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## SHARED SERVICES CANADA: THE REALITIES OF THE QUEST FOR EFFICIENCIES

Lieutenant-Colonel Melany Lepage

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By Lieutenant-Colonel Melany Lepage

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# **SHARED SERVICES CANADA THE REALITIES OF THE QUEST FOR EFFICIENCIES**

## **AIM**

1. The aim of this paper is to examine the impact Shared Services Canada (SSC) has on the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). While it is acknowledged that many of the problems described will have been experienced by the other elements, this paper will focus on the impact SSC has had on the RCAF, RCAF Doctrine, and the impact on RCAF operations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

2. SSC became a department within the government of Canada in 2012.<sup>1</sup> SSC was created with a view to centralize and standardize Information Technology (IT) across 43 departments within the government of Canada.<sup>2</sup> From the start, the establishment of SSC was not set up for successful implementation as the approach taken was to implement early and sort the details as they came up in order to prevent potential stone walling to delay the implementation.<sup>3</sup> One early example of this is that service level agreements were not created between SSC and the supported government departments. In all support situations, a service level agreement is a key document that protects both the provider and the supported organizations. The document would have described the needs of the supported government department, and it would help manage expectations as it would be a tool SSC would have to clearly communicate their capacity to support and manage expectations as to time to resolution. The fact that the service level agreements were not established meant that SSC could not create an effective plan to support the government of Canada as the needs of the government departments were unknown.

3. While service level agreements may be drafted or published today, the impact of this early mistake continues to permeate across the government. The impact of SSC either not understanding the needs of the department, or not established to provide the support required persists throughout the Department of National Defence (DND). The effects can be observed across the Wings and on operations. This paper will provide some recent examples observed at 14 Wing, Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Alert, as well as examples from 1 Canadian Air Division (1 CAD) A6 and examine the impact these incidents have on operations, RCAF Doctrine and the future of the RCAF.

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Zilio, "Department Has Trouble Proving Savings; Auditor-General Says Shared Services Canada Didn't Establish Baseline for How It Would Modernize and Deliver It Services," Globe and mail 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "A Report Obtained by the Cbc Is Sharply Critical of Shared Services Canada," (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Zilio, "Department Has Trouble Proving Savings; Auditor-General Says Shared Services Canada Didn't Establish Baseline for How It Would Modernize and Deliver It Services."

## DISCUSSION

4. According to RCAF Doctrine, centralized control and decentralized execution is air power's primary tenet.<sup>4</sup> A critical element to enable centralized control and decentralized execution is robust communications. This fact was emphasized in the RCAF Command and control doctrine stating, "Air power C2 systems are heavily reliant on effective communications and computer systems that are interoperable, agile and trusted."<sup>5</sup> While SSC is not responsible for communications systems on expeditionary deployed operations, the RCAF conducts operations domestically, either based out of the Wings or elsewhere in Canada. In a report CTV News reviewed, it stated that the CAF had reported receiving no support from SSC during a major outage on a domestic operation.<sup>6</sup> The outage occurred during the weekend, and SSC does not have any on call staff. This is a major concern for the RCAF as not only North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and Search and Rescue (SAR) missions can occur at any time, but the communications between the Wing Operations Centres (WOC) and the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) also occur frequently during off hours.<sup>7</sup> Outages experience at any of those locations must be resolved immediately in order to enable effective command and control. Unfortunately, in the nine years since SSC has been established, the support has not improved. The following paragraphs will cover examples experienced by the RCAF that highlight where SSC's lack of flexibility or limited ability to support have had direct impact to the RCAF's ability to operate at home or abroad in accordance with its doctrine.

5. When SSC was first created, a document outlining what systems were considered within SSC's area of responsibility was created. While it indicated what was in-scope for SSC, it did not provide agreed upon service levels or other details. Over the years, the document stopped being maintained and no longer exists, leaving the RCAF to argue with SSC what is or should be considered in and out of scope. This makes it difficult for communication planners at the Wings to develop an effective strategy to support the Squadrons and operations as the rules are not consistent. Every time a project or procurement is initiated it feels like the first time.

