

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



A CASE FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF THE NEURODIVERGENT

Lieutenant-Colonel Brenda Tinsley

JCSP 46

Solo Flight

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2020.

PCEMI 46

Solo Flight

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2020.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 46 – PCEMI 46
2019 – 2020

SOLO FLIGHT

A CASE FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF THE NEURODIVERGENT

Lieutenant-Colonel Brenda Tinsley

“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

Word Count: 5,255

“La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.”

Nombre de mots : 5.255

A CASE FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF THE NEURODIVERGENT

“In practice, the [Canadian] military is still not the friendliest place to be if you are someone diagnosed with Asperger’s or Autism.”¹

Introduction

Like cogs inside a tumbler lock, the conditions necessary for a new opportunity for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), for Canadian society, and for the *neurodivergent* in our society are falling into place. Those that diverge from the norm in terms of their neurology should be understood as being similar to other minority groups in society, with potential employment opportunities that could unlock a world of benefits for all involved. The question for all our futures is whether or not the CAF is capable of recognizing this opportunity and adjusting our recruitment and employment policies in order to take advantage. As a mother of a teen diagnosed as “high functioning autistic”, I have been involved with advocating the underappreciated skills and challenges of the neurodivergent in my family life.² As a LCol within the RCAF, participated in conversations with respect to recruiting shortages and the requirements of the military to be diverse and inclusive; this paper is where these two worlds collide with what I hope is mutual benefit to both.

In order to appreciate the situation it is important to understand both the definition and the societal movement of *neurodiversity* and the *neurodivergent* to frame the potential growth

¹ David Frigault, response to “Can you join the military with high functioning autism?”, *Quora* (Question/Answer website), 20 September 2018, last accessed 30 Mar 2020. <https://www.quora.com/Can-you-join-the-military-with-high-functioning-autism.html>.

² Since my son’s diagnoses; I have often had to address societal bias, often from authority figures such as teachers and sports coaches who are not educated on autism and therefore misperceive my son’s responses as disinterest, defiance, or lack of comprehension. This bias is discussed often on support groups as reflective of how the neurodivergent are misunderstood by society as “less intelligent” and having less to offer society as a whole.

opportunities for the CAF. Most prominently represented by the autism rights movement, the concept of neurodiversity only began appearing in literature within the last 15-20 years; it takes “neurological developments traditionally regarded as atypical, even as diagnosable disorders, and conceptualizes them as normal human variations.”³ More directly, it is a movement that accepts that members have a neurological difference/disability that affects their interactions in society, but rejects that this makes them substandard to neurotypicals, but rather provides important diversity to human cognitive capabilities. Recently, more discussion is appearing in studies and media on the neurodivergent, specifically on those considered ‘high functioning’ enough to integrate and successfully complete both high school and post secondary education. Although accurate statistics are challenging due to lack of reporting and diagnosing, it is estimated that in Canada there are 350 000 working age adults who could be classified as neurodivergent according to current medical diagnostics, 58% of whom have high school and 28% post secondary education, and mostly relevantly to this analysis, an incredible 85% unemployment rate.⁴

The relevance for the CAF and our recruitment policies and personnel requirements is in this exceptionally high unemployment rate. Existing policy clauses and the understanding of the necessity of diversity are already present within the CAF; albeit currently focusing on ‘visible minorities’. OPERATION GENERATION, the standing order on recruitment goals for the CAF, sets the goal of “generating a force of 101 500 talented and *diverse* members” and it is culturally understood that this goal exists in an era of expanding and new technical trades such as cyber and space that do not necessarily have the same general requirements for skill sets as previously

³ J.E. Robinson, “What is neurodiversity?” (blog) *Psychology Today*, (2013), as quoted in Anna Krzeminksa, Robert Austin, Susanne Bruyère, and Darren Hedley, “The advantages and challenges of neurodiversity employment in organizations,” *Journal of Management & Organization* 25, no 4 (July 2019): 453, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2292705376?pq-origsite=summon>.

⁴ Specialisterne Canada, *Specialisterne Canada: Overview*, (2019), Email exchange 20 March 2020.

recruited.⁵ This goal also needs to be accomplished in an era where the CAF finds itself “increasingly in direct competition with the private sector for the same high-priced talent” therefore the recruiting pool for these specialized skill sets will need to be diversified.⁶ It is therefore the argument of this paper that the logical opportunity for the CAF would be in recognizing and appreciating the unique skills of the neurodivergent, and then actively recruiting them as a vastly untapped candidate pool for the select trades for which they could be uniquely suited.

In order to explore and frame this opportunity, this paper is broken in three sections. The first section will be an examination of the CAF’s moral obligations to represent Canadian society, and current policies with respect to employment equity which could apply in the future to the neurodivergent. Next will be an overview of concepts of neurodiversity and their unique skill sets in the global workplace, with identified benefits to employers and therefore theoretically the CAF. The final section will discuss current ground breaking models of how neurodivergents are being recruited and employed by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and in the Canadian civil sector as potential models for the CAF. All the cogs are in place to unlock a unique opportunity and ensure that no one has to feel that the CAF isn’t “the friendliest place” for any group within our society with the desire to serve.

