



**The Roots of Belief and the Leaves of Behaviour:
Organizational Learning, Leadership, and an Infinite Vision**

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Master of Defence Studies

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the persistent organizational and institutional challenges facing the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in its efforts to achieve organizational transformation. Using John P. Kotter's eight-step model for change and W. Richard Scott's institutional theory, the analysis maps the CAF's repeated failures, particularly its inadequate responses to the Deschamps and Arbour Reports. Drawing lessons from NASA's Challenger and Columbia disasters and Boeing's 737 MAX crisis, the paper argues that transformation in the CAF has remained trapped within a finite mindset and a single- and double-loop learning model. Despite change initiatives like Operation HONOUR, the CAF has struggled to define a compelling vision, empower leaders, and shift entrenched cultural norms. While the Arbour Report offers a critical opportunity for institutional learning and cultural reframing, the research warns that the CAF risks repeating past mistakes by treating external reviews as compliance checklists rather than catalysts for profound and long-term transformations. The analysis offers concrete recommendations: transparent 360-degree evaluations, empowering leadership, and an infinite vision statement to guide the CAF beyond regulatory fixes toward sustainable evolution. It contributes to urgent debates on organizational learning, accountability, empowerment, and leadership in military organizations.

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The past year has been profoundly humbling, personally and professionally. I began this academic journey in the shadow of loss, having said goodbye to both of my parents within months of each other. Amidst that sorrow, this paper became more than a scholarly pursuit; it became a refuge, sometimes a distraction, at others a quiet act of perseverance. Mom and Dad, thank you for the laughs, the inspiration, and all the love. I miss you both profoundly and know you were with me every step on this journey.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my wife. Your strength held us all together when I was falling apart. You balanced work, ran the household, shuttled teenagers, and carried the emotional weight of our family, often while I was physically present but mentally elsewhere. I look forward to the years ahead and returning to the familiar rhythm of our life together.

To my children, your resilience continues to inspire me. You've faced life's challenges with grace, courage, and determination, and I am endlessly proud of the amazing human beings you are becoming. Thank you for your patience while dad wasn't available this year.

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If hardship reshapes who we are and how we understand our purpose, what kind of person will I choose to become on the other side?

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CHAPTER 1: IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING...

"Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'"

'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.

'I don't much care where—' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat."

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

What if everything we believe about our organization is holding back its evolution? The CAF stands at a cultural and strategic crossroads, grappling with systemic challenges, institutional distrust, and a lack of unifying purpose. Despite decades of leadership frameworks, *cultural change* initiatives, and professional ethos documents, the CAF still lacks a singular, memorable, and enduring vision that binds its members across generations, operations, and crises. These paradoxes confront the Canadian Armed Forces: momentum without direction, transformation without vision. Questions like: *Are we doing things right* have resulted in well-meaning policy adjustments. Reflecting: *Are we doing the right things* has prompted attempts to question underlying processes. Yet, despite these efforts, the CAF remains trapped in a bureaucratic feedback loop, where process is mistaken for progress and outcomes are measured by compliance rather than conviction. *How will the CAF know the path to travel if it does not know the destination?*

This paper argues that the CAF's failure to transform stems not from a lack of effort but from a failure to evolve, to engage in deep institutional learning, shift paradigms, and articulate a *singular vision* powerful enough to unify identity and inspire action. The transformation sought will only occur when the CAF embraces an infinite mindset, adopts values-based leadership, and internalizes a new vision, achieving cultural evolution.

Each chapter in this paper begins and ends with a question, posed not as a rhetorical device, but as a challenge. These framing questions are designed to provoke reflection, unsettle

assumptions, and invite the reader to confront not only what the institution does, but what it believes, how it learns, and who it is becoming. Throughout the paper, additional questions appear in *italicized form* within the text. These are deliberately placed to interrupt the flow, to provoke discomfort, demand pause, and model the kind of institutional reflection needed for organizational transformation. These questions serve as intellectual footholds along a path toward evolution, where transformation depends not on policy reform, but on a reimagining of leadership, vision, and identity.

Guidance Without Gravitas

The proliferation of guidance and a range of Defence Team charters has not clarified who the CAF is, or where they are going; it has obscured the collective sense of self. Instead of sharpening identity, the growing stack of laminated values statements has solidified a diffuse, reactive culture more aligned to policy compliance than long-term institutional evolution. While well-intentioned, the CAF's current ethos documents lack this integrative power. *Duty with Honour* was a product of its time, born from the Somalia Affair and other crises that forced the institution to reassert an ethical foundation.¹ But this doctrine is over 20 years old and overshadowed by newer publications like *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (2017), *Trusted to Serve* (2022), or *Fighting Spirit* (2024), which read more as corporate values checklists than bold declarations of purpose.² The fragmentation of these statements reveals a failure of visionary leadership: lacking a single, memorable line that any CAF member can recite when asked; *Why*

¹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2003.

² Canada. Department of National Defence, Canada. Canadian Armed Forces, and Government of Canada Publications Online, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*; Eyre et al., *Fighting Spirit: The Profession of Arms in Canada*; Canada. Department of National Defence and Government of Canada Publications Online, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve*.

do you serve? More concerning, no common thread binds senior leadership to the newest recruit in a shared future, further highlighting the lack of a generational identity.

The Lexicon for Evolution

Within the CAF, the language of change has grown stale, associated more with bureaucracy than progress, or external imposition than internal conviction. This paper intentionally uses *transformation* to signal a shift in ontological identity rather structure or procedural form. In contrast, *evolution* describes the continuous growth process without a defined endpoint, aligned with an infinite mindset. Save reference to theoretical concepts, this paper avoids change for its connotations of impermanence, compliance, and superficial adjustment rather than substantive epistemological or cultural evolution. Change is superficial, processes transform, and culture evolves. Additionally, the term *organization* will refer to the people, the leaders, members, and teams who make up the CAF. In contrast, *institution* refers to the processes, systems, and structures that shape behaviour over time. The tension between these is central to evolution: institutions resist transformation, but organizations must lead it.

