divide oral communication into components. To discuss oral communication relevant to junior officers, this thesis will divide oral communication into the following areas: 1) *beliefs and intentions held before communication*, 2) *the method of communication*, 3) *the message itself*. This is a simplified structure based on the models put forward by Aristotle (4th century B.C.), Martin and Colburn (1972), Wilson, Arnold, & Wertheimer (1990), and Goffman (1973).

### **1. Beliefs and Intentions Held Before Communication**

...Wesbrook (1980) observed that "the key element in the soldier's relationship with his military and political leaders is his perception of their legitimacy and hence their right to influence him." Identification with small unit leaders often extrapolates to identification with and internalization of the values of the larger enterprise. (Mael & Alderks, 1993, p. 143)

Researchers from every field that has anything to do with oral communication all agree that no conversation starts from a completely neutral, objective beginning. Whether referred to as a bias, a pathos, a projection, an alignment, an agenda, or simply an opinion, participants of a conversation have pre-existing beliefs both about the other participant(s) and about the subject at hand (Aristotle, 1991; Goffman, 1973; Wilson et al., 1990; Martin and Colburn, 1972; Myers, 2002; Nickerson, 1998). Junior officers are no less susceptible to this than anyone else. In fact, because junior officers exist in a very hierarchical organization, pre-existing beliefs are of particular concern, as illustrated by some of the research below.

E. Goffman, a founding researcher in the field of communication and interpersonal perception, observed that every oral communication is really a performance of sorts (1973). He made the important conclusion that when two people are in a conversation and there is some difference in status, expertise, or rank between the two, that each person is trying to judge whether the other person (performer), "is authorized to given the performance in question, and [is] not primarily concerned with the performance

itself" (p. 59). If a listener determines that the speaker is not 'authorized,' the message is discounted or ignored. Because very little conclusive information can be found in any give interaction, this determination must be inferred from previous knowledge or experiences with the other performer. When a performer is playing a 'role' of some importance, a military officer for example, this scrutiny of their 'authorization' becomes even more intense, and expands to include their motives for acquiring the role in the first place. At the same time the performer's actual message lessens in relative importance. Of particular frustration to the performer is that what is necessary to receive 'authorization' is almost entirely up to the listener(s) to determine.

If we apply Goffman's conclusions to new junior officers we see that they will have very little 'authorization' to speak at first. Others have no prior experience with them, they have little or no technical experience, yet they are in a role of importance and authority. Situations may likely arise where a JO delivers a message that is technically accurate and correct, but pertains to a subject which the JO is not perceived as 'authorized' to speak, and therefore his message meets opposition or is even ignored. His or her senior enlisted, while lesser in rank but with more personal experience with the troops, or his or her department head, with less personal experience with the troops but more rank, may deliver the *exact same* message and get a prompt and positive response because they are authorized to speak on that matter.

Modern research supports Goffman's conclusions about the importance of a listener's perceptions of the speaker's experience, authority, and position, relative to their own, and how the actual communication itself may sometimes be overshadowed by these effects. Snodgrass (1992), and later Snodgrass, Hecht, & Ploutz-Snyder (1998), assigned artificial boss/subordinate relationships to subjects (strangers) and had them interact. The effects of the artificial roles were significant. They and other researchers, McArthur and Baron (1983), have not concluded exactly what goes into these judgments, but clearly everyone makes them. Nickerson's (1998) comprehensive review or research into confirmation bias, "the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand" (p. 175), and Myer's (2002) text on intuition offer countless examples of the important role of existing beliefs in any

communication, from public speeches to one-on-one conversations. JOs need to be alert to these phenomenon, both as listeners and as speakers.

## **2. The Method of Communication**

There are many methods of communication, but this thesis is only concerned with methods of oral communication relevant to a junior officer. Those methods are public speaking to a relatively familiar audience, such as members of the JO's platoon or division, and one-to-one conversations. Other forms of oral communication, such as speaking to a large group of strangers, are not considered here because, in the author's opinion, they are outside the normal JO's experience. Also considered here are certain aspects of nonverbal communication which are common to both public speaking and one-to-one conversations.

### ***a. Public Speaking to a Familiar Audience***

Public speaking is considered by some to be a terrifying experience, and some studies have found that some people fear public speaking more than death (Motley, 1998). Junior officers are called upon to engage in public speaking in such scenarios as giving training to their sailors or marines, giving wardroom training, giving operation's briefs, and passing along news and guidance from the chain of command to their sailors or Marines. I have focused my research on public speaking to these scenarios.

Scholars agree that the goal of any public speaker is to form a consensus or common understanding regarding a specific topic or plan of action (Wilson et al., 1990; Martin and Colburn, 1972; Aristotle, 1991; Motley, 1998). Having a specific topic for a speech is essential, but so having a specific goal for the audience's thoughts and emotions at the end of the speech. Wilson et al. (1990) refer to this as the dominant response, "you need to decide as early as possible how you want listeners to respond to your speech" (p. 46). The key to success in this regard is for the speaker to actively look for feedback during his or her speech.

Expecting receivers to judge the message strictly on the basis of what you intended to say and to disregard their own reaction is making the assumption that others can read your mind (Chambers, 2001, p. 75)

In his quotation above, Chambers makes note of the fact that one of the reasons a speaker must get feedback is there are missteps and miscommunications in

every speech. This may be particularly true for a young JO inexperienced with public speaking. Many unintended messages delivered during a speech come from what could be termed the speaker's strength of delivery. While researchers have found that audiences perceive very little of a speaker's anxiety (Motley, 1998), Awamleh and Gardner (1999) performed a study of military officers whose "results suggest that strength of delivery is an especially important determinant of perceptions of leader charisma and effectiveness" (p. 345). They go on to conclude the following:

Studies of leader rhetoric suggest that the leader's choice of words, symbols, and expressions constitute critical elements which determine the extent to which the audience becomes aroused, inspired, and committed to the vision (p. 346).

In the previous section, beliefs and intentions held before communication, it was discussed how a JO's audience will already have an opinion about a JO, and therefore his or her impending speech, before it even begins. This should serve to a JO's benefit as the more familiar an audience is with a speaker, the more tolerant they will be of his or her speeches, even if they don't like the speaker personally (Martin and Colburn, 1972). The speaker also benefits when the audience has some sense of deference to the speaker (Martin and Colburn, 1972). While a brand new JO may not have earned much deference, a show of solidarity from the senior enlisted or a superior may serve to loan a JO some deference until he or she can build up their experience and credibility.

On a related note, while public speaking is essentially a one-way conversation, it is never the less important that the audience feels engaged in a discussion that challenges their intellect and values their opinions (Wilson et al., 1990). Motley (1998) believes that, "by far the most important quality of a speaker's delivery is to make members of the audience feel that they are truly being spoken with rather than spoken at" (p. 109). This conclusion is particularly true for junior officers because they are speaking to a group that is familiar with them, and with whom they will have many more interactions and speeches in the future. If persuasion is a goal of the speech then this is even more important. Reardon (1991) notes in her book on persuasion that, "persuasion is not something one does *to* another but something that he or she does *with* another" (p. 75).

***b. One-to-One Conversations***

The most frequent, and perhaps the most important, type of oral communication that junior officers will face are one-to-one conversations. In two studies of first year MBA students, Reinsch and Shelby (1996, 1997) found that the most frequently reported challenging oral communication incidents were in face-to-face conversations involving two people. This result should apply to junior officers as well. A JO will have countless informal conversations with members of his command on a daily basis. As face-to-face conversations have been found to be the richest form of communication, these conversations will communicate a great deal about a JO's beliefs, point of view, and character (Trevino, Daft, & Lengel, 1990; McArthur and Baron, 1983). They will therefore weigh heavily in people's opinions of that JO.

Less frequent, but perhaps equally important, are counseling situations. All military leaders are taught to 'praise in public, counsel in private.' This implies an oral conversation between two people, and counseling sessions are important, potentially critical, conversations. Therefore one can conclude that every JO will have several difficult and important face-to-face conversations either as a counselee or counselor. When acting as a counselor, junior officers need to remain very conscious of the boss-subordinate relationship and how it can affect the situation. Snodgrass et al. (1998) found that in face-to-face conversations subordinates were very sensitive to indicators of how the boss felt about them. Because an atmosphere of candor, trust, and positive regard for the counselee are critical to a successful counseling session, emotional indicators transmitted by the JO (boss) could foil the entire counseling effort (Welch and Gonzalez, 1999).

Another factor that junior officers should keep in mind during counseling encounters is their role as gatekeepers. Erickson (1975) describes gatekeepers as superiors who are in a position to evaluate subordinates and decide to what extent, if at all, that subordinate can continue in a particular endeavor or career. While they do not tend to have ultimate authority in personnel issues, junior officers are important gatekeepers for their subordinates. The important consideration for JOs to keep in mind is that gatekeeping is not necessarily explicitly communicated. JOs can effectively gatekeep simply by "the manner in which they describe the social structure" of the

organization (Erickson, 1975, p. 46). They can either present the organization as an open structure with opportunities for the subordinate ahead, or a closed structure with problems ahead. Essentially, just by presenting a 'glass half empty' vice a 'glass half full' point of view, a JO can have a powerful effect on a subordinate in a counseling situation.

**c. *Non-Verbal Communication***

Throughout both the discussion of public speaking to a familiar audience and one-to-one conversations, much could have been said about non-verbal communication. Because non-verbal communication is relevant to both, the important points are laid out here. Non-verbal methods of communication accompany every type of oral communication. Everything from gestures and eye contact to the rhythm with which one speaks, to split second facial expressions have been studied and found to communicate significant amounts of information (McArthur and Baron, 1983; Ambady and Rosenthal, 1992, 1993; Wilson et al., 1990; McCaskey, 1999; Awamleh & Gardner, 1999). Studies of military officers in specific have found that, "specifically, charismatic leaders are purported to project a powerful, confident, and dynamic presence through the delivery factors of eye contact, fluency, gestures, facial expressiveness, eloquence, energy, and voice tone variety" (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999, p. 346).

Outside of overt gestures and deliberate vocal emphasis, it is not clear how non-verbal messages are sent and interpreted because the process happens for the most part at the unconscious level. Ambady and Rosenthal (1992, 1993) have shown that people consistently make judgments about complete strangers, some which are strongly held, in a *fraction of a second*. These judgments are based solely on watching a split second of videotape with no audio, and therefore must be due to non-verbal communication. McArthur and Baron (1983) explain that at any given time so much information is sent non-verbally that the other person(s) in the conversation can't possibly take note of it all. Each individual has therefore, over time, unconsciously developed an 'educated attention,' whereby certain traits are focused on. Each individual's attention is unique and always changing. For example, happy observers more readily detect happiness. Just because most of non-verbal communication is unconscious does not mean that there is nothing for junior officers to learn; attention can be consciously educated also.

Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) go on to remark that non-verbal messages are consistently truthful. A person can choose their words carefully, but expressive behavior occurs unconsciously except for the most seasoned liars. McCaskey (1999) notes that when dealing with a sensitive subject, or discussing something where vocalizing one's true feelings may be inappropriate, non-verbal messages are more reliable and true because they are easy to reinterpret or deny later. General Pagonis (2001) is also a firm believer in the importance of being able to both project and interpret body language.

The important message to junior officers is that they, their subordinates, and their superiors, are sending important non-verbal messages all the time that are content rich and reliable. While, McCaskey (2001) noted that "no gesture has a single unvarying meaning" (p. 135), he is primarily referring to making comparisons across groups with different cultures and norms. Junior officers, who operate at the small group level within a fairly consistent culture, should educate their attention to take note of the non-verbal habits of those around them.

### **3. The Message Itself**

When someone tells a friend that they just had a conversation with someone, the usual reply is, "what did he/she say?" Ironically the message, or 'what' of oral communication, has not been discussed up to this point. There is a good reason, however, that I have delayed discussing the message itself to this point. In any given conversation the message itself is *no more important* than non-verbal communication, beliefs and intentions held before communication, the relationship between participants, or any of the other aspects of oral communication already discussed. There is nothing complicated about the message aspect of oral communication. Aristotle (1991) pretty much had it nailed down in the 4th century B.C.: one needs to have a point, and be able to logically explain that point. The way this is accomplished is simple: preparation.

Junior officers in particular need to be concerned with a particular type of message: explanation. As a leader, a counselor, a trainer, and as an inexperienced person trying to complete warfare qualifications, JOs are constantly called upon to explain material to other people, both subordinates and superiors alike. The ability to clearly explain material is made even more important to a JO by the finding that when the

audience doesn't understand the material, fault is attributed to the sender, even when the audience is the problem (Reinsch and Shelby, 1996). Quite simply, junior officers must learn to think before they speak so that they can quickly and concisely explain material to others.

#### **D. ORAL COMMUNICATION EDUCATION**

Some learners need to improve their competence. Some need to develop skills. Others need to alter their communicative orientations and feelings. Accurate diagnosis should precede instruction. Confusing competence with performance and/or ignoring affect will lead to both inaccurate diagnoses and ineffective instruction (McCroskey, 1982, pp. 6-7).

Exposure to the appropriate behavior of the military professional is an essential part of academic and tactical training (Janowitz, 1960, p. 131).