CAF Recruiting Policy and the drive to Diversity

In order to frame a case for the recruitment of the neurodivergent into the CAF, it is important to examine the current state of the CAF’s approach and obligations to diversity in

⁵ Department of National Defence, *Standing Operations Order – Operation Generation*, (Ottawa: 2019), para 9(a).

⁶ Christian Leuprecht, “Demographic Imperatives for Diversity and Inclusion,” in *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 29.

general. The debate regarding the neurodivergent as an identified minority group is ongoing globally; the CAF is not necessarily behind in this conversation, but it does have the option of being ahead of it. This section will examine the obligations of the CAF as a force to be diverse, the current CAF policy and strategy to do so, and discuss the need to extend this inclusivity past its current focus on visible minorities to include the often less visible and less well-defined neurodivergent. It should be noted at this stage that the CAF does not have an official policy prohibiting the recruitment of the neurodivergent outside the requirements of Universality of Service, and that due to high functioning autism being often undiagnosed and masking as neurotypical, there may be an unknown number of neurodivergent within CAF ranks. This section will refer specifically those with an official diagnosis and whose divergence would require them to be considered under the expanded category of “disabled” according to Canada’s Employment Equity Act.⁷

The case for diversity within the CAF is framed in terms of necessity, both for operational effectiveness (personnel available), and to honour critical social obligations. Historically, each time the traditional recruiting pool of ideal candidates has been threatened, either by the World Wars or by economic conditions, the CAF has been forced to expand its definition of “suitable” candidates and make internal adjustments. This necessity impetus alone is not a sustainable rationale for diversity recruitment, as it has been argued that these arrangements do not foster actual inclusion; “recruiting from the diverse merely for basic needs in the short term fails to meet the needs of the serving”, and arguably, the societal needs that

⁷ (3) **Persons with disabilities** means persons who have a long term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment and who:

A. consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or
 B. believes that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment.

Government of Canada, “Employment Equity Act”, (2017) Last accessed 27 March 2020, <http://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/employment-equity.html>.

CAF is obligated to serve as well.⁸ True inclusion out of acknowledged societal or moral obligations requires the acknowledgement of the divergence from the previously accepted ‘norm’ and “incorporating these differences into the organization in ways that improve mission outcomes”.⁹ Inclusivity of previously identified minority groups has historically proven benefits to the CAF, Canadian society, and the included members. Over the past decades we have worked through diversity based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and more traditionally-acknowledged forms of physical disabilities; extending this to the neurodivergent can be argued as a logical extension of the same conversation.

The first question to be answered is the CAF’s moral and legal responsibility to include diversity in its rank, and then to examine the extension of diversity to the neurodivergent. Although focusing on bilingualism and recruitment from Canada’s Atlantic provinces, Christian Leuprech makes the Janowitzian “citizen soldier” argument, based on the moral assertion that the CAF must “practice what we preach,” and that the failure to diversity our members puts the armed forces at odds with the Canadian population, delegitimizing the military in the eyes of society which we serve.¹⁰ This type of assertion is the basis for the Canadian and therefore CAF concept of recruitment, that diversity in the armed forces is a

litmus test of just how free, equal, and fair a democratic a society really is. For the armed forces to defend democratic values, all members of society have a stake in securing their defence...groups that are unrepresented or underrepresented risk

⁸ Alastair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani, “Unpacking Diversity and Inclusion,” in *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*, Ed Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat and Bessma Momani, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2019), 9.

⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰ Christian Leuprecht, “Demographic Imperatives for Diversity and Inclusion”, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*, Ed Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat and Bessma Momani, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2019), 20.

being relegated to a lower status of citizenship at best and to a fifth pillar of society at worst.¹¹

The CAF has made significant strides in attempt to keep pace with societal identification and inclusion of previously ignored minority groups, as these groups are identified by society, as part of the a moral imperative underlying the citizen soldier model. With the rise of the neurodivergent movement, it is logical that the CAF should made adjustments for inclusivity from the same standpoint.

The traditional counterarguments to diversity in the armed forces are based in Huntington's theory of functional imperative that a military is meant to defend democracy, not practice it. This takes the form of two assertions that have been used in the past against the inclusion of minority groups: first, that diversity undermines cohesion and thereby organizational effectiveness, and second that the minorities themselves are not interested in serving.¹² This could be used to counter the moral imperative of inclusion of the neurodivergent, as the even the label itself would indicate that they could be less cohesive as they are divergent from the homogenous *neurotypical*. While it cannot be denied that the recruitment, training, and employment of those whose thought processes differ from the accepted 'norm' would require significant institutional change to CAF processes and policies, the argument remains that we have the *moral* requirement to do so for any group identified as a designated group by the Canadian Employment Equity Act.¹³ The CAF is intended to fulfill its role of the defence of society, in a way that is representative--to the best of our ability--of that society as a whole.

¹¹ Christian Leuprecht, "The Demographics of Force Generation: Recruitment, Attrition and Retention of Citizen Soldiers.", In *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice*, edited by Thomas Juneau, Philippe Lagassé, and Srdjan Vucetic, (USA: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 181.

¹² Ibid, 180.