Transformation, not just in practice but also in purpose, requires a shift not in tools, but in thinking. As Thomas Kuhn describes in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), meaningful progress comes not through incremental improvement but through *paradigm shifts*, moments when the prevailing lens through which individuals interpret reality is fundamentally altered.³ Stephen Covey echoes this necessity: “We see the world not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it.”⁴ In Covey’s interpretation of Thoreau, lasting transformation demands we stop hacking at the leaves of behaviour and begin striking at the root: the paradigms

³ Richards et al., *Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*.

⁴ Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 53.

from which behaviour flows.⁵ In this sense, the CAF's greatest challenge is not creating new rules, but fostering a shared understanding of *why* those rules matter. Leadership must nurture the roots of belief, not just prune the branches of behaviour. As Covey cautions, continuing to *hack at the leaves*, tweaking attitudes or new training, will never be sufficient unless the institution first redefines its guiding paradigms. Paradigm shifts are not just academic abstractions but the precursors to the reconstitution of identity. These shifts are essential to cultural evolution because they challenge the foundational assumptions through which organization members interpret their reality. Until the CAF examines and redefines the paradigms that shape its conduct, it cannot expect lasting transformation, let alone cultural evolution.

A Framework for Transformation

In institutional terms, W. Richard Scott's three-pillar model helps illuminate how this shift must unfold.⁶ Early efforts at reform, including policy changes or new directives, primarily influence the regulative pillar: they establish new rules, update reporting structures, and create compliance frameworks. These are essential steps, but insufficient on their own. Over time, these changes may influence the normative pillar, as new expectations are internalized by members, shaping their understanding of *how we do things now*. However, transformation remains incomplete until the change becomes embedded in the cultural-cognitive pillar, the deepest roots of institutional logic, where behaviours are repeated, habitual, taken for granted, and identity-defining. This is where paradigm shifts have their most profound impact. When transformation reaches the cultural-cognitive level, individuals no longer need to be reminded *what* to do or *why*

⁵ Covey, 57.

⁶ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

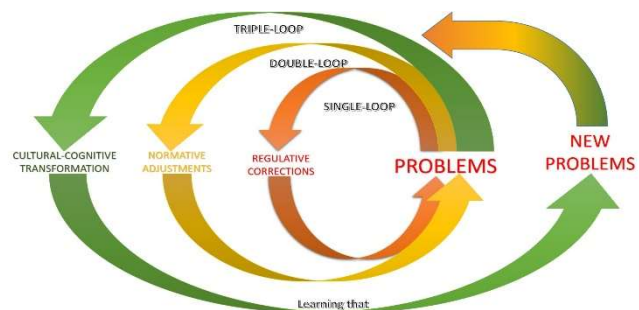
it matters; they believe it and act reflexively. When organizations *replace* behaviours with beliefs, culture *evolves*.

To evolve and embed new beliefs within the CAF's cultural-cognitive core, the institution must adopt an intentional process of transformation guided by John P. Kotter's Eight-Step Process for Leading Change and supported by the discipline of organizational learning.⁷ Kotter's model provides a roadmap for initiating, sustaining, and institutionalizing transformations. Top-down directives will not achieve transformation; it must be through cultivating urgency, building guiding coalitions, articulating a clear and resonant vision, and embedding new behaviours through reinforcement and empowerment. Wins are celebrated, and finally, transformations take root. It is a people-first model, aimed at converting compliance into commitment. Yet Kotter's model alone is not sufficient. This paper stresses Kotter's framework as a process guide for assessing how transformation can and should unfold. At the same time, organizational learning theory serves as the evaluative lens, isolating superficial change from evolution. Drawing from the initial work of Argyris and Schön, and furthered by Romme and Witteloostuijn as well as Tosey et al. this

paper adopts the lens of single-, double-, and triple-loop learning to diagnose the cognitive limitations of past transformation efforts.⁸ When combined

with Scott's institutional pillars, we see

where the pillars fall within the Organizational Learning loops (Figure 1). Applying a single-



How do we know the right things to do?

Figure 1: Triple-Loop Learning Model

⁷ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter.

⁸ Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning II*; Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning"; Romme and Witteloostuijn, "Circular Organizing and Triple Loop Learning."

loop focus on correcting errors within existing frameworks the question asked is: *Are we doing things right?* However, when reflecting, *Are we doing the right things?* Double-loop learning questions and revises the institution's frameworks. Triple-loop learning challenges the values and assumptions defining the organization's identity and reflects the goal the CAF should attain: *Evolution demands this level of reflection.* Organizations that embrace this wisdom reorient to an entirely new way of seeing themselves within their world. This is their paradigm shift.

This paper examines the cultural evolution of the CAF through the lens of organizational learning, institutional theory, and strategic mindset. It draws on the organizational failures NASA and Boeing to frame the conditions required for transformation, using Professor James Carse's theory of finite and infinite games (1986), expanded by Simon Sinek (2019), to contrast short-term, and compliance-driven thinking with long-term, purpose-driven leadership.⁹ The paper argues that the CAF's culture remains trapped within a finite mindset and that transformation will only occur when the institution learns how to learn, reframes its identity, and commits to a vision beyond its current structures.

Chapter 2 explores the CAF's repeated failure to convert crisis into opportunity. It traces historical and recent moments when the institution received clear warnings, through internal assessments, public reports, and leadership failures, but failed to adapt meaningfully. The chapter argues that the CAF is caught in a cycle of institutional inertia: a pattern of short-term responses and symbolic actions that insulate the organization from effective, lasting transformation. These failures highlight the occasional double-loop and complete absence of triple-loop learning, and the dominance of reactive, short-sighted governance.

