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AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAF CAREER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) pejoratively joke about the career management system; some even go as far as calling their Career Managers (CM) – “career manglers”. This derogatory label is given due to the perception of many that CMs do not actually do an acceptable job of managing the careers of the members. CMs transfer personnel from position to position, often across the country – but contrary to their official title, many feel that CMs do not manage careers – they mangle them. By joining the military, military members accept that postings are a normal part of military life and they recognize that the fundamental purpose of the CAF is to meet its operational requirements while ensuring mission success. To achieve this military operational readiness and to ensure that the CAF's military workforce evolves and matures, personnel are transferred from one position to another approximately every 2-3 years into progressively more responsible and demanding positions; this often includes geographical moves from one city to another, and often across provincial lines.

Generally speaking, postings can have significant impacts on one's career. As CMs develop their posting plans (referred to as posting plots) throughout the year, the resulting posting plot does not only directly impact the military member it employs, it can have secondary and tertiary effects on a member and their family. The resulting stress from such posting plots can negatively effecting job satisfaction and retention as alluded to in research¹ conducted by the CAF itself. Every year, as posting season approaches, military members anxiously await direction from their CM about what their future career path holds. Members often complain informally, and in some cases will submit formal complaints, but it appears that those in leadership positions often discount such complaints as only being the minority of individuals

¹ Department of National Defence. The 2010 Canadian Forces Retention Survey: Descriptive Results. DGMPPRA TM 2012-014. September 2012.

were are disgruntled with the CM system. This paper will demonstrate that complaints regarding the CM system should be seriously considered; upon deeper analysis, it is plausible that such complaints may be indicative of deeply rooted systemic problems associated with the CM system in its current state.

Chief Military Personnel (CMP) is the champion for Strategic Human Resource (HR) in the CAF and is responsible for the development and application of the majority of the HR policies in the CAF. These HR policies must evolve productively for the CAF to meet its organizational goals, while minimizing the negative impact (intended or otherwise) on its members. This paper will explore several aspects of career management and demonstrate that the customary complaints from some disgruntled people may in fact point to significant systemic problems within the current CAF CM model that should not be ignored, but rather addressed to ensure that CM system supports the goals of the CAF. The CAF CM model must be enhanced not only to improve the quality of life of those it manages, but in recognition of its significant cost - nearly \$400 million per annum². The cost of the CM model is staggering, but the CAF's greatest asset - its human resources - must be developed and managed appropriately in order to ensure an effective and productive organization for years to come while meeting its operational mandate and minimizing undesirable turnover of its HR.

STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE

As stated previously, career management in the CAF is the one of the primary responsibilities of CMP; specifically, within CMP's organizational structure, Director Military Careers (D Mil C) is the directorate which employs all the CMs who are responsible for posting

² Department of National Defence. Access to Information Request Number (A) 2011 – 00021 – Records Showing the Total Cost Move Budget Envelope for All CF members for the FY 06/07 to 10/11. April 2011

individuals within their respective trades (or in the case of some specialist occupations, those trades they manage). Career management in a military context is generally accepted as a function that includes such activities as succession planning, personnel evaluations, promotions, and postings. CMP's overall strategic HR plan is represented in the diagram found at Figure 1³.



Figure 1 – CMP Strategic HR Vision

In theory, CMP's strategic HR plan is built on ensuring that comprehensive HR policies are delivered for the CAF to ensure the right people are Force Generated (FG) to meet operational demands at the right time and in the right place. However, beyond CMP's mission statement as presented above, there is little in the way of concrete HR tools to effect the required task of managing careers in a more deliberate, transparent, and unbiased manner⁴. Results from a recent ATIP reveal that there is little, if any consistent formal training given to CMs before they begin their core tasks of managing the careers of those assigned to them for this HR

³ Department of National Defence. Chief of Military Personnel Home Page. Accessed 01 May 2016
<http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-org-structure/chief-military-personnel.page>

⁴ Department of National Defence. Access to Information Request Number (A) 2015 – 02187 – Provide any policy documents or internal SOPs which Career Managers utilize to determine positing priorities. April 2016

management purpose. They generally receive a short turnover with the individual they are replacing and there is a welcome package which explains some of the basics of career management and how the yearly posting cycle works. This is clearly not the ideal level of training or experience that would lead to effective career management.

