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Quantifying Mavericks: Institutional Fit, Risk, and Reward in Military Organizations

March 2026

LCDR Richard A. Andrews II, USN

Thesis Advisors: Dr. Nicholas Dew, Lecturer
Dr. Simona L. Tick, Senior Lecturer

Department of Acquisition, Finance and Manpower

Naval Postgraduate School

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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ABSTRACT

Militaries depend on procedural compliance, yet strategic adaptation comes from individuals willing to challenge prevailing assumptions. Despite historical accounts of “mavericks,” the concept is largely descriptive. This study develops and tests a measurable construct of military maverickism using personality data linked to longitudinal career outcomes.

Drawing on five-factor personality theory, the Dominance x Openness x Exertion – Agreeableness (DOX-A) construct captures assertiveness, mental range, drive, and reduced conformity using facets from the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS). The sample includes 49,393 enlisted accessions from FY09–FY13, followed to FY18. Logistic regression models estimate the relationship between standardized maverickism and selection into Special Forces, enlisted-to-officer commissioning, demotion, and discharge with a General characterization, controlling for Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) percentile and demographics.

Maverickism has meaningful variation and predicts exceptional performance and higher disciplinary risk. Cognitive capacity significantly moderates these effects: above-median AFQT reduces adverse outcomes and amplifies positive ones.

These findings identify a measurable tradeoff. Maverick traits generate asymmetric institutional returns conditional on cognitive capacity, providing an empirical foundation for managing unconventional talent in hierarchical organizations.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFQT	Armed Forces Qualification Test
ASI	Additional Skill Indicator
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
BCD	Bad Conduct Discharge
DD	Dishonorable Discharge
DIU	Defense Innovation Unit
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DODHRA	Depart of Defense Human Resources Activity
DOX-A	Dominance x Openness x Exertion – Agreeableness
GRGB	Get Real, Get Better
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
OTH	Other than Honorable Discharge
SF	Special Forces
SFAS	Special Forces Assessment and Selection
SFQC	Special Forces Qualification Course
TAPAS	Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System
UCMJ	Uniform Code of Military Justice



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Modern military institutions rely on standardization, discipline, and procedural compliance to generate reliability under stressful conditions. Yet history repeatedly demonstrates that moments of strategic inflection often hinge on individuals willing to challenge prevailing assumptions. These individuals—commonly labelled “mavericks”—are alternately celebrated as visionaries or criticized as disruptive outliers. Nonetheless, the term has remained primarily descriptive. Institutions have lacked a systematic way to identify who these individuals are, how many exist within the organization, and whether their presence adds value or cost.

This study converts maverickism in the military from a descriptor to a measurable construct.

Using the five factor model of personality theory, research on innovation, entrepreneurship, and mavericks, and military-specific assessment data, I developed a construct to capture traits associated with unconventional, independent, and driven behavior. Unlike additive personality tests, the construct is multiplicative, reflecting the premise that maverickism requires simultaneous elevation across core dimensions rather than compensation among them. The construct draws on TAPAS facets administered at accession and was standardized across a multi-year enlisted cohort.

Three research questions guided the analysis:

1. Can a measurable personality construct capturing maverickism be derived from existing military data?
2. How is maverickism distributed across the force, and does it predict meaningful career outcomes?
3. Do emotional regulation or cognitive capacity moderate these relationships?

The findings support the construct’s validity and reveal a conditional tradeoff embedded within military force management.



First, maverickism is measurable and reliably constructed from existing assessment data. The construct captures a specific psychological configuration: individuals who combine assertiveness and personal agency (Dominance), intellectual scope and tolerance for alternative perspectives (Openness), and internal drive (Exertion), while exhibiting comparatively lower deference to social harmony and rule adherence (Agreeableness penalty). It is represented by the acronym DOX-A and formulated as:

$$\text{Maverickism } (M_{raw,i}) = (D_i \times O_i \times X_i) - (10 \times A_i)$$

The multiplicative structure reflects that these traits must co-occur; high openness without agency produces reflection without action, and high drive without independence produces compliant effort rather than dissent. Distributional diagnostics indicate that this configuration is present in meaningful variation across the force, even within a population already shaped by screening standards and self-selection into a hierarchical institution.

Second, maverickism predicts consequential career outcomes. Higher maverickism scores are associated with increased odds of selection into Special Forces and enlisted-to-officer commissioning—outcomes linked to high performance and leadership potential. At the same time, higher maverickism is also associated with increased odds of demotion and a discharge characterization of General, which is a step below Honorable and limits both education and federal employment benefits. The pattern is not contradictory, but a consequence of the fact that unconventional thinking leads to institutional friction.

Third, cognitive capacity significantly moderates these effects. When paired with above-median AFQT scores, maverickism is associated with disproportionate institutional value and reduced adverse outcomes. Below that threshold, the risk of negative outcomes increases. Emotional self-control, by contrast, does not significantly moderate the relationship.

Taken together, the results reveal a measurable allocation problem. Maverick traits are neither uniformly beneficial nor inherently undermining. Their institutional value depends on combining unconventional disposition with sufficient cognitive capacity. Other



research indicates that the right placement and sponsorship also contribute to gaining the most from mavericks.

These findings have implications for accession screening, talent management, and force design. Institutions that optimize exclusively for procedural compliance risk suppressing individuals capable of strategic reframing. Conversely, unmanaged density of high-maverick personnel may increase friction without a corresponding gain. The evidence suggests that the challenge is not whether mavericks should exist within the force, but how they should be identified, developed, and positioned.

This research does not argue for indiscriminate elevation of unconventional personalities. Rather, it demonstrates that maverickism can be quantified, that it predicts both risk and reward, and that its institutional impact is conditional. By moving from anecdote to measurement, this study provides a foundation for deliberate, evidence-based decisions about how military organizations manage dissent, innovation, and talent under conditions of uncertainty.



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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE PROBLEM

Every military organization values discipline; every adversary exploits predictability. Institutions that suppress dissent are prone to calcification. Institutions that fail to enforce their norms fracture. How an organization manages this tension—leveraging nonconformity without surrendering order—determines whether it adapts or declines.

In his *Fighting Instructions* (2026), the Chief of Naval Operations calls for naval forces capable of adapting. He wants the fleet manned by Sailors who “know how to do what’s needed without thinking so linearly” as they do in their daily duties (Ceder, 2026). This demand for adaptive capacity reflects a persistent tension in military units between training and evolving. Militaries optimize for replication and coordination, and they excel at scaling proven methods and performing in high-stress conditions. They struggle with absorbing and processing unorthodox perspectives that challenge those methods. They miss out on improvements that require deviation from the status quo.

Fortunately, there are individuals who are predisposed to resist standardization and instead chart a different course. They are not merely contrarians; they identify new tools, processes, or structures, or apply existing methods in novel ways to improve performance. In addition to uncommon minds, they combine nonconformity with a willingness to challenge established approaches.

In this thesis, I adopt the term “mavericks” for such people. I endeavor to capture an element of rebelliousness that is necessary for new ideas to emerge in an entrenched, hierarchical bureaucracy, such as the military. Indeed, those who advocate for change in the military do so while serving under superiors who succeeded in the existing system. Therefore, change requires more than persuasion. Mavericks must call for novelty while being evaluated according to current norms. They assume a risk to personal success as a result.



These individuals raise a fundamental question for military personnel management: Can maverick traits be measured, and if so, what do they predict about military careers? Importantly, how can organizations identify and leverage such individuals systematically?

The stakes are greater than individual careers. Military effectiveness requires human capital optimization, with forces capable of both disciplined operation and adaptive execution. Moreover, militaries maintain a competitive advantage by improving their war-fighting capabilities. To that end, revolutions in military affairs (i.e., carrier aviation, long-range precision fires) are infrequent. Between these major shifts, competitive advantage accrues at the margins through incremental improvement in the daily duties, procedures, and organizational processes.

This study distinguishes between technical innovation and institutional dissent; the focus is not on who invents new tools, but on who challenges prevailing assumptions. Standard economic logic suggests organizations should produce until marginal cost equals marginal return. Once a service member is recruited, trained, and exposed to internal systems, the fixed costs of that accession and training are sunk. At that point, capturing that service member's ideas for improvement is value added, even if the proposed solutions fail more often than not. If the marginal cost of experimentation is low relative to the marginal benefit of a successful adaptation, then organizations should tolerate high failure rates and have an appetite for idea generation.

Mavericks offer this exact optionality. They challenge the status quo, particularly when processes are ineffective. They propose changes to established methods and identify opportunities for improvement overlooked by those who prefer to excel at existing systems. Some of their ideas may fail, but the alternative—never attempting to improve and not learning from failure—ensures defeat when adversaries adapt faster.

Reaping the benefits of maverick contributions within institutions that are designed for replication is no simple feat. Militaries codify doctrine, emphasize training, and certify based on standards. The inverse—soliciting dissenting views, evaluating challenges, and protecting those who question authority—is not nearly as easy. The Navy's *Get Real, Get Better* (GRGB) initiative acknowledges this asymmetry and calls on Sailors to “self-



correct, self-assess, solve problems and learn better than any potential adversary” (Gilday, 2022, p. 1). Yet achieving psychological safety and building a learning organization requires more than proclamations and culture shifts. The personnel challenge is not how to encourage dissent in the abstract, but how to distinguish productive dissent from corrosive noncompliance. One potential avenue is to use personnel systems to identify those who are already inclined to apply the GRGB mindset. Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google and former Chairman of the Defense Industrial Advisory Board, in testimony to Congress, spoke of such individuals:

“I consistently meet brilliant, creative, entrepreneurial people in DoD with novel and implementable ideas, but they are fighting against entrenched processes and regulations that – in some cases – haven’t been modified in decades... Early on, I reached a fundamental conclusion that has been borne out over time: DoD does not have an innovation problem; it has an innovation adoption problem.” (2018, p. 2)

Of course, mavericks are neither panacea nor uniformly valuable. A disposition toward nonconformity tends to generate friction in an organization. Without also offering something of value, they are contrarians expressing discontent, frustrating superiors, and adding noise that will further hide signals of real opportunities for growth. They impose the costs of investigations, disciplinary proceedings, and eroded relationships. An entire unit of mavericks will be hard pressed to accomplish its mission.

Despite extensive research on cognitive ability, personality, and retention, no validated construct isolates the trait configuration associated with institutional dissent and tests its military career consequences. There is a gap, then, in identifying mavericks, determining whether their contributions exceed their institutional friction and, if possible, distinguishing those who add value from those who impose net costs. Without such a determination, organizations must choose between tolerating all mavericks and absorbing the friction costs or suppressing all mavericks and forfeiting their boost in adaptive capacity.

I attempt to resolve that dilemma by empirically testing for maverickism—a composite of maverick traits—and exploring how those traits affect career outcomes. Using results from the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS) and



administrative personnel data from 49,393 U.S. Army Soldiers who enlisted between 2009 and 2013, I analyze how maverick traits are predictive of Special Forces selection, enlisted-to-officer commissioning, demotion, and involuntary separation. I then assess the extent to which emotional regulation, as measured by TAPAS, or cognitive capacity, as measured by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), moderates those results. The findings provide a quantitative foundation for force management strategies that leverage maverick contributions while managing institutional risk.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

Research Question 1: Can a measurable personality construct capturing maverickism be derived from existing military personality assessment data?

Research Question 2: How is maverickism distributed across the force, and does it predict meaningful military career outcomes?

Research Question 3: Do emotional regulation and cognitive capacity moderate the relationship between maverickism and career outcomes?

Hypothesis 1: A personality construct characterized by high openness and curiosity, high agency and drive, and low agreeableness and conformity can reliably be constructed from TAPAS scores.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of maverickism are associated with career outcomes, including increased risk of early attrition and variation in advancement and selection outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional regulation and cognitive capacity moderate the relationship between maverickism and career outcomes.

C. ROADMAP

This thesis proceeds in seven additional chapters. Chapter II provides background on military personnel systems and accession processes. Chapter III reviews the literature on mavericks and related personality constructs. Chapter IV describes the data and sample. Chapter V develops the maverick construct and outlines the analytic strategy. Chapter VI



presents the empirical findings. Chapter VII discusses implications for talent management and institutional design. Chapter VIII concludes and identifies directions for future research.



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II. BACKGROUND

For those who have spent significant time in or around the U.S. military, this chapter will be familiar (and unnecessary to understand the ensuing analysis; feel free to skim). For others, I aim to provide just enough context around military careers and policies to enable an understanding of my findings. First, I summarize military personnel systems, including rank structure, promotion and demotion, separation procedures, and the path from enlisted to commissioned officer. Then, I describe the basics of assessment and selection with regard to both the cognitive and non-cognitive (i.e., personality) testing upon accession, selection into Special Forces, and pre-enlistment waivers.

A. MILITARY PERSONNEL SYSTEMS

From the moment of entry to final separation, military members exist in a highly regulated personnel system. Where any member fits within the organization is both clearly defined and transparently displayed through rank and title. A member's value is not defined by rank, but rank tends to reflect experience, skill, and trust the organization has in an individual.

1. Rank Structure and Career Progression

The U.S. Army has three distinct career tracks: enlisted soldiers, commissioned officers, and warrant officers. Each track has its own ranks, promotion timelines and measures, and roles.

Enlisted soldiers make up the majority of the Army. Ranks, or pay grades, range from E-1 to E-9. Junior enlisted (E-1 to E-4) typically serve in roles executing orders, building technical expertise, and following procedures. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs, E-5 to E-6) begin to supervise and train personnel. Senior NCOs (E-7 to E-9) advise commanders, mentor junior leaders, and contribute strategic guidance (Department of the Army, 2019). While timelines vary, a soldier typically reaches E-4 within three to four years, E-5 within five to seven years, and E-7 within 10 to 15 years.



Commissioned officers hold pay grades from O-1 to O-10. To become an officer, one must have earned a bachelor's degree and commissioned.¹ The typical officer enters at O-1 and promotes to O-3 within four years. Then, promotion becomes competitive and selective, with fewer than 50% of O-3s reaching O-5 (Kane, 2012).

Warrant officers exist between enlisted and officer ranks, filling the role of technical experts. Unlike officers, who rotate through assignments to broaden experience and prepare leaders, warrant officers focus on mastery of a specialized field such as aviation or cyber operations. Becoming a warrant officer requires six to eight years of prior enlisted service and a competitive selection process. In addition to expertise, warrant officers provide advice to senior leaders but generally do not hold routine management responsibilities (U.S. Army Warrant Officer Career College, 2021).

Advancement on all three tracks requires time in service, time in grade, and performance evaluations. For senior ranks, board selection becomes part of the promotion process. The Army also mandates separation for soldiers who do not advance within certain timelines—an “up or out” policy—which incentivizes of traditionalism and conformity with organizational norms and standards to improve odds of promotion.

2. Promotion and Demotion Mechanisms

Promotion to E-2, and through E-4, is essentially automatic once time in service and training standards are met, though it can be accelerated for merit, or delayed due to discipline (Department of the Army, 2019). Getting to E-5 and beyond requires competition at an Army-wide board that considers each soldier's entire career history. The same is true for officers, who rise to O-3 unless they commit misconduct, fail to complete required training, or some other disqualifying circumstance.

Demotion, on the other hand, is rare. Known as “reduction in rank,” demotion can be punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) for misconduct (Department of the Army, 2019). The effects of demotion include reduced pay, loss of

¹ Commissioning generally occurs through one of three pathways: the U.S. Military Academy, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), or Officer Candidate School (OCS).



authority, adverse personnel file documentation, and delayed consideration for promotion. While the Army does not publish details, one study found that approximately 4% of soldiers promoted to E-5 were demoted within 24 months (Hosek et al., 2018).

3. Service Obligations and Separation Types

Enlisted soldiers initially commit to serve on active duty for three to six years, with the length dependent on their chosen occupational specialty as well as any bonuses or incentives received (Department of Defense, 2019). Soldiers may leave service at the end of their contract, or choose to extend their contract, or reenlist on a new contract. Those who complete their contract and leave are typically given an honorable discharge, while those who are involuntarily separated prior to the end of their obligated service undergo a record review to determine the characterization of service. There are five characterizations possible.

Honorable discharges represent completion of service with satisfactory conduct and performance. Soldiers receive full veterans' benefits, including education assistance (GI Bill), access to healthcare, home loan guarantees, and federal employment preference. Approximately 80–85% of service members leave the military with an honorable discharge (Holliday, S. B. et al., 2017).

General (Under Honorable Conditions) discharges are awarded to those whose service was overall satisfactory but marked by significant misconduct or performance deficiencies. Soldiers receive most benefits, but GI Bill education benefits may be withheld, and federal employment preference is limited (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). General discharges are given in approximately 10% of enlisted separations. Three characterizations—Other-than-Honorable (OTH), Bad Conduct (BCD), and Dishonorable (DD)—are limited to instances of misconduct and result in the loss of essentially all veterans' benefits. These characterizations are rare, with only 5% of separating soldiers receiving an OTH, and no more than 1% percent combined receiving a BCD or DD (Holliday, S. B. et al., 2017).



4. The Mustang Pathway (Enlisted-to-Officer Commissioning)

“Mustang” is an informal term applied to commissioned officers who have prior service as enlisted members (Marine Corps Mustang Association, 2026). While Reserve Officer Training Corps—a program completed during undergraduate education—and Officer Candidate School are options, enlisted soldiers are also able to pursue the Army’s “Green to Gold” program (U.S. Army, 2026). “Green to Gold” provides financial assistance and support to qualified soldiers who have met the minimum time in service and testing requirements. The Army does not provide information on the selectivity of Green to Gold, but states that it is competitive.

B. ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

1. Cognitive Aptitude Testing

The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is a multiple-choice test taken by everyone seeking to enlist in the military to assess cognitive abilities and predict training success (Department of Defense, 2018). The ASVAB has ten subtests, covering math, verbal, spatial, and technical knowledge. ASVAB scores are percentiles ranging from 1 to 99 and are relative to a nationally representative norming sample.

The Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) is a score comprised of four of the ASVAB subtests: arithmetic reasoning, mathematics knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and word knowledge. It is the primary measure of general cognitive ability within military accessions (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2006). AFQT scores are also presented as percentiles. The Army has a minimum AFQT score of 31 for those with a high school diploma, but the service has, at times, lowered the minimum in order to meet recruiting goals (U.S. Army Recruiting Command, 2019). The AFQT correlates strongly ($r = 0.8$) with civilian IQ tests and predicts military performance, training completion, and advancement, as well as maintains stability over time (McGrevy et al., 1974; Orme, D. R. et al., 2001).



2. Noncognitive Personality Assessment

The Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS) is a forced-choice, computer-adaptive personality inventory that supplements the ASVAB in military accessions screening (Drasgow et al., 2012). TAPAS measures personality traits predictive of performance and attrition. TAPAS testing occurs at Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) prior to enlistment, typically during the same session as the ASVAB. I dive deeper into TAPAS research in the literature review.

3. Special Forces Selection Process

The U.S. Army Special Forces (SF), also known as “Green Berets,” are the Army’s elite unconventional warfare component. SF soldiers carry out missions requiring cultural expertise, foreign language ability, advanced tactics, and the capability to operate autonomously in ambiguous environments (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2020). Selection for SF is one of the most difficult career paths available to enlisted soldiers, requiring completion of multiple phases of testing and training.

Phase I is the Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) course, where soldiers are evaluated over 24 days of events requiring physical fitness, mental resilience, and teamwork under stressful conditions. More than half of those attempting SFAS do not complete it (Farina et al., 2019). Phase II is the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC), during which a soldier receives training in one of five specialties: weapons (18B), engineering (18C), medical (18D), communications (18E), or intelligence (18F). SFQC lasts from 45 to 64 weeks, dependent on specialty (Army National Guard, 2026). Historical records indicate SFQC graduation rates were between 72% and 85%, with lower rate in medical specialty (Diana et al., 1995).

While this research is not about SF selection, I use it as one proxy of recognition of drive, capacity, and potential. In order to test whether someone has personality traits more likely to lead to innovation, SF selection may work to indicate whether traits linked with friction in conventional roles also lead to success in units that promote unconventional approaches.



4. Waiver Policies

Military candidates who do not meet eligibility criteria, whether for medical or past conduct reasons, may seek a waiver, which is a formal exception to policy that allow enlistment to continue despite the disqualifying trait or condition (Department of the Army, 2018). The number of waivers issued varies by year; total waiver counts for Army candidates were 6,700 in FY2016 to over 8,000 in FY2017 (Baldor, 2017). Between FY2001 and FY2018, 14.7 percent of all Army accessions required a conduct waiver, with 32 percent of them for a “non-traffic offense” (Asch et al., 2021).

For this thesis, waiver status offers some indicator of behavioral deviance prior to military service. This allows for testing of whether maverickism correlates with documented rule breaking outside of a military context.



III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. DEFINING THE MAVERICK

In 1845, on an island on the Texas Gulf Coast, a lawyer took possession of a herd of cattle as repayment of a debt. As the story goes, the lawyer did not know what to do with the cows, so he left them on the island where they grazed and multiplied. He also left the cattle unbranded, even after they eventually arrived on the mainland. Other cowboys began to use the lawyer's name to refer to the cattle—"Maverick's"—and eventually any unbranded animal became a "maverick" (Fisher, 2017). Thus, Samuel Maverick's name drifted from a literal description of livestock to a metaphor for someone who was unbound and unconstrained by the norms of ownership and allegiance.

The metaphor stuck. In popular business books, "maverick" became a useful label for an employee who demonstrated independent thinking, resisted bureaucracy, and challenged the status quo. Blohowiak (1992) wrote the first of such books, drawing on his personal experience as an employee and manager, his observations of geographically disparate companies, academic research in psychology, business, and other social sciences, and interviews with executives, employees, and consultants. He described mavericks as employees whose imagination mattered as much as, or more than, their production. He argued that management's predisposition to treat workers as "the work force or troops or labor," rather than individuals, smothered the valuable creative ideas those workers could contribute (p. 14). In his view, the maverick is the one who can aid a business in growing beyond the way things have always been done.

A generation later, Taylor and LaBarre (2006) extended the maverick concept beyond individuals to organizations. They assessed practices and interviewed key personnel at 32 organizations, including publicly traded companies, private enterprises, and non-profits. They presented mavericks who were startup founders, executives, and others who reimagined how an industry does business. While each unique, they had similar and familiar traits: creative, curious, and preferring openness over scripted roles. The authors quote Yahoo!'s chief personnel executive, who described the ideal candidate for a



disruptive (i.e., maverick) business: “They’re curious and energetic. They value openness and want to live unbridled and unrestricted” (p. 207).²

Similar books continue to offer a qualitative, case-study based approach in other contexts. In education, Baugh & Juliani (2018) recognized maverick teachers who deviated from the prescribed curriculum to improve student outcomes. In music, Broyles (2008) documented the maverick approaches by American composers. Business writing continues to profile mavericks and maverick practices to inspire readers to achieve success through unconventional leadership (e.g., Germain, 2017; Lewis et al., 2022; Haddon, 2023). In sales, Burns (2008) hails mavericks as smart, knowledgeable, and continuously learning. Kotler & Wheal (2017) draw on both maverick scientists and military operators who found high performance through altered states and extreme conditions.

Through all these works, the maverick metaphor performed heavy lifting, describing creative employees, leaders who broke the rules, founders who refused to compete in the status quo, and even entire organizations. This breadth of scope is valuable to the extent it offers a clear signal that, across multiple domains, certain individuals and organizations deviate from the status quo and, in doing so, they achieve outsized performance. However, applying “maverick” to everything from an unusual salesman to an imaginative startup reduces the clarity of the term’s meaning.

Military writing succumbs to this shortcoming as well. The role of the maverick in a military context tends to manifest as biographies or memoirs of well-known senior officers. Some of these books describe the subject as a maverick due to an independent streak or a commitment to internal values over societal pressures (e.g., Rose, 2007; Essex-Clark, 2014; Crozier, 2023). Others highlight a shift in position, reflecting a willingness to change (Schmidt, 2014). Harvey (2008) identified certain traits—restless, eccentric, courageous, opportunistic, intelligent, determined, and unconcerned with the rule—as those common to “maverick military leaders,” despite their other differences. Yet again, the essence is similar, but the application remains loose, with “maverick” applied to any

² At the time, these traits were described as, “The Y-Gene,” a reference to Yahoo!’s approach to personnel.



officer who performs not quite in the same manner as his peers. These assessments also omit whether such differences are the result of genetics, formative experience, or a response to incentives, thereby attributing a type and overlooking environmental factors.

Ridler (2018) applied a narrower aperture. He defined “mavericks of war” as unconventional experts who “fill gaps of knowledge and ignorance . . . challenge conventional wisdom . . . [and] speak truth to power” (p. 252). Through several case studies, he demonstrated the primary value of mavericks is in their ideas. Each of the identified mavericks had deep cultural and geographic knowledge of the peoples and regions involved in the conflict, a commitment to learning, and a willingness to challenge assumptions. Ridler also identified environmental factors that extend or suppress a maverick’s contributions. Mavericks need senior leaders who can protect them within a hierarchy; they need financial resources to test and develop their ideas; and they benefit from “career immunity” that frees them from the typical penalties when they step away from the traditional career path. Without these conditions, the valuable ideas and unorthodox positions are likely to remain private thoughts rather than contributions. Notably, Ridler intentionally excluded military professionals who obtained additional education or became experts in another field, considering “‘Soldier-Scholars’ to be a kindred spirit” to mavericks, but distinct (p. 9).

Considering all the works together, popular and military writing meet in a description of mavericks as independent, creative, and norm-defying. Many are described in a heroic fashion because of their abilities to both see what others do not, and to push that vision into being. However, settling on a definition solely from similar traits would fail to address a few significant issues. First, the writing is primarily *post hoc*, labelling individuals as mavericks because they were both successful and unconventional, without considering all their unconventional fellows who did not find success. Second, the same word is used for behaviors that range from disagreement to insubordination. Third, in both business and military contexts, authors apply a maverick label based on actions rather than the underlying personality. Or, if maverick behavior is attributed to personality, it is unclear whether those actions were based on a core identity or environmental influence. As such, the term is too all-inclusive to support empirical measurement or analysis.



Academic research on mavericks has started to address these issues. Gardiner and Jackson (2012, 2015) approached “maverickism” as a psychological construct rather than a label for an individual. They proposed that instead of a binary typology of maverick or not, individuals are somewhere on a continuous scale of maverickism indicators. At the high end, individuals are bold, independent, disruptive, and persistent, while also goal-oriented and socially capable of persuading others of their ideas. High scorers are also willing to challenge existing norms and hierarchies, but within the bounds of achievement and for the purpose of contributing to greater goals (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012). At the lower end, individuals are more conventional, team oriented, and risk-averse, preferring established methods.

Jordan et al. (2022, 2025) attempt to address the matter of norms by distinguishing between positive and negative deviance. Positive deviance is behavior that breaks rules in ways that ultimately benefit the organization, such as bypassing a process to meet urgent requirements or challenging a harmful status quo. Negative deviance is rule breaking for private gain, whether fraud, abuse, or avoiding work. In this light, mavericks are positive deviants who challenge norms and established processes to help accomplish their organization’s mission (Jordan et al., 2025).

Finally, mavericks exist alongside similar individuals—innovators and entrepreneurs—so much so that the terms are often conflated. Innovators are the first to adopt new ideas (Rogers, 1963) or, one step further, apply them (Fagerberg, 2005). They embrace risk, are comfortable with failure, and understand and use complex information (Rogers, 1963).³ Entrepreneurs, according to Schumpeter (1939), are those who combine knowledge, skills, and resources for innovation to occur, highlighting the necessary steps beyond an idea. Fagerberg (2005) describes both innovators and entrepreneurs as similar in their use of “creative destruction,” but with innovators more focused on ideas and entrepreneurs on execution. Last, *intrapreneurs* are entrepreneurs who operate within an

³ Rogers contrasted innovators with “laggards,” or those who are among the last to adopt an innovation. Laggards often look to the past and tradition and primarily interact with others who have traditional values; they are suspicious of innovators and those advocating for change.



existing organization, building new processes and products within the constraints of the firm (Pinchot, 1985).

Mavericks overlap with innovators and entrepreneurs but are not necessarily identical to them (see Figure 1). Innovators and entrepreneurs (or intrapreneurs) focus on identifying and implementing incremental changes. Mavericks focus on the norms and organizational expectations of what is acceptable. They may not be the creator of something new, or the one who executes it, but they are open to novelty and willing to deviate from convention when a change is necessary to achieve their goals (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012; Jordan et al. 2025).

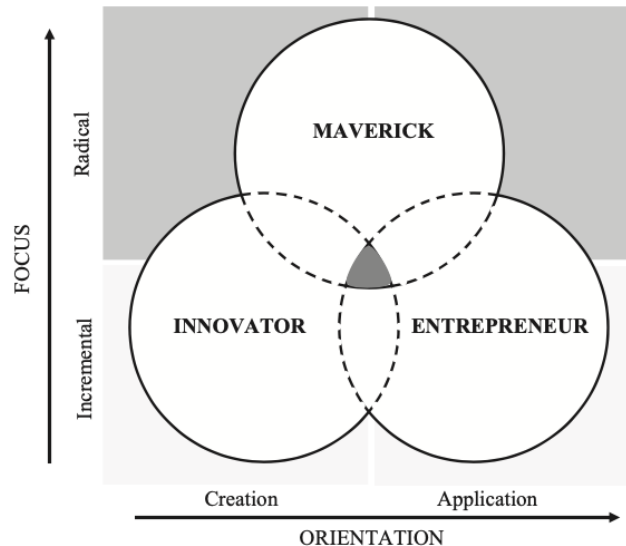


Figure 1. Venn Diagram of Maverick Terms. Source: Jordan et al. (2025).

The Venn Diagram is tidy, but it fails to capture the distinction between maverickism as a dispositional trait, while innovation and entrepreneurship are activities. An individual may innovate in one context, behave entrepreneurially in another, and follow established processes in a third. On the other hand, maverickism reflects a stable personality type.

One consistent theme in the literature is that the expression of maverick traits is dependent in part on the organizational environment. Research on creativity and deviance show that what enables high performance in one setting may be hazardous to unit cohesion in another (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012; Ray, Ugh, Brammer & DeWine, 1996). Scholarship on innovation in the military also reveals that the bureaucratic, cultural, and hierarchical context affects the expression of unconventional behavior (Rosen, 1991; Ridler, 2018). Because of this, traits of maverickism must be examined alongside the institutional conditions that enable or suppress deviations.

B. INNOVATION AND BUREAUCRACY – WHERE MAVERICKS OPERATE

Schumpeter (1939) describes innovation as “creative destruction,” a disruptive process that challenges the status quo and yields organizational resistance. The theory of innovation diffusion similarly presents innovation as influenced by legitimacy (Rogers, 1963). According to Rogers, novel ideas are accepted largely based on social networks, perceptions, and expectations. Fagerberg (2005) describes innovation as an iterative and uncertain process, requiring openness to ambiguity and the willingness to consider competing approaches.

Within the military context, there is heightened tension between standardization and adaptation. Kuronen and Huhtinen (2015) present two methods of evaluation for modern military forces: measures of performance, which prioritizes procedural adherence, and measures of effectiveness, which emphasizes mission accomplishment. They argue that military bureaucracies tend to use measures of performance because they are more easily tracked, measured, and controlled, despite the need for adaptive behavior.

Rosen (1991) evaluated major shifts in technology and doctrine, including carrier aviation, armored warfare, and nuclear propulsion. He found that such changes occurred due to the influence of senior military leaders with organizational legitimacy who championed the new ideas, rather than from individual innovators acting alone or with supporters outside the organization. His work indicates that personnel with low rank or little influence may introduce novel ideas, but effecting change within the military will



require powerful sponsors to either give that individual a voice or be the first to adopt the change. Likewise, key figures in irregular and unconventional warfare required autonomy, protection, and access to resources to be effective in their operations (Ridler, 2018). Ridler emphasizes that unconventional contributions must be built on a foundation of support and allowance for deviation.

C. MAVERICK MODELS

An attempt to convert maverickism from a descriptive label into a measurable model requires applying maverick traits to existing scientific theory. The popular literature identifies unconventional individuals but does not address the underlying identity of those persons distinct from their accomplishments, including how others with the same personality fared under different circumstances. Academic research attempts to remedy this through application of the five factor model of personality, which provides consistency and allows empirical testing.

Gardiner and Jackson's research is a foundation. Critically, Gardiner and Jackson (2012) linked their model of maverickism to established psychology theory, specifically the five factor model of personality. They conducted a multi-method study to identify the personality traits of mavericks, as well as their risk-taking propensity. They recruited 458 workers, representing a variety of industries, through an online research portal. The sample was nearly evenly split male and female and had an average age of 40 with a standard deviation of 13 years. The participants completed a questionnaire that asked participants to self-report on their unconventional thinking, willingness to take risks, and tendency to defy constraints. The participants then completed a personality inventory. Finally, participants were randomly selected into control or experimental groups, and they completed a computer simulation that required deciding whether to continue to risk earnings or take a reward.

Gardiner and Jackson then used regression analysis to identify the correlation between personality traits and maverickism. The five factor model is the most common framework in personality research (Wartberg et al., 2023) and includes five broad traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness



(Goldberg, 1990).⁴ In Gardiner and Jackson’s work, maverickism is associated with high extraversion, high openness to experience, and low levels of agreeableness, especially with regard to compliance and deference (2012). Openness was found to be the strongest predictor of all variables. Additionally, low neuroticism, moderated by lateral preference,⁵ was linked with high maverickism. High openness indicates mavericks are more willing to entertain new ideas and ambiguity. High extraversion could reflect the need to persuade, build alliances, and advocate for change. Low agreeableness reflects a willingness to reject societal pressures, confront others, and persist despite organizational resistance. These findings are logically consistent with the personality described in the popular literature and, when connected to measurable traits, are now accessible for further research and testing.

The Gardiner and Jackson model presents one ambiguity: conscientiousness, alternately referred to as “dependability” (Goldberg, 1990). Gardiner and Jackson (2012) initially found mavericks were not significantly higher or lower in conscientiousness. Rather, conscientiousness may be context dependent, in which the trait is high when a maverick pursues his own goals, but low regarding organizational routines, and it exhibits wide variability among individuals. As a result, it was found not to be a defining component of maverickism. Gardiner and Jackson (2015) later refined their position, though they reiterated that conscientiousness is not a meaningful predictor of maverickism. They claim that some facets within conscientiousness—persistence and achievement-striving—are sometimes aligned with maverick behavior, while other facets—orderliness and rule-following—are negatively associated. The ambiguity may be resolved through the application of nuanced facets but raises the question of whether mavericks are “dependable” but unconventional, or unreliable because of their lack of regard for organizational norms.

⁴ It is alternately referred to as the “Big Five” or the “OCEAN” model, an acronym formed from the first letter of each of the five traits (Wartberg et al., 2023).

⁵ Lateral preference refers to which hemisphere of the brain is preferred (i.e., right-side vs. left-side thinking), and was tested through self-reporting on ear preference for listening. There have been studies supporting both ear-to-brain relationship and brain-hemisphere-to-type-of-thinking (creative vs. logical), presented in detail by Gardiner and Jackson (2012).



Zhao and Seibert (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 23 studies comparing the personalities of entrepreneurs and managers. They used behavioral classifications such as occupational status and business ownership to measure individuals. Unlike Gardiner and Jackson's research, which relied on self-identification, entrepreneurs were identified based on actual behavior such as founding a venture, while managers were identified based on their organizational roles. Zhao and Siebert then applied personality traits from the five factor model to members of each group. They found entrepreneurs score, relative to managers, higher in openness, lower in agreeableness, and lower in neuroticism. These three traits parallel Gardiner and Jackson's research.