⁹ Carse, Overdrive, and Overdrive ebook, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*; Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

Chapter 3 examines how leadership culture within the CAF perpetuates finite thinking. Drawing on the work of Carse and Sinek, it analyzes how hierarchical command structures, reputational management, and risk-averse decision-making prevent the emergence of transformational leadership. Instead of empowering members to challenge assumptions or innovate from within, leadership prioritizes control, performance metrics, and institutional stability. This environment discourages moral courage and insulates authority from reflection or challenge, essential traits for long-term cultural evolution.

Chapter 4 addresses the lack of a unifying, institutional vision, what Sinek calls a *Just Cause*.¹⁰ Without a clear and compelling sense of purpose, the CAF's various change initiatives lack coherence, direction, and staying power. The chapter argues that this absence leads to directionless momentum, where programs proliferate but fail to anchor in values or inspire belief. Competing doctrines, fragmented strategic documents, and shifting messaging have left the institution rudderless in moments when clarity of vision was required.

Chapter 5 revisits the 2015 Deschamps Report as a watershed moment, a critical opportunity to spark lasting transformation.¹¹ The chapter uses institutional theory and Kotter's change model to assess the CAF's response, concluding that while the report diagnosed core cultural problems, the institution's reaction remained rooted in regulative adjustments and reputational management.¹² Instead of serving as a catalyst, Deschamps was absorbed into the institution's regulatory machinery, its transformative potential diffused by bureaucratic inertia.

Chapter 6 examines Operation HONOUR as the CAF's principal response to the Deschamps Report. While framed as a bold initiative to eliminate harmful sexual behaviour, the

¹⁰ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

¹¹ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹² Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter.

chapter reveals how the operation defaulted to a militarized, top-down campaign that reinforced the same structural limitations Justice Deschamps had identified. It parallels Boeing's post-crisis actions and argues that Operation HONOUR offered finite, regulatory fixes instead of cultural evolution. The initiative's failure to connect with core values or reframe institutional identity made its collapse both predictable and instructive.

Chapter 7 turns to the Arbour Report as the latest, and perhaps final, invitation to cultural evolution. While Justice Arbour's findings are scathing, they offer a blueprint for transformation if the institution is willing to engage in triple-loop learning. The chapter explores how Arbour challenges the CAF not just to respond, but to reflect: to confront the deeper question of whether the institution is capable of becoming what it claims to be. This chapter ends by posing a core triple-loop question at the heart of the paper: *Is the Organization prepared to recognize it is incapable of learning in its current state?*

Chapter 8 offers one path forward. It proposes a leadership framework grounded in moral courage, values-driven decision-making, and institutionalized learning. Central to this is the articulation of a unifying vision, one that is *not a branding exercise*, but a statement of identity. This vision must be concise enough to be remembered, powerful enough to be believed, and enduring enough to transcend leadership changeovers, political and policy shifts. Anchored in learning, leadership, inspiration, and service, the vision represents both the destination and the standard against which all efforts must be measured. No strategy, reform, or transformation initiative can succeed without a unifying purpose.

As noted in the beginning, throughout this paper, questions are posed as a challenge. These questions are more than a structural device, they are the beginning of transformation. They invite the reader to slow down, to sit with discomfort, and to reflect not only on institutional

actions, but on the beliefs and assumptions that shape them. These are the questions that will define the path ahead. For transformation to become evolution, the institution must grapple not just with what to change, but with who it is becoming, an ontological shift, and how it comes to know what matters and why it matters; a rethinking of epistemological foundations. If the CAF is to transition from finite, reactive thinking to infinite, value-driven leadership, it must begin by answering a simple question with clarity:

How do we know the right things to do?

CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZATIONAL STAGNATION: WARNINGS UNHEEDED, LESSONS UNLEARNED

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom

- Stephen R. Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

What would it take for an institution, burdened by its routines, to pause in that space and choose evolution over repetition? On Feb 1, 2003, NASA space shuttle commander Rick Husband looked out the window of Columbia as it raced through the earth's atmosphere and remarked: "Looks like a blast furnace".

"Yep, we're getting some Gs" shuttle pilot McCool replied, adding: "Let go of the card and it falls." Husband then quips: "You definitely don't want to be outside right now." Mission specialist Laurel Clark, seated behind him, joked: "What, like we did before?" drawing a laugh from the entire crew.

Prophetically, less than 10 minutes later, the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon re-entry, killing all seven crew members. Investigations revealed foam had struck the shuttle during launch 16 days prior, damaging "Thermal Protection System on the leading edge of the left wing".¹³ Over those two weeks, NASA was aware of the issue. While engineers had raised concerns, NASA leadership dismissed them, adhering to rigid bureaucratic procedures and statistical probabilities that prioritized mission schedules over safety.¹⁴ The loss of Columbia was eerily similar to the Challenger disaster of 1986, where engineers voiced concerns that were overridden by leadership under institutional pressures.¹⁵ The most damning similarity, however, was NASA's failure to internalize the lessons of Challenger, demonstrating a structural inability

¹³ NASA, "Columbia Accident Investigation Board," 9.

¹⁴ Mixson, "Inside NASA's Approach to Revitalizing and Transforming Organizational Culture."

¹⁵ Gross and Walzer, "The Challenger Disaster And The Revival Of Rhetoric In Organizational Life."

to engage in deep organizational learning.¹⁶ The Columbia disaster serves as a critical lesson in the consequences of bureaucratic inertia and a failure to learn from past mistakes.

