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## THE LESLIE TRANSFORMATION: ANOTHER FAILED ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

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**JCSP 40**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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## THE LESLIE TRANSFORMATION: ANOTHER FAILED ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

### INTRODUCTION

Change is a fact of life and the pace of change in modern society seems to be constantly increasing due to a multitude of different factors from new technology to globalization to changing demographics. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is not immune to change and in fact has had a history of change initiatives including: Hellyer's Reorganization,<sup>1</sup> MacDonald's Management Review Group,<sup>2</sup> Collenette's Management Command and Control Re-engineering Team,<sup>3</sup> and of particular note as a case study used during the Joint Command and Staff Program (JCSP), Hillier's Transformation.<sup>4</sup> What is not often discussed or analysed is the Report on Transformation 2011 written by the Transformation Team lead by Lieutenant General Andrew Leslie who was appointed as the Chief of Transformation (CoT) on 30 April 2010,<sup>5</sup> and was given the task of preparing a Master Implementation Plan (MIP) by 1 April 2011.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the lack of analysis of this transformation effort is due to the fact that it was essentially stillborn and therefore leaves little data for intellectual debate about the report and its recommendations. The fact that the recommendations in the report were not implemented leaves little doubt that this was a transformation failure. Given that it was unsuccessful,

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Rostek. "Managing Change," In *The Public Management of Defence in Canada*, ed. J.C. Stone, 221-222 (Toronto: Breakout Education, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, 223-224.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, 224-227.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, 227-230.

<sup>5</sup>DND, "Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie Appointed Chief of Transformation," last accessed 1 May 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?ctr.sj1D=&ctr.mnthndVI=5&mthd=advSrch&ctr.dpt1D=6670&nid=528829&ctr.lc1D=&ctr.tp1D=&ctr.yrStrtVI=2010&ctr.kw=leslie+appointed+chief+of+transformation&ctr.dyStrtVI=29&ctr.aud1D=&ctr.mnthStrtVI=4&ctr.page=1&ctr>.

<sup>6</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, (DND: file 1000-1 (VCDS)), 15 September 2010, 4.

the question then becomes why did Transformation 2011 fail? This paper will show that due to several issues, the most important of which was the fact the lack of coherence of Transformation 2011 with the simultaneous Strategic Review (SR) and to a lesser extent the Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP), guaranteed that the report and its recommendations would be left as nothing for than a footnote in Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) transformation history. The common errors cited by Kotter, which are known to kill institutional change, such as: not establishing a great enough sense of urgency;<sup>7</sup> not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition;<sup>8</sup> under-communicating the vision by a factor of ten;<sup>9</sup> not removing obstacles to the new vision;<sup>10</sup> and not systemically planning for, and creating, short-term wins,<sup>11</sup> will be used as a framework for this analysis. These errors effectively left this transformation effort destined to fail by keeping it stuck in the first phase (Awareness and Capability planning) of the change management process,<sup>12</sup> and therefore guaranteed its failure.

### **ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF URGENCY**

Hillier's Transformation had a readymade sense of urgency due to the then ongoing war in Afghanistan, which was a clearly why Hillier's transformation, which focused on "excellence in operations,"<sup>13</sup> needed to be swiftly implemented. It is easy to point to the horrors of war and use them as a catalyst for change, indeed sometimes it is the only way to overcome institutional inertia and to break with the tried and true ways of the past.

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<sup>7</sup>J.P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Harvard Business Review* 73, no. 2 (March/April 1995): 2-7.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, 7-8.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, 11-13.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, 13-14.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Rostek. "Managing Change," ..., 215 (Toronto: Breakout Education, 2009).

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, 227.

Near the other end of the spectrum, Leslie's report came out as Canada transitioned from warfighting to training in Afghanistan and the reason brought forth for change was the far less ominous need to "increase efficiency and effectiveness."<sup>14</sup> Increasing the numbers of people at the tactical level by reducing the number of people in non-deployable headquarters<sup>15</sup> is a marketable concept, but it is difficult to paint it as urgent. To compound this fact is that both the Report on Transformation<sup>16</sup> and the subsequent CANFORGEN<sup>17</sup> that was released after copies of the report were leaked both stated that the recommendations laid out in the report required further study in order to assess the second and third order impacts that the recommendations might have. If anything is destined to kill momentum in a large bureaucracy it is subsequent review and endless analysis.