¹³ designated groups as:

Hand in hand with the moral imperative of inclusivity and diversity employment is the legal requirement to do so. The concept of the neurodivergent and employment policies is starting to be researched and discussed within the legal and labour communities. We have accepted from the modern legal standpoint that discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, gender, and physical disabilities is wrong, but the concept of brain attributes as an employment equity category is still being examined. The very real new question that is starting to be asked is “can atypical neurocognitive traits be considered the new constitutional grounds of discrimination?”¹⁴ The rise of the neurodivergent movement has also been identified as having the component pieces of legally lobbying to establish and identify new rights as identified for other minority groups.¹⁵ These neurodivergent lobby group and the rise of analysis being done in the legal and human resource communities are shifting the conversation away from the dated understanding of neurodivergence as a disability that is discussed only in medical terms of needing ‘fixing’, to that of a new category of difference with strengths and weaknesses, but with the same societal access to employment opportunities as other groups. In the near future there is the likelihood that the CAF could be legally challenged to make accommodations within Universality of Service and employ the neurodivergent. The choice may be whether the

-
- **women;**
 - **Aboriginal peoples** – people who are Indian, Inuit or Métis;
 - **persons with disabilities** – people with a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment who consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment or who believe that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, as well as individuals with functional limitations due to their impairment that have been accommodated in their current job or workplace; and
 - **people, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.**

Canada. “Employment Equity Act in Federally Regulated Workplaces.” Last modified 12 December 2017. <http://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/employment-equity.html>. Members of visible minorities, last accessed 27 March 2020.

¹⁴ Andrea Lollini. “Brain Equality: legal implications of neurodiversity in a Comparative Perspective”, *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* vol 5 no. 1 (September 2018): 70. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?lname=&handle=hein.journals/nyuilp51&collection=&page=69&collection=journals>.

¹⁵ Ibid, 72.

institution requires being forced to do so, or leans forward to embrace the advantages and opportunities that come from this latest identified ‘non visible’ minority.

Inclusivity is already threaded throughout CAF policies with respect to recruitment, employment, and training, requiring only the expansion of our perspectives of diversity behind the described ‘visible minorities’ on which they tend to focus, to the less obvious neurodivergent. The Canadian Forces Employment Equity Regulations are the foundational document with respect to the CAF adherence to Canada’s Employment Equity Act. Currently it, like many federal documents, refers to the fact that CAF members may be members of one or more of the ‘designated groups’; aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of *visible* minorities.¹⁶ It is also in this document that the potential challenge or counter argument to diversity and inclusivity is found, the “need for operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces”, generally understood to be defined in the Universality of Service document.¹⁷ Universality of Service is the ‘out clause’ that the CAF is granted with respect to Canadian federal employment equity requirements in the interest that “the open ended nature of military service is one of the features that distinguish it from the civilian notion of employment.”¹⁸ It could be argued that this is inherently necessary to protect the intensely physically or emotionally demanding roles within the military from having to adapt in ways that could be compromising to the mission set, but could be legally challenged for roles that could be more adaptive. The underlying principle here is similar to Huntington’s concept of *operational effectiveness* being at odds with the concepts of diversity, due to the requirements to change

¹⁶ Canada. Canadian Forces Employment Equity Regulations SOR/2002-421, 2002, para 16 (a), <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2002-421/FullText.html>. Last accessed 27 March 2020.

¹⁷ Ibid, para 16 (c).

¹⁸ Canada. DAOD 5023-0 Universality of Service, (DND, 08 May 2006), para 2.3. <https://www.canada.ca/en/deparment-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/5000-series/5023-0-universality-of-service.html>. Last accessed 01 April 2020.

training and employment paradigms that have endured throughout decades. This view is diminishing in the technological age as a rising Canadian societal narrative is becoming that of the value and importance of neurodivergent workplace inclusivity.¹⁹ The CAF has learned and will continue to be asked to overcome previous paradigms to support the moral requirement of inclusivity, and this should eventually extend into the realm of neurodiversity.

The CAF has already made early steps in this, as is evident in some of its policies and publications. Within the CAF there are many discussions already taking place as to whether the requirements of specialized trades such as cyber might not require the same physical characteristics of the infantry, for example, re-evaluating the “universal” aspect of UoS. The most recent National Defence Departmental plan confirms that goal of the CAF is to “assemble a Defence team that supports wide-ranging perspectives, cultural and linguistic diversity, gender balance, age and *other distinctive traits*.”²⁰ Neurodiversity may not have been conceptualized when this directive was drafted, but it is not difficult to extrapolate either logically or contextually that it would apply to the neurodivergent, once the CAF and Canadian society embraces it as a minority group.

More groundwork for this discussion as to whether or not the employment of people with disabilities puts the CAF’s operational effectiveness at risk was the subject of 2013 ‘deep dive’

¹⁹ Michael McCullough, “Autistic employees make inroads as companies embrace “neurodiversity”,” *Canadian Business News*, March 29 2017, <https://www.canadianbusiness.com/innovation/autism-neurodiversity-hiring/>, last accessed 17 April 2020.

Stephanie Dunn, Krystale Wittvrongel and Jennifer Zwicker, “How do we boost Employment Outcomes for NeuroDiverse Albertans?,” *The School of Public Policy Publications*, 10, no. 5 (June 2018). <http://dx.doi.org/10.11575/sppp.v11i0.52988>.