The CAF faces a parallel challenge to NASA before the Columbia disaster: a leadership culture entrenched in regulatory compliance and institutional self-preservation rather than empowered, visionary transformation. Each catalyst, from the Somalia Affair to the Deschamps report, has led to policy changes, yet the core cultural problems persist. Unless it shifts from top-down, finite-minded reform to an approach rooted in institutional learning, decentralized empowerment, and a unifying vision, the CAF will remain trapped in a cycle of reactive correction rather than enduring evolution.

The Deschamps Report (2015) was a pivotal moment that could have signaled such a shift; however, it ultimately became another exercise in regulatory response without deep cultural buy-in.¹⁷ Treating the symptoms, not causes, the CAF risks repeating NASA's mistake if transformation is imposed from the top without empowering all members of the organization.

Drawing a comparison to NASA's organizational culture before the Columbia disaster, the CAF has repeatedly addressed cultural transformation through regulatory approaches rather than through an evolutionary lens. While both institutions implemented governing measures following crises, neither fundamentally altered their organizational mindset to prevent history from repeating. Germans call this *verschlimmbessern* which translates *to make something worse by trying to improve it*. Boeing's handling of the 737 MAX crisis in 2020 further underscores this pattern. Despite two fatal crashes caused by systemic design and safety failures, Boeing initially responded with minimal changes, prioritizing rapid regulatory approval and financial markets over genuine accountability and safety. Like NASA before the Columbia disaster and Boeing

¹⁶ Gross and Walzer; NASA, "Columbia Accident Investigation Board," 9.

¹⁷ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

before the 737 MAX grounding, the CAF risks prioritizing short-term solutions and goals over sustainable reform.

Columbia was the breaking point for NASA: it could no longer afford to rely on superficial change. Faced with fiscal pressures from the government, NASA chose not to impose additional regulations and policies, opting to reimagine its *just-cause*.¹⁸ Following the disaster, it found its purpose while asking: *How do we know what we're doing is right?* Their answer drove them to align their processes with the organization's *vision*. Reframing the question was their solution when forced to confront deep-rooted cultural and institutional bias.

The CAF, however, has yet to recognize that they have reached that crossroads, continuing its transformation by asking: *Am I doing things right* or *Am I doing the right things?* This finite-minded approach reinforces compliance, reputation, standards, and historical narratives, rather than transformation, interrogating purpose, eliminating structural inequities, and disrupting the *status quo*, ensuring that organizational evolution remains an aspiration rather than a reality. Otherwise, like NASA and the Columbia disaster, the CAF's aspirations for cultural evolution through organizational transformation will ultimately disintegrate under the weight of its own structural inertia.

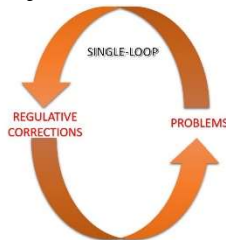
Organizational Learning

Structural inertia refers to the resistance of an organization or institution to alter its structure, processes, or strategies. This resistance arises from established routines, norms, and deeply embedded processes within the organization's culture, making it slow to adapt to environmental changes. While structural inertia can hinder an organization's ability to innovate

¹⁸ Sinek refers to an organizations vision as its “Just Cause”, denoting that it is “a specific vision of a future state...so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision”. This concept will be further explored later. Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 32.

or pivot quickly, it also provides stability and predictability, which can be advantageous in stable environments. Larger and more complex organizations, such as the CAF, typically exhibit higher institutional inertia due to the extensive layers of decision-making and coordination required for change. Understanding this inertia is crucial for leaders implementing organizational change, as it helps identify potential barriers and develop strategies to overcome resistance.

For the CAF to become increasingly agile, the culture evolution can be examined using the organizational learning theory developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön that introduces the concepts of single-, and double-loop learning.¹⁹ Single-loop learning (Figure 2) involves making adjustments to correct immediate errors without questioning the underlying assumptions,



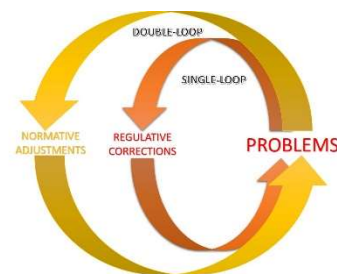
Are we doing things right?

Figure 2: Single-Loop Learning

focusing on institutional improvements within existing frameworks.²⁰ These regulative solutions are trapped by the question: *Are we doing things right?* Double-loop

learning in Figure 3 questions and modifies the underlying policies and practices that guide decision-making, framed

by the discussion around changing approaches to tackle the issues instead of implementing new policies.²¹ The CAF's creation of the CPCC and the development of the Path to Dignity strategy demonstrate double-loop learning, attempting to address the cultural elements



Are we doing the right things?

Figure 3: Double-Loop Learning

contributing to sexual misconduct. This is an effort to go beyond reacting to incidents and external reports to question and adjust policies within the organization. Unlike Operation

¹⁹ Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*.

²⁰ Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

²¹ Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning II*; Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

HONOUR and the immediate policy adjustments that followed the Deschamps report, these initiatives are asking, “*Are we doing the right things?*”²² However, these efforts still operate within the boundaries of the CAF’s traditional self-image, limiting their transformative potential. Rather than redefining what the CAF could become, they reinforce long-standing assumptions about what the CAF already is.