Courses should include oral communication and should not conceptualize oral communication exclusively in terms of formal presentations (Reinsch and Shelby, 1996, p. 36)

The three quotes above perfectly summarize the key elements of oral communication education: accurate diagnosis and feedback, exposure to those already communicating 'correctly,' and a focus on all types of oral communication. It goes without saying that experience, with anything, is an education in and of itself. The discussion here is focused on how the subject of oral communication can be taught in an academic environment. The subject matter of oral communication education is straightforward, is agreed upon by most scholars, and consists of much of the information presented in this thesis. Public speaking, counseling, non-verbal communication, delivery and presentation techniques, logic and debating skills are typical topics of study. What is not well agreed upon is how oral communication education should be integrated into an overall curriculum. The two main options are to either integrate oral communication training into all classes, or to have separate classes dedicated to oral communication.

In 1995 Vest, Long, Thomas, and Palmquist attempted to ascertain the appropriate methods for training new engineers in communication. They found that engineers felt that communication was an integral part of the engineering process, and therefore communication training should be an integral to the overall education of engineers, vice

separate communication classes. In this arrangement, grades for the engineering courses include and reflect the communication competence of the students. Kennedy (1988) supports this type of communication education, or what he terms, "speaking across the curriculum" (p. 130). He argues that the technical classroom is the best place for communication training because the technical professors have a unique knowledge of the course material, students are already grouped by similar interests, and the information used in the communication training is relevant to the students.

This form of communication education, and Kennedy's article in particular, provoked a lot of criticism from the academic community. Kennedy detailed the reactions he received in a second article in 1989. One concern was that there was no time in already packed classes to focus on oral communication, particularly for large classes. Professors themselves were concerned that they were not qualified to judge their student's speaking abilities. Others were concerned over why a technically apt student should receive a poor grade for a class if their only problem was with communication. Still more were concerned that in adopting a 'speaking across the curriculum' policy, the administration would mandate one form of 'correct' speaking for the entire campus.

Another approach to oral communication education is demonstrated by the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and their Center for Excellence in Oral Communication (Morreale, 1994). Here all incoming freshman are given a comprehensive oral communication assessment which judges their communication apprehension. Students can choose to take courses in public speaking or interpersonal communication. Both include an in-depth communication assessment based on personal evaluations, videotaped sessions, and computer assessments. The Center has several full time staff members but is heavily supported by graduate teaching assistants. Additionally the Center offers Individualized Assistance Programs to serve specific communication needs previously identified by surveys of the student body. The Center also helps non-communication department faculty incorporate communication into their classes. This approach to oral communication is obviously time and personnel intensive. For a diverse student body, such a program would have difficulty finding communication topics relevant to everybody.

The above ideas, and criticisms of those ideas, reflect the current debate about oral communication education. The conclusion that should be drawn from this material is that every profession should have a debate and a resulting policy over where and how new members of the profession receive their communication education. This policy should be based on the needs of the profession and the ability of the relevant academic institutions to provide the desired skills. The specific oral communication skills the Navy and Marine Corps need from junior officers are the focus of chapter four, data analysis. The potential for the Naval Academy, and other institutions that prepare junior officers, to address those needs is discussed in chapter five, conclusions and recommendations.

#### **E. HOW ORAL COMMUNICATION ABILITY IS JUDGED**

Among scholars in the field of oral communication education perhaps the only thing more contentious than how oral communication should be taught is how it should be judged. To begin with, even the definition of 'communication competence' is an issue of much debate. Cambell et al. (2001) did a study and concluded that communication cannot just be judged based on certain analytical components nor judged on a purely holistic basis, but must be judged via both methods. Their rubric for judging oral communication has six components, each with a five point scale: eye contact, body language, voice qualities, command of material, visual aids, and content. In their review of all current communication research, Jablin and Sias (2001) note that there is a behavioral side to competence and a cognitive side. Perhaps this is best explained by McCroskey (1982) who explains that there are no doubt great scholars in the field of communication who are terrible public speakers, and there are children who are terrific speakers yet have no understanding of how. He goes on to point out that both the behavioral and the cognitive sides will have an impact on the ultimate success of any communication. Overall effect or goal accomplishment is yet another way to judge communication.

Tied to the question of how to judge communication competence is who should judge communication competence. Clearly communication professionals and educators have the ability to reliably judge communication ability (per a given rubric), and that self ratings are not reliable (Cambell et al., 2001). The debate over who should judge communication competence centers around the question of whether peers should judge

one another's communication abilities. Cambell et al. went on to conclude that, among business professionals trained on a given rubric, peer ratings of communication abilities were consistent with instructor ratings. With regard to college students, however, Kennedy reported that many professors expressed "grave misgivings" over his suggestion that students be allowed to evaluate one another (Kennedy, 1989, p. 33). These concerns centered around a lack of sensitivity towards fellow students and the potential for destructive criticisms.

While there is no clear definition of oral communication competence, nor a consensus on how to judge oral communication, nor a consensus on who should judge oral communication, there are a few things that are agreed upon which can safely be applied to junior officers. The first is that no black and white judgments can be made about an individual's communication ability. There is no such thing as competent or an incompetent communicator (Jablin and Sias, 2001). Normally atrocious speakers will occasionally deliver very clear messages, and skilled speakers in a new situation may stumble extensively (McCroskey, 1982; Jensen, Duran, Cegala, 1982). On average, increased knowledge about communication, increases oral communication performance. With regard to who can judge communication ability, it seems clear that a sufficiently mature individual with a proper amount of training, and perhaps a rubric as a guide, can provide accurate, reliable judgments.

#### **F. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has shown how oral communication pervades any professional work environment, particularly the socialization of new members into an organization. Judging oral communication abilities and oral communication education must therefore be approached from a holistic standpoint, where the importance of effective oral communication is evaluated on a near continuous basis from a variety of perspectives. In summary, junior officers should give conscious thought to how those around them speak, how they speak themselves, and where improvements could be made.

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## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

As was mentioned in the opening introduction, this thesis relies on relevant and current data describing the current communications environment(s) in the fleet. These data were collected through focus groups with officers from each warfare community and interviews with senior enlisted from each warfare community. Warfare communities considered for this thesis were: Marine Ground, Marine Aviation, Naval Aviation, Surface Warfare, and Submarine Warfare. These warfare communities were chosen because they contain the majority of officers in the Navy and Marine Corps. Appendix A contains tables showing the warfare communities assigned to Naval Academy graduates between 1990 and 2003, which illustrates this fact (USNA institutional research, 2003). This chapter provides a description of the focus group and interview protocols, the participants, and the data analysis methodology.

### **B. OFFICER FOCUS GROUPS**

Focus groups consisted of four to six junior officers from each warfare community. Five focus groups were conducted with a total of twenty-two officers. Faculty and staff of the United States Naval Academy who recently served as junior officers in the fleet were recruited to participate in this study. All officers were contacted via e-mail. Focus groups were conducted in a conference room and tape recorded. After a brief introduction, participants completed a short questionnaire which asked for demographic information about the command they were attached to as junior officers and about their roles at those commands. Appendix B summarizes the junior officer demographic data.

After the questionnaires the focus groups shifted to the discussion portion of the protocol. Discussion was led by the researcher through questions posed to the group. Questions came from a focus group protocol provided in appendix C. In addition to these prepared questions, additional questions and probes were used whenever necessary to clarify a point or pursue a relevant topic of discussion. Some of these probes are listed on the focus group protocol. The two main elements of this organization were a 20 minute (approximate) portion about the types of oral communication junior officers engage in,

and a 25 minute (approximate) portion of personal stories about junior officers who were either good or bad communicators. Time was also spent discussing recommendations for the oral communication education of future junior officers.

Each focus group was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher for analysis. All names, command names, and other identifiers were removed during the transcription process.

### **C. NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER INTERVIEWS**

The eight noncommissioned officers interviewed for this thesis were all Senior Enlisted Leaders (SELs) at the United States Naval Academy. SELs work daily with midshipmen at the Academy and are competitively screened to provide the best examples of senior enlisted from the fleet today. As such, SELs are an above-average group of noncommissioned officers, but are ideal for this thesis as they are already heavily involved in preparing future junior officers for the fleet. Biographies for each of the Senior Enlisted Leaders were obtained, and participants were chosen based on the SEL's experience in working with junior officers as a noncommissioned officer. A summary of relevant biographical information on each noncommissioned officer chosen, edited to remove personally identifying information, is provided in appendix E.

Interviews were conducted in the SEL's office and followed an interview protocol provided in appendix F. Questions were focused in an attempt to define the junior officer/senior enlisted relationship in that community and to get the SEL's opinions of junior officer oral communication abilities. Personal stories about junior officers who were either good or poor communicators were highly encouraged, and time was spent discussing recommendations for junior officer oral communication education. Of the SELs at the Academy, there was only one NCO from the Marine aviation community, and only one NCO from the submarine warfare community whose backgrounds were sufficient to be considered for an interview. Therefore, they were the only noncommissioned officers interviewed for those warfare communities. In all other warfare communities, two NCOs were interviewed. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher for later analysis. All identifiers were removed during the transcription process.

#### **D. ANALYSIS**

Data collected for this thesis amounted to over 150 pages of single-spaced text. After removing all identifying information each transcript was imported into the qualitative analysis program NVIVO. Within this program, each document was 'coded' for thematic analysis. Once coded, the data was sorted for analysis. Data sorting was a two-stage process. In the first stage, data was sorted by relevant secondary research questions.

Once the data was sorted into these broad bins, an inductive thematic analysis was conducted. All the data in each bin was reviewed, and each theme discovered was assigned a descriptor. Examples include: personal, confident, arrogant, informal. To the extent possible, these descriptors reflect the exact wording used by the subject. However, some effort was made to use a similar set of descriptors across all the documents in the data set. This allowed the researcher to compare themes across documents and see both similarities and differences in the oral communication environments of the different warfare communities. Assisting in this were the results of the Likert-type questions each focus group member answered about their experiences within their warfare community. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis.

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## V. DATA ANALYSIS

### A. INTRODUCTION

The data gathered for this thesis was first analyzed using the five secondary research questions. *1)What is the communication role of a junior officer? 2)What is the nature of junior officer oral communication? 3)What oral communication knowledge, skills, or abilities are required for a successful junior officer? 4)What are the common oral communication weaknesses among junior officers? 5)What are the implications and recommendations for oral communication instruction at the USNA, ROTC, and OCS?* This chapter is organized around these questions. Each section begins with common themes among warfare communities for that research question. Next, themes regarding differences between warfare communities. Finally there is a justification section, which provides excerpts from focus groups and interviews including the rationale for the choice of themes.

During the coding process it became clear early on that the nature of oral communication at the junior officer level is directly tied to and often indistinguishable from the communication's role of a junior officer. Therefore, those two research questions are addressed together in the following section.

### B. WHAT IS THE COMMUNICATION ROLE OF A JUNIOR OFFICER AND WHAT IS THE NATURE OF JUNIOR OFFICER ORAL COMMUNICATION?

Several questions were put to the participants regarding the communication role of junior officers and the nature of junior officer oral communications. For example, "What is a JO's schedule on a normal day?" "Who do you talk to when you first get to work?" "Who do you go to with problems?" "What is your relationship like with your senior enlisted?" "Are your conversations formal or informal?" Focus group participants also completed a short survey which asked them to evaluate, on a five-point scale, the frequency and then the importance of their communications with their commanding officer, department head, peers, chief/gunny, and junior subordinates. The answers to these questions, among others, are summarized in this section.

### **1. Themes Regarding Commonalities Among Warfare Communities**

Four themes cut across the warfare communities regarding the nature and role of junior officer oral communication. Participants indicated that the nature of junior officer oral communication was predominantly interpersonal and of a collegial tone. Junior officers communicate the most with their peers, their immediate superior, and their immediate subordinate, yet these are not the most important conversations. Junior officers' most important conversations are one-to-one conversations with their commanding officer, whom they speak to the least. As a leader, junior officers are called on to do public speaking in the form of training and briefs, as well as interpersonal counseling with junior subordinates. As a member of a larger organization, a JO could be described as a conduit of information between his or her department head and their junior subordinates. However, this responsibility is shared heavily with the junior officers' chiefs and staff NCOs.

### **2. Themes Regarding Differences Between Warfare Communities**

For the most part the different warfare communities appeared to be fairly similar with regards to the oral communication role of junior officers and the nature of junior officer oral communication. However, certain warfare communities were more similar than others and the communities can be described as forming three groups: surface/submarine warfare, aviators, and Marine ground. The submarine warfare and surface warfare communities JOs were reported to have a significant socialization period during which much of their communication efforts were focused on establishing technical credibility. Participants from the Marine and Navy aviation communities indicated that JOs perform a great deal of public speaking, mostly in the form of flight briefs which occur on a near daily basis. Junior officers in the Marine ground community hold positions that are more hierarchical over their subordinates than the other communities and have less of a socialization period. Therefore they are expected to communicate as a knowledgeable professional relatively soon after their arrival.

### **3. Justification**

The data presented here follows the organization of the themes regarding the nature and role of junior officer oral communication as presented above. First, data

supporting the four themes common to the warfare communities is presented, followed by data supporting the three themes that draw distinctions between the different warfare communities.

*a. Collegial Nature of Communications*

Much of the data speaks to the nature of junior officer communication. "Formal" and "informal" are terms normally used to describe oral communication, but they do not do a very good job at describing the types of oral communication participants described for junior officers. Almost all the oral communication at the junior officer level, either with superiors or subordinates, one-to-one, or presentation/public speaking, was described as being somewhat informal. Collegial is perhaps the best term, as in the way members of a professional society such as lawyers or doctors would communicate with one another. Even when the subject of a conversation is serious, the conversation proceeds with certain casualness that comes from the individuals' expertise and familiarity with the material. The exception seems to be the few times when junior officers must communicate with senior officers from outside their command who they do not know. Evidence of a collegial atmosphere can be seen throughout the later sections where participants discuss the communication role of JOs, but some particularly poignant excerpts are provided here.