6. A secondary impact of the in and out of scope decisions was that telephony services were deemed in-scope in Canada while being out of scope for deployed operations. Prior to SSC, Aerospace Telecommunication and Information Systems Technician (ATIS Techs) were responsible to support this capability along with civilian employees which mean that they were always trained to deploy. After the transition, SSC refused to allow ATIS Techs to work on the telephony equipment while at home. As time passes, the impact of this decision has become more acute and the lack of flexibility on

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<sup>4</sup> Commander Royal Canadian Air Force, "Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine," ed. Department of National Defence (Her Majesty the Queen as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2016), 17.

<sup>5</sup> "Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine Command and Control," ed. Department of National Defence (Her Majesty the Queen as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2918), V.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Berthiaume, "Poor It Support Hurting Canadian Military Operations, Internal Review Finds," The Canadian Press, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/poor-it-support-hurting-canadian-military-operations-internal-review-finds-1.5253148>.

<sup>7</sup> Force, "Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine Command and Control," 30.

SSC's part is not helping. Initially the impact was not as severe as it is today, but as experienced technicians get promoted, new ones are asked to maintain equipment in theatre that they have had no exposure beyond their initial training. This directly threatens the ability of deployed commanders to communicate.

7. Another aspect that impedes the RCAF's operation is the process by which SSC receives and processes requests for support. Any request that requires SSC support must be initiated through a Business Requirement Document (BRD) which must be staffed through the RCAF before being prioritized for DND by the Assistant Deputy Minister (Information Management) (ADM (IM)). BRDs are required for anything from an Internet Service Provider (ISP) point of presence (PoP), to the procurement of a Video Teleconferencing (VTC) system. All items that used to be procured and managed locally at the Wings to provide flexibility to the Commanders. Not only has the BRD process now added layers of bureaucracy within DND for each request, but once it leaves ADM(IM), it has proven to be somewhat of a mystery process. The speed at which the request will be actioned is unpredictable, as is the cost. Wings have waited for years for a VTC only to suddenly receive notification from SSC that the VTC will be installed in a month and payment is required immediately. The inability to predict when a BRD will be realized is not the only problem when it comes to fiscal forecasting, the pricing model is inconsistent. It is not uncommon that a service inexplicably doubled in cost over a short period of time. 1 CAD A6 has been engaged on these concerns, but an explanation or solution has yet to be communicated.

8. Two concrete examples of ineffective BRD process were the procurement of ISP PoPs at 14 Wing to support the Blue Angels and testing of the new Aurora Block IV. In 2019, 14 Wing was the site of the Atlantic International Air Show, which the RCAF uses as a significant outreach event with the community. The US Navy Blue Angels were the guests of honour and requested an ISP PoP to maintain connectivity with their maintenance crew in the US. The procurement was initiated a year prior to the event. SSC never completed the project on time, which resulted in the Wing's Telecommunications Unit scrambling to establish a PoP with deployable equipment in order to ensure the Blue Angels could participate in the Air Show. This solution exposed the Wing to significant risk as deployable communications equipment was not available for use on operations for a few weeks. Shifting to an example that had significant operational impact for 14 Wing, the Aurora Block IV upgrade project had requested an ISP PoP to support the testing efforts. While the project required a specific amount of bandwidth to execute the required tests, SSC refused to procure anything beyond their standard service offering as they did not deem it worthy of the additional costs to upgrade the infrastructure. Not only did the installation take over a year to implement, it also resulted in a much slower connectivity for the project which directly impacted the final integration of the Block IV capability for the RCAF. In doing so, SSC did not look at how much their decision impacted a multi-million dollar initiative to upgrade a critical RCAF capability, but instead focused on their internal perspective of how much it would cost them and decided it would not benefit SSC in the short term.