Organizational evolution occurs in the third loop where the focus on identity and purpose demonstrates a major shift in organizational objectives, aligning actions with an overarching vision rather than reacting to problems as they arise.²³ Although there is debate about the competing definitions of Triple-loop learning (Figure 4).²⁴ Scholars agree it questions the

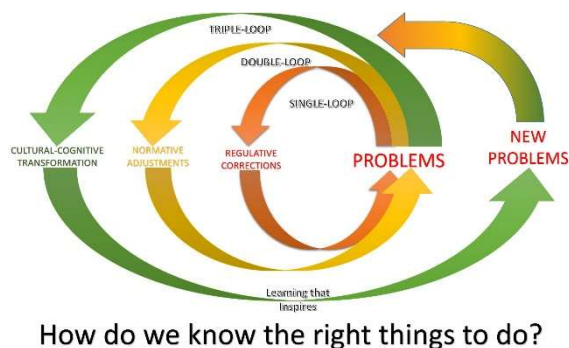


Figure 4: Triple-Loop Learning

fundamental assumptions that guide organizational actions, and queries how it can transform the understanding of its place in the world.²⁵ Triple-Loop learning questions: *Why are we doing these things?* Refocusing the question, this paper asks the institution: *How do we know the right things to do?* There is no evidence that the CAF engages in this third learning loop. While the Deschamps and Arbour reports identify a need for essential “cultural change” despite a perceived interest in shifting its culture, the CAF's responses to the reports remain within single- or double-loop learning, adjusting existing processes or creating new ones rather

²² Discussion on the CAF policy adjustments and responses will follow in subsequent chapters. Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces”; Defence, “About Operation HONOUR,” April 9, 2018.

²³ Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, “The Origins and Conceptualizations of ‘Triple-Loop’ Learning.”

²⁴ Tosey, Visser, and Saunders.

²⁵ Bartunek and Moch, “Third-Order Organizational Change and the Western Mystical Tradition”; Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, “The Origins and Conceptualizations of ‘Triple-Loop’ Learning”; Romme and Witteloostuijn, “Circular Organizing and Triple Loop Learning.”

than questioning the paradigms that shape those processes and the overarching reasons for change that exist.²⁶

Organizations often display an identity that shifts between single- and double-loop learning, but they tend to struggle with achieving consistent triple-loop learning. The Boeing Corporation has struggled to find footing in a culture of safety following a series of air disasters involving the 737-Max variant.²⁷ During the pre-Columbia disaster era, NASA faced an endless cycle of addressing complex safety issues while launching rockets and shuttles into space. Afterall, Bryan O’Conner, once head of NASA’s Safety and Mission Assurance Office said: “We have to keep admitting that this is dangerous stuff, and we’ve got to treat it that way.”²⁸ Despite numerous catalysts, neither the CAF nor Boeing has yet demonstrated the capacity to achieve triple-loop learning. Both organizations have structural inertia and reveal a tendency to default to single-loop corrections, with double-loop learning efforts often falling short of transformative change. Meanwhile, the Columbia disaster forced NASA to confront a crucial question: *Are they merely improving existing processes and procedures, or evolving as an organization?* This wisdom strikes the heart of organizational learning and is reflected through the focus on three learning loops.

The CAF offers a promise of improvement, as evidenced by their demonstrated capacity for 'deutero-learning,' which involves learning about the learning process.²⁹ Deutero-learning requires an understanding of why past approaches failed and how new methods must go beyond

²⁶ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review”; Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

²⁷ Boeing’s response and correction following multiple Air disasters will be discussed in future chapters. Staff, “Boeing Put under Senate Scrutiny during Back-to-Back Hearings on Aircraft Maker’s Safety Culture.”

²⁸ Wall, “Will Human Spaceflight Ever Truly Be Safe? | Space.”

²⁹ Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning II*.

structures, policies, and rule enforcement.³⁰ Historically, the CAF has been insular in its approach to problem-solving, often relying on internal reviews and hierarchical decision-making.

Even as a part of the Defence Team, which includes the DND, the CAF remains insular, closed, self-confident, persuaded of the merit of its methodology, and rarely exposed to the broader civilian organizational culture, particularly outside government. The CAF's leadership, at all levels, relies on its own history, culture, articulated values and repeated practices, in its attempt to effect the kind of change that requires revisiting these very practices.³¹

An essential aspect of deutero-learning is an organization's ability to benchmark against external organizations and integrate best practices from other fields.³² Additionally, deutero-learning requires learning from past failures to avoid repeating them. The CAF's engagement with past reports, such as Deschamps and Arbour, indicates an attempt to acknowledge systemic issues rather than dismiss them as isolated failures. Therefore, the introduction of external advisory bodies, independent audits and reports, as well as the creation of "an advisory council with external subject matter experts", marks a shift toward institutional self-reflection and broader input.³³ However, deutero-learning is not a third loop:

Argyris casts deutero-learning not as a further level in a hierarchy going beyond single- and double-, but as 'meta' to either single- or double-loop learning. Saliently, Argyris' comment about the knowledge and skills required for double-loop learning being significantly greater and more complicated than those required for deutero-learning on single-loop issues, supports our view that Argyris does not regard deutero-learning as a higher order of learning than double-loop learning.³⁴

Therefore, the CAFs efforts remain within the first and second loop learning frameworks, not building a third loop, because the institution does not yet have the capability or capacity to undertake a thorough examination of its fundamental assumptions. The third learning loop appears to be a risky undertaking for an institution with deep systemic roots.

³⁰ Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

³¹ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

³² Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

³³ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review"; Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

³⁴ Tosey, Visser, and Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'Triple-Loop' Learning."