While there was no ongoing life or death reason to urgently push ahead with the recommendations in the report, there was a fiscal reason to find the reductions in overhead that Leslie was told to identify in his terms of reference.<sup>18</sup> The sense of urgency could have been generated by leveraging the SR that was happening concurrently with the work of the Leslie transformation team, in fact one of the responsibilities Leslie was given was to "Ensure the alignment of CF 2020 with Strategic Review and other strategic planning activities."<sup>19</sup> Had the recommendations put forth by the transformation team been in concert with those of the SR then the reason to implement them as planned in

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Leslie, *Report on Transformation 2011*, (Ottawa: DND, 2011), iv.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>17</sup> CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

<sup>18</sup> W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

2011<sup>20</sup> could have been painted as urgent due to a symbiotic relationship between SR and Transformation 2011 and the high level of importance given to SR.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, although the Report on Transformation acknowledges the concurrent SR it also states in a foot note on the first page of the main document that “At the time of the writing of this report... the outcomes of the [SR] [have] not been announced.” While the results of SR may not have been announced that would not have precluded liaison between the two ongoing efforts to allow a level of coherence in the final plans, or the report could have been delayed until after the details of SR were announced so that alignment could be assured as directed. Unfortunately there is no indication in the time line of events issued as an annex to the Report on Transformation that any discussions occurred with the ongoing SR to ensure that there was alignment of effort.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it appears that the best opportunity to establish an urgency for transformation, the concurrent SR was, for some unidentified reason, not used by the Transformation Team as would have been expected given the clear importance the SR was given by both the Chief of Defence Staff and the Deputy Minister in the terms of reference for the Chief of Transformation.<sup>23</sup>

## **FORMING A POWERFUL GUIDING COALITION**

At first glance one might believe that a powerful guiding coalition was in place to prepare and eventually enact the recommendations in the Report on Transformation 2011. Lieutenant-General Leslie’s appointment as Chief of transformation was announced by

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> W. Natynczyk, "The Canadian Forces in 2010 and 2011 - Looking Back and Looking Forward," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2. (Spring 2011): 9.

<sup>22</sup> Transformation Team, “Appendix 1 to Annex N - Timeline of Events,” *Report on Transformation 2011*, n.p., n.d., 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 1.

the Minister of National Defence in a press release,<sup>24</sup> rather than in a simple CANFORGEN like most General or Flag Officer appointments are advertised. The first Terms of Reference were signed by the CDS,<sup>25</sup> but a mere six days later a very similar terms of reference were signed by both the CDS and the DM, highlighting the fact that Leslie would need to not only consider the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), but would necessarily need to consider the Department of National Defence (DND) in the course of his duties.<sup>26</sup> With the written backing of the Minister and both Level Zeros it would appear that the required power base for an extremely strong powerful guiding coalition was in place, but that would ignore the competition of the simultaneous SR.

The fact that transformation and the SR were not fully aligned would have meant that there was a competition for support amongst the power players in the CAF and DND and it appears that this is a fight that was lost by the transformation team. The clearest indications of this loss are from the CDS who in an article in the Canadian Military Journal included a section about transformation, in which SR is discussed, but the work of the transformation team is not mentioned at all. Also in the CANFORGEN which was issued after the report was released in an uncontrolled manner it says that a review of recommendations was determining, “which elements of transformation are already being implemented through the [SR], which options merit implementation in concert with DRAP, and which options have second and third order consequences that require

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<sup>24</sup>DND, "Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie Appointed Chief of Transformation," last accessed 1 May 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?ctr.sj1D=&ctr.mnthndVI=5&mthd=advSrch&ctr.dpt1D=6670&nid=528829&ctr.lc1D=&ctr.tp1D=&ctr.yrStrtVI=2010&ctr.kw=leslie+appointed+chief+of+transformation&ctr.dyStrtVI=29&ctr.aud1D=&ctr.mnthStrtVI=4&ctr.page=1&ctr>.

<sup>25</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*. CAF, (DND: no file number), 19 September 2010.