9. The last example is representative of a systemic problem with SSC. Once implementation of the department was complete, SSC was initially baselined with

personnel and budget to support the RCAF requirements. Since the service level agreements and other documents were not completed, this fact meant different things to different organizations. Recently SSC has stated that any increase in infrastructure, bandwidth or technology is the responsibility of the end user. While this is valid for requirements that are added through the relocation of units or purchase of new equipment, they have also applied the same logic to existing system for which capacity has been reached due to normal increase in usage. Additionally, as technology requires life cycling, upgrades will be inevitable as older technologies are phased out. This has become a point of contention between SSC and their clients. Wing infrastructure and bandwidth upgrade are a significant cost, and as mentioned above, it is difficult to forecast the cost and timeline. Unless policy changes, as technology changes and requires more bandwidth, the Wings across the RCAF will be required to pay for the expansion. This exemplifies a concerning trend where a cost was identified, or decisions made by SSC resulted in an unexpected cost to be absorbed by the RCAF.

10. Beyond the technical challenges explained above, SSC also struggles with understanding who and what they are responsible to support. Their geographical support structure does not mirror that of DND's organization and it has caused some locations to be forgotten in the process. For example, CFS Alert which falls under the responsibility of 8 Wing Trenton is not under SSC Ontario Region's area of responsibility but SSC Prairie Region. While the author was the Commanding Officer at CFS Alert in 2019, they received a call from SSC prairie region wanting to discuss support for the station. This demonstrates a problem as for the previous eight years, the Station had not been supported by the Region SSC had assigned to the Station. Furthermore, according to the SSC construct, the Station had been supported by the wrong SSC office and it took this long for someone to realize it. This exemplifies SSC's lack of understanding of the requirements of the RCAF. It also demonstrates the culture of SSC clashes with the operational focus of the RCAF.

11. Recently, Op LASER presented unique challenges across the country. While Op LASER was focused on shielding the force from COVID-19, Wings across the CAF were required to continue operations. In March 2020, Wings received messages from SSC stating that they would not provide support unless it was related to Op LASER until further notice. What constituted support to Op LASER was left to interpretation across SSC and resulted in the halt of progression of all initiatives, unless the issue was raised to the highest levels. SSC's lack of understanding of RCAF's mission at home directly impacted the RCAF and caused additional work when the force was already stretched thin due to the pandemic.

12. On the other hand, SSC does have some dedicated staff who do understand the requirements of the RCAF and the operational impacts of not having effective communication equipment. SSC has embedded support in the Telecommunication Units across the RCAF. Many of those employees were once members of the CAF and they understand the impact of unresolved communications issues restricting air platforms from taking off. However, often these SSC members must come in after hours and not report it to SSC because they were not permitted to work after hours. A member of SSC should not be forced to choose which organization to be loyal to, nor should they be forced to

break the rules their boss puts in place because SSC does not understand the imperative requirements of the RCAF and what it means to wait until Monday to resolve the technical issue.

13. The RCAF future concepts directive document has acknowledged the importance of technology in the current digital age. Communications will continue to play a significant role in the future of the RCAF “This vision will require the RCAF to develop a force with the freedom of action across the air, space and cyber domains and throughout the Electro-magnetic spectrum in order to deliver effective air power in support of Canadian interests.”<sup>8</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

14. SSC was hastily established with the view to centralize IT support with significant cost savings across government departments. It is recognized that it takes a significant amount of effort and time to create a new department, however as it was built on shaky foundation, its effectiveness has not increased over time. After nine years the situation has not improved, costs for IT support across the government are high, while costs the RCAF are forced to absorb continually increase and examples of SSC not understanding or being able to support the operational requirements of the RCAF continue to grow. With costs increasing and support to operations decreasing, SSC is proving they are not capable of meeting the operational requirements of the RCAF, and the CAF.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

15. As the support to CAF and RCAF continue to decrease under the responsibility of SSC, it is recommended that the RCAF and CAF start to develop plans that will see to it that IT support returns to the RCAF and CAF.

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<sup>8</sup> Royal Canadian Air Force, "Future Concepts Directive Part 2: The Future Air Operating Concept," (Royal Canadian Air Force, 2016), 6.

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