For NASA, the Columbia disaster served as the catalyst that compelled a shift beyond the single- and double-loops, where processes were modified or committees created after each incident, to a triple-loop mindset, from which they redefined their commitment to safety and mission integrity.³⁵ Following the disaster, the US administration identified it as an opportunity to make budget cuts. NASA faced a defining moment; sending humans to space was no longer feasible within its budget, forcing the agency to confront a more profound question: *Who are we, and what is our purpose?* Rather than simply adjusting strategy, NASA took a step back and asked, “*Why do we know what we’re doing is right?*” The answer was hiding in plain sight: their vision statement: “To improve life here. To extend life to there. To find life beyond.”³⁶ A vision is not just a tagline on the first page of a strategic report, even though that is exactly where NASA had placed theirs! It is meant to be the guiding force behind every decision, it is Simon Sinek’s *just cause*.³⁷ Yet, too often, organizations forget to lead with their vision, losing sight of their greater mission and settling for short-term solutions over long-term transformation, a safer, less disruptive path that avoids the risks associated with transformation. Careful consideration would not suggest that the vision requires NASA to reach space? The administration recognized their role was not to be an institution that got astronauts into space; it was to discover the universe using space as their vehicle, not delivering a vehicle to space. The costs to research and develop assumed by previous administrations could be deflected to industry, and the risks taken by new experts in the field. NASA recognized that its role was no longer to reach space but to explore how space can shape humanity, delivering a *just cause* that is affirmative, inclusive, service-oriented, resilient, and idealistic.³⁸

³⁵ Mixson, “Inside NASA’s Approach to Revitalizing and Transforming Organizational Culture.”

³⁶ NASA, “NASA Strategic Plan 2003.”

³⁷ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 32.

³⁸ These are all the qualifying traits identified by Sinek as making a ‘Just Cause’ valid. Sinek, 32.

The CAF, by contrast, remains trapped in the first and second loops. The organization operates with a finite mindset, reacting to crises rather than cultivating a culture that prevents them. Progress demands more than policy adjustment; it requires a *paradigm shift*. To evolve, the CAF must transition to triple-loop learning, embedding cultural change not through control or compliance, but through empowered leadership aligned with an enduring, unifying vision. It is this finite mindset and the leadership culture that sustains it that we turn to next.

Are we solving problems to protect our past or shape our future?

CHAPTER 3: THE FINITE MINDSET OF THE CAF

Organizations are filled with skilled people who are unaware of the defensive routines they use to avoid embarrassment or threat, and unaware of the cost of this behavior to themselves and their organizations.

- Chris Argyris, Organizational Learning II

If leadership is defined by control and compliance, how can an organization learn to lead itself? This chapter builds upon the organizational learning failures by focusing on one of the primary barriers to evolution within the CAF: leadership mindset. While institutional learning reveals how the CAF struggles to adapt, this section examines how leadership, through a finite, top-down approach, continues to reinforce those failures. Positive organizational evolution requires leadership that values people over performance, long-term trust over short-term wins, and cultural depth over superficial compliance. Without visionary, empowering leadership, no amount of structural learning will lead to transformation.

Leadership is about protecting people, not prioritizing organizational reputations over individuals' needs, or focusing on production schedules over safety. The CAF has historically responded to criticism by protecting its reputation rather than addressing root causes.³⁹

Transformational leaders address ontological security and not statistical risk matrices. NASA once relied on regulatory fixes and compliance-driven responses, failing to address the cultural issues that allowed risk to be normalized.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the CAF's persistent reliance on regulatory fixes stems from a finite mindset, focusing on short-term problem-solving rather than

³⁹ This historical pattern has been proposed by studies and highlighted in Verran and English who talk about leadership "circl(ing) the wagons" to defend the culture of the organization. Arbour makes a central point that the CAF values the "appearance of activity" vice actual activity. This is finally acknowledged by the institution through *The Path to Dignity and Respect* where the decision was to address "the symptoms of the problem, rather than the underlying causes." Verran, "Canadian Armed Forces Culture Change: A Regulative Delusion"; English, "Corruption in the Canadian Military?"; Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review"; Defence, "The Path to Dignity and Respect."

⁴⁰ Mixson, "Inside NASA's Approach to Revitalizing and Transforming Organizational Culture."

long-term institutional evolution. This mentality prioritizes compliance, hierarchy, and immediate reputation management over cultural evolution. The CAF has approached progress with an *operational mindset*, seeking a defined end state and measurable outcomes to an evolutionary problem. This mindset remains entrenched within the institution as they continue to seek metrics that support a confirmation bias, as if there is an end-state to evolution.⁴¹ This approach is ill-suited for organizational growth, a continuous process that requires infinite agility and adaptation.

The CAF, as an institution, is playing an infinite game. As Professor James Carse defines it, “A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play.”⁴² Thus, the CAF, and by extension, the Government of Canada, operates within an infinite game paradigm. Subsequently, cultural evolution within the military is an ongoing process, adapting and operating in a constantly shifting environment; *an infinite game*.

Understanding the infinite game concept reveals that leadership focused solely on protecting an institution's reputation through short-term regulatory actions or metrics does not adequately address the deeper issues essential for long-term improvement. In an infinite game, there are no wins or losses. However, adopting a finite mindset can complicate the journey and obscure the path to organizational evolution, creating an illusion of winning or losing for those involved. Institutions that operate within a finite mindset fail to grasp the fundamental concept that an end state of evolution always pushes bounds forward to improve the organization indefinitely, remaining perpetually beyond reach. These institutions seek metrics to measure

⁴¹ In the 2024/25 recommended research list for the RCAF, Theme 4: Engage and Partner for Success, Question 5 – Allied Forces’ positive progress and best practices on culture change, the research sponsor is looking for metrics to assess the major problem spaces for “achieving diversity, overcoming gender and racial barriers, promoting inclusivity, and achieving positive organizational change?” RCAF, “Air & Space Power Research List.”

⁴² Carse, Overdrive, and Overdrive ebook, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*, 12.

progress, yet fail to recognize the goal is infinite and therefore not divisible by their present state. An organization operating in a finite reality will announce they've achieved 33% female applicants by 2035 and celebrate their successes only to *hopefully* realize their finite minded goals during the next external review.⁴³ In reality, goals will continue to shift for an organization committed to infinite evolution. Rather than reaching a conclusive target, such institutions recognize the futility of measuring progress against fixed metrics. Drawing from John Kotter's eight-step model for leading change, infinitely minded organizations celebrate short-term wins to build momentum (Step 6), and then expand and evolve those gains (Step 7) by redefining success through values-based, purpose-driven objectives.⁴⁴ This mindset reframes progress not as a final achievement but as an ongoing alignment with vision, culture, and mission. Recognizing these central concepts reveals that leadership focused on safeguarding an institution's reputation in the short term, through regulatory actions or assessments of various metrics, does not address the underlying issues necessary for evolutionary growth.⁴⁵ Leaders focused on protecting the former institution and failed to recognize the consequences their actions would have on the future institution.