Consider the following; CMs must develop a posting plot for all the individuals they manage; this entails balancing the CAF's operational needs with their personnel's respective desires. Although this task seems simple, upon closer examination it is quite complex with a significant amount of variables to balance including several federal laws as they apply in the career management setting. Not only must the CM learn how to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization, he or she must also become knowledgeable on many sensitive HR policies (e.g., compassionate processes) while following employment laws (e.g. Duty to accommodate) and ensuring that all of these factors have been balanced and/or applied appropriately. Other variables such as attrition (either planned or unplanned) can have ripple effects throughout an entire posting plot (especially in smaller occupations where such effects are magnified). No matter how well thought out, often previous decisions (and analyses) need to be revisited, often with an entirely new plot being created to fill these newly vacated positions. Further, without the requisite training (especially with an inexperienced CM), tools (frames of reference) or resources, many poor decisions can be made which can have further deleterious effects on both the member, at the tactical level, and ultimately for the CAF at the strategic level if careers are mismanaged and by resulting increases in attrition.

A promising theory that aims to address issues germane to the field of career management is that of HR Analytics. HR Analytics is defined as “the systemic identification and quantification of the people drivers of business outcomes, with the purpose to make better

decisions.”⁵ Essentially, HR analytics is focused on using new technology and information systems to gather and analyze HR data for the purpose of making better decisions. Although CMs do use data contained in the Human Resource Management System (HRMS) and combine in with data generated through the CM portal of the Employee Member Access Application (EMAA), this data is often incomplete, out dated or not readily available. Applying a governance framework such as HR analytics would facilitate and improve on the analysis of the available data so that CMs could make more informed decisions on members’ careers. In order to have a truly strategic HR plan for the future of the CAF, leaders must approach the HR function as they would any other function. As stated by van den Heuvel and Bondarouk, “the HR decision science could enhance decisions about people, just as the marketing decision science enhances decisions about customers, and the finance decision science enhances decisions about money.”⁶ While the CAF is working towards developing a better analytic tool for their other lines of business, it is incumbent upon leaders to address the HR realm with the same rigour. This can be hard to envision for many, as it is conflicts with many norms and requires a degree of change management.

Another significant issue that will be facing strategic HR planners of the CAF will be demographics on individuals being recruiting into the organization. Specifically, there is a significant body of research conducted on millennials and their personality traits⁷. The research demonstrated that these individuals expect more from their employers and they question why

⁵ van den Huevel, S., and T. Bandarouk. “The Rise (and Fall) of HR Analytics: A Study into the Future Applications, Value, Structure, and Systems Support.” 2nd HR Division International Conference (2016).

⁶ van den Huevel, S., and T. Bandarouk. “The Rise (and Fall) of HR Analytics: A Study into the Future Applications, Value, Structure, and Systems Support.” 2nd HR Division International Conference (2016).

⁷ Ng, E.S.W., and C.W. Gossett. “Career Choice in Canadian Public Service: An Explora-tion of Fit with the Millennial Generation.” *Public Personnel Management* 42, no. 3 (2013).

decisions are made. Specifically, Ng and Gossett found that millennials have many key characteristics which may make the CAF an employer of choice for this group (e.g. they want to make a contribution to society, not just get highly paid and they want international work). However, some of their other common traits do not lend well to employment in the CAF as it has been found that millennials have a strong desire for a work/life balance and a strong sense of entitlement. If future HR processes at D Mil C are not adapted to become more analytically driven, less ad hoc, and more transparent, this will likely result in the CAF not being an employer of choice for this generation soon to be entering the work force. Millennials want choice, they demand accountability of their leaders and they want transparency - none of these factors seem unreasonable or insurmountable in the career management context.

CAREER MANAGERS

Currently, D Mil C achieves its mandate by employing a wide range of individuals from different CAF occupations in the position of CM. Depending on the number of individuals within a CAF occupation, a CM is assigned to manage all the individuals in a certain rank range within their respective occupation. CM's have a variety of tasks in their job which include such things as coordinating promotion boards, however I would argue that their principle task is to manage the careers of the people they are responsible for by posting them from position to position, sometimes laterally and sometimes into positions that broaden and develop these workers. As previously stated, such transfers can include a posting to a new position within their current geographical area (local), or a posting outside the geographical area, which includes a cost move (move paid for by DND).

Regardless of skill set, occupation, or rank, a CM for a specific trade is generally the same trade as the members he/she manages. This is obviously problematic given that many occupations have not been given training in the HR field, nor do they possess any prior HR experience, tactical or otherwise.