Regarding extraversion and conscientiousness, however, Zhao and Siebert found different results. Specifically, they found no significant difference in extraversion between entrepreneurs and managers. This potentially indicates that the link between extraversion and maverickism is nuanced and considers certain elements of extraversion rather than the trait. Zhao and Siebert also found conscientiousness is higher among entrepreneurs than managers. This may highlight a difference between mavericks and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are driven by the need to execute and implement, reflected by high conscientiousness, while mavericks are identified by their willingness to think differently and embrace novel ideas, which could present in varying levels of conscientiousness.

Taken together, the research coalesces around a maverick profile of high openness, low agreeableness, and emotional stability. On the other hand, conscientiousness appears to be dependent on roles and circumstances, while extraversion could be useful, but appears to be unnecessary. This work, however, is limited to civilian workers and entrepreneurial settings rather than military organizations. The next section explores the unique nature of military organizations, specifically in an effort to determine whether the civilian models can be applied and what insights they may provide.

D. MEASURING MAVERICKISM IN THE MILITARY

Research on military personnel and organizations finds that unconventional behavior occurs within cultural and bureaucratic constraints. The system affects both an individual's decisions and the organization's perception of how its members act. Kuronen



and Huhtinen (2015) describe modern armed forces as governed simultaneously by measures of performance, which value compliance with regulations and procedures, and measures of effectiveness, which prioritize mission accomplishment in changing conditions. Their work indicates bureaucratic oversight tends to lead organizations to use measures of performance more, despite the need for flexibility and adaptability to compete in ever changing environments. Historical research of military innovation reveals the same trend. Rosen (1991) determined that major changes occurred when senior leaders with legitimacy chose to champion novel ideas. Without sponsorship, unconventional approaches will likely fail to take root in military systems.

Analysis of irregular warfare also lends to the idea that unconventional ideas require structural support, rather than individual efforts alone. Ridler (2018) identified autonomy, access to resources, cultural awareness, and protection by leadership as conditions that allow maverick figures to operate effectively and fully contribute. The same is true of military education research. Augier and Hughes (2019) argue that militaries must approach innovation deliberately by incentivizing and encouraging intellectual range, active-learning environments, and protected experimentation. They assess that professional military education tends to become routine over time, which reduces the space for unconventional ideas to emerge unless leaders enforce open and critical thinking.

Research on personality among military members has found that military structure interacts with individual traits. Jackson et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal study using German conscription to isolate selection effects from socialization effects in military service. Their sample included over 1,200 men who, following high school graduation, chose either military or civilian service. The researchers measured personality using the standard five factor model inventory at three points: pre-service, immediately after training, and five years post-service. Prior to any training, men who chose military service scored lower in agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism than those who chose civilian service. This indicates the military attracts those who are more skeptical, less imaginative, and more emotionally stable than their civilian peers.

Approximately nine months later, the men who chose military service had an additional decline in agreeableness relative to the civilian group, which the authors attribute



to the structured, hierarchical, and abrasive nature of basic training. This change remained, as the military cohort continued to display relatively lower agreeableness even though both groups had by then transitioned into the labor market or higher education. While this offers some evidence that personality distributions in the military reflect both who chooses to serve and how the system affects them, the study isolates agreeableness as the only trait significantly impacted by military service, while differences in the other traits reflect selection effects.

The Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS) is the Army's principal noncognitive tool for accession screening, using forced-choice, computer-adaptive testing to reduce faking and increase precision (Knapp & Heffner, 2010). TAPAS evaluates candidates on a variety of temperament facets.⁶ From these facets, researchers can create two composites correlated with the five factor model: conscientiousness and neuroticism. The other traits—openness, agreeableness, and extraversion—could be measured inconsistently or are tenuously linked with TAPAS facets.

Several studies further explore the uses and limitations of TAPAS. Stark et al. (2014) trace the development of TAPAS, recognizing its link to the five factor model as well as its narrowed focus on certain facets. Nye et al. (2020) reinforce that forced-choice personality scores at enlistment can predict a broad range of soldier outcomes. Drasgow et al. (2020) found that although TAPAS draws from the five factor model, its inconsistent facets as a result of revisions attenuates the correlation with the five factors. On the other hand, some research has used TAPAS to explore outcomes such as injury risk (Oetting et al., 2017), revealing an opportunity to investigate relationships between individuals and their organizational experiences.

TAPAS has proven reliable in predicting service member outcomes and assessing varying temperament facets. However, it is limited in the facets it captures, particularly with regard to openness, and it lacks a clear test for risk-taking propensity. Accordingly, an exploration of maverickism among military personnel will require a model built from

⁶ Ever adapting, only six have appeared in all the versions since it was first introduced: achievement, order, non-delinquency, adjustment, even-tempered, and optimism



the facets available, based on theory, rather than a pre-existing composite. The resulting model will approximate maverickism, constrained by the TAPAS design and the bureaucratic pressures of military service.

E. CONCLUSION

The existing literature offers maverickism as a personality-based construct that overlaps with, but remains distinct from, innovation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, its expression depends on the individual's environment and context. Military institutions, in particular, pressure their members to conform, through both initial training and ongoing performance evaluation, and research suggests that both selection into military service and post-entry training alters the trait distributions in military populations.

Additionally, the Army's assessment tools provide only partial coverage of the five factor model traits associated with civilian mavericks. TAPAS captures a set of facets linked to conscientiousness and emotional stability, but it lacks direct measures for openness and risk orientation. TAPAS is better at capturing entrepreneurial indicators of self-efficacy and need for achievement.

Accordingly, assessing maverickism in the military requires a theory-based approximation rather than a direct measure. The chapters to follow apply these insights to test a TAPAS-based model for maverickism among U.S. Army personnel, while maintaining consideration of organizational constraints.



IV. DATA

This study draws on an administrative data set that links assessments at military accession to subsequent career outcomes. The data set is longitudinal, though only up to nine years at most, following individuals from entry through early career milestones, including separation when applicable. It is narrow in one respect and broad in another. It is narrow in that it focuses on specific accessions cohorts and a defined set of standardized assessments. It is broad in that it captures multiple dimensions of career outcomes and demographic aspects using consistent, centrally maintained records. The data therefore support analysis of early institutional fit and deviance, but do not extend to long-term career outcomes.

I relied on the same underlying merged administrative data set used in a prior Naval Postgraduate School graduate thesis (Hassin, 2019), which documented the relationship between accession waivers and early career outcomes, and considered the effect of TAPAS scores as a secondary analysis. I began with the same data construction described in that work and then merged additional personnel data and TAPAS results. The original data set construction and my additional steps are described below.

A. DATA SOURCES

Conducting this analysis required the integration of two distinct data sources. Personnel records of enlistment and career events are managed by the Department of Defense Human Resources Activity (DODHRA) Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). TAPAS scores are maintained by the DODHRA Office of People Analytics.

B. COHORT DEFINITION AND SAMPLE CONSTRUCTION

I used data from the Army because it was the data available. While the analysis is therefore limited to one service, the underlying traits explored are not service-specific. The military branches recruit from the same national population, rely on comparable entrance screening instruments, and operate within similarly hierarchical institutional structures emphasizing discipline and coordination. As a result, I have no theoretical reason to expect the relationship between maverickism and institutional outcomes to be unique to the Army.



The data set contains records of Soldiers who enlisted in the Army between FY2009 and FY2013. These Soldiers were followed annually through FY2018, unless they separated earlier. The original data set included 361,108 service records. During cleaning, duplicate records, incomplete records, and records indicating the Soldier enlisted outside the subject period were removed. The cleaned data set included 286,696 unique service members.

The original TAPAS data set contained 110,433 observations. However, a significant number of observations lacked results across TAPAS facets, and several TAPAS dimensions lacked data on many observations. The merging of the TAPAS data set with administrative personnel records yielded a population of 49,521 unique service members.

To this data set, I added information about an individual's military occupational specialty (MOS), additional skill indicators (ASI), separation date, type, and characterization of service, as well as deployments and the duration thereof. I also retrieved the raw AFQT and ASVAB scores, which were represented in the original data set as binary variables indicating above or below the median.

Of note, 3,793 observations lacked data regarding MOS and initial entry date, though they each had a month and year of accession. I isolated these observations for closer examination and found that 3,752 (98.9%) had separated. The remaining 39 individuals lacked separation information. Apart from being near universally separated in the first contract, and slightly younger on average, this group appears to be otherwise random and distributed similarly to the sample as seen in Table 1. As a result, I kept these observations in the data set and each of them the first day of their respective month and year of accession as their entry date.

Finally, during a review of the cleaned data set, I noted that some observations had entry dates prior to 2008. A closer look revealed 128 such observations. Given the study is limited to those accessing in FY2009 at the earliest, and because this group constituted only 0.2% of the sample, I removed them from the data. This left a final sample of 49,393 observations.



Table 1. Sample Portion Missing Certain Variable Data

		n = 45,728	n = 3,793	
Variable		Complete Data	Missing MOS/Entry	p-value
Sex	M	39,780 (87.0%)	2,951 (77.8%)	<0.001***
	F	5,948 (13.0%)	842 (22.2%)	
Race/Ethnicity	American Indian	323 (0.7%)	36 (0.9%)	<0.001***
	Asian	2,162 (4.7%)	130 (3.4%)	
	Black	8,522 (18.6%)	670 (17.7%)	
	Pacific Islander	123 (0.3%)	6 (0.2%)	
	White	34,598 (75.7%)	2,951 (77.8%)	
Age (years)	—	21.41 (3.84)	20.70 (3.46)	<0.001***
	NE	6,322 (13.8%)	501 (13.2%)	
	SE	10,422 (22.8%)	946 (24.9%)	
Region of Origin	MW	7,981 (17.5%)	631 (16.6%)	
	SW	8,839 (19.3%)	803 (21.2%)	
	West	9,983 (21.8%)	742 (19.6%)	
	OCONUS	1,181 (2.6%)	70 (1.8%)	
	Unknown	1,000 (2.2%)	100 (2.6%)	
Dependents	—	0.43 (0.90)	0.34 (0.81)	
AFQT Percentile	—	60.62 (20.03)	57.45 (18.92)	<0.001***

Note: Values shown as n (%) for categorical variables or Mean (SD) for continuous variables.



C. VARIABLES

1. Demographics

Each observation has a unique identification number assigned by DMDC. That same identification number is used to link variables throughout the data set. All demographics variables reflect the individual's status at the time of enlistment.

An individual's age is presented in whole years. The minimum age in this sample is 17; the maximum age is 42. The average age is 21.4 with a median age of 20.

An individual's marital status indicates whether they are currently married. If not, the data is coded to clarify whether the individual never has been married, or is divorced, legally separated, annulled, or widowed. Only one code is presented even if multiple conditions apply. In this sample, 10,220 individuals were married; 38,569 were never married. The number of dependents includes an individual's spouse and children, and may also include secondary dependents (e.g., parents, incapacitated adult children) if the service member provides greater than fifty percent of living expenses (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2024).

There are 42,602 males and 6,778 females in the sample. The data set limited race to only one code per individual, even if more than one applied. Here, 357 are American Indian, 2,285 are Asian, 9,174 are Black, 128 are Pacific Islander, and 37,436 are White.

An individual is linked to one of six regions: northeast, southeast, midwest, southwest, west, and outside the continental United States (OCONUS). This link is based on the individual's state of residency of the individual at time of enlistment and may or may not reflect place of birth or long term presence.

Northeast includes Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Washington, DC. Southeast includes West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Florida. Midwest includes Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Southwest includes Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona. West includes Colorado, Wyoming,



Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington. OCONUS includes states and territories of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Guam, Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

Finally, the data included an education level code, but I lacked a data dictionary to translate those codes. Prior manipulation created a binary variable to indicate whether the individual completed college.

2. Military Service and Career Records

The data set provided two methods to calculate time of entry. I primarily used the initial date of service. When unavailable, I relied on the month and year of accession and populated the first day of the respective month. From this, I calculated each individual's tenure, which is the difference in years from start date to separation date. For those not separated, I right censored the data at September 30, 2018, the conclusion of FY2018.

An individual's initial pay grade represented the rank at accession. From the longitudinal data, I created variables to capture an individual's first pay grade and max pay grade. I also calculated promotions, counting each time the rank changed to one higher, as well as demotions, counting each time the rank changed to one lower.

The data set included both first MOS and last MOS, from which I was able to create a variable to calculate the number of different MOSs held. I also integrated all Additional Skill Identifiers held by an individual. These codes represent additional training or certification beyond the MOS.

Finally, the data set included whether an individual separated and, if so, the separation date, a separation type code, a separation program designator, and the characterization of service. The separation program designator reveals the precise reason for separation, while the characterization affects an individual's benefits entitlements after separation. I created a binary variable to reflect whether an individual separated. In this sample, 27,132 (55%) individuals separated prior to September 30, 2018.



3. Cognitive Aptitude Measures

Prior to enlisting, candidates for military services take the AFQT. Each branch of service has a minimum score that must be obtained to enlist. The AFQT is a composite of four sections of the ASVAB: arithmetic reasoning, mathematics knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and word knowledge. The AFQT score is reported as a percentile, with a reference group established via a nationally representative sample in a study in 1997.

The data set includes the AFQT percentile, as well as the corresponding AFQT Category: I for scores 93–99; II for scores 65–92; IIIA for scores 50–64; IIIB for scores 31–49; IVA for scores 21–30; IVB for scores 16–20; IVC for scores 10–15; and V for scores 1–9.

The data set also includes scores for each of the subtests. In addition to the four tests that comprise the AFQT, the ASVAB includes: general science, electronics information, auto information, shop information, mechanical comprehension, and assembling objects. These scores can range from 0 to 100 and are used to assist recruiters in identifying the best MOS for an individual.

4. Non-Cognitive and Personality Measures

The TAPAS data consisted of 18 variables, three of which were composite scores—Can-Do, Will-Do, and Adaptation. Stark et al. (2014) described the Can-Do score as ability in technical and soldiering skills; the Will-Do score reflects achievement, leadership, and a capacity for physical and military discipline; the Adaptation score indicates an individual's ability to adjust to a military environment. The composite scores are normalized as z-scores with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. A z-score presents a raw score as the number of standard deviations it is from the mean (Hayes, 2019). A positive z-score therefore indicates the raw score is above average, while a negative z-score is below average (Hayes, 2019).

The remaining 15 TAPAS variables reflect specific personality facets. Apart from the physical facet, the remaining facets correspond to one of the Big Five personality dimensions: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and



Openness to Experience. Drasgow et al. (2023) mapped the facets to Big Five factors and described high scores as follows.

Within the Agreeableness factor, TAPAS facets include cooperation and selflessness (generosity). An individual high in cooperation are pleasant, trusting, cordial, and easy to get along with. Those scoring high in selflessness are generous with their time and resources.

Under the Conscientious factor, TAPAS facets include achievement, non-delinquency, order, and self-control. Individuals high in achievement are hard-working, ambitious, confident, and resourceful. Those high in non-delinquency are more likely to conform to rules and norms, and are less likely to challenge superiors. Individuals scoring high in order will organize tasks and activities and seek to maintain neat surroundings. Those high in self-control tend to be level-headed, patient, and capable of delayed gratification.

The Emotional Stability factor includes TAPAS facets of adjustment, even tempered, and optimism. Those high in adjustment are worry free and able to handle stress well. Those with high scores in even tempered are calm and stable, unlikely to display anger, hostility, or aggression. High scorers in optimism are more likely to experience joy and hold a positive outlook on life.

The Extraversion factor includes attention seeking, dominance, and sociability. High scores in attention seeking behave in a manner to attraction social attention. They are loud, talkative, entertaining, and boastful. Those high in dominance are assertive, direct, and tend to take charge. Those high in sociability tend to seek out and begin social interactions.

The Openness to Experience facet includes intellectual efficiency and tolerance. Those high in intellectual efficiency process information and make decisions quickly. Those high in tolerance are broadminded and interested in cultures and opinions that may differ from their own.



The data set provided each of the facets as trait scores. I converted each into normalized z-scores, again with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one, to better compare the facet levels of individuals in the sample.



V. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

I aim to identify the personality traits linked to maverickism in civilian research and identify corresponding measurable traits in military data. This chapter discusses the development and validation of a military maverickism construct, which relies on TAPAS data, followed by the analytic strategy I used to test its predictive validity. Section A explains the theoretical foundation of the Dominance x Openness x Exertion - Agreeableness (DOX-A) framework, and then demonstrates its psychometric properties through validation, sensitivity analysis, and distributional diagnostics. Section B identifies the statistical models and robustness checks used to explore maverickism's relationship with military career outcomes, including tests for subgroup heterogeneity and threshold effects.

A. THE MAVERICK CONSTRUCT

1. Theoretical Foundation

I developed a primary independent variable, “maverickism,” after a thorough review of the literature and the available data. Recognizing that maverickism is linked to high openness, low agreeableness, and high emotional stability, with situation dependent value on conscientiousness, I developed the DOX-A construct.⁷ Unlike additive models, where a high score in one trait can compensate for a low score in another, the DOX-A construct uses a multiplicative interaction model. This reflects a logic that maverickism has necessary conditions; a maverick must simultaneously have high levels of all identified traits in the DOX core. I added a subtractive penalty for Agreeableness that is designed to capture the independence of mavericks. While the literature cites emotional stability as a component, other research found that military members tend to be more emotionally stable than their civilian counterparts due to self-selection and screening effects. As a result, I

⁷ The acronym derives from the Greek *doxa* (δόξα), meaning popular opinion or common belief, distinguishable from *episteme* (knowledge) or *aletheia* (truth). *Doxa* is the root of *orthodoxy* (correct opinion) and *paradox* (contrary to opinion). The term reflects mavericks operating in, around, and in tension with the dominant institutional views.



have omitted an emotional stability variable but will test it as a moderator given the theoretical expectation that it affects overall maverick behavior.