Richard Branson, “Auticon, leading global technology employer for autistic professionals, expands worldwide reach and joins forces with Meticulon, Canada’s first technology company focused on employing people with autism,” *Canada NewsWire*, 04 June 2019, <http://www.newsire.ca/en/releases/archive/June2019/04/c7221.html>, last accessed 27 March 2020.

²⁰ Canada. Department of National Defence. “National Defence Departmental Plan 2020-2021.” Last accessed 27 March 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-plans/departmental-plan-2020-20-index/planned-results/defence-team.html>.

study done on behalf of the Chief of Military Personnel. This study defined ‘disability’ contextually within the CAF as an “inability to perform the associated tasks and activities within the organization”.²¹ Acknowledging the increasing limited recruiting demographic in Canada and the CAF’s ‘out clause’ from the Employment Equity Act via Universality of Service, the study examines in vignette form the advantages and disadvantages to the CAF in employing more people identified as ‘disabled,’ and the subsequent risks and benefits to that inclusivity. It makes several proactive statements that people who are considered ‘disabled’ at the time of writing would not be considered so in the future due to technological adaptations and shifts in educational paradigms. The report ends with a prophetic recommendation that recruitment in 2024-2025 should focus on “Canadians with specific abilities and engagements that will allow the CAF to meet its cyber-warfare mandate, in particular....individuals with mild forms of autism.”²² Although this study was merely an exercise in theoretical thought, there is actual evidence that the CAF is starting to make policy adaptations in the concepts of neurological diversity. Recently DAOD 5516-5 “Learning Disability Accommodation during Recruiting, Training and Education” was issued under the Director of Human Rights and Diversity. The directive contains adaptations and accommodations that are required to be made for those with a learning disability, which is essentially a form of neurodivergence. Although this language is not used in the directive, it could be in order to widen its applicability. While still tied to Universality of Service, the Directive does in its language acknowledge the moral and legal responsibility to accommodate diversity in its ranks while still being able to maintain operational effectiveness by stating pragmatically that “the diagnoses and reporting of LDs has increased within the general population. Because of the evolution of research and awareness, persons with

²¹ Chief of Military Personnel. *Persons with Disabilities in Defence Deep Dive to 2023*. (Canada: N.D. 2013). 2.

²² Ibid, 23.

LDS have been able to achieve greater success in education and careers.”²³ The fact that this is a new directive acknowledging that accommodations can and should be made for those with learning disabilities is proof that the CAF acknowledges its moral obligations to support candidates that may have otherwise not made it through recruiting or training, in order to support its operational effectiveness.

By reviewing opinions on the moral obligations of citizen soldier militaries to reflect their societies, the upcoming legal arguments for the inclusion of the neurodivergent in employment, and the current state of CAF policy, it is clear that there is an existing foundation of thought for the future targeted recruitment of the neurodivergent. The CAF in all its policies and doctrine promote the Canadian value of diversity, and while these policies do not yet recognize the neurodivergent as a non visible minority group, it would not be an insurmountable leap in logic to do so. Although Universality of Service does still give the CAF an ability to reject inclusivity based on operational effectiveness, there are shifts in thoughts as evidenced by the DAOD on how to make accommodations that could balance the previously oppositional diversity vs effectiveness dichotomy. The case that needs to be made for the neurodivergent will be that the necessity and value in their inclusion will be worth the accommodations that must be made.

The Strengths of the Neurodivergent

There are two separate narratives that arise with respect to the hiring of the neurodivergent as a ‘non visible’ disability or minority group; the moral implication of hiring those on the lower end of the autistic spectrum for ‘make work’ to ensure societal participation,

²³ Department of National Defence. DAOD 5516-5, *Learning Disability Accommodation during Recruiting, Training and Education*. 29 April 2019. 4.2. Last accessed 29 March 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/5000-series/5516/5516-5-learning-disability-accommodation-during-recruiting-training-and-education.html>.

and the value in recognizing the unique skill sets of those on the higher end of the spectrum and directing them towards employment for which they would be as, if not more, suited than neurotypicals. As my personal experience with my autistic son and my advocacy for adaptations in his school environment have been in the latter domain, this is the aspect I evaluated as a potential opportunity for the CAF.²⁴ Within the CAF we are taught to value different perceptions within groups to offset the damages of groupthink and to evaluate and direct personnel towards trades and employment for which they are best suited, the neurodivergent would be an expansion of processes already in place. It was established in the first section that Canadian society is beginning to recognize the neurodivergent as a group to be considered for employability and by that by the concept of ‘citizen soldier’, the CAF should as well. This section will discuss the potential benefits of actively pursuing the neurodivergent in terms of both unique skill sets and unique availability as an argument for their value for specialized roles within the CAF.

Previous descriptive language regarding people on the autism spectrum or classified as neurodivergent have come from the medical community via the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and communicated in terms of *disability* when compared to neurotypicals.²⁵ More and more published conversations are framing the *abilities* of the

²⁴ For example, my son was struggling with written work in school and testing poorly, once an evaluation was done on his abilities, it was revealed that his memory and retention skills for information that was presented orally was significantly higher than his peer group. Evaluations for him subsequently were done orally, and then later extended to several of his classmates who had previously been struggling improving their performance. His memory skills came in useful later when the teacher forgot her class notes one day, and my son proceeded to recite word for word what she had said the previous day. Easy adaptations made for the neurodivergent and then understanding and using their strengths would improve many conditions for any group.