To use an analogy to illustrate how unacceptable the current state of the CM system is, consider the following: one would expect that medical professional have a certain level of medical training before treating patients. Similarly, one would expect that a pilot has the requisite training before flying a plane. Although these positions can ultimately develop a person, having them work so far out of their area of expertise is not always desirable, certainly as the individual learns how to do their new job causing a most certain degradation in the delivery of their responsibilities. Consistent with other areas within the CAF, D Mil C employs numerous trades where many of the individuals posted into the unit have never been given HR training. They have been selected by the organization to be CMs for varying reasons, but generally they have been selected as they have demonstrated a high level of performance in their occupation and as a leader.

Another irregularity with the CM construct is the fact that CMs, although performing the same tasks, can range from the rank of Sergeant/Petty Officer 2nd Class to Lieutenant Colonel. Although the ranks of the CMs are diverse, the tasks they perform are not. The military rank structure is designed such that every rank and trade is expected, and capable of performing different tasks at different levels of one's career. CMs are one of the only positions whereby ranks of such variance perform essentially the same job. This would suggest that D Mil C is not using an optimal model for career management employment. It would be recommended that they conduct a job task analysis to determine the correct rank and skill set for the work that needs

to be conducted and then employ the correct people in the job. Again, even this approach faces some challenges as it would be culturally unacceptable for a Junior Officer to manage the Career of someone more senior to him; perhaps it is time to consider the hiring of civilians to do the job of CMs; such a change would lead to continuity and less pressure for a CM to capitulate to the desires of their occupations' desires resulting in a more objective, consistent, accountable and robust CM system. Many occupations possess a designated Branch Advisor (BA) appointed by A/CMP; these BAs can exert considerable influence on their respective CMs (even if their careers are managed by Director Senior Appointment as the majority of BAs are Colonel/Capt(N)s).

In addition to the duties of their primary job, these BAs are responsible for the leadership and direction of their occupation. These individuals are not often in the same Chain of Command as D Mil C and thus have no authority over the CM. Nevertheless, the CMs are vulnerable to their influence given the power differential. Generally, the CM and BA will work together, but often when there is a disagreement on where an individual should be employed it can cause friction between the two entities. Given the senior rank associated with the position of BA, it is too easy for them to influence postings, even if unintentional. The CM can feel pressured to post individuals consistent with the desire of the BA knowing that in a few years the CM will go back to their Branch and the BA will have more direct control over him/her. In addition to the BAs, most occupations have local advisors that are informally responsible for posting movements in their local geographical area. Although the CM is responsible for this function, the CM relies on these local advisors to provide recommendations on where people should be posted locally. The theory being, that the local advisor (being the senior person of that occupation on the base) is in direct contact with the junior people of the occupation and thus has

a better sense of individuals' skill sets and their wishes of where they would like to work. Given the prevalence of the BA and the local advisor's influence, the CM could simply be cutting a posting message with little assurance that the information provided by a sub-BA was accurate and reflective of the individual or the organizations' desires. The prevalence of this practice should be further explored by D Mil C; HR Analytics could serve to alleviate and document these types of concerns. The CMs job is to manage careers, not cut posting messages based on someone else's management of the career.

Perhaps the reason that CMs need to rely so heavily on BAs and local advisor assistance is they are under resourced to perform the full extent of their duties. As previously stated, CMs with little training and minimal experience working in the HR field may feel overwhelmed. CM workload should be assessed to ensure they have the time to properly perform their tasks. In order to determine the standard workload of the career managers, an Access to Information Request was submitted to D Mil C requesting that they provide how many files each career manager is responsible for.⁸ Regrettably, this request was not answered. Instead D Mil C stated that this information did not exist, even though it is not logical to assume that CMs do not even know the number of files they are supposed to manage. In order to further enhance the effectiveness of CMs, it is recommended that D Mil C determine the standard number of files that one individual can manage and then ensure that CMs do not have more files than one could reasonably expect to manage.