In this first passage, MA 1 describes a Marine aviation squadron as being like a family. This closeness goes a long way towards describing the feeling junior officers would have when communicating with other members of the squadron.

MA 1

It is really good. Being in a squadron, hanging out in the ready room, going on deployments, going on the road, you really, you learn a lot about yourself and you learn a lot about people that you can trust and it is a great feeling. I'd say very close, like family type close

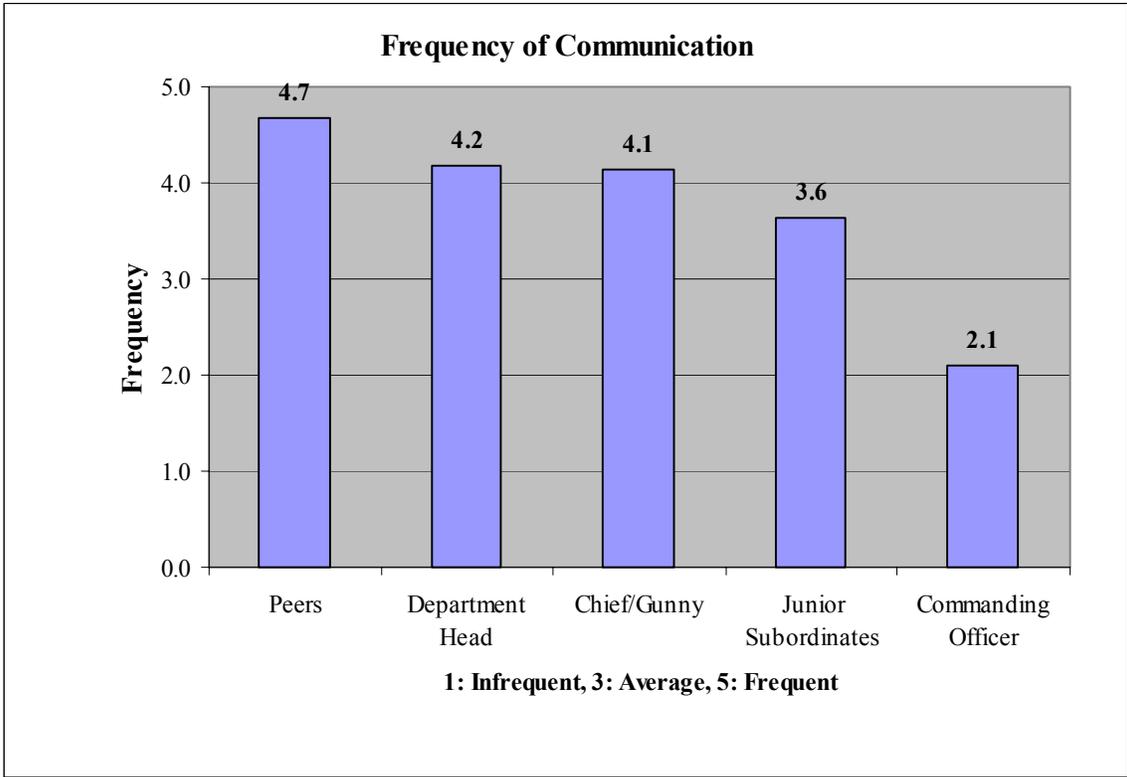
In this next passage, SUB 3 makes a somewhat similar statement. He draws a distinction between the nature of a submarine and that of a family or a fraternity, but maintains that communications flow quite naturally between all members of the command.

### SUB 3

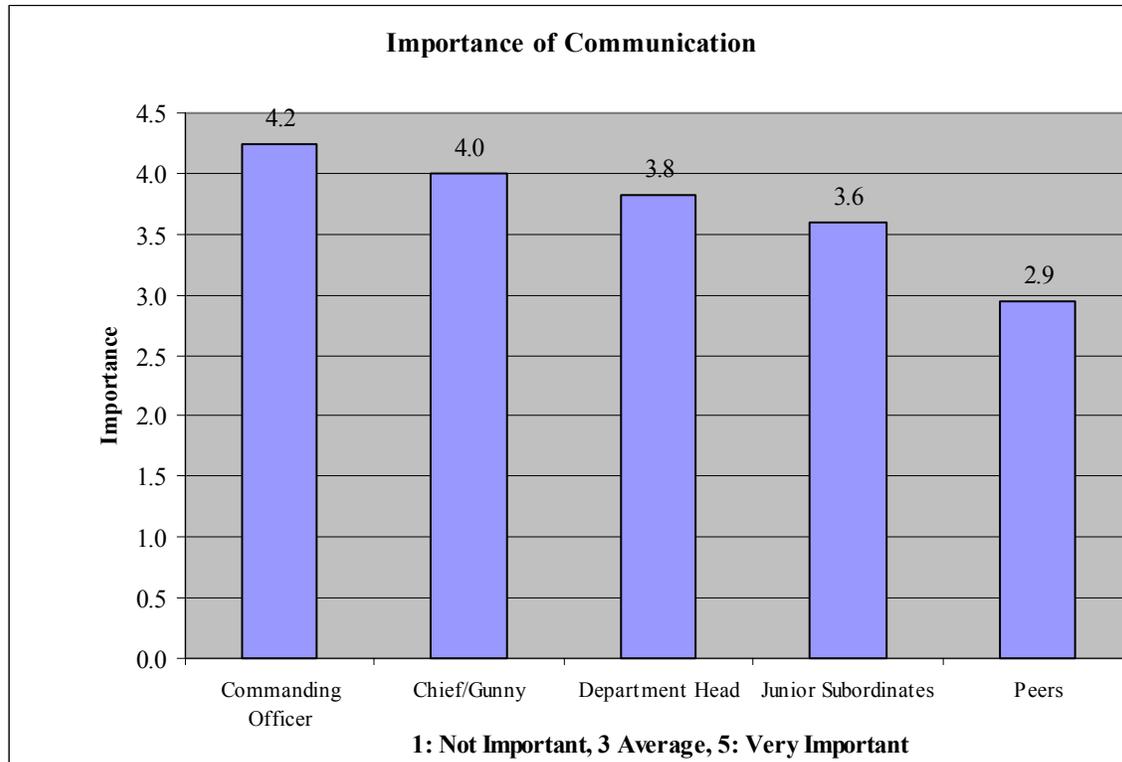
Yeah I didn't, it all seemed sort of natural, I guess just the general structure of the submarine is harder...family. I never get to say this, its not quite like that, and it is not quite like on the fraternity side of things. Everybody on the same boat and going along doing the same thing, even the lowest seaman on board I would talk to him the same way I would talk to the LPO, its just what you are talking about is different.

#### *b. Importance vs. Frequency of Communications*

An initial assessment of junior officer oral communication was made using data from the surveys that focus group participants completed (N= 22). Two survey questions asked whom junior officers communicate with the most, and with whom it is most important for junior officers to communicate well with. The results indicated that junior officers communicate most frequently with their peers (other JOs), immediate superiors (Department Head), and immediate subordinates (chief/staff NCO). Of note, however, is that junior officers' most important conversations are with the Commanding Officer (CO). These results were consistent among all the warfare communities, and are displayed in Figures 2 and 3 below.



**Figure 2: Frequency of Communication**



**Figure 3: Importance of Communication**

The two survey questions provided only a small amount of data regarding the nature of junior officer oral communication; the bulk of the data came from the discussion portion of the focus groups and from the interviews. Discussions with participants diverged somewhat from the survey question data regarding the importance of conversations with junior subordinates, and indicated that conversations with junior subordinates are extremely important. Taken as a whole, the data indicated that junior officers communicate the least, at a one-to-one level, with their junior subordinates and their commanding officers, but that these relatively infrequent conversations were the most important. The passages below speak to this conclusion.

The Commanding Officer is ultimately responsible for everything and everyone at his or her command. As such, a CO is very busy with a wide range of activities, individuals, and groups. Therefore when a CO gives his or her full attention to a junior officer, that junior officer would understandably consider that conversation as being important. SWO 1 echoed the thoughts of many participants when he described the psychological impact the CO's extraordinary powers can have on a JO.

## SWO 1

Maybe it's just the psychology, you know whatever the Captain says, goes. That is always the number one priority, so when he says something, it just has the ripple effect of, 'ok we are going to do this now.'

The importance of the relationships between junior officers and their junior sailors and Marines came up with each participant. Much will be said about this in later sections, particularly communicating as a leader, and later in knowledge skills and abilities of a successful JO. In this case the conversations are important not because of the other person's importance, as is the case with conversations with the CO, but because of the JO's importance. SWO 3 provides an explanation of this when he describes how important it can be for a junior officer to help one of his or her junior subordinates.

## SWO 3

...there were times when I was talking to sailors, that they had some pretty amazing problems, and I did not want to be a source of aggravation towards those problems. I always wanted to help them get through it. So that is when, looking back, that is when I cared the most, so I guess that is what I would say is my most important.

### *c. Communicating as a Leader*

One of the principal communication roles of a junior officer is communicating as a leader. Whether through a demonstration of their theoretical knowledge, their tactical prowess, or their personal concern, junior officers are expected to communicate in a way that demonstrates leadership ability. Junior officers accomplish this through two general mechanisms, public speaking and counseling.

Junior officer public speaking was a specific topic of conversation with each participant. Data indicate that in each warfare community junior officers are required to do a moderate amount of public speaking. The three main types of public speaking a JO will encounter are morning briefs to his or her unit, unit training, and operations briefs. They are not expected to present new and creative ideas, or win over an audience to a particular opinion or point of view. Instead, they are expected to communicate their competence on the matter at hand in much the same ways all the junior officers which have come before have done. In the quote below, NA 2 describes

how aviators learn a prescribed brief at flight school which provides the foundation for the briefs they will give in the fleet.

#### NA 2

First you learn almost a verbatim brief at flight school. So then when you get to the squadron you're expected to tailor to the flight that you are doing, as a combination of what you are going to be doing on the flight, you know safety procedures, that you have to remember 4.0.

JOs aren't required to be creative, for the most part, yet they are expected to be convincing public speakers. Essentially, whenever junior officers give a speech their audience already knows what he or she is supposed to say, and how he or she is supposed to say it. Therefore the audience is primarily evaluating how close a junior officer's performance approaches an established norm. Briefs and training were reported to be predominantly technically oriented. NA 3 describes the importance of being able to give technical briefs.

#### NA 3

The brief was huge at our command. The brief was the opportunity pretty much for the JO to make their impression upon not only the other JOs but the CO, XO and the other department heads. You had two reputations at my command, you had your reputation for doing your desk job, and you had your reputation for how well you could be an aviator, how well you could brief and how well you could talk on the radio, doing your job flying. But the brief was the first impression that you were able to make upon everybody else.

It was mentioned that the Marine ground community does the least amount of public speaking relative to the other communities. MG 2 stated, "I probably briefed my CO a half a dozen times the whole time I was at my command." MG 2 later went on to say that she normally only briefed subordinates about once a week, and that those briefs were just informal safety briefs. MG 1 followed up MG 2, and in the following passage voiced agreement about the informal nature of briefs in their community.

MG 1

Yeah, I mean that, formal is 'Hey, gather around my tank I'm going to take some chalk and write on my skirt and tell you what we are doing.' On the skirt of the tank, that is a formal brief, you know what I am saying, that is formal.

Junior officers are expected to have good interpersonal skills, including the ability to effectively counsel junior sailors and Marines. Junior officers are expected to personally know each one of their subordinates. The importance of this skill is covered in a later section of this thesis, KSA of a successful JO, but from a role standpoint junior officers spend time seeking out and talking one-to-one with their junior subordinates. The purpose of these conversations is to stay current with the junior subordinates' activities, and to communicate to them that they have an officer "advocate" (MA 1) who represents them.

*d. Communicating as a Member of a Larger Organization*

Another communication role of a junior officer is to give or receive orders or instructions concerning a specific mission or task that must be accomplished. With regards to these directions, a junior officer could best be described as a conduit of information. Participants reported that most of the time junior officers receive directions from their immediate superior and are then responsible for making sure those directions are relayed to their junior subordinates. Many times, however, a JO's immediate subordinate, the chief or gunny, actually communicates the specific directions to the junior subordinates. Junior officers originate very few directions of their own. As for how and when directions were passed at their commands, most indicated that there was some form of daily morning meeting just for officers and senior enlisted. From this meeting, participants indicated that they, along with their senior enlisted, would hold their own meeting for the purpose of briefing junior subordinates. These divisional meetings also represent a minor public speaking opportunity for junior officers, but were reported to be run primarily by the senior enlisted. MA 1 describes a typical morning meeting in the maintenance department of a Marine aviation squadron below.

MA 1

...Maintenance is really run by the senior staff NCOs. They are the ones that turn the wrenches, and they know what is wrong with the airplanes, and they know how to fix them. We are kind of there to absorb what is going on and make sure that it gets passed down. I mean really the maintenance meeting is for staff NCOs. It is for Master SGTs to tell staff SGTs, 'hey, this is going to be what you are going to do today.' and we just kind of hang out there so that we are filled in, so that we understand what is going on, we are not turning wrenches, so we know what our guys are doing that day.