²⁵ **Autism Diagnostic Criteria:** A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts. B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. C. Symptoms must be present in the early elopement period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies in later life). D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.

American Psychiatric Association, “Autism Diagnostic Criteria”, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition* (DSM-5), 2013. As found on <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnosis-criteria-dsm>, last accessed 26 March 2020.

autistic and/or neurodivergent and identifying areas in which they might thrive, this is a shift of perspective that could be beneficial for all. An article in the *Journal of Management and Organization* referred to several psychological studies in framing the advantages for management to hire the neurodivergent, citing that;

the special abilities of people with autism to complete exacting and repetitive tasks, to observe and recall detail and to recognize patterns (Austin & Busquets 2008, Boucher 2009) allow them to do valuable work for which others lack patience or similar ability. In some contexts, the ability to focus single-mindedly on a task has been observed to generate substantial productivity benefits (e.g. Austin, 2018).²⁶

The authors then note that that managers at businesses recruiting and employing the neurodivergent are “pointing to an easing effect on the company’s talent scarcity problems in certain key areas (e.g.: cybersecurity, business analytics).”²⁷ Similar findings were described in an article in the *Journal of Accountancy* written with respect to a pilot program in hiring the neurodivergent conducted by the international finance and tax company “EY”. The company is quoted as praising the neurodivergent as an “untapped resource pool” and stating that “many with autism excel at data analysis, looking at problems from different angles and spotting solutions that may elude others.”²⁸ Auticon, a global IT and compliance consulting business, specifically hires the neurodivergent for their unique skillsets in “pattern recognition, error detection, fraud prevention, logical analysis, sustained concentration and attention to detail.”²⁹ These articles and industries are representative of the reframing of societal perceptions of the

²⁶ Anna Krzeminska, Robert Austin, Susanne Bruyere, and Darren Headly. “The advantages and challenges of neurodiversity employment in organizations,” *Journal of Management and Organization* 25, no 4 (July 2019): 454.

²⁷ Ibid, 454.

²⁸ Sarah Ovaska-Few, “Promoting neurodiversity”, *Journal of Accountancy*, Jan 2018, <https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2018/jan/ey-pilot-program-workers-with-autism.html> , last accessed 27 March 2020.

²⁹ Richard Branson, “Auticon, leading global technology employer for autistic professionals, expands worldwide reach and joins forces with Meticulon, Canada’s first technology company focused on employing people with autism,” *Canada NewsWire*, 04 June 2019, <http://www.newsire.ca/en/releases/archive/June2019/04/c7221.html>, last accessed 27 March 2020.

neurodivergent by various employment sectors; the viewing of medically diagnosed traits as desirable positive attributes to be employed, vice deficiencies causing the person to be disregarded. The very existence of *Auticon*, *Meticulon*, a Canadian company focussing on hiring the neurodivergent, and *Specialisterne*, an international agency that works with large companies to place autistics in the business domain; are strong indicators that globally these valuable skills are being recognized and actively pursued in the civilian sector and the CAF is potentially falling behind.³⁰

This is not to imply that the neurodivergent would be well suited to all professions, either in the civilian or military sectors. As noted by autism researchers in an article supporting the employment of the neurodivergent, the characteristics of autism mean that autistics “may not cope well in jobs that require immediate and rapid processing of requests or demands... (they) are also more likely to struggle in busy or noisy environments”.³¹ The debate of operational effectiveness and the potential negative impacts of accommodating the neurodivergent is a valid one with respect to debating specific types of work for which the challenges of the neurodivergent make them unsuitable. However; this should not be used as a justification to disregard the neurodivergent as a viable candidate pool for all types of work, under the cover of something such as Universality of Service. The divergence that would make the neurotypical unsuitable for the infantry could make them flourish in fields such as cyber warfare.

The second factor to consider for the active recruitment of the neurodivergent is that of availability or potential depth of this non traditional recruiting pool for the CAF. Precise

³⁰ Specialisterne Canada. “Specialisterne Canada: Overview.” (2019). Slidedeck provided by Julia Martensson julia.martensson@specialisterne.com. Email exchange 20 March 2020.

³¹ Susanna Baldwin, Debra Costley, and Anthony Warren. “Employment Activities and Experiences of Adults with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger’s Disorder,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 44 no 10 (Oct 2014): 2440.

numbers of diagnosed neurodivergents distinguished by levels and type of education are challenging to obtain either within Canada or in other countries for a variety of reasons including being fairly nascent field of interest.³² As cited in the introduction, the estimate done by Specialisterne Toronto with assistance from Statistics Canada is as of 2012, 350 000 working age neurodivergents, nearly 60% with secondary education and an estimated 85% unemployment rate.³³ This extremely high rate of unemployment is attributed by most literature to hiring processes and work environments that are not well adapted to the challenges of the neurodivergent, as well as a lack of education and understanding of neurodivergence by potential employers.³⁴ Given my previously cited personal experiences as the parent of an autistic child and interacting with teachers, sports team coaches and other members of society, I would infer also a high level of bias translates into the professional domains and CAF leadership that will need a period of education to overcome, fortunately there are agencies globally and within Canada working in this towards this end.