Another potential solution which has been proposed before is to develop a model which utilized civilians for career management of civilian personnel. Many are opposed to this idea as

⁸ Department of National Defence. Access to Information Request Number (A) 2015 – 02185 – Records demonstrating a list of all the career managers by Rank/Military Occupation and MOSID/Total number of files they administer. April 2016

they heavily weight the CMs knowledge of the trade and knowledge of the people as one of the most important attributes of a CM. However, adding a civilian HR expert to fully control career management could solve many of the perceived issues stated above. Firstly, the civilian CM would be an HR expert and would theoretically possess the necessary skill set, unlike many current CMs. Civilian CMs could also provide a level of continuity that currently does not exist as CMs are posted every two years. They would retain corporate information and ensure the corporate knowledge is not lost with postings of CMs. Further, civilian CMs would be more immune to pressures of the Branch system that influence the career management system.

A significant part of career management for the individual is the perception of being treated fairly and transparently. It is not simply the perception of being treated fairly relative to one's self, but also the perception that you have been treated fairly relative to others. For an organization as large as the CAF, policies are utilized to standardize behaviours of its members. Policies can also take the form of internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), or any document designed to provide guidance to individuals in a position making decisions. Again, when D Mil C was asked for internal SOPs they had none.⁹

With respect to career management, CMs must make decisions on where members of their respective trade will best be employed. In order to do this, they must have a fulsome understanding of the variety of the positions and the work entailed in each position, as well as the skills required for each job. They must also understand the skill set that each member brings to the table and the members posting preferences are also taken into account and be provided with SOPs to assist them in doing their job.

⁹ Department of National Defence. Access to Information Request Number (A) 2015 – 02187 – Provide any policy documents or internal SOPs which Career Managers utilize to determine positing priorities. April 2016

EVIDENCE

As a senior officer, I have been witness to the plight of colleagues and subordinates alike who have experienced a lack of transparent and logical posting decisions (e.g. from the seemingly unnecessary postings to the spiteful posting with no accountability for the CM). This is not only concerning from an HR perspective but also from a fiscal one - as was discussed earlier, the entire CM budget is \$400M annually; does this number need to be as high as it is? Can the CAF save its resources by providing more training to CMs and standardizing many of the career management principles as discussed above.

Although many of my personal experiences are anecdotal in nature, I will attempt to provide further evidence will support my beliefs and hopefully further analysis will be conducted on the gaps that are indicated in this paper.

The CAF's posting construct has not changed since its Unification in 1970. In theory, the posting construct works well, but it was designed during a different demographic time for Canada. In that era, many families were only one income families. If the father was in the military, it is likely that his spouse was a stay at home mother, so when postings happened, although the family would be required to move geographically, there was little impact to the overall financial security of the family. However, in the last four decades, society has changed drastically and instead of having one earner per household, most households require dual incomes to support their families.¹⁰ However, as seen in report published in 2015 by Statistics

¹⁰ The Vanier Institute of the Family. Families Count: Profiling Canada's Families. Accessed 09 May 2016 <http://vanierinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Families-Count.pdf>

Canada¹¹, the number of dual income families has more than doubled since 1976. This change in demographic obviously represents a further challenge for career management within the CAF.

With the increase in double income families, geographical postings become much more challenging for members. A spouse has to find new employment in the future location, lose their job, or decide to stay in the old location. In order to address this issue, the CAF leadership responded with improvements to several posting policies and thereby assisting members as noted in the Scodva Report of 2000. Specifically, the Scodva report noted that a Quality of Life (QOL) review was conducted with “the aim of considering family requirements in decisions; nonetheless, recognizing that meeting operational requirements and providing for career and professional development for CF members must remain paramount.”¹² An important aspect of policy making according to the Walt Gibson model¹³ is the actors and knowing the context of the situation. Current policy and posting construct at D Mil C is based on an old context of a military member. Strategic HR polices must evolve with the times and take the current context into consideration to be truly effective.

GRIEVANCES

As stated above, many complaints by currently serving military members about postings and career management can be viewed by leaders as the few disgruntled that are simply the

¹¹ CTV News. Number of dual-income families doubled since 1976, StatsCan report finds. Accessed 01 May 2016. <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/number-of-dual-income-families-doubled-since-1976-statscan-report-finds-1.2438072>

¹² Department of National Defence. The Minister of National Defence and The Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada 2000 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs on Quality of Life in the Canadian Forces. March 2000.

¹³ Walt, G., and L. Gilson. “Reforming the health sector in developing countries: the central role of policy analysis.” *Health Policy Planning* 9, no. 4 (1994).

minority. In this section I will discuss several of the CAF methods of determining systemic issues.