MA 1's quote above also illustrates how in most cases a junior officer's immediate subordinate, his or her senior enlisted, was described as providing most of the formal 'hour to hour' guidance to junior subordinates. Below, SUB 3 describes how, in the submarine force, this is also the case.

### SUB 3

...You had the departments all sitting in the crew's mess with their department heads and they would go through their quarters and then they would all just turn around when the XO walked in and we had quarters. And after that we would go down to the spaces and sit down with your division and usually that is when the meeting between you and your chief happened, on the way to quarters to talk about whatever it was that was just handed to you or ram-rodged to you, and how you were going to work that day. Then you would have divisional quarters. The chief would run that for the most part.

Junior officer's direction of junior subordinates was indicated to be more at the 'day-to-day' level, again mostly occurring at morning meetings or formations. Comments from the senior enlisted participants also indicated that they felt responsible for the detailed operation of the divisions. SWO SEL 2 describes below his feelings about a junior officer's participation in the morning meetings and the affairs of the division.

### SWO SEL 2

Well I do, I talk the majority of the time. I talk every single day but I always afford the div-o the opportunity to say something, because we have ship quarters, then we go to departmental quarters, and usually by the time we are walking all the way up to the folk sail I'll say, 'hey sir you need to mention this, this and this...' And so that way he talks first and then I'll talk last, and that way we are not saying the same thing...

*e. Marine Ground Community*

The Marine ground community is the one community that is fairly unique as far as the nature and role of junior officer oral communication is concerned. They did not seem to have these regular morning meetings that provided junior officers with day-to-day guidance. As such, junior officer platoon commanders were reported to operate with relative independence, as indicated in the quotations below MG 4 explains that part of this independence is due to the experience of his subordinates.

MG 4

As an 81 Ld mortar platoon commander we were much more autonomous and you know now you've got a gunny instead of a staff SGT. For a platoon SGT you've got company staff NCOs as section leaders you know so people say it's almost more like being a main company commander as far as the autonomy goes and the seniority of the enlisted marines that you have working for you.

MG 4 goes on to further describe an environment where a junior officer would be discouraged from seeking a daily meeting or guidance from his superiors when he stated, "Higher, you know it was by, not by exception, but you didn't want to be wasting the Company Commander's time with going in there with the things that you should be working out with your peers." MG 5, however, provided some insight that perhaps the nature of Marine ground assignments requires Marine ground junior officers to be relatively independent.

MG 5

Just because the recon platoons operate very autonomously, you really don't operate as a reconnaissance company. You are always on different training schedules and cycles. Some platoons are probably down the line getting ready to be assigned to the MEU, some are just coming back, so it depends on where you are, but you are very autonomous. So you are operating and executing your training schedule solo. I hardly ever talked to the other platoon commanders because they were in the field, or they were in schools, that type of stuff.

*f. Aviators*

Contrasting in many ways the Marine ground community are the Marine aviation and Navy aviation communities. In these communities participants indicated that JO's perform a great deal of public speaking, mostly in the form of flight briefs

which occur on a near daily basis. Also different is the relative lack of hierarchy in the aviation communities. Participants reported rank was not of concern when it came to flight briefs and especially flying itself. Consequently, one-to-one conversations in the aviation community are predominantly informal discussions, instead of more formal directions. Also of note in the aviation community is that data indicate that aviators communicate less with their subordinates than JO's in the other communities. Most of the public speaking and discussions already mentioned were said to be between officers. It was also noted that a JO's busy flight schedule and unfamiliarity with aircraft maintenance were limiting factors to how much a JO could practically communicate with his or her division.

As was already somewhat illustrated by the quotes from NA 2 and NA 3 above, aviators perform the most amount of public speaking because of all the flight briefs they must give. MA 1 adds the following observation illustrating how central giving and receiving flight briefs are in the aviator culture.

MA 1

Part of growing an aviator. We are taught from day one that you are going to stand up there in front of your flight, or whoever it is that you are briefing that day, and you are going to talk about it and you are going to get smoked when you do it wrong and you are going to get used to that until you do it right. I mean we grow in the ready room it is like a giant Petri dish where you are growing aviators in there, and that is why everybody wants to hang out in there. That is the nerve center.

Another communication theme particular to aviators is the relative unimportance rank sometimes plays in their organizations. During the Navy aviator focus group, NA 4 volunteered the following point.

NA 4

I think one thing to touch on just dealing with communications. You know whether it's the flight brief or when you are actually flying, there is no more rank. There is no, "crap I'm flying with the CO, call him sir in the cockpit." You are two professional aviators flying up there. Just look out for each other and get the aircraft back.

During the Marine aviator focus group the same issue was raised, summarized here by MA 1.

MA 1

There is a point whether it is all the time or whether it is when you actually get into the cockpit. There is a point where these (motions to rank insignia) come off. That is a little hard for a JO to start to work into that, to be able to do that in a cockpit, it is not a trivial thing to do at all but once you get that, it does sort of imply that you will always have a different type of relationship then you would say in a ground unit.

While the aviators seem to do the most public speaking, they seem to be the least involved with their subordinates' day-to-day activities. The passage below from MA 3 and MA 1 illustrates this point and some of the reasons behind it.

MA 1

Most of the maintenance stuff that is going on is kind of like magic to us anyway...we are, we give them an 'omni-omni' and say. "if you tell me this jet is good I'm going to walk around it and look at stuff and bang on it for a minute, but I am going to get in it with your full assurance that it is going to go fly." So we don't, very rarely, I mean sure, you could go to the maintenance guys and ask them anything you want, and they would be happy to tell you. They would bend your ear for an hour and a half about Fetzer valves and whatever. But you don't do that unless you are really into maintenance and you don't have anything better to do which isn't very often.

MA 2

And you are going to annoy the f#@% out of them. I think, and this is a [MA 2]' ism, I think that largely one of the rules of a JO in maintenance is just to be an advocate for your Marines. I mean they want you there professionally so you can be a buffer. So you can help them with whatever problems, but it works both ways professionally in that you, as their advocate, can go back to the MO [Maintenance Officer] and say, "sir we really want to do this." Or you can go up to OPS on their behalf and say, "do you understand that you are screwing my guys and gals down there?" So I think that is probably a good way to describe what our role is down there, and really as [MA #1] said, kind of absorb the atmosphere so that someday, God forbid any one of us is put in a MO position, you might have an idea of which end is up.

***g. Submarine and Surface Warfare Communities***

Unlike aviators, JO's in these communities were reported to be heavily involved with their subordinates, and unlike the Marine ground community, communication with their subordinates was largely in the form of informal discussions.

While less than their aviator counterparts, data indicate that submarine and surface JOs perform a moderate amount of public speaking in the form of operations briefs and training, both on approximately a weekly basis. Junior officer submariners and surface warfare officers experience a more prolonged socialization period than the other warfare communities. This seems to be due to the time it takes before a JO is considered technically proficient. This socialization has some direct effects on the ways in which JOs in these communities communicate. The following quote from SUB 3 illustrates this point.

SUB 3

One of the beauties of it, when you are new onboard and you have that humility and you are getting a checkout, and even some of the lower guys, they will take you under their wing. When you are trying to learn sonar for instance, it could be a second class petty officer and he is in there and he is showing you this, showing you that, he's like, "no sir, you want to look at this, you want to look at that." But as you grow up on the submarine you are like the LT standing Officer Of the Deck. They look at you differently. Especially when you are on watch, they treat you differently when you are on watch. And even as there is this sort of shift, where as before you were asking them everything, the same guys you were getting checkouts from are saying "sir, should we do this, should we do that?" "what about this, what about that?"

SUB SEL 1 shared many of the same views expressed about the socialization of new officers, and about how much a junior officer changes after he has been on board for a few years.

SUB SEL 1

I mean the mess cook on the decks who has been there for two years knows more than the Ensign showing up. So the Ensign doesn't know anything, so he is in learning mode what is going on and how the submarine works. You know after an Ensign or a jg [LTjg] has been there a couple of years, I mean he knows it, I mean he has ran the boat, I mean his competence...

**C. WHAT ORAL COMMUNICATION KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, OR ABILITIES ARE REQUIRED FOR THE SUCCESSFUL JUNIOR OFFICER?**

**1. Themes**

Analysis of the data concerning the communication knowledge, skills, or abilities of a successful junior officer uncovered five main themes that cut across the warfare communities. The descriptors for those themes are: personal, confident, collaborative, clear, and open minded. That ordering reflects the relative frequency that theme was mentioned, starting with the most frequent, personal.

## **2. Differences Between Warfare Communities**

Overall there was general agreement between warfare communities concerning the communication knowledge, skills, and abilities of a successful junior officer. The biggest difference observed was that both submariners and surface warfare officers place significant importance on the technical competence of a junior officer, particularly when he or she is giving a brief. A second, more subtle, difference between communities is that both Navy and Marine aviators place a premium on non-arrogant communication traits above the other communities.

## **3. Justification**

Table 1 below shows all themes. Amplifying information about the five main themes is provided below, as are explanations of what differences there are among warfare communities. The descriptors "confident" and "collaborative" are somewhat intertwined and will therefore be discussed together.

<b><u>Themes from Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for a Successful JO</u></b>	
<b>Common Themes Across Warfare Communities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal</li> <li>• clear</li> <li>• open mind</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confident</li> <li>• collaborative</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Themes From the Marine Ground Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand role</li> <li>• appropriate delivery</li> <li>• professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approachable</li> <li>• strong quest for knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Themes From the Marine Aviation Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• humble</li> <li>• reflective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• plain</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Themes from the Navy Aviation Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional</li> <li>• even</li> <li>• objective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good listener</li> <li>• genuine</li> <li>• not arrogant</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Themes From the Surface Warfare Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand role</li> <li>• competent</li> <li>• positive</li> <li>• versatile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concise</li> <li>• humble</li> <li>• appropriate delivery</li> <li>• good natured</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Themes From the Submarine Warfare Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competent</li> </ul>	

**Table 1. Themes from Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for a Successful JO**

**a. Personal**

The descriptor "personal" indicates that a successful junior officer should frequently seek to discuss personal subjects with his or her subordinates. Much about being personal is tied to listening and memory: knowing where a subordinate grew up, inquiring about his or her family situation and remembering family member's names. Predominantly, however, the participants indicated that it was very important that a junior officer communicate a level of personal concern to their subordinates on an individual basis. This should be an overt act of a junior officer; he or she should seek out subordinates and initiate these personal conversations.

The theme of personal care and attention for one's subordinates came out in each warfare community, and multiple times in most. Marine ground senior enlisted #1 (MG SEL 1) commented that an officer's ability to talk to an individual on a personal level was much more important than public speaking. Surface Warfare Officer #3 (SWO 3) felt that his conversations with individual sailors about their personal problems were the most important conversations he had, and "that was when I needed to be at my best, and those, a few of those conversations are the ones that I remember the most." This theme is perhaps best explained by Marine ground senior enlisted #2 (MG SEL 2) in the following quote.

So if you are going to do anything and be successful in the fleet, one gets to know your people, who they are. Sit down with them if you get the chance and as time allows it, and avails it to you, get to know your people. When you stop to say how you are doing, listen to what they are doing. Listen to what they are saying. Not you know, 'how are you doing,' and keep pressing on, because you know what they may say something other than, 'yeah, good to go.' Actually be thoughtful of what is on their minds, and care about them, and have genuine concern for their interest.

**b. Collaborative and Confident**

Junior officers and senior enlisted agreed that it is important for junior officers to collaborate with their senior enlisted when making decisions. When asked who a junior officer turns to when he or she has a problem, MG 5 reported that he relied on his staff NCO. Similarly, SUB 3 noted that because of the power and respect senior enlisted have, when a JO and his or her senior enlisted disagree on an issue, a junior officer's skill at collaborating and communicating "win-win" situations was very

important. At the peer level, SWO 3 reported how a fellow junior officer who always made "sure that you had all of the bases covered" made a lasting positive impression on him.

SWO SEL 1 was asked to characterize what made the most outstanding junior officers that he had worked with stand out. In his response below, he answered that it was their ability to learn and their ability to collaborate with him (their senior enlisted).

### **SWO SEL 1**

Their ability to learn, ability to understand my point of view. Even though they got to make the total decision, that they are able to take in all the info and then just tell me exactly what they want, but they did listen to my two cents. I have run into some bad ones who don't give a darn what you say, and make the decision, and they watch them fall on their face. But the great officers are the ones that come out there, and they are not arrogant. Actually they are like, "wow, I really don't know what is going on here senior," and then we can, "hey, this is what we do," and those I feel they always seem to go farther working relationship wise. Because then I'll do anything. You can call me up, "hey I need this senior." "You got it sir, I'll take care of it for you."

When it comes time for a junior officer to present information or a decision, confidence is very important. In many ways this is analogous to being a spokesman or a press secretary. A junior officer should speak confidently, yet not speak about anything that he or she has not discussed before hand with a more experienced individual, such as his or her senior enlisted, or a more experienced junior officer. There is evidence that a junior officer who makes confident decision that was reached without consultation with others will be received poorly.

SWO SEL 1's quote above also illustrates the danger of a junior officer expressing too much confidence in his or her individual decision making ability. Confidence is a difficult trait for a junior officer. While, as MA 1 mentioned, a junior officer should preferable be able to speak confidently such that everyone gets a "warm fuzzy" from listening to them, a prerequisite is that junior officer has to have done his or

her research before hand, to include collaborating with experienced, proven, and trusted personnel. SWO SEL 2 explains that this is because a junior officer is not, on most things, "a subject matter expert."