2. Operationalization

The construct is composed of three standardized core dimensions derived from TAPAS facets. Dominance (D) is a direct import of the dominance score, representing assertiveness and personal agency. Openness (O) is a composite of intellectual efficiency and tolerance, representing cognitive scope and a willingness to explore new ideas. Exertion (X) is tied to the achievement facet, capturing self-efficacy, drive, and an internal motivation. I applied a mean-shift of $k = 3$ to all Z -scores in the core to prevent negative traits multiplying to become a false-positive product. This ensures that elements of the construct remain positive while preserving their relative distance from the mean. The DOX core is calculated as in the following formulas:

Let $Z_{d,i}$ = Standardized Score of dimension d for individual i

$$\text{Dominance (D)}_i = Z_{\text{Dominance},i} + 3$$

$$\text{Openness (O)}_i = \left(\frac{Z_{\text{Intellect},i} + Z_{\text{Tolerance},i}}{2} \right) + 3$$

$$\text{Exertion (X)}_i = Z_{\text{Achievement},i} + 3$$

The Agreeableness (A) penalty is comprised of two TAPAS facets: non-delinquency, which reflects adherence to rules, and cooperation, which reflects social harmony. Given the military context, I weighted non-delinquency more heavily than cooperation. This emphasizes that a maverick's defining characteristic is a willingness to challenge formal norms and expectations. It also accommodates the reality that military performance and mission accomplishment require teamwork, though the team dynamics need not be pleasant. In forming the penalty, I also applied a soft cap, clamping the values between -2 and 2, in order to prevent extreme outliers from overpowering the construct. In other words, an individual who is extremely compliant ($Z > 2$) is penalized similarly to a standard rule follower, which preserves the balance of all DOX-A components.



$$\text{Agreeableness } (A)_i = \text{Clamp}_{[-2,2]} \left(\frac{2 \cdot Z_{\text{Non-Delinquency},i} + Z_{\text{Cooperation},i}}{3} \right)$$

Finally, I applied a scalar of 10 to the Agreeableness (A) component to match the mathematical scale of the core variables. Because the *DOX* core is a multiplicative product of three independent standardized traits, its variance will be larger than that of a single linear trait. The scalar ensures that institutional deviance remains a meaningful filter.

The final DOX-A construct is thus represented as:

$$\text{Maverickism } (M_{raw,i}) = (D_i \times O_i \times X_i) - (10 \times A_i)$$

Combined, the DOX-A index accounts for the institutional friction a maverick will face in the military environment by identifying those with high performance that is decoupled from high compliance. In this construct, the maverick is defined by both their capability to accomplish as well as their willingness to challenge the status quo. The final index represents a mathematical hurdle for the maverick designation: one must score high in three distinct personality domains while not being predisposed to social conformity.

3. Construct Validation

This maverickism construct has appropriate psychometric properties for a latent trait. This section presents evidence of its internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, and distributional characteristics.

Unlike traditional psychometric measures, the DOX-A construct intentionally combines three distinct personality dimensions that interact. The moderate correlations between the DOX core components ($r = 0.20-0.33$; Figure 2) indicate that Dominance, Openness, and Exertion represent related but not redundant traits. This is consistent with the theory that maverickism requires the simultaneous presence of each of the traits, rather than a high score in any single dimension.



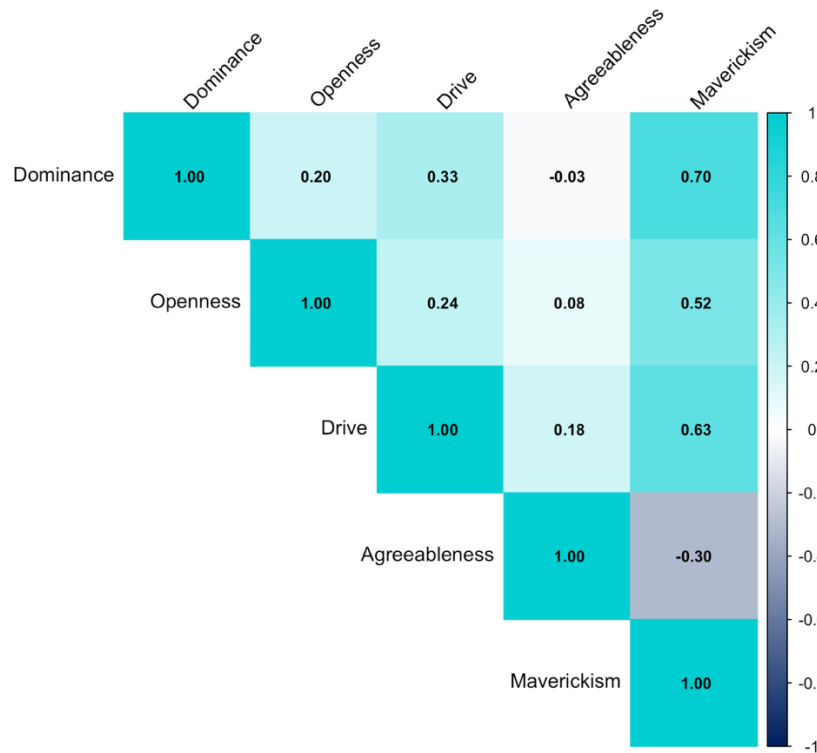


Figure 2. Intercorrelations of Maverick Construct Components

The correlation matrix also reveals the intended structure of the Agreeableness penalty. The DOX components correlate moderately with each other, and strongly with the final index, while the Agreeableness penalty has an expected negative correlation with maverickism ($r = -0.30$).

The maverickism construct has positive skewness (0.84) and moderate excess kurtosis (1.05), indicating a right-skewed distribution with an extended upper tail (Table 2). While a deviation from a normal distribution, this reflects the theoretical expectation that true mavericks are uncommon. In other words, the distribution's shape of most individuals clustered toward conformity and a small subset exhibiting high maverickism, aligns with the theory that mavericks are exceptional rather than widely presented.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Maverick Construct Components

Component	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Dominance (D)	-0.00	1.00	-2.34	2.41	-0.01	-0.35
Openness (O)	-0.00	0.74	-2.38	2.39	-0.00	-0.20
Drive (X)	-0.00	1.00	-2.35	2.33	-0.00	-0.36
Agreeableness (A)	0.00	0.80	-2.00	2.00	-0.02	-0.32
Maverickism (Final)	0.00	1.00	-2.44	5.66	0.84	1.05

4. Sensitivity to Specification

To ensure that my results were not the product of arbitrary weighting choices, I tested six alternative specifications of the DOX-A construct. Each alternative varied component weights, penalty strength, or overall form, as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Sensitivity to Alternative Construct Specifications

Specification	SF Selection	Demotion	General Discharge	SF Change %	Dem Change %	Exit Change %
Baseline (Original)	1.40	1.11	1.10	0.0	0.0	0.0
V1: Equal A-weights	1.39	1.10	1.09	-0.4	-0.9	-1.1
V2: Stronger A (15×)	1.43	1.12	1.13	1.9	0.9	2.3
V3: Weaker A (5×)	1.37	1.09	1.07	-2.5	-1.4	-3.0
V4: Additive core	1.34	1.11	1.18	-4.1	0.4	7.0
V5: Emphasize D	1.37	1.09	1.07	-2.5	-1.4	-3.0
V6: No penalty	1.33	1.07	1.03	-5.3	-3.2	-6.3



The baseline model uses the multiplicative core ($D \times O \times X$) with a 10x Agreeableness penalty, within which is a 2:1 weighting of Non-Delinquency to Cooperation. The six alternatives consisted of the following changes:

- V1: Changed the A ratio from 2:1 to 1:1, treating Non-Delinquency and Cooperation equally.
- V2: Increased the A penalty from 10x to 15x.
- V3: Decreased the A penalty to 5x.
- V4: Replaced the multiplicative interaction with a sum ($D + O + X$)
- V5: Doubled the weight on Dominance ($2D \times O \times X$)
- V6: Removed the A penalty.

The correlations between the alternative models and the baseline ranged from 0.93 to 0.99 (Figure 3), indicating that all variants capture similar underlying constructs. Additionally, predictive validity remained robust across alternatives. Odds ratios for Special Forces selection varied by only -5.3% (V6) to +1.9% (V2) from baseline, demotion risk by -3.2% (V6) to +0.9% (V2), and general discharge by -6.3% (V6) to +7.0% (V4).



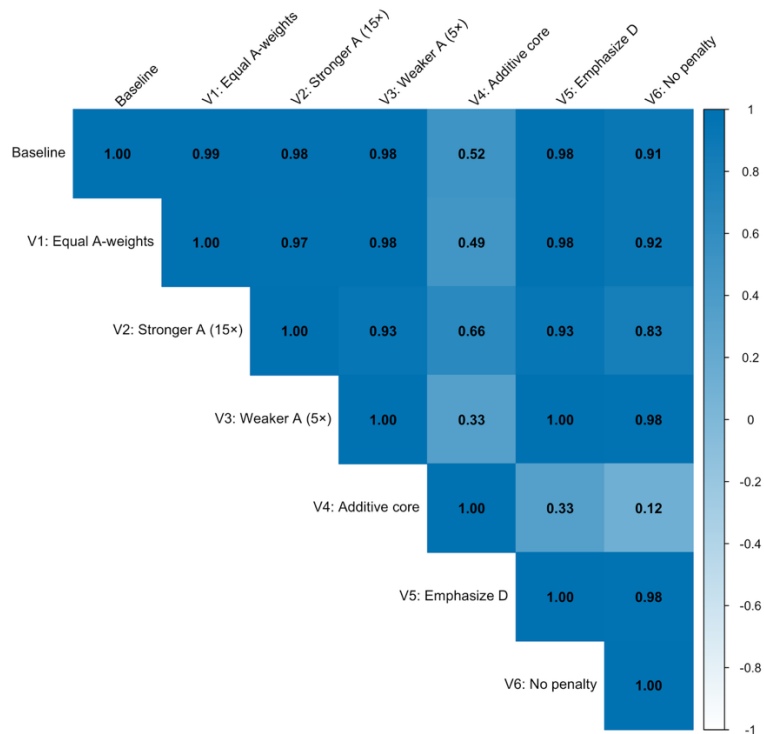


Figure 3. Correlations Across Maverick Construct Specifications

All effects retained statistical significance except in one case. When I removed the Agreeableness penalty entirely (V6), the effect on General discharge weakened from OR = 1.10 ($p < 0.001$) to OR = 1.03 ($p = 0.10$). This supports including the penalty to account for conformity and recognize potential adverse career outcomes from a lack of it.

The alternative that replaced the multiplicative with an additive core (V4) showed the largest deviation for a General discharge (+7.0%). This suggests that the multiplicative interaction captures some element of synergy among the DOX core that a sum does not.



Figure 4. Construct Validity Across Alternative Models

In summary, the DOX-A construct of maverickism exhibits robustness to alternative models. The Agreeableness penalty is necessary, the 10x multiplier is reasonable within a 5x to 15x range, and the multiplicative core outperforms an additive version. These findings support that the baseline function is both theoretically justifiable and empirically defensible.

5. Distribution Properties

I standardized the maverickism score to $M = 0$, $SD = 1$ to make use of it in regression models. The sample presents a range from -2.44 to +5.66 standard deviations (see Figure 5; Table 4). The median (-0.14) falls slightly below the mean, indicating that the “average” soldier exhibits mild conformity rather than complete neutrality on the scale.

Approximately 0.94% of cases (466 observations) fell beyond ± 3 standard deviations. This is slightly more than the 0.3% that would exist in a normal distribution. The maximum maverickism score of 5.66 represents an individual almost 6 standard deviations above the mean; this is a statistical anomaly but not a data error. Of note, there is pronounced asymmetry in the tail length: the upper tail extends to +5.66 while the lower tail reaches only -2.44, a 2.3:1 ratio. This asymmetry reveals right-skewness in the

distribution, driven by a small number of individuals exhibiting exceptionally high levels of dominance, openness, and achievement motivation.

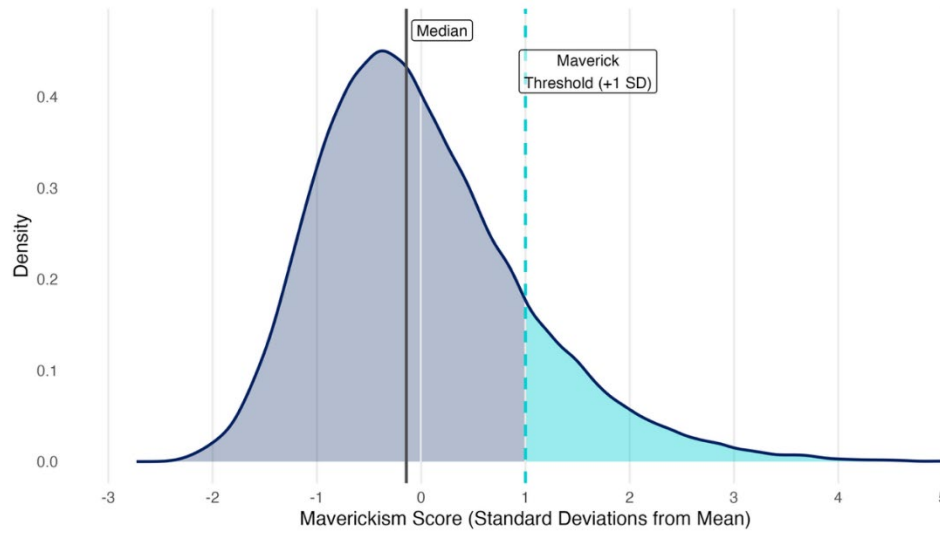


Figure 5. Distribution of Maverickism Scores

Table 4. Percentile Distribution of Maverickism Scores

Percentile	Score
1st Percentile	-1.78
5th Percentile	-1.37
10th Percentile	-1.14
25th Percentile (Q1)	-0.71
50th Percentile (Median)	-0.14
75th Percentile (Q3)	0.56
90th Percentile	1.34
95th Percentile	1.87
99th Percentile	2.95

Note: Scores are standardized ($M=0$, $SD=1$).
Values >1.0 indicate Maverick status.

Finally, to ensure that the findings are not driven by the 466 outliers exceeding ± 3 standard deviations, I re-estimated my primary models excluding those cases. The results remained substantively unchanged. Odds ratios shifted by less than 6% (range: 1.1% to 5.5%) and all effects remained statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Sensitivity Analysis – Robustness to Outliers

Career Outcome	Sample	OR (95% CI)	p	% Change
SF Selection	Full Sample	1.40 (1.29-1.51)	***	—
SF Selection	Robust (± 3 SD)	1.48 (1.35-1.62)	***	5.5
Demotion	Full Sample	1.11 (1.06-1.16)	***	—
Demotion	Robust (± 3 SD)	1.13 (1.08-1.18)	***	1.6
General Discharge	Full Sample	1.10 (1.06-1.14)	***	—
General Discharge	Robust (± 3 SD)	1.11 (1.07-1.15)	***	1.1

Note: ‘Full Sample’ includes all cases; ‘Robust’ excludes 466 cases beyond ± 3 SD. % Change indicates how much the OR changed when outliers were removed.

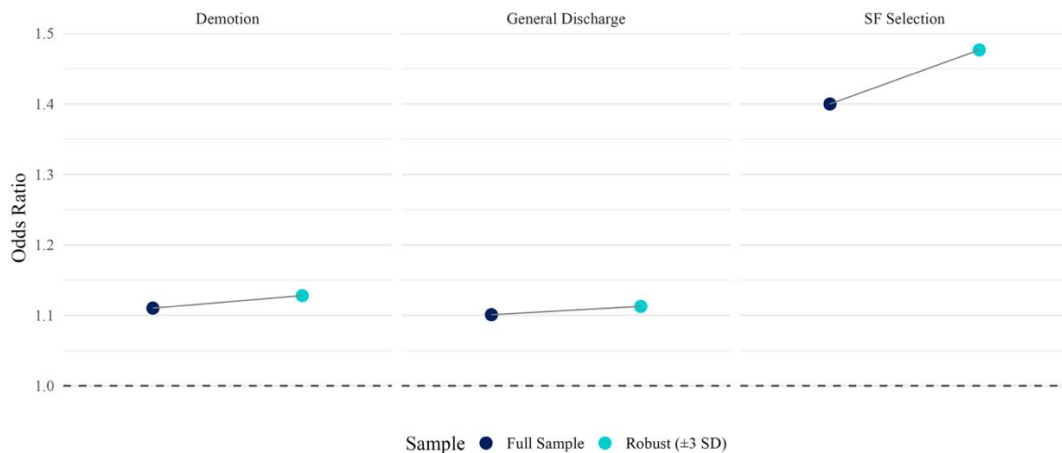


Figure 6. Sensitivity Analysis – Effect of Excluding Extreme Outliers



For selection to a Special Forces MOS, excluding outliers slightly strengthened the effect of maverickism (+5.5%), potentially revealing some quality of extreme mavericks not captured by the construct. For demotion and discharge, the effects were nearly identical (changes of 1.6% and 1.1%, respectively). These robustness checks confirm that the construct operates consistently across the full distribution and is not overly influenced by a small number of extreme observations.

In summary, the maverickism distribution appears to be as theorized, with a positive skew reflecting the rarity of mavericks and robustness to removing outliers. The lack of perfect normal distribution does not weaken the DOX-A construct's validity.

B. ANALYTIC STRATEGY

With the DO construct's validity and robustness checks complete, I advanced to statistical analysis to test its predictive validity. In this section, I describe the sample, specify the regression models used to estimate maverickism's effects on career outcomes, and describe the subgroup analyses performed to identify thresholds and moderating factors.

1. Sample Description

The sample comprises 49,393 U.S. Army personnel who completed the TAPAS inventory upon enlistment.