<sup>26</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference, ...*, 1-4.

additional study.”<sup>27</sup> The message here is clear, the Transformation Report is, at best, a supporting document to SR and DRAP or is unreliable without further study. If a powerful enough guiding coalition had been assembled and nurtured, the senior level buy-in for the recommendations would have already occurred rather than needing to fit them into other plans or requiring further analysis before being implemented.

While it is clear that a powerful guiding coalition was not formed, it is not clear that this is the fault of Leslie or the transformation team. Certainly in Leslie’s terms of reference the CDS and DM “authorized [direct liaison] with all L[evel] 1s within DND/CF, as well as external stakeholders.”<sup>28</sup> This indicated that Leslie had the authority to build the guiding coalition required to make this transformation a reality. The transformation team was “form[ed] with broad representation from Level 1s,” albeit with only people in uniform.<sup>29</sup> During the year that the transformation team was in existence there were a total of 14 briefs to the DM, CDS and to powerful bodies such as the CDS’s Executive Council and the DM’s Council.<sup>30</sup> There were also working groups and seminars comprised of General and Flag Officers to provide advice on transformation initiatives.<sup>31</sup> So if a powerful guiding coalition was not formed it was not necessarily due to a lack of effort. In fact it seems that although access to Level 1s was authorized, that did not extend to all of the stakeholders, as indicated by correspondence to the CDS and DM which stated, “As directed, we have not consulted with the various internal process

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<sup>27</sup>CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

<sup>28</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 3.

<sup>29</sup>Transformation Team, “Appendix 1 to Annex N - Timeline of Events,” ..., 1.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*, 1-4.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid*, 3.



stakeholders to refine the art of the possible.”<sup>32</sup> Without the ability to show that the recommendations were realistic it would have been extremely difficult to get the agreement from those with the power to make the transformation a reality, which would be a key component of a guiding coalition, therefore it was doomed to eventual failure.

### **UNDER-COMMUNICATING THE VISION BY A FACTOR OF TEN**

It is interesting that there was more official communication about the appointment of Leslie as Chief of Transformation than there was about the report and its recommendations. The Minister announced the appointment in a news release,<sup>33</sup> and a CANFORGEN<sup>34</sup> on 30 April 2010. This was followed about six weeks later by another news release announcing the appointment of other senior leaders to the transformation team.<sup>35</sup> All of these announcements were well before the transformation team was actually formed in August/September 2010.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand the completion of the Transformation Report was announced in a CANFORGEN only when an “uncontrolled release of copies of the report,”<sup>37</sup> occurred. The fact that, as previously mentioned, the CDS chose to not mention the report the transformation portion of his Spring 2011 Canadian Military Journal article, was certainly foreshadowing that the report would not be at the forefront of future CAF transformation. While it is clear that the Transformation report was not actively marketed by senior leaders, and it even appears that it was

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<sup>32</sup>Andrew Leslie, *Chief of Transformation Thrust Six - Administrative Review Update*, (Transformation Team: file 1950-2-5 (DG CSI)), 18 April 2011, 1.

<sup>33</sup>DND, "Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie Appointed Chief of Transformation," last accessed 1 May 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?crtr.sj1D=&crtr.mnthndVI=5&mthd=advSrch&crtr.dpt1D=6670&nid=528829&crtr.lc1D=&crtr.tp1D=&crtr.yrStrtVI=2010&crtr.kw=leslie+appointed+chief+of+transformation&crtr.dyStrtVI=29&crtr.aud1D=&crtr.mnthStrtVI=4&crtr.page=1&crtr..>

<sup>34</sup>Transformation Team, “Appendix 1 to Annex N - Timeline of Events,” ..., 1.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

destined to be buried in a similar fashion to the report produced by Macdonald's Management Review Group,<sup>38</sup> had it not been for the "uncontrolled release"<sup>39</sup> of the report, the question then becomes, why would nearly a year's worth of work by a group of highly paid officers be dismissed so quickly? The answer to this question is tied to some of the other failures in this transformation attempt, certainly the lack of a powerful guiding coalition would have played a part, but not removing obstacles to the vision, which will be discussed next, would also have created an incentive to not tout the recommendations in the report as key to the future effectiveness of the CAF, therefore the report would have likely sat in a filing cabinet or in perpetual analysis had it not been for the aforementioned "uncontrolled release."<sup>40</sup>

Once again the fact that Transformation 2011 was not working in concert with SR predetermined that there would be essentially zero voluntary communication about the report, its recommendations and how they fit into the future of the CAF by the CDS and other senior leaders in CAF/DND.