As both global and Canadian understanding of the neurodivergent as a group increases, there are an increasing number of fields and businesses that are recognizing the particular unique skill sets of this group as would apply to their domains. More literature is being produced by companies such as Auticon and Specialisterne to educate employers on how to adapt their practices in order to harness what is starting to be seen as an untapped recruiting pool in a period of high competition for talent. Companies such as Microsoft, SAP, Wills Towers Watson, Hewlett Packard Enterprise and Ford, as well as the Canadian ‘Big Five’ banks

³² Telephone conversation/email exchange with Alan Kriss, Director Specialisterne Toronto Branch, 19 March 2020.

³³ Specialisterne Canada, *Specialisterne Canada: Overview*, (2019), Email exchange 20 March 2020

³⁴ Stephanie Dunn, Krystale Wittvrongel and Jennifer Zwicker, “How do we boost Employment Outcomes for NeuroDiverse Albertans?” (June 2018).

Karen Kopelson, “Know thy work and do it: the Rhetorical-Pedagogical Work of Employment and Workplace Guides for Adults with “high functioning” Autism, “ *College English*, Vol 77 n6 (July 2015) , 554.

are all now known to be adapting hiring processes and working with experts in order to access the talent pool of neurodivergents.³⁵ The question is whether the CAF will examine its own policies, types of work, and recruiting needs, and step in early to access this potential recruiting pool.

Potential models for CAF Neurodivergent Inclusivity

To this point this paper has examined the “whys” of the deliberate recruitment of the neurodivergent by examining the moral obligation of inclusivity as a non visible minority group, the existing governmental and CAF supporting policy framework, and outlining the desirable skill sets and availability of this potential talent pool. This final section will suggest a roadmap of ‘how’ by outlining the current employment of the neurodivergent by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) , and the efforts of the Canadian branch of Specialisterne, an agency that overcomes societal barriers by educating major corporations and placing the neurodivergent in the business workforce.

Israel is currently the first and only military in the world to have an active deliberate recruitment policy of the neurodivergent, with an adapted education model and employment streams specifically chosen for their emphasis on the skillsets for which autistics are known. The program known as *Roim Rachok* (Looking Ahead) was cofounded in 2012 by several former Moussad agents and its official website describes the model as;

an innovative program designed to train adults on the autism spectrum in professions required by the Israel Defense Forces and the civilian market. Qualified young adults, who want to volunteer for service in the IDF or integrate

³⁵ Angela Nelson, “Neurodiversity in the Workplace, Exciting Opportunities on the Horizon”, Exceptional Parent Magazine, March 2018, <https://www.eparent.com/education/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace-exciting-opportunities-on-the-horizon/>, last accessed 27 March 2020.

into the job market, are taught professions for which they have a comparative advantage.³⁶

Although arguably Israel has a different recruitment model and requirement than Canada, given its continued use of conscription and obligatory service, the motivations for inclusivity and acknowledgement of its moral obligations are comparable. Due to Israel's compulsory service model, service in the military is seen as a right of passage, a vital contribution to the security of the state, a definition of character.³⁷ One of the founding members of Roim Rachok, Leora Sali, had first hand experience, having served with the Moussad and having an autistic son, she represents the motivations of both parent and representative of the state when she is quoted as saying "I wanted him to be part of society. I wanted him to learn to have a profession, to be able to work and support himself in the future."³⁸ The concepts of inclusivity are being applied from the perspectives of the needs of the neurodivergent and their families, as well as from that of the military reflect the composition and greater needs of their society.

For inclusivity to work in practice it must overcome the oppositional challenge of any perceived negative effect to the operational capability of the force, the members must be contributing. Each autistic that graduates from the Roim Rachok program would have been previously rejected by the army due to their challenges under the traditional model, until the founders of the program recognized and promoted what was understood to be the strengths of the neurodivergent "their attention to detail, their attachment to familiar, repetitive work and their

³⁶ Beyond the Horizon (charity), "Roim Rachok Program", Last accessed 27 March 2020, <https://www.roim-rachok.org/english>.

³⁷ David Kushner, "The Israeli Army's Roim Rachok Program is Bigger than the Military", *Esquire*, 2 April 2019, <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a26454556/roim-rachok-israeli-army-autism-program/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

ability to spot anomalies.”³⁹ The IDF has harnessed those abilities into the trades that would benefit the most, predominantly the visual analysis of a constant stream of aerial reconnaissance imagery as part of what is known as Intelligence Unit 9900.⁴⁰ Given that Israel and its current level of conflict is inarguably one of the most unforgiving operational environments imaginable, these neurodivergents are credited with a capability that is seen as beyond that of neurotypicals, “nine hours a day, or more during a crises, they exhibit almost bionic focus, an uncanny ability to start at a screen and process highly complex data without tiring or daydreaming.”⁴¹ In addition to aerial reconnaissance analysis, employment includes the domains of software quality assurance, informatics (the gathering of intelligence from open sources, geographic information systems (input and analysis of geographic information), and the maintenance of electronics, all trades selected not only suited for the unique talents of neurodivergents, but also for the high demand in the civilian sector, ensuring employability and reinforcing the military’s obligations and commitment to society at large.⁴²