Table 6. Summary Statistics for Analytic Sample

Variable	N	N = 49,393 ¹
Age	49,393	21.35 (3.81)
Marital Status	49,393	
Never		38,573 (78%)
Married		10,229 (21%)
Other		591 (1.2%)



Variable	N	N = 49,393 ¹
College Graduate	49,393	3,504 (7.1%)
AFQT Percentile	49,393	60.35 (19.96)
Maverickism (Z)	49,393	0.00 (1.00)
Tenure (Years)	49,393	5.50 (2.17)
Days Deployed	49,393	181.15 (230.10)
Conduct Waiver at Entry	49,393	185 (0.4%)
Special Forces Selected	49,393	434 (0.9%)
Ever Demoted	49,393	2,097 (4.2%)

¹Mean (SD); n (%)

The sample is predominantly young ($M = 21.4$ years old, $SD = 3.8$). The majority are unmarried (78%), with 21% married at the time of accession. Educational attainment is limited: only 7.1% (3,504 observations) held a college degree or higher at enlistment. Taken together with age, this indicates the vast majority are recent high school graduates. Cognitive capacity, as measured by AFQT percentile, averages 60.35 ($SD = 19.96$). Pre-enlistment behavioral issues are rare: only 0.4% (185 observations) entered on conduct waivers.

The average length of career was 5.5 years ($SD = 2.2$). Deployment experience varied heavily ($M = 181$ days; $SD = 230$ days), reflecting a likelihood that some individuals experienced long or multiple deployments during the subject period while others never deployed.

To better interpret interaction effects, I also partitioned the sample into four quadrants defined by maverickism (≥ 1 SD vs. < 1 SD) and intelligence ($\geq$ median AFQT vs. $<$ median AFQT).



Table 7. Sample Distribution by Maverickism $\times$ AFQT Quadrant

Maverickism x AFQT	N	% of Sample	Mean Maverickism	Mean AFQT
Low x Low	23,497	47.57	-0.35	43.97
Low x High	18,463	37.38	-0.26	78.21
High x High	4,632	9.38	1.82	81.13
High x Low	2,801	5.67	1.66	45.71

Note: Quadrants defined by Maverickism ≥ 1 SD and AFQT $\geq$ median.

This distribution reveals that nearly half of the enlisted force falls into the category of those low in maverickism and low in cognitive capacity. On the other hand, just under one in ten have the combination of traits I hypothesize enable outsized contributions to adaptive capacity.

Finally, the outcomes explored in this research are overall uncommon. Attaining a Special Forces MOS is rare (0.9%, N = 434), as to be expected given its reputation for selectivity. Demotion affects 4.2% of the sample (N = 2,097), while 14.9% of those separated received a General characterization of service. These base rates provide context for interpreting effect sizes, as even small odds ratios can have practical significance for infrequent outcomes.

Table 8. Prevalence of Career Outcomes

Outcome	Prevalence (N)
SF Selection	0.88% (434)
Demotion	4.25% (2,097)
General Discharge	14.89% (4,041)

Note: General Discharge rate calculated among separated soldiers.



2. Statistical Models

I use logistic regression to model binary outcomes as a function of maverickism, controlling for cognitive ability (AFQT percentile), demographic characteristics (age, marital status, and college education), and flags of prior indicators (conduct waivers). The general form of the model is:

$$\begin{aligned} \log \left(\frac{P(Y_i = 1)}{1 - P(Y_i = 1)} \right) \\ = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Maverickism}_i + \beta_2 \text{AFQT}_i + \beta_3 \text{Age}_i + \beta'_4 \text{MaritalStatus}_i \\ + \beta_5 \text{CollegeGrad}_i + \beta_6 \text{ConductWaiver}_i \end{aligned}$$

where β'_4 is a vector of coefficients for the marital status categorical variable, and Y_i represents one of three primary outcomes: selection to Special Forces, as represented by those whose final MOS belongs to the 18-series occupational field; demotion, as indicated by those who experienced at least one reduction in rank; and a General discharge, which indicates, among those who separated, that departure from active duty was with a General characterization of service.

The control variables isolate maverickism's independent effect. AFQT percentile controls for general cognitive ability, which on its own predicts high performance and selection into Special Forces. Age controls for maturity, as older enlistees are likely to have more life and work experience than their counterparts who join immediately after high school graduation. Marital status accounts for family responsibilities that may influence career decisions and risk-taking behavior. College education, which is a binary variable indicating a bachelor's degree or higher, controls for pre-military human capital that may predict career success. Finally, conduct waivers control for pre-enlistment behavioral issues that could confound the relationship between maverickism and discipline-related outcomes.

I do not control for the self-control facet of TAPAS in the main effects models because early interaction analyses, reported in the next section, showed that self-control does not significantly moderate maverickism's effects. Including it as a control would not improve model fit. However, self-control is included as a covariate in interaction models



to explore the distinction between intellectual ability reflected in the AFQT and emotional self-regulation.

In the analysis, I exponentiate the logistic regression coefficients and report them as odds ratios (*OR*). An *OR* > 1.0 indicates that a one-unit increase in the predictor increases the odds of the outcome, while an *OR* < 1.0 indicates decreased odds. As an example, for maverickism, which is standardized (*M* = 0, *SD* = 1), an *OR* of 1.25 means that an increase of one standard deviation in maverickism is associated with 25% higher odds of the outcome, keeping all other variables constant.

3. Subgroup Analysis

To identify any constraints within which maverickism predicts outcomes, I conducted two sets of subgroup analyses: tests for interaction effects with intelligence and self-control; and threshold analysis to identify any discontinuities.

I tested whether intelligence and self-control moderate maverickism's effects by adding terms to the logistic regression models:

$$\log\left(\frac{P(Y_i = 1)}{1 - P(Y_i = 1)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Mav}_i + \beta_2 \text{Mod}_i + \beta_3 (\text{Mav}_i \times \text{Mod}_i) + \mathbf{X}'_i \gamma$$

where *Mod_i* represents the moderator variable—either standardized AFQT or standardized self-control—and $\mathbf{X}'_i \gamma$ includes the baseline model controls.

The results indicate that self-control does not significantly moderate maverickism's effects. Interaction coefficients for self-control were non-significant across all outcomes (*p* > 0.50 for SF selection, demotion, and general discharge), with odds ratios around 1.00. This finding contradicts an initial hypothesis that high self-control would protect mavericks from adverse outcomes, or that low self-control would increase risks of discipline and friction. Instead, maverickism appears to operate independently.

On the other hand, intelligence is a significant moderator for General discharge (*OR* = 0.94, *p* < 0.001) and marginal effects for SF selection (*OR* = 0.89, *p* = 0.06) and demotion



(OR = 1.04, $p = 0.06$). This pattern of protection from a characterization of service less than honorable motivated a threshold analysis.

Table 9. Interaction Effects on Maverickism

Moderator Variable	Career Outcome	Interaction OR (95% CI)	p
Self-Control	SF Selection	0.99 (0.92-1.07)	
Self-Control	Demotion	0.99 (0.95-1.03)	
Self-Control	General Discharge	1.01 (0.97-1.04)	
AFQT	SF Selection	0.89 (0.80-1.00)	.
AFQT	Demotion	1.04 (1.00-1.08)	.
AFQT	General Discharge	0.94 (0.91-0.98)	***

Note: OR > 1.0 = moderator amplifies effect; OR < 1.0 = moderator suppresses effect.

I evaluate the interaction between maverickism and AFQT scores further in the findings.

The analytic strategy described above provides a framework for testing maverickism's predictive validity while accounting for alternative answers, measurement extremes, and subgroup constraints. The next chapter presents findings, specifically regarding the maverick profile, main effects on career outcomes, the intelligence threshold and quadrant comparisons, and secondary analyses of the enlisted-to-officer pathway and maverick case studies.



VI. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of my analysis in three parts. First, I provide a profile of the maverick, exploring the demographics, pre-enlistment flags, geographic origins, occupational patterns, and career behaviors of those who are at least one standard deviation above the average maverickism score. Second, I examine maverickism's main effects on career outcomes, specifically looking at job mobility, discipline, involuntary separation, selection into Special Forces, and officer commissions. Third, I assess how intelligence moderates those effects, discovering a sharp threshold below which maverickism presents significantly less advantage and above which predicts exceptional performance. Overall, maverickism appears to be a double-edged sword with outcomes largely connected to cognitive capacity.

A. THE MAVERICK PROFILE

Mavericks scored differently than non-mavericks in TAPAS traits. These differences were as expected for facets identified in the DOX-A construct. Yet other, non-prescribed traits also appeared, albeit with lesser values, as seen in Figure 7. They suggest mavericks are slightly above average in adjustment, attention, optimism, and sociability. In other words, they are distinguished not by emotional volatility or maladjustment, but by elevated dominance and achievement motivation—paired with intellectual curiosity and tolerance—suggesting a temperament of assertive agency rather than instability.



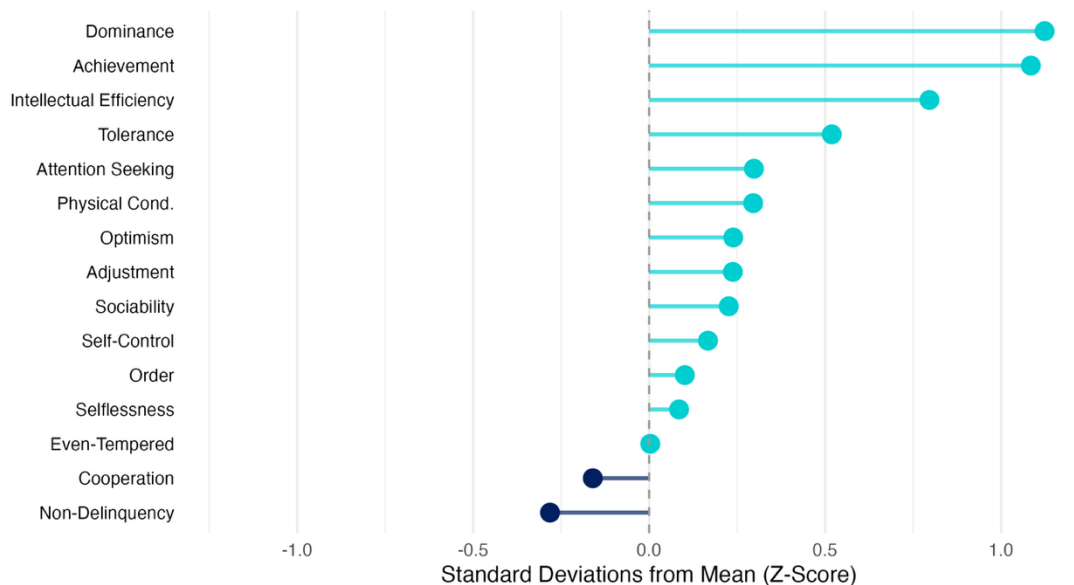


Figure 7. Personality Deviation of Mavericks vs. Army Average

1. Pre-Enlistment Risk Factors

In theory, if maverickism reflects a tendency toward nonconformity and bending the rules, mavericks would be more likely to require conduct waivers to enlist. Table 10 displays the waiver rates for mavericks (≥ 1 SD) compared to non-mavericks (< 1 SD).

Table 10. Pre-Service Risk Factors – Comparison of Waiver Rates

Waiver Category	Non-Mavericks	Mavericks	Odds Ratio
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependents Waiver	55 (0.1%)	21 (0.3%)	2.16**
Admin Waiver	6 (0.0%)	2 (0.0%)	1.88
Conduct Waiver	140 (0.3%)	45 (0.6%)	1.82***
Any Waiver	861 (2.1%)	184 (2.5%)	1.21*
Medical Waiver	743 (1.8%)	143 (1.9%)	1.09
Military Spouse Waiver	12 (0.0%)	2 (0.0%)	0.94

Note: p-stars based on Fisher's Exact Test. OR > 1.0 indicates mavericks have a higher propensity for the waiver.

Analysis performed on N = 49,393 unique soldiers.

Though it is worth noting that the absolute level of waivers is low, mavericks exhibit significantly higher likelihood of enlisting with a conduct waiver (0.6% vs. 0.3%, OR = 1.82, $p < 0.001$). An 82% increase in odds of requiring a conduct waiver supports that some level of maverickism is a pre-existing trait as opposed to a behavior that results from military service. Mavericks also tended to require dependent waivers more often than non-mavericks (OR = 1.09, $p > 0.05$), which could reflect a maverick's tendency to follow unconventional paths even in their personal lives (i.e., starting a family younger). Of note, the level of medical waivers is the same with both groups.

2. Geographic Origins

Regions, and the cultures within them, influence the individuals who grow up there. While the data presented only home of record and not place of birth, let alone location of



primary, middle, and high school, I assume that the vast majority of the sample was born and raised in the place they enlisted. Table 11 and Figure 8 display whether certain regions produce disproportionate shares of mavericks.

Table 11. Regional Origins of Mavericks

Region	Mavericks N (%)	Non-Mavericks N (%)	Over/Under Representation	Sig.
SW	1,587 (21.4%)	8,034 (19.1%)	2.20	***
NE	1,083 (14.6%)	5,728 (13.7%)	0.92	*
Unknown	178 (2.4%)	915 (2.2%)	0.21	
SE	1,679 (22.6%)	9,670 (23.0%)	-0.46	
OCONUS	153 (2.1%)	1,094 (2.6%)	-0.55	*
MW	1,234 (16.6%)	7,351 (17.5%)	-0.92	
West	1,519 (20.4%)	9,168 (21.8%)	-1.41	*

Note: Positive values in 'Over/Under' indicate regions that produce a higher proportion of Mavericks relative to the general population.

Significance (* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$) indicates that the proportion of Mavericks from this region differs significantly from Non-Mavericks.

Regional differences in maverick representation appear statistically, though they are substantively moderate. The Southwest has the strongest over-representation, with 21.4% of mavericks as opposed to 19.1% of non-mavericks (+2.2 percentage points difference, $p < 0.001$). The Northeast also tends to overproduce (+0.92 percentage points, $p < 0.05$).

In contrast, those who enlist from OCONUS are less likely to be maverick, but the region has a relatively low pool of enlistees and does not represent as a coherent geographic area, besides. The West also has moderate underrepresentation (-1.41 percentage points, $p < 0.05$), while the Midwest and Southeast had no statistically significant difference from expected representation.



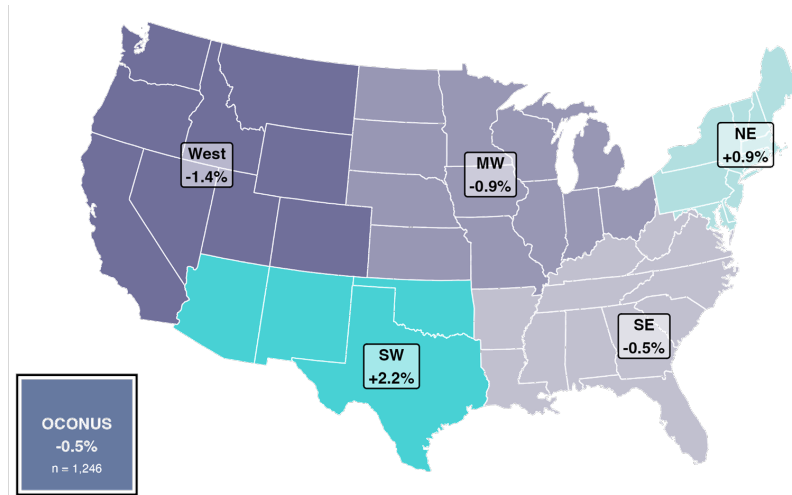


Figure 8. Geographic Distribution of Mavericks

Overall, no region deviates by more than about two percentage points, which suggests maverickism is only loosely connected to geographic origin and culture, if at all. Rather, these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that maverickism is a construct of personality traits and not a regional outcome.

3. Occupational Selection Patterns

Military occupational specialties (MOS) require varying skills and place soldiers into different environments and roles. Whether mavericks self-select into certain MOSs or are steered into them by recruiters, certain occupations would have higher concentrations of mavericks. Table 12 displays the MOS codes with the ten highest and ten lowest mean maverickism scores, limited to MOSs with at least 50 soldiers.

Table 12. Top and Bottom MOS Maverick Profiles (N ≥ 50).

Tier	MOS	N	Maverick Score Mean (SD)	Relative Z
		(1)	(2)	(3)
High Maverick MOS	11A	74	1.111 (1.250)	2.0283785
	18D	97	0.768 (0.977)	1.2990938
	18E	98	0.706 (1.214)	1.1681453
	18C	116	0.700 (1.161)	1.1552032
	17C	57	0.491 (1.152)	0.7115722
	003A	58	0.481 (1.032)	0.6902071
	18B	96	0.428 (1.076)	0.5794039
	68P	97	0.411 (1.201)	0.5425077
	37F	77	0.402 (1.180)	0.5229963
	35P	508	0.366 (1.118)	0.4464091
Low Maverick MOS	92S	67	-0.336 (0.857)	-1.0424520
	91C	189	-0.333 (0.888)	-1.0366047
	94R	51	-0.299 (0.855)	-0.9642613
	12W	102	-0.279 (0.812)	-0.9221479
	89A	58	-0.268 (0.981)	-0.8972163
	15B	51	-0.257 (0.757)	-0.8758549
	91H	182	-0.254 (0.911)	-0.8686398
	92G	855	-0.247 (0.880)	-0.8541401
	56M	125	-0.246 (0.789)	-0.8521278
	15N	59	-0.236 (0.771)	-0.8304724



The MOS with the highest mean maverickism score is 11A (Infantry Officer, $M = 1.111$, $SD = 1.250$). Infantry officers lead small units in combat operations and must be capable of acting within ambiguous environments, taking risk, and adapting to circumstances even if it goes against doctrine. All of these aspects of the role align with the DOX-A construct components.

Three of the top five, and four of the top ten, are Special Forces MOS codes (18-series): 18D (Medical Sergeant, $M = 0.768$), 18E (Communications Sergeant, $M = 0.706$), 18C (Engineer Sergeant, $M = 0.700$), and 18B (Weapons Sergeant, $M = 0.428$). These scores are consistent with the maverickism construct, as Special Forces roles select for soldiers who can operate independently, develop solutions, and learn to navigate within foreign cultures and environments.

Other roles with higher maverickism scores include those in intelligence and cyber operations related fields: 35P (Cryptologic Linguist, $M = 0.366$), 17C (Cyber Operations Specialist, $M = 0.491$), and 37F (Psychological Operations Specialist, $M = 0.402$). While these jobs include duties with significant oversight, they also deal with uncertainty, abstract concepts, and unconventional approaches.