The CAF uses a grievance system whereby its military members can formally grieve any decision or action for which they feel they have been wronged. The organization responsible for CAF grievances is the Director General Canadian Forces Grievance Authority (DGCFGA). DGCFGA is responsible to facilitate the grievance process and report on statistics on grievances that military members submit. They publish their findings in an annual report that can be found online. When a grievance is adjudicated, the grievance authority is responsible to decide whether the grievance is founded or not. If founded, the authority must rectify the issue, not only for the specific member who submitted the grievance, but the DGCFGA must also determine if the grievor's issue is a systemic issue within the CAF. If a systemic issue exists within the CAF, it is incumbent upon the grievance authority to address the issue. This would usually include implementing a policy change whereby the CDS would issue direction to a responsible organization so that the issue will not reoccur.

Grievances are submitted by CAF members for a variety of reasons which include anything from articulating unfair policies, to benefits, to postings. Reviewing the CAF Grievance System Combined 2011 and 2012 Annual Report it is clearly evident that Career Management grievances far surpass the next closest category of grievances which is Compensation and Benefits (see Figure 2). As states by DGCFGA, career management includes more than just postings, it includes performance appraisals, release, professional accreditation, promotions, and postings. Based on the data obtained in the report, it is not possible to determine how many grievances under the category of career management are specifically related to postings. To provide more granularities on this issue an Access to Information request

was submitted. Although the data received was not from 2011 or 2012, it indicates that roughly 10 out of 100 career management grievances are related to postings¹⁴.

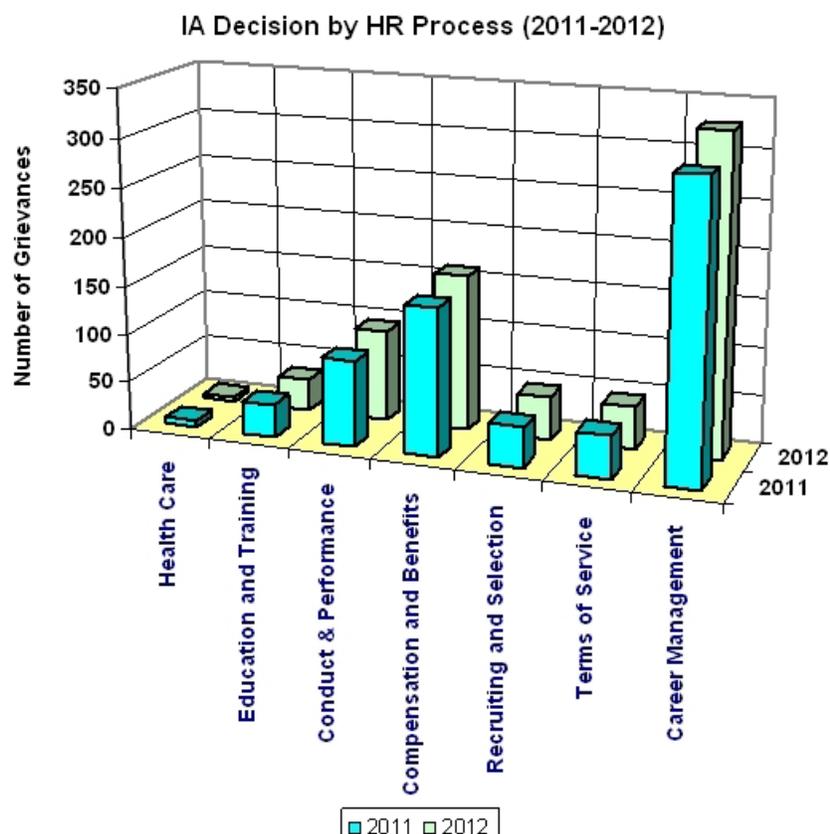


Figure 2 – Number of Grievances at the IA level for 2011 and 2012

To gain even further clarity on the issue, an ATI was submitted to the Ombudsman. The mandate of the CAF Ombudsman is: “Ombudsman investigates complaints and serves as a neutral third party on matters related to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. Acting independently of the chain of command and managers, he reports directly to the

¹⁴ Department of National Defence. Access to Information Request Number (A) 2010 – 01296 – List of Grievances at the Director General Canadian Forces Grievance Authority for the year 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 pertaining to all subject matter, specifically, postings and Imposed Restriction. March 2011