*c. Clear*

"Clear" refers to the importance of being able to give accurate and concise directions to subordinates. Participants indicated that a junior officer's subordinates will work hard to accomplish any task that he or she assigns. However, if a junior officer did not give clear directions and the subordinates do not complete the task in the intended manner, then the blame for the miscommunication will fall entirely on the junior officer. Miscommunications are frustrating for the subordinates and can create a lasting negative impression of the offending junior officer.

When it comes to giving direction to others SUB 2 stated that providing unclear directions can be one of the most exasperating things a person can do. MG SEL 1 and SWO 1 spoke about the importance of clarity.

MG SEL 1

...public speaker: he wasn't that, but he could sit down on a one-to-one and truly express what was going on, and that helped us to complete the mission to his standard, and that's that way that it should be. His commander's intent was crystal clear because of his interpersonal skills.

SWO 1

There is a lot of pain connected to the fact that once it is out there, whether it is spoken, written, e-mail, whatever, you can't get it back, and I think that it is a hard lesson to learn in that. But you know, what I said was perfectly absolutely one hundred percent crystal clear to me, but the division took it 180 out, and not what I meant, and that could create problems.

*d. Open Mindedness*

The last theme common to the warfare communities is "open mindedness." While somewhat related to collaboration, open mindedness refers to a passive act on the part of a junior officer. Essentially, when anyone, particularly a senior enlisted or subordinate, brings a suggestion to a junior officer, he or she must be open to that suggestion and give it due consideration. A failure to do so may result in a junior

officer being considered arrogant. MA SEL 1 indicated that junior officers always tend to be open to ideas from superiors, but that it is equally important for a junior officer to listen to his or her peers and subordinates. Participants seemed to be describing a passive communication behavior that some would call being a good listener. MG SEL 2 noted that everyone, including low ranking members of the unit, should feel comfortable talking to you about their thoughts and ideas. He also had this to say about the quality of those ideas.

I say approach your job open minded, understanding that you can learn from anybody, eight to eighty, that PFCs and lance corporals have great ideas, as do company commanders and battalion commanders.

*e. Additional Themes Regarding the Submarine and Surface Warfare Communities*

In both the submarine and surface warfare communities, the importance of presenting technically correct information was highlighted several times. This theme was not noted in the other warfare communities. It was also addressed that the technical details were more important to a presentation than the presentation's smoothness or the presenter's confidence. If a junior officer gives a confident, smooth presentation, but the technical content of his or her brief is incorrect, then the brief and the junior officer will be received poorly. SUB 1 states that respect is very important. Presenting technically inaccurate information or not being able to explain technical information is a fast way to lose respect from peers, superiors, and subordinates. Once that respect is gone, SUB 4 explains that briefing anything will become difficult because "the receivers ears are shut when you are unable to establish yourself as a technical operator." Below, SWO 2 provides a great example related to a gunnery brief.

I would say that in general, even if someone is a bad public speaker, they would get through it if they had the correct background first. I guess the ones that really failed, went to do a gunnery brief and didn't have all their information for the brief, and got called on it. Times I've seen really huge failures have been in that case. I mean even if you are a poor presenter, it just makes it a little bit more painful, maybe five minutes longer, but really what makes or breaks it, is if the Captain has this question about preparing for whatever, and you can't answer it, or you didn't do it right. That's when things turn south; that is what I have noticed the big difference is.

*f. Additional Themes Regarding the Navy and Marine Aviation Communities*

There were a collection of themes in the data for Navy and Marine Aviators that noted a concern with not appearing arrogant. Themes include personal, not arrogant, even, genuine, humble, and plain. The importance of these communication traits were noted for communication with subordinates, peers, and superiors alike. MA SEL 1 suggested that junior officers be "humble," and a compliment from MA 4 towards junior officers who spoke to their subordinates in a "plain way." NA 1 sums this up in the following quote.

I think the better communicators lacked arrogance. At least in the aviation community, pilots can get a little sense of arrogance or ego. If that was present when they were trying to communicate, it really threw up a barrier sometimes with the communicating, both for up and down and laterally. I think that if they had a little bit of humility and could speak and listen that they were much better communicators.

**D. WHAT ARE THE COMMON ORAL COMMUNICATION WEAKNESSES AMONG JUNIOR OFFICERS?**

**1. Themes**

This research identified many weaknesses in junior officer oral communication, but there were only two themes that seemed to apply across all the warfare communities. They were that junior officers often speak in an inappropriate manner, and that they tend to lack confidence when they speak. Confidence was identified in the section above as one of the communication knowledge, skills, and abilities of a successful JO. Therefore it will only be touched on here. Inappropriateness is somewhat of a broad theme, and will be the focus of this section. It refers to speaking in such a manner that is not appropriate given one's rank, position, or experience.

**2. Differences Between Warfare Communities**

There were not too many substantial differences between warfare communities on this issue. Similar to their views about the KSA of a successful JO, the surface warfare and submarine communities again placed an emphasis on technical competence and found fault with those who made technical mistakes when speaking. The Marine ground

community found fault with junior officer's physical presentation and formality in communication with officers outside his or her command.

### **3. Justification**

Table 2 below shows all the themes related to common junior officer communication weaknesses. Overall, however, participants thought that junior officers were adequate to above average speakers. No subject reported any grave concerns or fundamental problems with the ability of junior officers to communicate in general. The themes of lack of confidence, inappropriate communication, as well as the themes unique to the submarine and surface warfare communities and the Marine ground community are explored further below.

<u>Themes From JO Communication Weaknesses</u>	
<b>Common Themes Across Warfare Communities</b>	
• inappropriate	• unconfident
<b>Additional Themes From the Marine Ground Community</b>	
• pointless • unclear	• poor physical presentation
<b>Additional Themes From the Marine Aviation Community</b>	
• disrespectful	
<b>Additional Themes From the Navy Aviation Community</b>	
• too friendly • abrasive • arrogant • uncommunicative	• unconfident • impersonal • not collaborative
<b>Additional Themes From the Surface Warfare Community</b>	
• too friendly • incompetent • arrogant	• impersonal • awkward • poor grammar
<b>Additional Themes From the Submarine Warfare Community</b>	
• abrasive • unclear • awkward	• condescending • shy

**Table 1: Themes from JO Communication Weaknesses**

**a. Unconfident**

Most participants indicated lack of confidence was rooted in the socialization process that the junior officers were experiencing: dealing with new people, occupying a new position, and speaking about unfamiliar material. As was alluded to in the KSA section, junior officers that have the biggest problem with this were the ones who got up to speak without first working with, or collaborating with, an experienced member of the command.

Many statements regarding the importance of confidence were given in the previous section, KSA of a successful JO. Specific comments about the lack of confidence were given by both senior enlisted and officer participants. MA 1 noted a specific example of a flight brief where a junior officers who could not speak confidently about an upcoming sequence of events pertaining to a mission, and the flight was canceled because of it. SWO SEL 1 and MA SEL 1 both noted that much of the lack of confidence comes from not knowing what an audience expects to hear, or how to address an issue for the first time. SWO SEL 1 described this as the junior officers being like "a new kid in a candy store out there going, whoa..."

**b. Inappropriate Communication**

The theme of "inappropriate" communication is also related to the socialization process. Junior officers who exhibit this weakness often have misperceptions about where they fit into their new command, what authority they have, and whom they have authority over. Many were cited as speaking down to experienced sailors and Marines, to include their senior enlisted. Others were seen as offering opinions to superiors on matters which they were unqualified to speak about. One specific type of inappropriate communication that was reported was junior officers being too friendly with subordinates. These are just some of the some of the reported behaviors that fall under the theme of inappropriateness. Importantly most of the reported behaviors have to deal with the specific norms of the unit. For example, a newly commissioned officer technically outranks and therefore has authority over a senior chief or a gunnery sergeant. However, a senior chief or gunnery sergeant's 20 odd years of experience give him or her culturally accepted authority over a new ensign or second

lieutenant. This illustrates how a junior officer is expected to communicate according to the cultural norms of his or her unit, instead of the official rules and regulations.

There were numerous examples of inappropriate communication behavior from almost every subject in the study. As was mentioned before, most have to deal with junior officers violating the communication norms of their unit, or not understanding their place in the unit. Below are some examples that illustrate this type of behavior.

In this first passage, a young second lieutenant reporting to his first command makes the mistake of referring to his staff SGT as "the bottom of the food chain."

MG 1

We had a LT walk in, a Naval Academy grad. Well he goes to check in and he walks up to the staff SGT and he is like, "well I'm checking in. I need to get to know the people in the battalion so I thought I'd start at the bottom of the food chain." This is how he introduces himself to the staff SGT, and then, "hey my name is LT whatever." He was just an idiot, in all ways, in more ways than one. He lacked common sense. You know I think would be the big... just a lack of common sense of where he fits in as a new Lt to the organization.

In this passage MG 2 relates how a young junior officer must earn his or her proverbial seat at the table. In this instance, the table is at the weekly staff meeting, where the CO customarily goes around the room and solicits inputs from everyone present, even though some participants are not expected to have any comments, as MG 2 explains.

MG 2

I know that when I attended my first staff meeting, I think that I said something when it was my turn to say something, when I really should of just shut up. I got looks from everybody there that just said, 'shut up, you are new, why are you...'. It was just a dumb question, it was always a dumb question. And I learned to help second Lts, and to help myself by telling them that it is going to take you a minimum of half a dozen staff meetings before you are allowed to talk.

NA SEL 2 related a story of a junior officer who went around his or her chief and would directly criticize the division.

## NA SEL 2

Just a lack of a communication, going around you, not involving you, just totally disregarding you. You know where you go in, you find out that your division officer is holding a meeting and he is screaming and yelling at the people to a point where he is micromanaging.

In this story, SUB SEL 1 explains how a young Ensign attempted to allow some sailors to go home on liberty, a traditional responsibility of the Chief of the Boat (COB). While technically senior in rank to all chief petty officers, to include the COB, SUB SEL 1's story illustrates how the experience and positional authority of a chief often makes them senior to an Ensign in practice.

## SUB SEL 1

There was some meeting going on and the XO and the COB wanted everyone sticking around for some reason. "Everyone just stay, liberty is not down, liberty is not down." And there was some meeting going on and all the young guys are getting frustrated... all the chiefs are in the meeting, all the department heads, CO, COB all that, hour after hour, and this Ensign says to the NAV division, he goes, "the hell with it this is bullshit, you guys you just go home, go home. Liberty is down from the Ensign," and everyone just kind of looked at him, and luckily the guys that were in there were smart enough to say, "you can't do that Ensign..."

In this last passage, SWO SEL 1 explains how inappropriate it is for a junior officer to criticize and order that he or she passes down from a superior.

## SWO SEL 1

...instead of them, the JOs, giving the order like it came from them they always use that second person, 'the XO said, and I don't believe it,' and that is the wrong thing to ever put out, and that is when you want to grab a hold of them and just choke them physically, 'you can't do that!'...

### *c. Themes Regarding the Submarine and Surface Warfare Communities*

The issue of technical competence was previously addressed as far as it pertains to submarine and surface warfare officers. In those communities the impression was that it is better for a junior officer to profess ignorance and not speak on a subject at all, than to say something technically incorrect or to say something in a confused manner. Discussions with participants from this community emphasize that this is truly a

communication issue. Several examples were given of intelligent junior officers who just could not communicate their competence to others and suffered because of it. Knowing the material is not enough, a junior officer is judged, at least partly, by how well he can communicate that material. SUB 2 relates the following story of a junior officer with this problem.

...he was just a genius. Just smart as he could be, but he demonstrated an inability to articulate what he was trying to say. So when he went before the Captain, or went to his boards for EOOW (Engineering Officer Of the Watch), or whatever, he just couldn't, he couldn't get it across. You know I told the Captain several times that this kid knows more from this RPM (Reactor Plant Manual), than I will ever know, but he just... it was just stuck there. So he couldn't, it took forever before the Captain would let him stand watch, even though he knew it was there.

*d. Themes Regarding the Marine Ground Community*

While the other communities focused primarily on weaknesses in the ways junior officers conducted their interpersonal communications within their immediate chain of command, the Marine ground community focused on faults in the way junior officer's communicated with individuals outside their chain of command. Examples included poor physical presentation, the lack of appropriate military courtesies, and an excessively casual tone in their communications with officers of higher rank who were not in the junior officer's own chain of command. The consensus seemed to be, that in the Marine ground community at least, oral communication could be informal or formal, but it was very much up to the superior, and not the junior officer, to set the tone. MG 4 provides an excellent explanation of this below.

MG 4

I just found that in spending three years at TBS (The Basic School) seeing Lts coming in, and this comes, this deals with knowing your place and knowing how to deal with people, and it was not, it was not limited to Naval Academy graduates, it was also a lot of the prior enlisted Lts, but you know I wouldn't let, I wouldn't let a Lt talk to me with their hands on their hips or their arms crossed. It wasn't so much because I was important as a junior Captain staff platoon commander, but I wanted them to understand that you know, you are sending body language there and you could go out there and talk to a Major or a Colonel, or somebody who will just, you know rip your head off, and you don't even know why. And I think that they need to be made aware, you know don't go into a

interaction with somebody, a conversation with somebody and start making assumptions about what is your prerogative, body language wise do I sit down, should I call him sir every time I open my mouth or what, and I just think that you know you need to let the senior set the tone, and you go in there on the high end, and it is his prerogative to back it off. It is not your prerogative, the junior, to set the tone.