### **NOT REMOVING OBSTACLES TO THE NEW VISION**

In any attempt at instituting change there will undoubtedly be at least some resistance, in a major organizational shift as recommended in the Report on Transformation the resistance will likely be significant and failure is likely.<sup>41</sup> The foreword to the report identifies this problem very clearly:

Not everybody will agree – indeed, our historical review has shown us that in previous transformation efforts there has always been significant

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<sup>38</sup>Michael Rostek. "Managing Change," ..., 223 (Toronto: Breakout Education, 2009).

<sup>39</sup>CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

<sup>40</sup>CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

<sup>41</sup>P. Strebek, "Why Do Employees Resist Change?" *Harvard Business Review* 74, no. 3 (May/June 1996), 82.

resistance to change that has manifested itself in a classic passive/aggressive style; instead of seeing the collective as a future winner with the new, in the past some have looked at themselves as individuals who may lose status, resources or power. Or else they have delayed making the hard choices, passing the issues on to their successors.<sup>42</sup>

The report also suggests that the remedy to this problem is leadership, specifically that changes can be made to the plan, but eventually people will need to be told what to do.<sup>43</sup>

There are several problems with this approach, the first of which is the fact that very few people are actually able to direct change in organizations as large as DND or the CAF, which obviously means that they need to share the vision or it will not have any chance of becoming reality. As repeatedly stated the CDS focused on the SR to drive CAF transformation.<sup>44</sup> Therefore the transformation report should have been closely tied to SR, but as previously stated it appears that each of these efforts was conducted in isolation,<sup>45</sup> and given the fact that SR and indeed DRAP had the more powerful backing<sup>46</sup> the recommendations in the Report on Transformation were left unheeded. This did not have to be the case since Leslie's terms of reference stated that he, "Ensure the alignment... with SR and other strategic planning activities," and he was to "Be prepared to take on additional transformation responsibilities that may be assigned, including supporting a potential Defence strategic alignment effort under Defence Team leadership."<sup>47</sup> Obviously this alignment did not occur, and it appears that no coordination at all was conducted with SR,<sup>48</sup> therefore the biggest obstacle, the lack of support from

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<sup>42</sup>Andrew Leslie, *Report on Transformation 2011*, (Ottawa: DND, 2011), v.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>W. Natynczyk, "The Canadian Forces in 2010 and 2011 - Looking Back and Looking Forward," ..., 9.

<sup>45</sup>Andrew Leslie, *Report on Transformation 2011*, (Ottawa: DND, 2011), 1.

<sup>46</sup>CAF, *CANFORGEN 164/11 CDS 024/11 - CF Transformation Report*, (NDHQ: 091605Z September 2011).

<sup>47</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 2.

<sup>48</sup>Transformation Team, "Appendix 1 to Annex N - Timeline of Events," ..., 1-4.

the CDS and DM due to the higher importance of SR, was not removed and therefore this transformation effort failed.

Another major obstacle is the fact that simply telling people what to do, even with the support of the CDS and DM would not likely have been enough. The report points out that the passive/aggressive resistance to previous change attempts in the CAF have been significant,<sup>49</sup> which is completely correct. What is missing from this analysis is the fact that previous attempts at transformation must have also used the, “people have to be told what to do,”<sup>50</sup> approach and still did not achieve success. The senior leaders in the CAF and DND did not rise to their positions by being stupid, and therefore explaining to people why something has to change and getting them to believe in the need for change is the only way to truly remove resistance.