In order to understand potential applicability for the CAF, there are many lessons to be learned as to how the IDF adapted its recruitment, training, and employment models to include the neurodivergent. In emails exchanged with Tal Vardi, a former Moussad agent and one of Roim Rachok’s founding members, he listed a series of criteria that were critical to the process. The program was described by him as holistic in nature; including the screening of candidates, a three-month training course in both military and life skills supported by autism specialists, and a formal volunteering period within the unit, whose leadership had been educated as to how to

³⁹ Jenni Frazer, “Autism and the IDF: How a unique unit is ending exclusion”, Jewish News, 2 March 2017, <https://www.jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/autism-and-the-idf-exclusion/>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ David Kushner, “The Israeli Army’s Roim Rachok Program is Bigger than the Military”, *Esquire*.

⁴² Tal Vardi. Roim Rachok Program. Summary provided via email exchange with author, 17 March 2020.

best lead and manage the neurodivergent.⁴³ After a formal four month volunteer work employment stage within the unit, the candidates who have been able to adapt to the work and military lifestyle are offered a period of service of one year, with the option to extend to the full normal duration of compulsory service. Graduates from IDF's Roim Rachok program have been hired for their skills and military training by companies in Israel such as Intel and eBay and it was assessed at the time that other companies wouldn't far behind.⁴⁴ The IDF is setting a clear example of how a military can change its perceptions, alter factors that inhibit inclusivity and then operationally benefit from a previously untapped talent pool.

In contrast with the example set by a foreign military is one set domestically in the business sector by the Canadian branch of the international company *Specialisterne*. The company started in Denmark and has expanded globally over the last ten years, the company mandate is to be a;

socially innovative company where the majority of employees have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. Employees work as business consultants on tasks such as software testing, programming and data entry for the public and private sectors.⁴⁵

Based in Toronto, the Canadian branch of Specialisterne works with both private corporations to help them access “this under employed talent pool, a community rich in individuals with tremendous skills and unique perspectives.”⁴⁶ The company acts as a talent finder for the business community specifically into the neurodivergent talent pool, providing the additional support of employer and human resource manager training and support throughout the hiring and

⁴³ Note: candidates are screened and classed as “high functioning” meaning that they have high language skills and an intellectual level assessed in the normal to high range.

Tal Vardi, *Roim Rachok Program*, Summary provided via email exchange with author, 17 March 2020.

⁴⁴ David Kushner, “The Israeli Army’s Roim Rachok Program is Bigger than the Military,” *Esquire*.

⁴⁵ Specialisterne, “About Specialisterne”, <https://specialisterne.com/>, last accessed 02 April 2020.

⁴⁶ Specialisterne Canada, “Specialisterne Overview Canada”, document provided by email exchange with Julia Martenssen, Specialisterne Canada, 20 March 2020.

early employment stages. The company has successfully placed neurodivergent candidates in companies such as Canada's "Big Five Banks", IBM, and SAP, amongst others in fields such as financial and information analytics, security, and information management.⁴⁷ In a telecom held with Alan Kriss, CEO of Specialisterne Canada, he indicated that Specialisterne Canada had interacted with Tal Vardi of the aforementioned Roim Rachok program, as well as help early conversations with CSIS, and the RCMP, which indicates that the CAF would not be alone in federal agencies in exploring the recruitment of the neurodivergent.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The Canadian Armed Forces is currently in period of expansion in personnel, new employment domains such as space and cyber, and a period of high competition for the candidate pool within our nation. The recent CAF Diversity Strategy acknowledges both the moral imperative for diversity to "reflect the society it serves" as well as pragmatically assesses our operational need to do so in order to "attract from an increasingly diverse labour market".⁴⁹ Although current policy currently reflects a focus on the recruitment of women and visible minorities, all the policy pieces and discussions within leadership are present within our culture to embrace the potential expansion of the ideals to the emerging realm of the neurodivergent.

The neurodiversity movement is globally reframing cultural perceptions of the neurodivergent, such as those on the autism spectrum, as less of a medical disability and more as a divergence in human cognitive abilities that needs to be better understood. Strengths of the neurodivergent such as high levels of attention span and detail orientation in 'high functioning' members of the spectrum, are being discussed being highly desirable in certain employment

⁴⁷ Specialisterne Canada "Specialisterne Canada New Employer Slide deck", document provided by email exchange with Julia Martenssen, Specialisterne Canada, 20 March 2020.

⁴⁸ Telecom with Mr. Alan Kriss, dated 19 March, 2020.