#### **E. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION AT USNA, ROTC UNITS, AND OCS**

Presented in this section are the various recommendations participants had for improving the oral communication education of future junior officers. Analysis of their recommendations, the author's own recommendations, and final conclusions regarding communication education will be presented in chapter five, conclusions and recommendations.

Because all of the participants in this study were assigned to the Naval Academy at the time they were interviewed, most of their references to future junior officers and communication instruction refer specifically to midshipmen and the Naval Academy. This is good in that they offer some very specific recommendations for the Naval Academy, and are all in credible positions as Company Officers and Senior Enlisted Leaders to make such recommendations, but negative in the respect that these recommendations cannot be directly applied to other commissioning sources. The implications of their recommendations to the other institutions which prepare future junior officers, namely Officer Candidate School (OCS) and ROTC units, will be addressed in chapter five, conclusions and recommendations. For consistency and conciseness, in this chapter all junior officers in training are referred to as midshipmen.

##### **1. Themes**

"I think that part of good communications is so inexplicitly intertwined with good leadership..." The preceding quote from SWO 1 illustrates a general consensus among the participants when it comes to oral communication education, and that is that oral communication is not something should be dealt with in a vacuum, but instead as an integral part of a future officer's education. Three main themes concerning communication education emerged from the data. First, participants agreed that experience is key to becoming a good speaker, and therefore any experience that the midshipmen could get, both at the interpersonal and public speaking levels, would be

excellent. Second, midshipmen should be given consistent and specific feedback regarding their speaking abilities. Lastly, participants felt that midshipmen should be given roles and responsibilities that more closely match their future roles and responsibilities as junior officers in the fleet.

## **2. Differences Between Warfare Communities**

No clear differences were identified between warfare communities on *the methods* future junior officers should be taught to communicate. Participants from each community agreed that experience and feedback were the keys to developing oral communication skills. However, it can be assumed that Marines would naturally want future Marines to communicate like Marines, submariners would naturally want future submariners to communicate like submariners, etc. Consider an evolution that has midshipmen communicating like Marine officers. This same experience would not necessarily benefit future submariners or naval aviators, just as experiences communicating like submariners would not necessarily benefit future Marines. One can therefore conclude that while each warfare community would like midshipmen to gain communication experience, the warfare communities are not referring to the same experiences. This issue will be dealt with more fully in chapter five, conclusions and recommendations.

## **3. Justification**

The table below shows all the themes that came out of the data regarding recommendations for oral communication education. The three common themes are explored in greater detail in the following sections.

However, before these themes are discussed, it should be noted that several participants expressed that belief that effective oral communication could only be learned in the fleet at operational commands. They reported that in their personal experiences even the warfare specific training they received at schools such as flight school did not fully prepare them for the way they were expected to communicate at their first operational command. Some noted that the extended duration of initial warfare training schools, and in some cases significant delays even getting to those schools, would make any training received at the Academy a distant memory by the time a JO arrives at his or her first command. These participants were not advocating that experience in various

types of speaking were not useful, merely that the necessary experience cannot be gained anywhere except the operational fleet.

<b><u>Recommendations for Oral Communication Instruction</u></b>	
<b>Common Themes across warfare communities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more experience</li> <li>• better roles and responsibilities for midshipmen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feedback on communication skills</li> </ul>
<b>Additional themes from the Marine Ground Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get experience with SEL</li> <li>• better pro reports and come arounds for Plebes</li> <li>• make USNA more like fleet</li> <li>• firm 4 class system for midshipmen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistency among staff on standards</li> <li>• interpersonal communication class</li> <li>• peer counseling</li> </ul>
<b>Additional themes from the Marine Aviation Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage self reflection</li> <li>• get experience with SEL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication can't be taught beforehand, must be experienced in fleet</li> </ul>
<b>Additional themes from the Navy Aviation Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have SEL's be more open to midshipmen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better pro reports and more come around's for Plebes</li> </ul>
<b>Additional themes from the Surface Warfare Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can't be taught beforehand, must be experienced in fleet</li> </ul>	
<b>Additional themes from the Submarine Warfare Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>	

**Table 2: Recommendations for Oral Communication Instruction**

*a. More Experience*

Nearly every participant in this study lauded the benefits of experience when it comes to developing oral communication skills. For example, participants suggested that midshipmen be given every opportunity to give presentations to peers, address a group of subordinates, give presentations to superiors, interact with senior enlisted, counsel individual subordinates, and interact with junior sailors and Marines. In most cases specifics plans, or examples already in place, were provided with the above recommendations. They included having squad leaders give presentations, shifting all academic classes to a seminar type format, having midshipmen present various topics in their professional development classes, and having senior midshipmen formally counsel junior midshipmen regarding their oral communication abilities (which benefits both the senior and the junior midshipmen).

MA SEL 1 felt that "by gaining confidence in speaking with the senior enlisted gives them a great deal more confidence in speaking with the junior troops." He went on to say that midshipmen should speak to and hear from junior sailors and Marines because, "You can hear it from me but you are thinking that is 17 years experience. You can hear it coming from a junior officer here, but it is not the same as seeing it for yourself." Several participants plainly stated, as MG 1 does here, that to gain skills in public speaking, "part of it is just the fact of how much you do it." In the following passage, NA 2 states that the practice of having plebes memorize rates will benefit future aviators.

Memorizing rates or numbers or names or whatever, that sort of memorizing and spitting it out under pressure is very good for aviation. Just that kind of, like we talked about here that anytime that you can practice in front of a small group, a crew, your squad, you know whatever. Maybe not the whole company but the more times you get up in front of maybe peers as well as someone above you and below you, the more times you get up and talk, just comfort and confidence. That confidence is what helps you in aviation, not necessarily being formal, but just being able to do it is what counts.

There were several more references to the benefits of speaking experience, but importantly most felt that the midshipmen at the Academy were not currently getting

enough public speaking experience. SUB 3 had the following to say about the current environment at the Naval Academy.

I think that there is not enough opportunities, as far as widespread, to make midshipmen talk in front of other people. There are quite a few that are placed in those positions, Company Commanders, those type people, they have to do that, and I know that there is a push now to try to force people into those type of roles. But for a long time the guys went through here and they had never had to stand in front of someone and articulate anything. The first time that they are having to do that is after they graduate, which is a disservice. But I think that we allow that to happen.

SUB SEL 1 had the following comments along the same lines.

I think that a lot of officers learn it the hard way, they may not be used to it, you know getting in front of people, and as soon as you get out in the fleet, boom they are going to throw you in front of people, to whatever your job is, whatever your collateral duty is, you are all the sudden boom pushed out in front of people and giving training, is my experience. So the more they have to do it here, the better prepared they are going to be, because I don't think just this public speaking, they do the public speaking course, I don't think that is enough for the midshipmen. I think that what you are talking about, any opportunity that they have to get in front of people, give training, have to talk, have to articulate something, the better prepared they are going to be when they get out there. That is probably something that they should do more of.

***b. Feedback***

The second theme from the data is that midshipmen should be given feedback specifically on their communication abilities. It was recommended that this feedback be given by both the midshipmen and the faculty. Specifically it was noted that the practice of 'come-arounds' and 'pro reports,' where plebes (midshipmen in their first year at the Naval Academy) must rapidly recite professional information to an upper class midshipmen, for example the types of aircraft the Navy uses, provides a perfect opportunity for both plebes to practice their speaking abilities and upperclassmen to give them feedback. It was also recommended that communication ability be made a specific grade on midshipmen fitness reports. Another subject noted that peer counseling is not only a good communication exercise, but a fundamental leadership exercise as well.

SWO 3 had the following thoughts about the benefits of both midshipmen training midshipmen and giving midshipmen specific feedback on their communication abilities.

I think that we need to get as much midshipmen training midshipmen as possible because that forces them to stand up and communicate. Now what they don't do, however, is that there is not a specific grading, 'how does this midshipmen communicate?' They have the, they have the fitrep block or the eval block, but I don't think that is specific enough for what we are trying to do here.

MG 3 observed that the feedback does not have to originate with the faculty and staff of the Academy, but could be from the midshipmen themselves. Professional knowledge reports, for example, gives the upper class "the opportunity to provide feedback and actually receive the brief and provide that training opportunity and for the fourth class the opportunity to actually be under pressure, under the gun, and to get the confidence to pitch, and honestly I see us lacking in that." MA SEL 1 felt that midshipmen could provide their own feedback individually through self reflection.

I think the one thing that officers have to take into consideration is always reflect back on your conversations with folks. It will make you a better person, a better officer, a better Marine, a better pilot, but a better man in the long run. So always do some self reflection and you will be alright. It prevents you from being a hypocrite first and foremost anyways.

***c. More Roles and Responsibilities for Midshipmen***

The final theme is that midshipmen should be given roles and responsibilities that more closely match their future roles and responsibilities as junior officers in the fleet. It was felt that this would significantly improve the midshipmen's transition from the Academy to the Fleet. Along these same lines there were several recommended changes to the general environment and focus of the Academy. Specific differences between the Academy and the fleet which participants felt needed improvement include the relationship between midshipmen and senior officers, and the lack of contact between midshipmen and junior sailors or Marines. It was also noted that one's oral communication environment is very much tied to one's role, and it was felt that the midshipmen did not have well defined role at the Academy. Specifically the participants were referring to the espoused four class system for midshipmen at the

Academy, which they felt was a two class system in practice. In general, participants agreed that the environments the midshipmen would be entering as JOs would be dramatically different than the environment of the Academy, and that difference makes it difficult to fully prepare the midshipmen in all regards, including from an oral communication standpoint.

It was also noted several times that the Academy has more rules and regulations than most fleet commands, and it was recommended that the Academy's regulations be pared down. At the same time, it was frequently recommended that the midshipmen be held strictly accountable to the remaining regulations. Several participants felt that the midshipmen must be given real and significant authority and responsibilities, because the way one communicates with others is directly tied to one's responsibilities and authority. It was also felt the professional development classes first class midshipmen take after they have chosen a warfare community should focus on realistic 'what if' scenarios, because such training gives the midshipmen an idea of what the fleet is really like. MG 1 does perhaps the best job at explaining how this recommendation is related to communication education.

I think that the more you can institute a, I don't want to say a class system, but a first class that is different from a second class, that is different from a third class that is different from a fourth class. The more a person knows their place in the institution, then that drives what is expected of them, and the more a person knows where I fit into the organization then they know how to relate to others both seniors and subordinates.... where as in the Marine Corps you always know. You either always know, or you figure it out pretty damn quick where you fit in. You know you figure out, 'I'm a second LT, where do I fit into this meeting of other second LTs?' or, 'where do I fit in to this meeting with gunnies?' or, 'where do I fit into this meeting with the LtCol?' So that helps drive the way you present yourself and the message you send.

NA SEL 2 provides a similar opinion. He believes that if the Academy "gave people [midshipmen] more freedom, you held harder on the standards, you would get a better officer coming out of here." He goes on to state, "I think that sometimes if you treat somebody a certain way, that is how they act."

## **G. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided a summary of data collected in the officer focus groups and senior enlisted interviews. Their statements were looked at from within the context of the secondary research questions, and within each one of these areas of concern broad themes were identified. While the different warfare communities all shared the same main themes, minor differences between warfare communities in the oral communication environment were also addressed. The thoughts and opinions presented in this chapter have been those of the participants with as little modification as possible. Chapter five presents this researcher's conclusions based on the data presented here and the academic literature presented in chapter two.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. CONCLUSIONS

Junior officers arriving at their first operational assignments have already accomplished a great deal. They have completed years of rigorous education and physical conditioning. They have finished some of the most comprehensive and expensive technical training in the world. They have been forced to meet demanding standards on a daily basis. Starting the first day at their new commands, they will be assigned a number of experienced people to lead and millions of dollars in equipment to manage. Yet as far as their new colleagues are concerned, they have proved, and earned, little to nothing. From a communication and social standpoint, junior officers are somewhat analogous to the stereotypical new MBA. Well educated, given immediate responsibilities, but young, inexperienced, and in many ways, lost.

Even though junior officers are unproven newcomers, the data indicate that they are expected to communicate confidently, clearly, and personally. The key to this seeming contradiction is *what* junior officers must be confident and clear about in their communication. Indeed, since the very beginning of this research, the question has been, “what does it mean to be an ‘effective’ communicator?” The answer, and the main conclusion of this research, is that a junior officer who is an effective communicator is one who can acknowledge that he or she is inexperienced and somewhat lost, but is comfortable with these weaknesses because of his or her trust in the organization, and confidence in their abilities to learn and grow.

There are two additional, narrower, conclusions. First, the communication environments of the different warfare communities are stable, with each having clear, yet relatively unspoken, expectations for how junior officers should communicate. Second, the ultimate success or failure of a junior officer to communicate will likely have little to do with his or her communication abilities per se, but rather with the overall positive or negative regard an individual earns within the unit.

## 1. Communication as a Newcomer

The issues of confidence and credibility are like the chicken and egg for junior officers, each is a prerequisite for the other. Perhaps this is the best opening greeting a junior officer could make, “As a new junior officer, I am ignorant of many important customs and values, I am inexperienced, and generally unprepared to make independent decisions. But I am also confident that I will succeed with the help and guidance of those around me.”