Conversely, the MOSs with the lowest scores in maverickism are clustered in support roles: 92S (Shower/Laundry Specialist, $M = -0.336$), 91C (Utilities Equipment Repairer, $M = -0.333$), 92G (Culinary Specialist, $M = -0.247$), and 56M (Chaplain Assistant, $M = -0.246$). These occupations involve established procedures, routines, and standardized daily tasks.

4. Career Restlessness: Job-Switching Behavior

To the extent allowed by the military, mavericks would be more likely to change MOSs than the average soldier, reflecting a desire for novelty. Table 13 displays the maverickism scores for those who switched MOSs during the observed period and those who remained in their first MOS.



Table 13. Comparison of Maverickism by MOS Switching Status

Career Path	Sample Size (N)	Maverick Score Mean (SD)
	(1)	(2)
Job Switchers	7,472	0.081 (1.029)
Non-Switchers	38,138	-0.012 (0.997)
Unknown / Missing Data	3,783	-0.040 (0.963)
Difference (Switchers - Non): 0.093 (t = -7.22, p = 0.0000***)		

Note: 'Unknown' MOS observations are excluded from the statistical comparison.

Job switchers have significantly higher maverickism ($M = 0.081$, $SD = 1.029$) than non-switchers ($M = -0.012$, $SD = 0.997$), a difference of 0.093 standard deviations ($t = -7.22$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is modest but may demonstrate that mavericks are more likely to seek new challenges rather than become experts in a single role.

B. CAREER OUTCOMES

I now analyze whether maverickism predicts meaningful career outcomes. This section explores certain main effects before investigating moderating factors in Section C.

1. Attrition Rates

I conducted a Kaplan-Meier survival analysis to compare retention patterns between mavericks and non-mavericks over the observation window. Figure 9 shows that mavericks exhibit slightly higher survival probabilities across most years of service, indicating a modestly greater likelihood of remaining on active duty at each point in time. The difference between the curves is small but statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Both groups display a noticeable decline around the three- to four-year mark, corresponding roughly to the first enlistment contract conclusion point. Overall, the results suggest that



mavericks do not exit the force earlier than their peers and may in fact persist slightly longer.

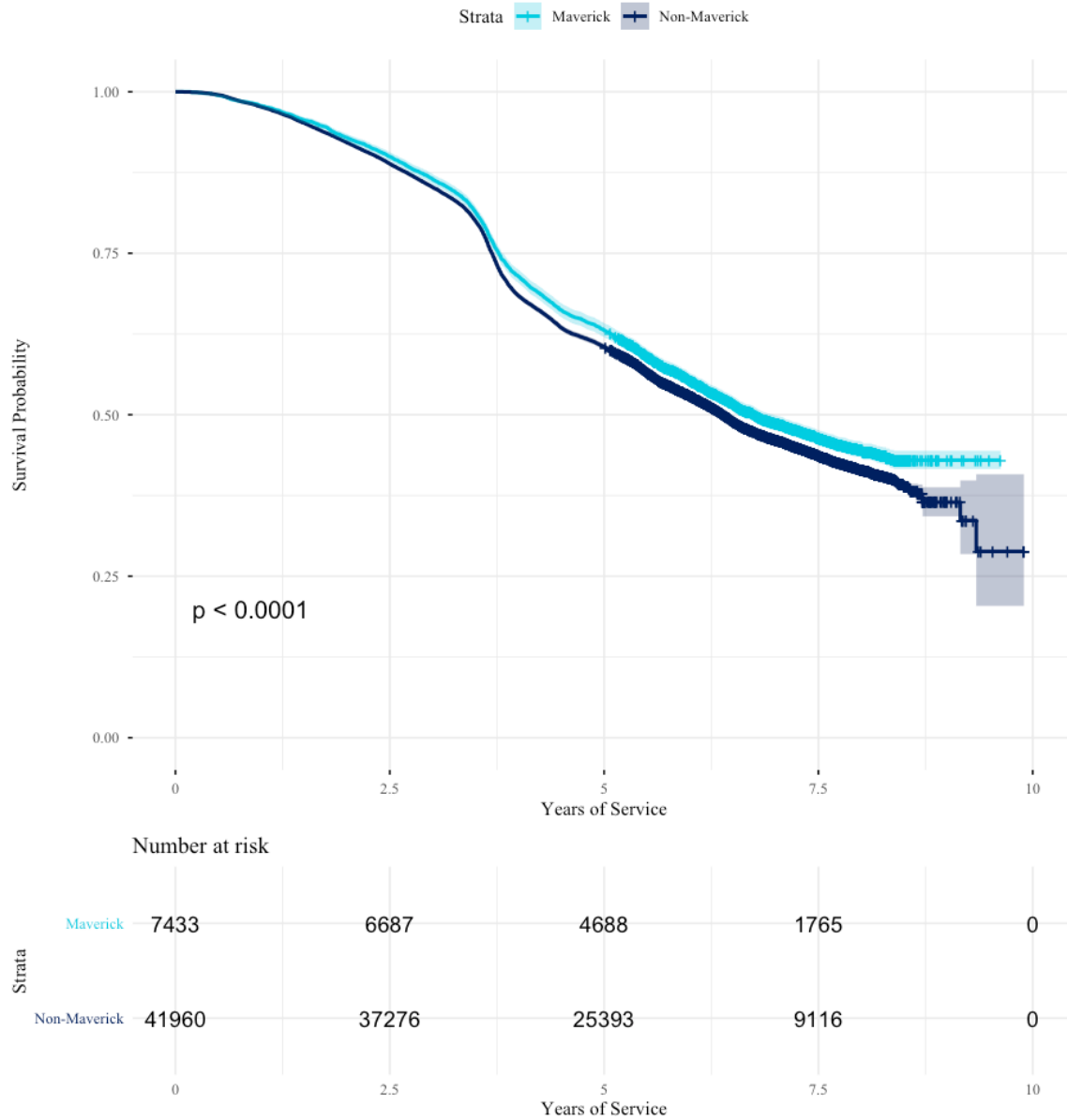


Figure 9. Kaplan–Meier Survival Curves for Maverick and Non-Maverick Soldiers (FY09–FY18)



2. Punishment by Reduction in Rank

Maverickism has a significant effect on demotion (OR = 1.11, 95% CI: 1.07-1.16, $p < 0.001$). Each standard deviation increase in maverickism in a soldier is associated with an 11% increase in the odds of receiving a demotion in the soldier's career, controlling for AFQT percentile, age, marital status, and college completion.

Table 14. Predicted Demotion Rates by Maverickism Level

Maverickism Level	Demotion Rate	N (if applied to sample)
	Predicted Probability	Expected Count
Low (−1 SD)	3.51%	1,732
Mean (0 SD)	3.89%	1,921
High (+1 SD)	4.31%	2,129

Logistic regression: OR = 1.11 (95% CI: 1.07–1.16, $p < 0.001$)

Observed demotion rate: 4.2% (2,097 of 49,393 soldiers)

Note: Predicted probabilities calculated at mean AFQT and age, modal marital status and education.

Model controls: AFQT percentile, age, marital status, college graduate.

Considering the base rate of demotion is 3.89%, this results in a 22.7% increase from soldiers one standard deviation below the mean in maverickism to those one standard deviation above. That this effect exists after controlling for indicators of maturity and responsibility suggests that those with maverick personality traits experience friction with organizational norms even when it may not be in their financial or career best interest.

3. Involuntary Separation

Maverickism also predicts separation with a General characterization among separated soldiers (OR = 1.15, 95% CI: 1.11–1.19, $p < 0.001$). Of the 54.9% of soldiers in the sample who separated, each standard deviation increase in maverickism is associated with 15% higher odds of separation with a General discharge, as presented in Table 15.



Table 15. Predicted General Discharge Rates by Maverickism Level

Maverickism Level	General Discharge Rate	N (among separated)
Low (-1 SD)	12.96%	3,516
Mean (0 SD)	14.61%	3,966
High (+1 SD)	16.44%	4,463

Logistic regression: OR = 1.15 (95% CI: 1.11–1.19, $p < 0.001$)

Observed general discharge rate: 14.9% (4,041 of 27,139 separated soldiers)

Note: Predicted probabilities calculated at mean AFQT and age, modal marital status and education.

Model controls: AFQT percentile, age, marital status, college graduate.

Sample restricted to separated soldiers only (N = [your N])

A General discharge reflects a serious conflict with the military organization, albeit not one large enough to warrant more severe punishment. It could be the result of poor performance, limited drug or alcohol use, or minor disciplinary matters. Nonetheless, such a characterization likely restricts GI Bill benefits and hinders future employment, especially by the federal government. A 15% odds increase indicates maverickism has a meaningful effect on career-ending decisions.

Figure 10 reveals that maverickism is highest among those who receive an Other Than Honorable (OTH) characterization of service. Though rare, an OTH reflects a significant departure from military standards and likely comes as the result of serious misconduct. Interestingly, the average maverickism score for a BCD or DD is below average, though the infrequency of such outcomes and wide range of scores precludes any reliance or inference.



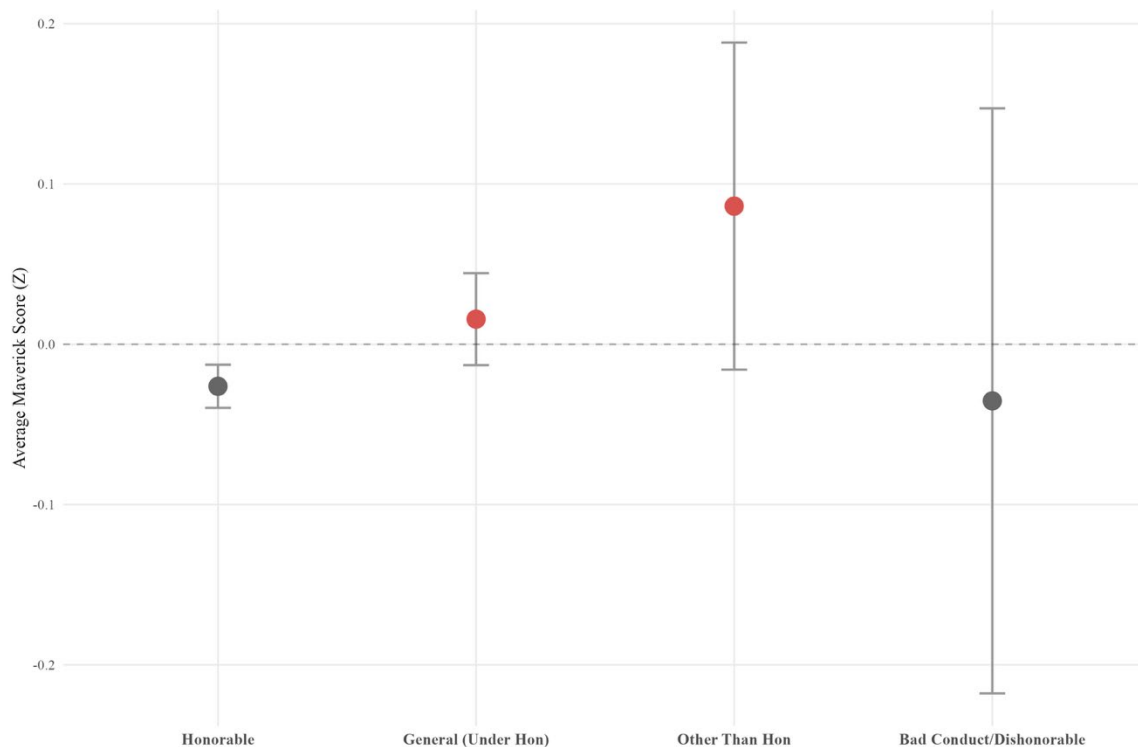


Figure 10. Maverickism by Characterization of Service

Importantly, this is the effect when controlled for AFQT percentile, age, marital status, and college completion, each of which affect retention and conduct. In other words, those at risk for separation with a characterization that is not Honorable may have their risk compounded by high maverickism.

4. Elite Achievement: Two Paths to Institutional Recognition

Prior effects indicated the risks of increased maverickism, but there are rewards as well. Maverickism predicts acceptance into two competitive paths, Special Forces and officer commissioning (Mustangs). Both require exceptional performance across a breadth of standards.

Higher maverickism is associated with selection into a Special Forces MOS (OR = 1.38, 95% CI: 1.27–1.51, $p < 0.001$). Each standard deviation increase in maverickism is associated with 38% higher odds of SF selection.



Table 16. Predicted Special Forces Selection Rates by Maverickism Level

Maverickism Level	SF Selection Rate	N (if applied to sample)
Low (−1 SD)	0.24%	120
Mean (0 SD)	0.33%	165
High (+1 SD)	0.46%	228

Logistic regression: OR = 1.38 (95% CI: 1.27–1.49, $p < 0.001$)

Observed SF selection rate: 0.9% (434 of 49,393 soldiers)

Note: Predicted probabilities calculated at mean AFQT and age, modal marital status and education.

Model controls: AFQT percentile, age, marital status, college graduate

Though less than 1% of the sample earned selection into Special Forces (434 of 49,393 Soldiers), a 38% odds increase is not only statistically significant, but also practically significant. Moreover, maverickism, or the lack thereof, is associated with SF selection both above and below the mean; more maverickism means greater odds, while less maverickism reduces odds.

This indicates a link between Special Forces selection and the traits of mavericks—dominance, openness, drive. These traits can cause friction, but also enable a soldier to tolerate ambiguity and relentlessly pursue difficult goals. This main effect, however, fails to convey a critical threshold. Section C will address how the 38% odds increase applies only to soldiers above a certain intelligence level; below that level, maverickism has zero predictive validity for selection into Special Forces.

Table 17 examines whether maverickism predicts the pathway of enlisted-to-officer, considering both commissioned officers and warrant officers.



Table 17. Maverickism and Enlisted to Officer Transition

Career Track	N	Maverick Score Mean (SD)	Difference (vs. Enlisted)
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Enlisted	48,721	-0.010 (0.993)	0.000 (Ref)
Mustangs (Combined)	672	0.758 (1.181)	0.768 ***
Officer Candidate	522	0.821 (1.204)	0.831 ***
Warrant Officer Candidate	150	0.537 (1.073)	0.547 ***

Note: (Ref) indicates the 'Standard Enlisted' baseline group.

Significance stars (* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$) based on pairwise t-tests against the baseline.

Mustangs are defined as enlisted entrants currently holding O or W-series MOSs.

Of the sample, only 1.4% (672 of 49,393 soldiers) became Mustangs. Mustangs appear to possess elevated maverickism ($M = 0.758$, $SD = 1.181$) compared to other enlisted personal ($M = -0.010$, $SD = 0.993$), a difference of 0.768 standard deviations ($p < 0.001$). This effect is larger than any other examined career outcome, indicating that Mustangs may benefit the most from maverick traits.

There is a difference in maverickism between those selected for officer commissions ($M = 0.821$) and those selected to become warrants ($M = 0.537$). The former requires a bachelor's degree as well as a competitive board that emphasizes leadership potential, capacity for strategic thinking, and ability to adapt. Warrant officer selection is also competitive, but places greater emphasis on technical expertise and tactical proficiency. Both pathways reward maverickism, but it is more valued in roles involving complex concepts, uncertain environments, and independent decision making. Figure 11 depicts the shift in which those selected to become officers emerge from the portion of the enlisted distribution with higher maverickism.



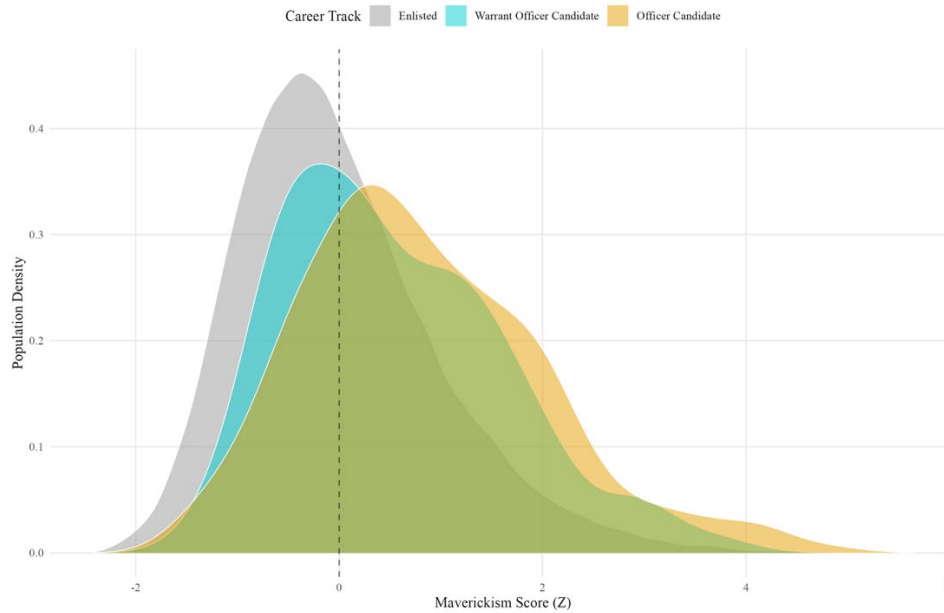


Figure 11. Revealed Preference: The Mustang Shift

Thus far, the findings offer a paradox. Maverickism is associated with exceptional achievement (Special Forces selection, enlisted-to-officer commissioning) and uncommon setbacks (demotion, involuntary separation). The same personality traits, measured at accession and therefore unaffected by institutional socialization, lead to such divergent outcomes. Section C examines how cognitive capacity—intelligence—interacts with maverickism, guiding its trajectory to either reach great heights or come crashing down.

C. THE INTELLIGENCE MODERATOR

I continue to rely on selection into Special Forces as a proxy for recognition of potential to contribute to the organization at exceptional levels. Below a specific cognitive threshold, as measured by the AFQT, maverickism offers no advantage and may impose costs. Above that threshold, it becomes a significant predictor of achievement.