⁴⁹ Department of National Defence, "Canadian Forces Diversity Strategy", April 2016. Foreword.

fields, and research for needed adaptations to work environments being done. Major corporations within Canada are accessing autism employment experts such as Specialisterne Canada in order to educate themselves and access a candidate pool that is currently vastly untapped within our country due to lack of understanding of this distinct group and of neurodiversity as a concept. The Israeli Defence Force is the first military in the world to develop an understanding of the advantages both for themselves and for their society of deliberating recruiting the neurodivergent into trades for which they are deemed uniquely suited, even over their neurotypical counterparts. It is the position of this paper that the CAF could address some of its recruiting challenges, reap benefits in similar trades as the IDF, and demonstrate its commitment its values based Diversity Strategy by the deliberate recruitment of the neurodivergent within our society. Outreach should be conducted by the CAF with the IDF and Specialisterne Canada in order to educate ourselves and be among the first federal agencies to lean forward and access this candidate pool. The CAF prides itself on leadership by example, and so many could benefit if we do this now.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baldwin, Susanna, Debra Costley, Anthony Warren. "Employment Activities and Experiences of Adults with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger's Disorder," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 44 no 10 (Oct 2014): 2440-449.
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1562334731?pq-origsite=summon>.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. "Canadian Forces Diversity Strategy." April 2016.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. "Canadian Forces Employment Equity Regulations." SOR/2002-421. Current to 20 August 2020. Last accessed 27 March 2020. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2002-421/FullText.html>.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. *Standing Operations Order – Operation Generation*. Ottawa: Commander Military Personnel Command, 20 March 2019.
- Canada. Minister of National Defence. D2-386/2017E, *Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017.
- Canada. Government of Canada. "Employment Equity Act in Federally Regulated Workplaces." Last modified 12 December 2017. Last accessed 27 March 2020.
<http://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/employment-equity.html>.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. DAOD 5516-5, *Learning Disability Accommodation during Recruiting, Training and Education*. 29 April 2019. Last accessed 29 March 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/5000-series/5516/5516-5-learning-disability-accommodation-during-recruiting-training-and-education.html>.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. "National Defence Departmental Plan." Last accessed 27 March 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-plans/departmental-plan-2020-20-index/planned-results/defence-team.html>.
- Canada. Chief of Military Personnel. *Persons with Disabilities in Defence Deep Dive to 2023*. Canada: N.D. 2013.
- Dunn, Stephanie, Krystale Wittevrongel, Jennifer Zwicker. "How do we boost employment outcomes for Neurodiverse Albertans?" *The School of Public Policy Publications* 10, no. 5 (June 2018). <http://dx.doi.org/10.11575/sppp.v11i0.52988>.
- Eastwood, James. "Enabling Militarism? The Inclusion of Soldiers with Disabilities in the Israeli Military," *International Political Sociology* 13, no 4 (December 2019): 430-446.
<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/13/4/430/5559668>.

- Edgar, Alastair, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani. "Unpacking Diversity and Inclusion." In *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*, edited by Alastair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani, 1-19. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.
- Gelbar, Nicholas W., Isaac Smith, Brian Reichow. "Systematic Review of Articles Describing Experience and Supports of Individuals with Autism Enrolled in College and University Programs," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 44 no 10 (Oct 2014): 2593-601. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1562335083?pq-origsite=summon>.
- Kopelson, Karen. "Know thy work and do it: The Rhetorical-Pedagogical Work of Employment and Workplace Guides for Adults with "High Functioning" Autism," *College English* 77 no. 6. (July 2015): 553-576. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1689391043?pq-origsite=summon>.
- Krzeminska, Anna, Robert Austin, Susanne Bruyere, Darren Headly. "The advantages and challenges of neurodiversity employment in organizations," *Journal of Management and Organization* 25, no 4 (July 2019): 453-463. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2292705376?pq-origsite=summon>.
- Leuprecht, Christian. "The Demographics of Force Generation: Recruitment, Attrition and Retention of Citizen Soldiers." In *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice*, edited by Thomas Juneau, Philippe Lagassé, and Srdjan Vucetic, 179-200. USA: Palgrave MacMillan., 2019.
- Leuprecht, Christian. "Demographic Imperatives for Diversity and Inclusion." In *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*, edited by Alastair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani, 19-35. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2019.
- Lollini, Andrea. "Brain Equality: Legal Implications of Neurodiversity in a Comparative Perspective," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 51, no. 1 (September 2018): 69-135. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?lname=&handle=hein.journals/nyuilm51&collection=&page=69&collection=journals>
- Nelson, Angela. "Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Exciting Opportunities on the Horizon," *Exceptional Parent*. (March 2018) Last accessed 25 March 2020. <https://www.eparent.com/education/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace-exciting-opportunities-on-the-horizon/>.
- One Academic College. "Roim Rachok Program," last accessed 30 March 2020, <https://www.roim-rachok.org/english>.

Specialisterne Canada. “Specialisterne Canada: Overview.” (2019). Slidedeck provided by Julia Martensson julia.martensson@specialisterne.com. Email exchange 20 March 2020.

Specialisterne Canada. “Specialisterne Canada: overview including performance and evaluation.” (2019). Document provided by Julia Martensson julia.martensson@specialisterne.com. Email exchange 20 March 2020.

United States. American Psychiatric Association. “Autism and Asperger Syndrome.” *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM V. 2013*. As found on. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnosis-criteria-dsm>. Last accessed 27 March 2020.

Vardi, Tal. *Roim Rachok Program*. Summary provided via email exchange with author, 17 March 2020.