The data indicate that excellence in communication requires a candid acknowledgement of the above conditions on the part of the junior officer, but not so as to appear weak. A unique aspect of the military is that all officers were new junior officers on their first assignment at one point in time. The commanding officers of ships, rifle company commanders, and senior pilots all understand the limitations of a new JO because they have been there themselves. The effective JOs are the ones that understand this themselves, and also understand that they have been given positions of authority and responsibility *despite their limitations*. In essence, effective JO oral communication seems to be about communicating a realistic and comfortable understanding of one’s own weaknesses and limitations. Almost all themes from Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of a successful JO support this explanation, not just the common themes of clear, confident, personal, collaborative, and open minded; but also the less frequent themes such as humble, plain, knowing one’s place, reflective, and having a strong quest for knowledge.

Not just the reported knowledge, skills, and abilities of a successful JO indicate the importance of communicating an understanding of one’s weaknesses and limitations, but also the reported weaknesses as well. Arrogance, inappropriate communications, and a lack of confidence are all symptoms of someone who either has misconceptions about their role and importance, is unaware of their weaknesses, or worse still, is in denial about them. None of the participants indicated that they had ever experienced or witnessed a junior officer being reprimanded for not communicating more like a senior officer, but several recounted times when junior officers were chastised for communicating too much like a senior officer.

This conclusion also fits in well with the academic perspective of what junior officers are going through. A positive socialization experience is as much about a JO communicating a desire to be socialized as it is about a JO discovering the underlying cultural norms and assumptions of their new group. Many of the participants' comments support Goffman's (1973) assertion that effective communication starts with the listeners "authorizing" an individual to speak on a given topic. A JO could hardly expect to earn such authorization without first acknowledging that he or she does not yet have it. In the high pressure environments of today's Navy and Marine Corps, junior officers must accept that they do not possess the experience of their subordinates, nor the expertise of their superiors, and communicate this understanding to others. Communicating this overall attitude is more important than anything specific which a junior officer could say.

## **2. Specific Expectations**

All of the participants in each warfare community were able to describe both an effective junior officer communicator and a poor one. Each warfare community has specific expectations regarding junior officer oral communication. This is certainly a better situation for incoming junior officers than an ambiguous environment where they would be unable to determine what was expected from them. Perhaps the biggest point that needs to be made to incoming junior officers is the mere fact that specific expectations exist. They should know that there is a 'correct' way to speak at their new command, and they should therefore strive to figure it out. Future junior officers should not make the assumption that they will be allowed to communicate in any way that they please. The sooner they realize this, the more likely they will be motivated to study the communication habits of the successful junior officers around them and improve their own communication skills.

However, junior officers also need to understand that no one is going to come up to them upon arrival at their new commands and tell them what the specific expectations are. They are for the junior officers to figure out on their own. If they make a conscious effort at doing so, then they will likely learn the rule more quickly and better than those who do not. Similarly, future junior officers should be aware that it is also unlikely that anyone would approach them with specific criticisms regarding poor communication habits. The research does not indicate that communication ability is something that is

overtly discussed or judged. Rather, communication ability is a component of an individuals overall holistic evaluation. That is not to say that if a communication conscious junior officer were to specifically ask for feedback regarding his or her communication abilities that feedback would not be given.

### **3. Authorization**

Some people seem to be blessed and can do no wrong. Others can do nothing right. There is evidence that these statements apply to junior officer oral communication. When asked to describe poor communicators, on several occasions participants gave multiple examples of a particular poor communicator whom they had encountered, who apparently communicated poorly in several different ways. The same could be said about skilled communicators. Participants recounted stories about individuals who were apparently universally skilled communicators. These trends seem to be a result of what Goffman (1973) described as authorization, and the latitude that comes along with it.

When people are evaluating what a junior officer is saying, they are not so much judging what is specifically being said, but whether the person speaking is "authorized" to speak on the subject at hand at all. If the answer is no, then it hardly matters how well the junior officer actually delivers his or her message, because it will be discounted based on a lack of authorization, i.e. credibility. Any mistake on the junior officer's part will just further exasperate the situation, solidifying in the listeners' minds that he or she is not a good speaker. By the same token, once a junior officer had earned "authorization" to speak, what he or she actually says will be evaluated much less stringently and will generally be accepted. Small mistakes will go unnoticed, further adding to the junior officer's positive reputation as a good communicator.

So how do junior officers earn this important authorization? They earn it by establishing individual relationships with those they will be speaking with. This theme came up time and time again from the participants; junior officers must go out to meet and know their subordinates as individuals, and must allow their superiors to get to know them as individuals. Establishing positive individual relationships with subordinates and superiors alike is extremely important if junior officer are going to be viewed as a successful communicator. If they accomplish this early, then their communications will be successful even before they occur, because they will be "authorized."

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO USNA, ROTC COMMANDS, AND OCS**

There was significant agreement between the academic research surveyed for this thesis and the participants' thoughts on education. They agreed that experience and feedback are fundamental components of any successful communication education. Academic literature further suggests that an in-depth assessment should be made of each student's oral communication ability early on in his or her education such that it could be tailored to their specific oral communication needs. Participants further suggested that a more hierarchical culture within the midshipmen ranks would go a long way towards better preparing midshipmen to be effective communicators as junior officers. Several recommendations from both the academic literature and the participants are related to the ways in which academic classes can be structured and taught in ways that have oral communication benefits. Each of these recommendations is explored in further detail in the sections below, to include how they may be specifically implemented.

### **1. Productive Speaking Experiences**

The two main communication roles of a junior officer that were identified in this thesis were a junior officer's role as a leader, and a JO's role as a member of a larger organization where word must be passed from superiors to junior subordinates. Any activity that places future junior officers in either one of these roles is highly encouraged.

There are many creative ways in which one could put a future junior officer in a role where he or she must communicate as a leader. Many involve placing several midshipmen or officer candidates under another's command for the purpose of accomplishing some small task, such as completing an obstacle course, assembling a designated group of midshipmen at a given time and place, or something as simple as cleaning a space. The key is to not let the midshipmen or officer candidate chosen to be the leader for the evolution be a part of the team, or help in the completion of the exercise as a peer with the other future JOs. Instead they must be forced to be somewhat detached from the actual evolution as the leader and must be forced to communicate as such. These teams do not need to be long lasting; they can be constituted for the specific purpose of the exercise at hand which may last only an hour. While this arrangement is different from what awaits them in the fleet, where JOs will be leading longstanding

groups which have a specific purpose, its overriding benefit is that it should enable all future JOs several opportunities to communicate as a leader.

Another leadership communication experience that this research recommends is peer counseling. As has been documented in chapter four, one-to-one counseling represents one of the most important, and one of the most difficult communication challenges facing junior officers in the fleet. Any experience they could gain before reaching the fleet would be extremely useful. Currently, the Naval Academy does have midshipmen evaluating one another on overall performance, but through a computerized evaluation system that requires no oral counseling sessions between midshipmen. The current system could be left in place, but each upper class midshipmen could be assigned a small group of lower class midshipmen to whom he or she must orally deliver their evaluation grades. Some might argue that midshipmen are not old enough or mature enough to conduct such counseling sessions. This research counters that on commissioning day, midshipmen only grow one day older, and are not awarded additional maturity along with their commission. Verbal counseling is a requirement placed on junior officers in the fleet; it should be a requirement placed on future junior officers as well.

There are also several ways one could force future junior officers to communicate as a member of a larger organization, or as it was described in chapter four, a conduit of information. The most fundamental way is to avoid having faculty or a few senior midshipmen or officer candidates put out information to a large group. While this is certainly the most convenient and expeditious method to put out information, it denies most of the future junior officers the chance to do something which they will be expected to do on a daily basis in the fleet. An alternative would be to have the faculty put out information to only the most senior midshipmen, and then have them pass the word to midshipmen of intermediate rank. A specific example for the Naval Academy would be to avoid having the Company Commanders address his or her companies as a group each day before noon meal formation. Instead, the Company Commanders should address only their two platoon commanders at a small meeting. The platoon commanders would then turn around and address the eight squad leaders, who would then pass the word to their squads. While this may sound tedious and unfeasible, this process occurs every day

in the fleet, as documented in chapter four. The gains would be enormous, instead of having one person with experience passing along information, the example above has 11.

The Naval Academy, ROTC Commands, and OCS already provide numerous productive experiences for their future junior officers. Few, however, are designed with oral communication specifically in mind. While future junior officers would benefit from some exercises designed with oral communication experience specifically in mind, the larger point is that every evolution or exercise should be evaluated from a communication standpoint to see how it might provide a better overall experience for the future JOs.

## **2. Oral Communication Feedback**

Providing productive speaking experiences for future junior officers is only a start; each of these experiences must also be accompanied by quality feedback. This feedback should be timely, consistent, and critical. It sounds simple and common sense, but quality feedback regarding oral communication is rarely given. The most likely reason why feedback often does not happen is because it may seem that to achieve these qualities, particularly consistency, that the faculty and staff of training institutions would themselves have to be trained along some universal oral communication metric which dictates a 'right way' to communicate (Kennedy, 1989). That is not the case.

With a basic understanding of the communication environments out in the fleet, and the skills required for a junior officer to be successful there, any faculty member or midshipmen should feel comfortable giving another midshipmen feedback on their oral communication abilities. Feedback represents one's *personal* impressions of a communication, not reference to an ideal or a 'right way' to communicate. Feedback should consist of statements such as "what you just said was confusing," "your speech was very convincing on the following points," "you came across as very empathetic just now," and *not* statements such as "an ideal Marine aviator would have said it this way," or "most surface warfare officers would have disliked the following aspects of your presentation." The purpose of understanding the communication environments in the fleet as far as giving feedback is concerned is to have a general idea of what to look for in a communication. What skills or aspects are the most important and what are the most dangerous mistakes. The actual feedback given is rooted entirely in the speech or

conversation at hand. Reference to the fleet communication environments plays a larger role in assessments, which are discussed below.

### **3. Oral Communication Assessments and Evaluations**

If any institution is going to make a systematic attempt at producing effective communicators, it needs to have robust assessment and evaluation programs. This research distinguishes assessments from feedback in that where feedback is delivered to an individual in response to a speech or a conversation that served some other purpose, assessments are planned speeches or conversations for the specific purpose of evaluating oral communication abilities with reference to some goals or ideal. Assessments are not graded positively or negatively, however, they are for the purpose of collecting objective information. Assessments are also consistent among participants, which enables quantitative and qualitative comparison between individuals, and for individuals over time. There are numerous assessments that are already available. The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has shown that it is possible to consistently assess its entire class of incoming freshman, and there is no reason that the Academy or any ROTC unit could not do the same (Morreale, 1994). This research would suggest that the Academy and ROTC commands perform an assessment of all midshipmen in their first and final years of training. Even though OCS only lasts about 13 weeks, it would still be useful to assess incoming officer candidates. The assessments could be provided to the candidates for future reflection, and significant trends among candidates could be used to adjust the OCS curriculum for future classes of officer candidates.

Because oral communication is so pervasive it is routinely taken for granted. Therefore a comprehensive oral communication assessment would likely serve two important purposes. First, it would make the future junior officers themselves aware of their overall communication style, strengths, and weaknesses. Second, it would allow the training institutions to evaluate and revise their programs based on their communication goals. The institutional benefit of oral communication assessments will be addressed further in a following section, recommendations for further research.

Oral communication evaluations represent another important component of an overall institutional effort to produce effective communicators. Whereas assessments are diagnostic tools without grades, evaluations provide a grade based on performance over

time, usually a period of several months. If the institutions that prepare future junior officers are serious about producing effective communicators, then they must establish consequences for those who do not meet the standards. A specific oral communication evaluation would put midshipmen and officer candidates who were failing to adequately communicate on notice and could provide a positive incentive for those who do it well.

#### **4. Military Environment**

Because junior officers will have real authority over the sailors and Marines in their units, they should be given real authority while midshipmen. JOs are not friends or peers with their junior sailors or Marines, nor are they with their chiefs or staff NCOs, and they do not communicate with them as such. If midshipmen are always communicating with other midshipmen as peers and friends then they will be inexperienced communicating as authority figures when they get out to the fleet. They may be well educated in communication techniques, but as has been shown at numerous points throughout this thesis, experience is just as valuable. Therefore a true four-class system at the Academy and ROTC commands would go a long way to better prepare midshipmen to communicate as junior officers in the fleet. The Academy is currently working towards this large and fundamental goal for several reasons (Allen, 2002). This research indicates that improving oral communication abilities is another reason.

#### **5. Academic Environment**

Three recommendations are made regarding the academic environments at the Naval Academy and at ROTC units. First, as many classes as possible should be in a seminar format instead of lecture format. Seminar format classes require students to speak more during class, and force them to defend their ideas orally in front of their peers and the professor. This type of speaking requires midshipmen to be persuasive, is of a technical nature (for technical classes), and is to a familiar audience, all of which reflects the conditions in which they will be forced to speak as detailed in chapter 4. Specific speaking assignments could include the presentation of homework problems, or assigning a student to explain a short topic from a text to the class. Unfortunately, seminar format classes proceed at a slower pace than lecture format classes and require relatively small classes. The Academic administration could mandate that seminar discussions occur without mandating any specifics, thereby allowing individual professors to maintain a

high degree of autonomy and control over their classrooms, a concern raised by many educators as seen in Kennedy's (1988) research.