1. The Special Forces Discontinuity at AFQT 59

To evaluate the interaction between intelligence and maverickism, I partitioned the sample into AFQT deciles and then estimated Special Forces selection rates within each decile for mavericks (≥ 1 SD) and all other soldiers (< 1 SD). Table 18 presents the results.

Table 18. SF Selection Rates and Maverick Advantage by AFQT Decile

Decile	Mean AFQT	AFQT Threshold	High Mav %	Standard %	Advantage	N (High)	N (Std)
1	32	Below Threshold	0.00	0.04	-0.04	420	4,520
2	38	Below Threshold	0.00	0.04	-0.04	438	4,502
3	43	Below Threshold	0.00	0.07	-0.07	498	4,442
4	48	Below Threshold	0.00	0.07	-0.07	566	4,373
5	54	Below Threshold	0.00	0.09	-0.09	647	4,292
6	62	Above Threshold	0.83	0.36	+0.48	720	4,219
7	69	Above Threshold	2.18	0.56	+1.62	826	4,113
8	77	Above Threshold	3.13	1.35	+1.78	927	4,012
9	85	Above Threshold	3.29	1.26	+2.03	1,063	3,876
10	95	Above Threshold	5.42	3.30	+2.13	1,328	3,611

Below Threshold (AFQT < 59): Maverickism OR = 1.00, p = 0.99

Above Threshold (AFQT ≥ 59): Maverickism OR = 1.52, p < 0.001

Advantage = High Mav % - Standard %. Positive values indicate maverick benefit.

A discontinuity appears at the sixth decile, where $AFQT \geq 59$. Below this threshold, in deciles one through five, mavericks have a 0% selection rate. In other words, no mavericks with an AFQT below the 59th percentile were selected for Special Forces. While those selected among non-mavericks were few, they performed marginally better.

Above the threshold, however, the association becomes apparent. In decile six (AFQT 59–66), mavericks have a 0.83% selection rate, over twice as advantageous as non-



mavericks in the same decile. The advantage persists with increasing intelligence levels; by decile 10 (AFQT 90–99), mavericks have a 5.42% selection rate, 1.6 times that of non-mavericks at the same intelligence level.

Upon observing this pattern, I split the sample at AFQT = 59 and ran separate logistic regression models predicting Special Forces selection from maverickism, controlling for age, marital status, education, and conduct waivers. Below the threshold (AFQT < 59), the odds ratio is 1.00 (95% CI: 0.54-1.73; $p = 0.99$). Above the threshold (AFQT ≥ 59), the odds ratio is 1.52 (95% CI: 1.41-1.64; $p < 0.001$).

Put another way, below the threshold maverickism as zero predictive validity as revealed by an odds ratio of 1 and a p-value indicating nearly perfect chance. Above the 59th AFQT percentile, each standard deviation increase in maverickism increases Special Forces selection odds by 52%, a practically and statistically significant effect.

Figure 12 presents this discontinuity, dividing the sample into two zones: a “Dead Zone” (deciles 1–5) where maverickism provides no value, and an “Active Zone” (deciles 6–10) where maverickism is significantly associated with Special Forces selection.

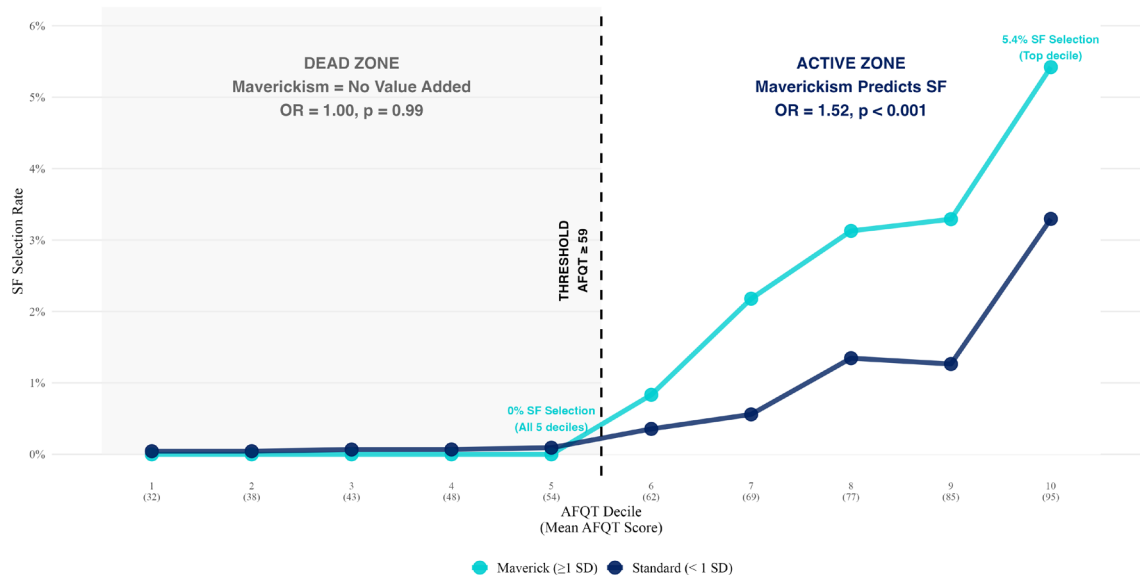


Figure 12. Maverickism and SF Selection Around AFQT 59th Percentile



Granted, selection rates for anyone below the 59th percentile are very low. Nonetheless, the threshold for mavericks is not gradual; there is no decile where maverickism has marginal predictive validity. The effect is binary below and above AFQT = 59. This suggests the most value from maverickism comes when it is combined with above average cognitive capacity.

2. Quadrant Comparisons

To explore this threshold further and consider the risks of maverickism as well, I grouped soldiers into quadrants based on maverickism (≥ 1 SD vs. < 1 SD) and AFQT (above and below the median). I then named each quadrant (see Figure 13):

- Originals (high maverickism, high AFQT)⁸
- Wildcards (high maverickism, low AFQT)
- Regulars (low maverickism, low AFQT)
- Stewards (low maverickism, high AFQT)

⁸ The term “Originals” draws from Adam Grant’s (2016) characterization of those who advocate for novel approaches and challenge the status quo, identified through anecdotal outcomes.



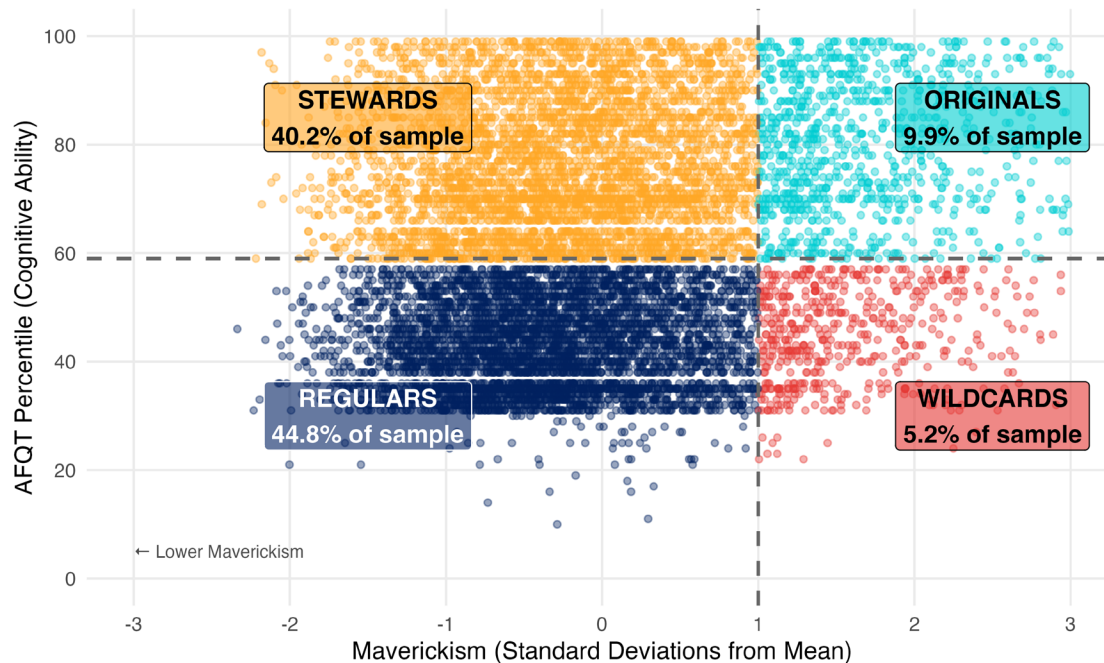


Figure 13. The Four Quadrants – Maverickism x Cognitive Capacity

Table 19 and Figure 14 present the outcomes by quadrant.

Table 19. Career Outcomes by Maverickism x AFQT Quadrant

Quadrant	N	% of Force	Mean AFQT	Mean Mav	Mustang	SF Selection	General Discharge
Originals	4,869	9.9%	80.1	1.81	5.11%	3.29%	5.6%
Wildcards	2,564	5.2%	44.4	1.65	0.31%	0.00%	10.6%
Regulars	22,111	44.8%	43.0	-0.35	0.19%	0.06%	9.8%
Stewards	19,849	40.2%	76.9	-0.26	1.88%	1.31%	6.6%

Note: Quadrants defined by maverickism ≥ 1 SD (high) vs. < 1 SD (low) and AFQT $\geq$ median vs. $<$ median.

Median AFQT = 59.0. High maverickism threshold = 1.00.

SF Rate = % selected for Special Forces. Discharge Rate = % receiving General discharge among separated.

Mustang = % receiving commission as Officer or Warrant Officer.



Originals (high maverickism, high AFQT) achieve a 5.11% commissioning rate, by far the highest of the quadrants. They also have a 3.29% Special Forces selection rate, the highest of any group and 2.5 times higher than the Stewards (1.31%). Despite a tendency to not conform, this group also has the lowest rate of separation with a General characterization of service (5.6%). This group represents nearly 10% of the sample and embodies the positive expression of maverick traits.

Wildcards (high maverickism, low AFQT) represent maverickism unchecked by cognitive capacity. They face the highest risk of a general discharge (10.6%), nearly twice as high as the Originals, but with 0% selected into Special Forces and nearly zero (0.31%) offered commissions. They make up 5.2% of the sample, the smallest group. They likely represent those whose predisposition toward challenging authority is not mitigated by the ability to think up novel solutions or creatively adapt to challenges.

The contrast between the two maverick groups, both of which scored over 1 standard deviation, makes clear the entirely different outcomes resulting from variation in intelligence. Originals are more likely to thrive, while Wildcards are more likely to derail.

Regulars (low maverickism, low AFQT) make up 44.8% of the sample. They achieve nearly no commissions (0.19%) or selection to Special Forces (0.06%) and have elevated rates of general discharge (9.8%). Nevertheless, they are the largest group in the sample, likely reflecting the military as a viable employment option for those willing to accept the hazards and discipline of military life.

Stewards (low maverickism, high AFQT) round out the quadrants. This group achieves modest rates of commissions (1.88%) and Special Forces selection (1.31%), with lower general discharge rates (6.6%). At 40.2% of the sample, this group represents the institutional backbone of the military, personnel who are competent, reliable, and likely to preserve the organization.



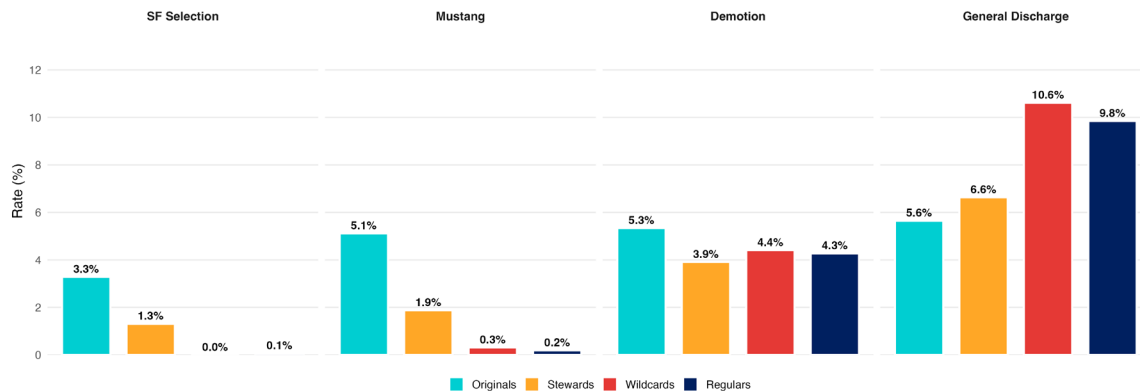


Figure 14. Career Outcomes by Maverickism x AFQT Quadrant

3. The Protection Effect: Intelligence and Discharge Risk

As revealed in the quadrant analysis, intelligence moderates maverickism's relationship with a general discharge. The protective effect of intelligence is most apparent in the difference between Originals and Wildcards. Maverickism does not eliminate the disciplinary costs of nonconformity, as those with higher maverickism remain more likely to receive a general discharge, but intelligence deescalates these effects. This could be the result of several impacts. Mavericks with high cognitive capacity may be better able to anticipate consequences, adjust their behavior to bend rather than break rules, or articulate justifications for their deviance. Those with lower intelligence scores may be more likely to suffer from repeated offenses or struggle with navigating the institutional dynamics that offer leniency to those who offer high performance, even if it comes at the cost of some friction.

4. Interaction Effects: Formal Tests

Table 20 presents the results of formal interaction models testing whether AFQT and the TAPAS facet of Self Control moderate maverickism.



Table 20. Interaction Effects of AFQT and Self Control on Maverickism

Moderator Variable	Career Outcome	Interaction OR (95% CI)	p
Self-Control	SF Selection	0.99 (0.92-1.07)	
Self-Control	Demotion	0.99 (0.95-1.03)	
Self-Control	General Discharge	1.01 (0.97-1.04)	
AFQT	SF Selection	0.89 (0.80-1.00)	.
AFQT	Demotion	1.04 (1.00-1.08)	.
AFQT	General Discharge	0.94 (0.91-0.98)	***

Note: OR > 1.0 = moderator amplifies effect; OR < 1.0 = moderator suppresses effect.

The interactions between maverickism and Self-Control are non-significant across all outcomes. Self-Control does not buffer mavericks from demotion, improve their odds of Special Forces selection, or moderate their general discharge risk. This null finding fails to reject the hypothesis that emotional regulation would distinguish productive mavericks (high self-control) from destructive mavericks (low self-control).

In contrast, the maverickism and AFQT interaction is significant as applied to general discharge (OR = 0.94, $p < 0.001$), confirming that intelligence reduces maverickism's effect in involuntary separation contexts. As for Special Forces selection, the interaction is nearly significant (OR = 0.89, $p = 0.06$). This is consistent with the earlier threshold findings and only slightly below conventional significance levels. This may be due to the rarity of Special Forces selection, which causes a small sample size with limited power.

Theoretically, this highlights an institutional preference for capability over regulation. High AFQT scores reflect an ability to solve problems, learn new skills, and operate in complex scenarios. High Self-Control scores reflect an ability to inhibit impulsive behavior and maintain focus. At least with Special Forces, the military wants soldiers who have potential to operate in complex environments over those who are able to follow orders and rules.



This has implications for talent management. Organizations cannot simply recruit mavericks and expect constructive deviance. Rather, they must recruit *smart* mavericks—those who are predisposed to nonconformity and novel ideas along with the cognitive capacity to produce their solutions.



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VII. DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the empirical findings in light of the central tension that motivated this research: how institutions can benefit from nonconformists without eroding cohesion. I explore what the statistics imply for theory, personnel systems, and the broader challenge of managing dissent within hierarchical organizations.

A. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings contribute to theory in three ways. First, they clarify how maverickism fits within existing personality frameworks while remaining empirically distinct. Second, they illuminate a section of the population distinct from the broader society where effects may be more pronounced. Third, they sharpen the conceptual difference between a dissenting disposition on one hand, and innovation as an outcome on the other, which carries consequences for both research and practice.

1. The Conscientiousness Puzzle

Past research into the conscientiousness personality trait resulted in ambiguous findings. Gardiner and Jackson (2012, 2015) found mavericks scored high when in pursuit of their own goals, but low in regard to organizational routines, and with much variability among individuals. They ultimately decided to exclude conscientiousness from their maverick model. This present research resolves the ambiguity by distinguishing traits of motivation conscientiousness (achievement, goal orientation) from regulatory conscientiousness (rule-following, orderliness).

The DOX-A construct applies this distinction by treating achievement as a core component of maverickism while treating rule-following as a penalty. The results appear to validate this approach, as mavericks have Special Forces selection and officer commissioning rates above non-mavericks, distinguishing constructive deviance from pure rule breaking. As conscientiousness is most often described as “dependability,” these findings indicate that mavericks are not undependable in general. Rather, they are dependable to broad mission objectives while resistant to the procedures that get in the way



of mission accomplishment. One implication is that using a broad conscientiousness metric may exclude individuals who are capable of exceptional performance in contexts that demand flexibility toward procedures.

2. Restricted Sample and Conservative Estimates

The findings are from a population already self-selected for lower baseline openness and agreeableness compared to civilians. Jackson et al. (2012) found that German military recruits scored lower than their civilian peers on those traits prior to any training. One could reasonably conclude the same is true for the U.S. military: recruits who choose to join an all-volunteer force, thereby self-selecting into a hierarchical institution with an emphasis on obedience, likely differ from the general population in core personality traits.

This restricted range implies that the findings in this research are conservative estimates of maverickism's impact. Civilian populations with greater personality variance—tech companies, academia, entrepreneurial endeavors—may find that mavericks have a larger advantage for innovation outcomes, a greater risk of adverse effects from organizational friction, or both. The odds increase for Special Forces selection might translate to even higher figures in broader samples.

On the other hand, the threshold effect may be limited to contexts in which high cognitive ability is required. The military has AFQT minimums (31st percentile for high school graduates) that exclude the lowest-capacity candidates. Civilian labor markets with lower aptitude minimums might have different interaction effects.