Another problem lies in the level of detail that was made available in the report. There were very clear reduction targets in the report. For example recommendation number six has specific targets to, “rebalance personnel levels,”<sup>51</sup> including, “reduce headquarters staff structures to allow the reinvestment of at least 3500 Regular Force personnel into new and emerging capabilities.”<sup>52</sup> The report clearly shows that headquarters above the brigade, wing and fleet levels increased 46% between 2004 and 2010.<sup>53</sup> This sounds like a disproportionately large amount of growth, but what is left unexplained is why the growth occurred and what the consequences would be if these headquarters were reduced by 3500 or more personnel. Presumably all of these people do something on a daily basis, so would this work be redistributed amongst the personnel

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<sup>49</sup>Andrew Leslie, *Report on Transformation 2011*, (Ottawa: DND, 2011), v.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

remaining in the headquarters or would certain activities be reduced or cut altogether?

While it might be unfair to expect that this level of detail could be generated for a large organization in less than a year of study, it is unwise to make provide specific targets without having thought through the mitigation strategies and communicating them along with the recommendations in the report.

These problems are certainly obstacles and it could be argued that by building the right guiding coalition they could have been avoided. They have been included here because resistance in all of its forms is an obstacle, and resistance can begin at a very high level. At some point, which may be hard to define, the guiding coalition ends and the people who will implement change will take over, and in the case of CAF/DND the implementation will begin at a very senior level and so will the resistance, which does not necessarily need to be overt, and this can easily derail change initiatives as is the case in Transformation 2011.

### **NOT SYSTEMICALLY PLANNING FOR, AND CREATING, SHORT-TERM WINS**

Leslie was given 11 months from the date his appointment as CoT<sup>54</sup> to prepare a Master Implementation Plan (MIP).<sup>55</sup> Typically an implementation plan would include a schedule, but the report is just that, a report, not an implementation plan.

It can be assumed that any guiding coalition would need to include the DM and CDS, and that the plan would be given their blessing early to ensure that effort would not be wasted given the short time given the team to produce a plan. In fact there are

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<sup>54</sup>DND, "Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie Appointed Chief of Transformation," last accessed 1 May 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?ctr.sj1D=&ctr.mnthndVl=5&mthd=advSrch&ctr.dpt1D=6670&nid=528829&ctr.lc1D=&ctr.tp1D=&ctr.yrStrtVl=2010&ctr.kw=leslie+appointed+chief+of+transformation&ctr.dyStrtVl=29&ctr.aud1D=&ctr.mnthStrtVl=4&ctr.page=1&ctr>.

<sup>55</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 3.

indications that the DM and CDS were not brought onboard as one would expect during the planning process. The Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) Initiating Directive clearly requires a decision brief to the CDS no later than 1 November 2010,<sup>56</sup> but what appears to have actually occurred was a brief on the “Options Design Approach” to the CDS and the DM on 4 November 2010.<sup>57</sup> This is a far cry from getting a decision from the CDS and then using the next five months to develop an implementation plan. It is not clear why this change was made, but in the end the report was not a plan at all, which could have been identified short-term wins, it was actually an analysis that still required further consideration to determine the higher order effects of the recommendations. Therefore there were no short term wins identified in the report that would allow the gaining and maintaining of momentum for this change effort, thereby adding another nail into the coffin of Transformation 2011.

## CONCLUSION

In the end it is clear that the errors that made the Report on Transformation 2011 no more than an interesting discussion paper that was not realistically implementable are related to the fact that the recommendations were isolated from the realities of SR and DRAP. Why this isolation occurred is not entirely clear, particularly when it is evident that the importance of alignment of this round of Transformation with SR was mentioned in both the VCDS Initiating Directive,<sup>58</sup> and the terms of reference for the CoT.<sup>59</sup> Nor is it clear why these efforts were not combined in the first place so that there would be a

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<sup>56</sup>J.A.D. Rouleau, *VCDS Initiating Directive - CF2020 Transformation*, (CAF: file 1900-1 (CFD)), 26 July 2010, 12.

<sup>57</sup>Transformation Team, “Appendix 1 to Annex N - Timeline of Events,” ..., 2.

<sup>58</sup>J.A.D. Rouleau, *VCDS Initiating Directive - CF2020 Transformation*, (CAF: file 1900-1 (CFD)), 26 July 2010, 6.

<sup>59</sup>W.J. Natynczyk, and R. Fonberg, *Chief of Transformation (CT) - Terms of Reference*, ..., 1.

virtual guarantee that the plans would not be disjointed. Nonetheless the outcome is clear and this case study should be considered for future change initiatives of this magnitude the DND/CAF.

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