A second recommendation is that future junior officers should participate in counseling and interpersonal communication classes. Again, these should be seminar format classes. While such classes are most likely available for some ROTC midshipmen, there are currently no such classes in the Naval Academy Catalog. They should be made a mandatory part of every midshipman's curriculum. Participants and academics agree that interpersonal oral communication represents the majority of anyone's daily oral communications, and counseling represents a particularly challenging, and important, form of interpersonal communication. Interestingly, the United States Naval Academy has all future Company Officers take classes in both communications and counseling. The United States Military Academy at West Point, and the United States Air Force Academy also have similar requirements. The logical extension of this is that communication and counseling are fundamental skills for all officers, and therefore all future officers should be required to take classes in these areas.

The final recommendation concerning academics concerns the Naval Academy's Junior Officer Practicum classes, but could easily be applied to ROTC commands and OCS as well. Junior Officer Practicum classes are warfare specific classes that midshipmen take in their final semester at the Academy after they have been chosen to join a specific warfare community. The classes are taught by junior officers and senior enlisted from that warfare community. This arrangement could hardly be more ideal for an organizational socialization or an oral communication class. One focus, if not the main focus, of capstone classes should be description of communication environment specific to that warfare community. Junior sailors or marines, as well as senior officers, from that community should be brought in to share their perspectives and answer questions. The focus *should not* be tactics or procedures, but the daily routine, values, and organizational norms of that community, to include oral communication norms. While it may seem mundane, something as simple as describing the daily routine, common terms, or social network of the community would be of extreme value for all the future JOs. It would not only help them communicate in an appropriate manner when they get out to the fleet, one of the main weaknesses pointed out by participants, but

would greatly help the overall socialization process. As was stated in chapter 2, socialization occurs to all new members of an organization; the only variable is whether that member is conscious of it or not. Being educated and aware of the socialization process is certainly preferred.

While they have experienced it for themselves, the junior officer instructors for practicum classes should be given training in organizational socialization so they are aware of its importance from an academic standpoint. Then, the midshipmen should be taught organizational socialization so that they are aware of how socialization is going to occur before they get to the fleet and experience it first hand. This subject should be taught in the JO Practicum classes because examples specific to that one warfare community could be used and would be relevant to all the students. ROTC commands and OCS could establish similar capstone courses, also with a focus on communication and socialization. It should be noted that several of the JO Practicum courses currently incorporate many of the elements mentioned here (Department of Seamanship & Navigation, n.d.). This researcher's point is that socialization topics should be made the main, if not exclusive focus, of these classes.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Future research on the topic of junior officer oral communication is warranted on many reasons, not the least of which is that communication environments are always changing, and therefore research must be up to date to remain relevant. Future research may want to incorporate senior officer participants and direct surveying of the fleet.

The bulk of junior officer oral communication is conducted with individuals one step up and one step down the chain of command, namely department heads, peers, and senior enlisted. This research had junior officer participants and senior enlisted participants, but did not include any senior officers. Because of their different perspective senior officers would likely have some valuable insight into junior officer oral communication. It should also be noted that senior officers were junior officers themselves once, and therefore also have their own personal junior officer experiences to share. Senior officers were not included in this research due to a lack of time.

Because so many of the recommendations for education were centered around the general theme of making the communication environments of the USNA, ROTC units, and OCS more like those found in the fleet, it would be beneficial if someone were to conduct a systematic assessment comparing midshipmen communication habits and communication habits out in the fleet. For example, a common survey could be given to midshipmen, ROTC students, officer candidates, and junior officers in the fleet. Researchers would then be able to quantitatively compare any differences in the oral communication environments of these groups. A recommendation is that the United States Naval Academy take the lead on this potentially important research, as they have a dedicated institutional research department and experience surveying the fleet.

It is appropriate to close with a return to the topic of assessments. The communication assessments recommended above in section B would provide an excellent source of future research projects. Data could be evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of future communication initiatives. At the Academy and ROTC units, longitudinal analysis could gauge the progression of midshipmen communication abilities over their years in training. An ethnographic analysis may discover differences in communication abilities based on demographic differences in the midshipmen population. Any of these research projects could make extremely valuable contributions to the overall effectiveness of institutions that produce the future leaders of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. As institutions they must commit themselves to supporting thorough and critical assessment and analysis in the field of communications if they are going to excel at producing effective communicators.

**APPENDIX A: INITIAL ASSIGNMENT OF NAVAL ACADEMY  
GRADUATES 1990-2003**

<b>NAVY UNRESTR LINE/USMC</b>	<b>'90</b>	<b>'91</b>	<b>'92</b>	<b>'93</b>	<b>'94</b>	<b>'95</b>	<b>'96</b>	<b>'97</b>	<b>'98</b>	<b>'99</b>	<b>'00</b>	<b>'01</b>	<b>'02</b>	<b>'03</b>
Surface	247	260	283	281	329	221	233	222	209	193	193	186	211	224
Pilot Training	233	210	230	215	145	210	231	240	250	230	233	242	257	268
Naval Flight Officer Training	113	104	114	108	56	100	99	90	79	80	100	59	88	77
Submarines	134	101	90	103	90	87	69	99	104	116	123	148	131	138
U. S. Marine Corps	93	97	142	176	180	118	161	160	153	148	157	154	165	168
Special Warfare	20	19	10	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
Surface (Oceanography)	2	5	4	6	7	8	9	7	7	7	7	10	10	9
Surface (Engineering Duty)	4	5	0	0	6	9	8	3	4	4	7	7	7	7
Surface (Nuclear)	37	41	18	15	28	37	15	49	27	37	44	43	45	39
Special Operations	4	7	10	9	10	8	8	8	9	10	11	10	11	14
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>841</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>960</b>
<b>RESTRICTED LINE</b>	<b>'90</b>	<b>'91</b>	<b>'92</b>	<b>'93</b>	<b>'94</b>	<b>'95</b>	<b>'96</b>	<b>'97</b>	<b>'98</b>	<b>'99</b>	<b>'00</b>	<b>'01</b>	<b>'02</b>	<b>'03</b>
1400 - Eng Duty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1510 - Aeronautical Eng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1520 - Aviation Maintenance	1	1	0	1	1	3	3	3	4	4	0	1	1	0
1610 - Crypto/Security	8	2	3	4	2	4	2	2	4	5	3	4	6	4
1630 - Intelligence	4	5	5	5	9	12	12	7	5	5	4	4	3	3
1650 - Public Affairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820 - Meteorology/Ocean (Geophysics)	3	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0
1605 - Information													1	0

Professional														
1405 - Human Resources Professional														1
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>STAFF CORPS</b>	<b>'90</b>	<b>'91</b>	<b>'92</b>	<b>'93</b>	<b>'94</b>	<b>'95</b>	<b>'96</b>	<b>'97</b>	<b>'98</b>	<b>'99</b>	<b>'00</b>	<b>'01</b>	<b>'02</b>	<b>'03</b>
1960 - Medical Scholarship	8	8	14	18	13	13	16	15	6	13	13	13	10	5
1100 - Gen. Unrestricted Line	36	28	40	40	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
3100 - Supply Corps	39	40	31	30	24	38	16	15	29	19	10	10	8	6
1700 - Fleet Support	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
5100 - Civil Eng Corps	10	11	10	8	8	7	7	7	4	4	6	2	5	2
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>OTHER</b>	<b>'90</b>	<b>'91</b>	<b>'92</b>	<b>'93</b>	<b>'94</b>	<b>'95</b>	<b>'96</b>	<b>'97</b>	<b>'98</b>	<b>'99</b>	<b>'00</b>	<b>'01</b>	<b>'02</b>	<b>'03</b>
Air Force	4	6	7	13	3	6	4	7	2	2	2	1	2	2
Army	0	0	0	2	2	2	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
NPQ (Not Commissioned)	4	1	4	1	2	4	1	0	3	1	6	0	0	3
Foreign Nationals	4	8	12	12	6	7	7	9	9	10	8	10	4	8
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1008</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>1028</b>	<b>1064</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>981</b>	<b>994</b>

Source: USNA Institutional Research Department. Used with permission.

## APPENDIX B: OFFICER FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Person	Specific community	Rank upon arrival	Rank upon departure	Total number of people at first command	Total number of first tour junior officers at first command	Rank of immediate superior	Average number of sailors/marines assigned to a first tour JO
SUB 1	N/A	ENS	LT	165	8	LCDR	8
SUB 2	DIVER	ENS	LT	170	9-10	LT-LCDR	10
SUB 3	N/A	ENS	LT	150	5	LCDR	10
SUB 4	N/A	ENS	LT	165	9	LT-LCDR	12
NA 1	HSL	LTJG	LT	135	17	LCDR	35
NA 2	HSL	LTJG	LT	300	40	LCDR	15
NA 3	JETS, EA-6B PROWLERS	LTJG	LT	200	15	LCDR	50
NA 4	HC	LTJG	LT	300	25-30	LCDR	40
NA 5	HSL	LTJG	LT	125	15	LCDR	8
SWO 1	DESTROYERS	ENS	LTJG	310	8	LT	10-20
SWO 2	N/A	ENS	LTJG	350	12	LT	15
SWO 3	DESTROYERS	ENS	LTJG	300		LT	18-25
SWO 4	DESTROYERS	ENS	LTJG	340	10-15	LT	10-15
MA 1	FIXED WING	CAPT	CAPT	250	5	MAJ	3-30
MA 2	CH-53E	1ST LT	CAPT	500	20	MAJ	5-45
MA 3	HELO	1ST LT	CAPT	110	15	MAJ	5
MA 4	CH-53E	1ST LT	CAPT	250	20	MAJ	3
MG 1	ARMOR COMBAT	2ND LT	CAPT	1400	15	CAPT	20
MG 2	ENGINEERING	2ND LT	CAPT 1ST	700	10-12	CAPT	40
MG 3	ARTILLERY	2ND LT	LT 1ST	450	10	CAPT	110
MG 4	INFANTRY	2ND LT	LT	160	20	CAPT	35
MG 5	INTEL/RECON	2ND LT	CAPT	350	1	CAPT	40

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## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### Primary Questions

- **Receive:** Who does a junior officer receive important information and directions from? What form and in what venue does this information arrive?
- **Transmit:** To whom must a junior officer communicate information or give directions to? How and when does he do this?
- **Context:** What types of oral communication must a junior officer be skilled at in order to be successful?
- **Informal:** What opportunities are there for informal social conversations during a work day for a junior officer? With whom and when do these conversations occur?
- **Training:** What could have better prepared you for the communications challenges you faced at your first command?

### Probes

Join probes to main questions or use 'stand-alone' to get personal stories and opinions from group members

#### General

- Walk me through a normal day at work.
- Who/what do you normally talk to/about first when you get to work?
- Who/what do you talk to/about before you go home (or to the rack)?
- Think back to a junior officer who seemed to struggle with communications. How would you characterize his/her communication deficiencies?

#### Receive

- Who/what do you normally talk to/about first when you get to work?
- When you get to work in the morning (or get out of the rack), how do you find out what you need to be doing for the day?
- If I need an answer about something, or want to find out what is going on, I go talk to...?

#### Transmit

- Who/what do you normally talk to/about first when you get to work?

#### Context

- Can you think of any junior officers who were successful and good communicators? How would you characterize their communication abilities or style?

#### Informal

- Are junior officers and their immediate superiors close socially? How about JO's and the CO?
- Describe the relationship of a JO to the senior enlisted at your command.

### Training

- What best prepared you for the communications tasks you faced?
- What additional training might have better prepared you?

### Tests

These questions are essentially the rephrasing of a subject's answers and giving it back to them for approval. Maybe I have misunderstood them or maybe when they hear what they said previously, they don't like the way it sounds.

- From looking at what we have said so far, it seems like \_\_\_\_\_ is the most important person a JO needs to be able to communicate with. Does that still sound right?
- It seems like most communications could be describes as \_\_\_\_\_, is that right?
- It doesn't sound like \_\_\_\_\_ is very important, does the group agree with that?
- It sounds like the most frequent communications occur with \_\_\_\_\_ and that you rarely communicate directly with \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX D: SENIOR ENLISTED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Explain purpose of the interview. Why you are interviewing senior enlisted. Explain the point of view they have to share and why it is unique.

Q: Describe the relationship between senior enlisted and junior officers in your community.

- Get information about rank, relationship, expertise, how they relate to one another on the job
- Get an example, have them tell a story about a typical way that senior enlisted and JO would work together
- What were the jobs assigned to first tour marine officers at your commands?

Q: How does the relationship change from the time the junior officer comes onboard to the time they leave their first tour of duty?

- How would you typically meet the new officers who checked?
- Were there any junior officers where you got to see their whole tour?
- What is the nature of the relationship with incoming JO's versus those who are more experienced?

Q: Think of the most outstanding JO's you have worked with. How would characterize them? What made them stand out?

Q: How would you characterize the communication skills required for junior officers?

- Who do they interact with?
- How much is formal vs. informal?
- What types of communication do they do?
- Provide examples

Q: What do see as the communication strengths and weaknesses of JO's?

- What to they seem to do well?
- Where do they struggle the most? What are their biggest challenges?
- Examples of JO's communicating well. Examples of typical challenges.

Q: What suggestions do you have for improving the communication abilities of junior officers?

- Could USNA/ROTC do something to better prepare them?
- What on-the-job training would improve their communication skills?

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