Minister of National Defence.”¹⁵ The ATI demonstrated that 59 complaints were submitted to the CAF Ombudsman’s Office in 2010.¹⁶ This is a dramatic difference from the ten grievances in 2010 timeframe that were submitted to the DGCFGA. Firstly, this number from the Ombudsman confirms that postings are a significant issue in the CAF as it provides coinciding information to support the data obtained by DGCFGA. Secondly, it indicates that some irregularities in the data. Why are so many individuals submitting complaints to the Ombudsman and not the DGCFGA? Perhaps there is a perception that submitting a grievance with an internal body of review will not be fairly analyzed so complaints are sent to the Ombudsman as they are external to the Chain of Command. Regardless, these numbers demonstrate a consistent pattern of complaints being submitted on career management/postings which clearly indicate there is a systemic issue at play which must be explored further.

CAF RESEARCH

Another source of existing data on satisfaction of postings is research which is conducted by Director General Personnel Research Analysis (DGMPRA). This organization works under CMP and conducts research on a wide array of subjects. Specifically, the Your Say Survey (YSS) was developed in 2004 to ascertain CAF military members’ opinions on various subjects. This includes satisfaction scales on variables such as QOL, to pay, to family life. The results from these surveys are conclusive and they corroborate the data from DGCFGA. The YSS from indicates the following: “many indicated their career has had an impact on several aspects of their personal and family life, including stability of family life and spouse/partner’s employment.

¹⁵ National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman. Accessed 05 May 2016.
<http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/en/index.page>

¹⁶ Ombudsman, National Defence and Canadian Forces. Access to Information Request Number (OMB) 2011 – A – 004 – Total Number of Files Pertaining to Postings (By Year, for the Past 5 Years). March 2011

Finally, many personnel indicated that they would like more control over their career.”¹⁷ These negative aspects of members’ dissatisfaction are all a direct result of postings and indicate that this is a significant issue facing the HR policies of the CAF.

Further to the YSS, DGMPPRA conducts research on a variety of topics important to the CAF. Extremely important to the ability of the CAF to operate is the retention of its personnel. In order to understand why CAF members release from the military several different surveys were conducted. The first was a series of Exit Surveys aimed at personnel that have already decided to release. The information obtained was garnered from members during the final stages of their career. The second set of information was a Retention Survey, designed to be administered towards currently serving members to ascertain reasons why members would want to release from the CAF. Both surveys clearly indicated that postings and career management were significant factors in CAF members retiring as well as a significant factor in why someone would contemplate leaving the CAF. The Exit Survey report states the common reasons why CAF members leave as “recognition for one’s work and the feeling of accomplishing meaningful work, work-life balance, the effects of postings on families, attachment to the local community, and the career management system.”¹⁸ Specifically, of the primary reasons cited as reasons to leave the CF, postings was second at 17.7% behind “Other” at 20.4% (note: the authors of the research will explore what other is in upcoming research). This information clearly demonstrates the significant impact that postings are having on the QOL and retention of CAF personnel.

CONCLUSION

¹⁷ Department of National Defence. Spring and Fall Your Say Survey: Core Section Top Line Results. Fall 2010

¹⁸ Department of National Defence. The Canadian Forces Exit Survey Descriptive Analyses of 2008 to 2011 Data. DGMPPRA TM 2012-026. December 2012.

Although there is ongoing work within CMP to assess military member's satisfaction with Career Management and postings, it is not sufficient. Through the CAF's own internal processes, it is evident that there is a systemic problem, which is not adequately rectified relating to career management through the numerous grievances which are filed each year. Further, the Your Say Survey data also indicates that postings and career management are major dissatisfiers amongst military members. This data is gathered to assist senior CAF leadership to focus resources to towards programs which matter to members and which will undoubtedly also improve secondary effects such as recruiting, retention, and overall job satisfaction.

Despite these strong indicators of an underlying culture issue, the career management system remains an issue, not only for a financial perspective, but also an operational readiness issue. CMP should publish a clear CM strategy and policy which not only facilitate the job of its CMs, but to provide transparency and procedural justice for the members whose careers CMP manages – and hopefully predictability thus lessening the negative consequences of postings for its members.

Although this paper outlined several issues with the current Career Management system, it has sufficiently demonstrated that further analysis is required by senior leadership to optimize the way the CAF conducts career management. There are other CM models that can be utilized and the CAF should continue to explore and enhance our system to ensure we optimize our talent within our organization.

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