3. The Maverick-Innovator Distinction

Mavericks exhibit a significantly higher job-switching behavior than non-maverick soldiers (mean maverickism difference = 0.093, $p < 0.001$; 15.1% switching rate). However, they do not appear to cluster around specialties that would be most associated with technical innovation (e.g., cyber, electronics), though this may be due to the fact that the military generally relies on civilians and contractors for its significant research and development efforts (e.g. DARPA, RAND). Nonetheless, these findings are consistent with



Jordan et al.'s (2022, 2025) framework of mavericks as positive deviants who add value by their willingness to challenge norms and processes, rather than innovators who generate novel technical solutions. Of course, the two behaviors overlap, and it may be frustration with existing processes that motivates a maverick to innovate a new solution. But, generally speaking, innovators seek to improve a system or practice; mavericks question whether that system or practice is right, or if an entirely different view is needed.

This, too, has meaning for talent management. Organizations seeking technical solutions should recruit, screen, and select for high openness and conscientiousness. Organizations facing strategic inflection points should pursue mavericks who are willing to abandon established approaches, even when successful in the past. Conflating the two constructs results in an inefficient misallocation of resources.

B. A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The data present a clear pattern: higher maverickism is associated with selection into Special Forces and enlisted-to-officer commissioning, as well as demotions and general discharges. This may be the result of a few mechanisms working simultaneously.

First, the military has cultural norms that incentivize conformity. The military optimizes for procedural compliance, standardized actions, and obedience to authority (Kuronen and Huhtinen, 2015). The norms exist for good reason, in that trained actions are more readily executed in stressful conditions or in settings where ongoing coordination and reminders are not feasible (i.e., combat). Mavericks who challenge protocol and question authority will cause organizational friction, even if the justifications for their challenges and questions are legitimate. Demotion and general discharge rates indicate the reality and severity of this friction as signs of the organization's attempts to maintain good order and discipline.

Second, high performance in combat leadership and Special Forces roles benefits from the same traits that generate friction. Special Forces operators conduct missions that demand decision-making and critical thinkings skills at all ranks. Personnel within those units are expected to process complex environments, adapt to foreign cultural expectations, and improvise tactics when the situation demands. This translates to selecting soldiers who



are comfortable with ambiguity (high openness), willing to challenge authority when there is information asymmetry (low agreeableness), and driven to complete the mission even when facing stiff resistance (high achievement). A similar analysis would emerge for infantry officers, who must lead units to “locate, close with, and destroy the enemy by fire and maneuver, or repel the enemy’s assault by fire and close combat” (Marine Corps, 2020).⁹ The role requires technical competence and leadership ability, but foremost the capacity to learn, adapt, and continue to operate effectively in shifting settings.

Third, mavericks self-select into challenging and risky pathways. They are more willing to change occupational specialty, pursue Special Forces selection, and seek a commission. These findings suggest that mavericks pursue challenge, growth, and novelty, even if it comes with a high risk of failure. It is one thing to understand the nature of risk; something different to accept risk. Mavericks appear willing to act on paths that are more risky, more uncertain, and more difficult.

One other critical trait is in play—intelligence. A soldier’s cognitive capacity is the single-greatest predictor of whether maverickism manifests toward elite performance or detrimental friction. As previewed earlier, this may result from an ability in smart mavericks to anticipate the consequences of their actions, visualize potential scenarios, and select the best course of action. A maverick with greater intelligence might skip a procedural step in order to accomplish an urgent mission, but also report for duty on time, even if the appointed time is unnecessarily early, to avoid pointless friction. Mavericks with lower cognitive capacity may struggle to make those distinctions, frequently drawing the ire of their superiors. Additionally, smarter mavericks may be able to justify their decisions better. They can frame their deviance in the context of the mission and explain how they add value despite not complying perfectly. Mavericks with less verbal or logic ability might be limited to expressing frustration with the norms. Such unexplained behavior inevitably requires leadership to impose punishment in order to maintain discipline, even if the underlying, unspoken justification would be considered reasonable.

⁹ Within that core mission alone are four possible tasks. The remainder of MCRP 3–10A.4 (“Marine Rifle Squad”) includes additional sections on planning, patrolling, urban operations, movement, and training, among others.



Finally, intelligence could provide certain mavericks with the ability to discern which leaders tolerate dissent and which punish it ruthlessly, as well as which contexts reward creativity and which require compliance. They are then able to navigate the organization, gaining the support of allies and sponsors while avoiding roles and managers that impose conformity and punish change.

A trait not in play is self-control, as measured by TAPAS to reflect impulse control and emotional stability. The interaction between maverickism and self-control resulted in a null finding across all outcomes. I hypothesized that self-control would moderate maverickism's effects under an assumption that it would mitigate the consequences of low agreeableness and make deviance more constructive than destructive. The analysis showed otherwise. This suggests that maverickism functions through cognitive channels rather than regulatory ones. Mavericks succeed not because they suppress their impulses and nonconformity, but because they apply those impulses into the contexts and challenges that reward such behavior. Mavericks do not act on fleeting urges to break the rules; they are deliberate norm-challengers willing to deviate from established procedures in pursuit of achieving a broader objective.

C. THE UNEXAMINED QUADRANT: STEWARDS

I categorized individuals with high AFQT scores and low maverickism as "Stewards," implying risk-averse conformists who are capable of executing established doctrine. This characterization is empirically supported, but paints too broadly a group that likely contains subsets. For instance, one type that would likely exist within this quadrant is the active traditionalist, or someone who proactively defends existing norms against change.

This raises a question that remains unresolved: Does low maverickism comprise passive conformists who accept norms without strong opinion, or active traditionalists who enforce norms against those who challenge them? The former are not a threat to innovation, though they may delay it. The latter may actively obstruct it. In other words, if the approximately 40% of the population who are Stewards include a substantial subgroup who resist innovation and enforce status quo, they may inhibit novel approaches more



effectively than mavericks develop them. This is particularly true if the Stewards are in positions of authority and have existing policy, law, and norms on their side.

Future research should examine the low-maverickism quadrants by distinguishing rule-followers from rule-enforcers. Potential methods include identifying measures for traditionalism or authoritarianism. Talent management strategies would need to accommodate for both, especially when assignments involve working with mavericks on teams. Additional impacts could be in promotion boards, where Stewards could endorse similarly conforming subordinates, further reinforcing traditionalism. In that instance, mavericks would experience not only bureaucratic friction, but opposition from peers and leaders who found success through conformity. Left unchecked, the military could end up with a lack of the senior champions Rosen (1991) identified as essential for military innovation.

D. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Maverickism is measurable and consequential. The question now is whether those findings translate into personnel decisions without distorting incentives or lowering standards. The recommendations below are deliberately incremental. They do not require cultural revolution; rather, they require better alignment between what the institution says it desires and what it screens, rewards, and develops.

1. Selection and Recruiting

Recommendation 1: Screen and recruit aggressively on the combination of maverickism and AFQT. Current military enlistment processes use AFQT as a primary screening tool, with TAPAS consideration as a secondary factor. Formally integrating maverickism and AFQT scores would require the creation of a maverick flag in the military entrance system, which could be visible to Special Forces recruiters and assignment managers. Recruiting materials could incorporate some elements of maverickism to attract those interested in variety and unconventional approaches by emphasizing problem-solving, adaptation, and complex environments.



Recommendation 2: Avoid lowering cognitive standards for those high in maverickism. The findings present that high maverickism and low AFQT scores combine to present as elevated risk and minimal reward. A soldier with a below average AFQT and greater than one standard deviation maverickism represents an increased likelihood of disciplinary proceedings, early separation, and friction with superiors, all of which may outweigh their performance.

Recommendation 3: Signal tolerance for constructive nonconformity. If the military seeks novel ideas and adaptive capacity, both recognition and messaging should affirm that principled deviance is valued. This could take the form of 360-degree evaluations, reducing the weight of a superior's input and thereby lessening the cost of challenging authority. Additionally, public affairs could highlight initiatives that challenged existing procedures and promoted novel solutions at the same level as traditionally significant traits—physical fitness, marksmanship, and appearance in uniform (i.e., honor guards). One method could be the implementation of an award for innovator of the year, celebrated at a level on par with service member of the year awards that tend to emphasize excellence under existing norms and values.

2. Retention and Development

Recommendation 4: Deliberately route maverick personnel into roles that tolerate and reward variance. Elevated demotion rates among maverick Soldiers suggest that friction is not randomly distributed. Similarly, the high average maverick scores for some occupations, and low average scores for others, reveal some sorting already occurs organically. Some roles prioritize strict procedural compliance and consistent, uniform execution, while others require adaptation, problem-solving, and iteration. Rather than treating disciplinary outcomes as purely individual failure, assignment systems could account for person–environment fit. Where there is continued friction, leadership development focused on managing high–agency subordinates might further mitigate unnecessary disciplinary issues and attrition.

Recommendation 5: Invest in environments that accelerate learning. Signaling tolerance (Recommendation 3, above) is insufficient without environments that convert



dissent into learning. Innovation tends to occur in environments with informal networks, rapid iteration, and collaboration, not those with bureaucratic planning cycles and intensive oversight (Augier & Hughes, 2019). RAND Corporation after World War II collocated diverse thinkers and experts with minimal oversight and provided them unstructured time to explore (Hounshell, 1997). Existing military entities include the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU), SOFWERX, and the service-specific equivalents. Other opportunities include empowering Red Teams to be truly adversarial and staffing them with subject matter experts on the relevant topic alongside capable mavericks willing to offer direct critiques. Mavericks may also benefit from intentional grouping, whether through assignments to professional military education or training in the same cohort, or headquarters staff tours in which they will collaborate. This offers an opportunity to build a peer network, providing both support and a forum to test ideas that ordinarily would be summarily dismissed by conventional peers.

Recommendation 6: Raise awareness of constructive deviance to promotion boards. If maverickism produces both elevated opportunity for valuable innovation and elevated risk of friction, promotion systems inevitably decide how to value it. Evaluations that rely on cooperation and adherence to procedures may inadvertently suppress the traits of those who could provide more adaptive capacity. On the other hand, ignoring disciplinary signals would erode standards and reduce accountability. The implication requires threading a needle and asking promotion boards to interpret records with attention to context, recognizing the difference between corrosive behavior and principled dissent. Even without formal presentation of a maverick score, awareness of personality-related variance may sharpen board member judgment without lowering expectations.

Recommendation 7: Implement a pilot program experiment and evaluate results. Prior to broad policy changes, each service would benefit from a controlled pilot. Using AFQT and TAPAS scores, accession cohorts with high maverickism and above-average cognitive capacity could be identified and intentionally routed to units with an innovation orientation (e.g., test pilot school) or billets with a mandate for experimentation. Comparison groups would follow existing billet assignment processes. Over a defined



period, measure differences in performance evaluations, disciplinary events, retention, and other outcomes.

E. LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation is that cross-sectional correlations cannot establish causation. Unobserved characteristics correlated with both maverickism and outcomes could explain the findings. Alternatively, the effect of military socialization is assumed from one study. It is possible that basic and initial training enhances pre-existing traits or shifts personality distribution, which would influence effect sizes.

Another limitation is that the sample includes only enlisted soldiers from a set accessions window. Whether maverickism affects officer outcomes similarly remains untested, as does the prevalence of maverickism traits in other periods of time. Likewise, this data set observed at most nine years, with the majority of personnel having six to seven years of observations. This timeframe, while sufficient for early promotions and MOS assignment, lacks enough length to develop insights about retirement, terminal rank, and ascension to the most senior of leadership positions.

The DOX-A construct seeks to operationalize maverickism using available TAPAS facets, but my approximation introduces measurement error. TAPAS lacks direct measures of elements of openness and propensity for risk taking, both of which were essential aspects of Gardiner and Jackson's (2012) civilian maverickism construct. Additionally, the forced-choice format of TAPAS could mean that absolute trait levels differ from a respondent's relative assessments. Using Likert-scale measures mitigate this error, but then have the hazard of socially desirable response bias in the answers.

F. FUTURE RESEARCH

This research raises more questions than answers; I offer several areas of further exploration. First, applying the DOX-A construct to TAPAS and career data of other services could validate or call into question these findings. Even obtaining career outcome data for the years since the subject dataset could yield additional insights into retention and career progression.



One practical question that remains unknown is the optimal team composition and maverick density. In theory, too many mavericks could preclude smooth execution of necessary functions. Too few leads to an institution becoming stale, redundant, and behind the curve. Identifying certain high-performing units and linking TAPAS-based maverickism scores to personnel assigned to those units could reveal the ideal composition, taking into consideration the mission and context of the unit. A related analysis could evaluate the impacts of mavericks and non-mavericks stationed together, which would benefit from surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Replication in civilian and allied military samples is critical for validation. The ideal would be obtaining DOX-A scores of those in the technology sector, from software engineers to executives, and in startups and established firms. Then, one could test whether maverickism predicts patents, promotions, and turnover. Allied and partner militaries may also be interested in applying this analysis to their personnel databases. Do the effects persist in different cultures? Do different selection standards (i.e., volunteer versus conscription service) change the outcomes? Different national results would shed light on whether the findings reveal universal human capital dynamics or U.S.-specific preferences.



VIII. CONCLUSION

I set out to answer three questions: First, can a measurable personality construct capturing maverickism be derived from existing military assessment data? Second, how is maverickism distributed across the force, and does it predict meaningful career outcomes? Third, do emotional regulation and cognitive capacity moderate the relationship between maverickism and those outcomes? This study develops, tests, and explores that construct in order to understand not only who the mavericks are, but how institutions respond to them.

I found that maverickism—operationalized through TAPAS facets capturing openness, low agreeableness, dominance, and achievement—can be measured reliably within existing military data. It predicts career outcomes associated with exceptional performance, as evidenced by enlisted-to-officer commissioning and Special Forces selection. It also correlates with disciplinary outcomes such as demotion and involuntary separation. Cognitive capacity appears to buffer the disruptive potential of maverick traits while magnifying their performance benefits. Mavericks above the median AFQT generate disproportionate institutional value with comparatively reduced cost. Emotional regulation, or self-control, by contrast, did not significantly moderate these relationships.

There is, therefore, a measurable population within the force inclined toward novel and unconventional approaches, and capable and driven enough to execute them. But novelty generates friction, especially in institutions designed to maintain order. Deviation without sponsorship may draw suppression, and without some degree of senior support, innovative behavior is more likely to surface after a crisis than before.

The question is not whether to build a military composed entirely of mavericks; that would be structurally unstable. Nor is it whether to excuse misconduct in the name of creativity. The evidence suggests something more nuanced: unconventional personnel already exist within the force, and their impact—positive or negative—depends less on their presence than on how they are managed. Institutions that fail to distinguish between high-capacity challenges and low-value disruption will either waste talent or bring about



preventable friction. The empirical question now becomes strategic: how should the institution identify, channel, and invest in unconventional personnel in ways that capture their upside while managing their risk?

Adaptation does not emerge from personality alone. It requires selection standards that recognize potential, leaders willing to sponsor deviation, and assignment systems capable of matching unconventional talent to consequential challenges.



IX. AFTERWORD: MAVERICKS BEFORE MAVERICKS

The world knew the type before it gave it a name. Mavericks have always existed and institutions have had to respond. Here is one final story.

When I enrolled in the first phase of Joint Professional Military Education, class began with Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War. Around 431–404 BC, a rising Athens battled with Sparta for Greek supremacy. But the origin of the conflict was over 50 years earlier, when Athens listened to one man’s urging to deviate from military and political tradition and adopt a new approach to meet future threats.

Around 483 BC, the Athenians discovered a massive silver lode in their mines. The established response to such an event was to distribute a portion to each citizen, consistent with Athenian democracy. However, Themistocles, a newly elected, non-aristocratic official argued for the use of the silver to build 200 triremes—fast, oar-powered ships with bronze prows for ramming enemy vessels. The government ultimately agreed and Athens constructed the largest fleet in Greece (Herodotus; Hale, 2009).

In 480 BC, and only weeks after 300 Spartans held off the Persians at Thermopylae, the Athenian and Persian fleets met in the straits between mainland Greece and Salamis, an island about one mile offshore. Themistocles, now a General and veteran of the Battle of Marathon, lured the Persians into the narrowest part of the straits. There, the triremes outmaneuvered the Persian fleet, leading Athens to a decisive victory that ultimately repelled the Persian invasion (Herodotus; Holland, 2006).¹⁰

By all accounts, Themistocles possessed every trait measured in this study. He challenged Athenian orthodoxy by abandoning land warfare for naval power. He displayed relentless drive, spending years building naval infrastructure and political influence. He possessed tactical brilliance, using subterfuge and terrain to best position his forces against the enemy. Most importantly, Themistocles did not simply defy norms, question the status

¹⁰ This account emphasizes strategic decision-making and institutional response rather than the full range of political, environmental, and operational variables present at Salamis.



quo, and challenge authority. Rather, he channeled his criticism productively. He studied geopolitics, logistics, and Persian culture and psychology, all to form the best plan.

Athens faced a choice to trust the maverick or trust tradition. They chose the maverick and Greece survived. But the story continues just a bit further, for 10 years after Salamis, Athens exiled Themistocles, due to the rise of aristocratic politicians who saw Themistocles as too ambitious, independent, and self-promoting. In other words, he was demoted and involuntarily separated (Thucydides; Hale, 2009).

This study quantified what Athens experienced over 2,500 years ago. Institutions benefit from unconventional thinkers when facing strategic complexity and must adapt, but struggle with those same individuals when the stability returns and leaders want obedience. Organizations need both conformists who diligently execute the mission and mavericks who challenge ineffective processes and propose novel solutions when circumstances demand.

Nearly 10% of the sample have the same personality traits and cognitive capacity that multiples the likelihood of selection into Special Forces or officer commissioning. They are identifiable through assessment, capable and driven to produce outsized value, and eager to prove themselves.

Themistocles' unconventional strategy proved indispensable at Salamis. Soon after, he became an inconvenient maverick. The pattern existed long before the term.



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