Like NASA before Columbia, the CAF has relied on top-down solutions that reinforce existing hierarchies rather than fostering an environment where individuals at all levels feel empowered to drive cultural change. This is not just a policy failure but a leadership philosophy failure. Transformational leadership demands more than procedural reforms; it requires a fundamental shift, a foundational change that reshapes the core values, mindset, and operational philosophy of an institution. It goes beyond procedural adjustments or regulatory compliance,

⁴³ The Canadian Military College Review Board Recommendation #43: Increase the percentage of female Naval and Officer Cadets at the CMCs to 33% by 2035. Defence, "Findings, Analysis and Recommendations."

⁴⁴ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

⁴⁵ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

addressing the underlying leadership culture, decision-making processes, and systemic biases that sustain the *status quo*. This fundamental shift in leadership must prioritize trust, empowerment, and adaptability over rigid adherence to structure.

Without embedding empowerment at all levels of leadership, the CAF risks remaining trapped in a cycle of organizational stagnation and unintended consequences, where every change or intended improvement merely deepens existing problems. To evolve institutionally, it must abandon its reliance on regulatory oversight alone and instead prioritize leadership that selects people over performance, long-term vision over short-term gains, and empowerment over hierarchy.

An organization driven solely by a top-down directive approach from leadership is trapped in a finite mindset, unable to adapt or evolve in response to changing circumstances. This culture manifests as institutional defensiveness and a lack of empowerment, both of which stifle innovation and growth. Scott's view that cultures are shaped by leaders who impose their values and assumptions on a group aligns with this approach, where leaders dictate rather than engage.⁴⁶ Kotter refers to these leaders as lone-ranger bosses, emphasizing that relying on a singular, top-down figure can be ineffective in a fast-moving world.⁴⁷ He highlights leadership styles like *coercive*, in which the leader demands compliance ("Do as I tell you"), and the pacesetter who sets high standards ("Do as I do, now"), as having negative impacts on an organization, leading to resentment, overwhelming anxiety, and burnout.⁴⁸

A striking example of this mindset can be found in NASA's decision-making prior to the Challenger disaster in 1986. Despite repeated warnings from engineers at Morton Thiokol, the

⁴⁶ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

⁴⁷ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

⁴⁸ Kotter.

company responsible for the shuttle's solid rocket boosters, NASA leadership, under significant pressure from management and government, ignored the engineers' concerns about the risks of launching in cold weather.⁴⁹ This top-down approach, where leadership launched against expert advice, highlights the dangers of a finite mindset: their obsession with meeting immediate goals and protecting the organization's reputation at the cost of long-term safety and organizational learning. In the CAF, *cultural change* efforts, such as Operation HONOUR, have been imposed reactively by leadership rather than developed collaboratively with affected members and experts.⁵⁰ Arbour notes that the CAF's top-down approach demonstrates historical opposition to input and resistance to external influence and progress.⁵¹

Bonin *et al.* argue that cultural evolution in the military requires leaders to demonstrate a commitment to the transformation process.⁵² The top-down approach must be viewed holistically as part of the organization, rather than as the sole driver of organizational evolution. "Units can drive cultural change from the top down through the formal chain of command. However, this can be supplemented with a more robust approach by involving informal leaders in the process", implying that a solely top-down approach has limitations in fostering buy-in and empowerment.⁵³ Kotter's change management framework emphasizes the importance of a "guiding coalition" that extends beyond senior management, engaging informal leaders and frontline staff in shaping the culture.⁵⁴ Leadership may set the tone, but sustainable change requires broad-based participation. Without this buy-in, reforms become performative rather than substantive.

⁴⁹ Gross and Walzer, "The Challenger Disaster And The Revival Of Rhetoric In Organizational Life"; Raval, "Challenger: A Management Failure –."

⁵⁰ Discussion on the top-down approach Defence, "About Operation HONOUR," April 9, 2018.

⁵¹ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

⁵² Bonin et al., "Culture Change Can Fix the Talent Shortage in the Military."

⁵³ Bowen and Bate, "Cohesion, Performance, and Readiness."

⁵⁴ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

The CAF's finite minded, protectionist mentality, driven by a top-down, directive leadership culture, continues to hinder meaningful change. Despite reforms like Operation HONOUR, the core issues of cultural evolution remain unaddressed because they are imposed from the top rather than developed collaboratively with the people most affected. This finite mindset focuses on short-term compliance rather than long-term evolution, prioritizing reputation protection over genuine transformation. To break this cycle, the CAF must move away from merely responding to external pressures and start fostering an environment where every member feels empowered to take responsibility for upholding the institution's values. Leadership must shift from a rigid, hierarchical approach to embracing continuous, infinite evolution, where growth, adaptation, and *cultural evolution* are ongoing processes rather than finite objectives. Only then will the CAF be able to grow beyond the limitations of its mindset and evolve into an institution capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

An Ill-Fated Catalyst for Transformational Leadership

The Deschamps Report was pivotal in the CAF's cultural reckoning, yet its impact was limited by the same bureaucratic tendencies that plagued previous transformation efforts. The report identified deep-seated issues, including widespread underreporting of sexual misconduct due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in leadership, and ambiguity in policies.⁵⁵ However, beyond recommending a reporting mechanism outside the chain of command and leadership acting as role models to emulate, Justice Deschamps does not explicitly state the case for empowering members to effect cultural transformation. Her written conclusion highlights the responsibility of leadership to be the focal point of change:

⁵⁵ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

Therefore, CAF leaders are responsible for change. Leaders must not only serve as role models but also intervene personally where inappropriate conduct occurs. Senior leaders, in particular, must drive the process of cultural reform by engaging in initiatives to prevent inappropriate sexual conduct.⁵⁶

The Deschamps Report calls for change, but drawing on Scott's framework, this change must address more than just the regulative aspects of the institution (like policies); it must also transform the normative (shared values and beliefs) and cultural-cognitive (taken-for-granted assumptions) dimensions to be genuinely effective.⁵⁷ Without embedding empowerment into the institution's DNA, a critical gap remains in achieving organizational evolution and moving away from structural inertia towards cultural agility. A failure to empower the entire institution and challenge existing cultural norms leaves the Report with a gap in achieving organizational evolution, just as NASA's failure to empower those with the requisite knowledge led to disaster. The CAF risks repeating that mistake if it fails to empower those who live and experience its culture daily.

Sinek argues that transformational leadership is not measured by performance metrics alone, but by the ability to foster trust, safety, and empowerment within an organization.⁵⁸ Leaders must not only shape culture, but they must also equip, encourage, and embolden others to drive it forward.⁵⁹ A culture of compliance does not inspire commitment; a culture of empowerment does. This rigid top-down, compliance based leadership culture, shaped by a finite mindset, has had lasting repercussions, obstructing the conditions necessary for cultural evolution.

⁵⁶ Deschamps.

⁵⁷ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

⁵⁸ Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 245.

⁵⁹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 15.

The Limitations of Quantifying Leadership

Although redefined, the CAF's performance appraisal reporting (PAR) system is still rooted in quantitative evaluations such as technical proficiency, mission execution, lack of transparency, and hierarchical adherence.⁶⁰ Rather than embracing more difficult, qualitative assessments, such as a leader's ability to foster trust, empower others, model institutional values, or inspire belief in a shared vision, the CAF relies on what is most easily measured, not what is most meaningful. Efforts to evaluate personnel through standardized testing and quantitative metrics fall short, as they overlook the deeper qualitative issues at the heart of transformative leadership and cultural evolution.

The CAF has repeatedly experienced this costly error and must disconnect the finite-minded cause-and-effect relationship associated with single-loop learning from its leadership evaluation practices. When promotion and career progression are primarily determined by measurable outputs rather than a leader's ability to create an inclusive, empowered, and values-driven environment, the result is a cycle of reinforcing existing power structures rather than challenging them. This mindset limits the CAF's ability to evolve into transformational leadership and succeed in the complex, ever-changing world, the infinite game.

The redefinition of this selection began in late 2021 where the CAF implemented programs that target members aspiring for promotion to General Officer/Flag Officer (GOFO) and Colonel/Captain(Navy).⁶¹ This initiative was a reactive measure by senior leadership, intended to address longstanding promotion practices that had elevated individuals later revealed to be responsible for the very cultural failures they were expected to reform. Many of these leaders were found to have committed the various cultural transgressions they were charged with

⁶⁰ Hamel, "CAF Improves Promotion Selection Process, Beginning with General and Flag Officers."

⁶¹ Hamel; Abdullahi, "National Selection Board Promotion Year 2025," August 29, 2024.

transforming.⁶² As a result, the CAF chose to introduce a new (*regulative*) process that administers three psychometric tests to those nearing promotion, including a non-verbal cognitive ability/reasoning test geared toward senior executives; Raven's Advanced Progressive Matrices (Raven's APM), a personality inventory commonly associated with organizational success; the Trait Self Descriptive – Personality Inventory (TSD-PI), and a listening skills assessment used for executive selection; the Listening Skills Profile - Revised (LSP-R).⁶³

The United States Air Force (USAF) introduced TSD-PI in 1994 to expedite the testing of the Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory (NEO-PI); however, the CAF's adoption of the 75-question version, which includes random measurement errors and content deficiencies, compromises reliability in exchange for faster results.⁶⁴ Similarly, the Listening Styles Profile-16 (LSP-16) was criticized for substantial measurement error, prompting the development of the LSP-R, which addresses concerns about validity and reliability but still relies on self-reporting, leaving room for inflated results.⁶⁵ The Ravens-APM, a non-verbal intelligence test, measures fluid intelligence but fails to account for crystallized intelligence, emotional intelligence, or creativity.⁶⁶ While culturally less biased, it still contains socio-economic and

⁶² Burke, “A Military in Crisis: Here Are the Senior Leaders Embroiled in Sexual Misconduct Cases”; Burke, “Former Top Commander Vance Acknowledges Sexual Relationship with Subordinate in Court Document”; Brewster, “Key Allies Watching Closely to See How Canada Handles Sexual Misconduct Claims against Vance, McDonald.”

⁶³ Abdullahi, “National Selection Board Promotion Year 2025,” August 29, 2024.

⁶⁴ Tupes and Christal, “Recurrent Personality Factors Based on Trait Ratings”; Credé et al., “An Evaluation of the Consequences of Using Short Measures of the Big Five Personality Traits.”; O’Keefe, Kelloway, and Francis, “Introducing the OCEAN.20: A 20-Item Five-Factor Personality Measure Based on the Trait Self-Descriptive Inventory.”

⁶⁵ Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart, “The Listening Styles Profile-Revised (LSP-R)”; Bodie and Worthington, “Revisiting the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16)”; Ford, Wolvin, and Chung, “Students’ Self-Perceived Listening Competencies in the Basic Speech Communication Course.”

⁶⁶ Carpenter, Just, and Shell, “What One Intelligence Test Measures: A Theoretical Account of the Processing in the Raven Progressive Matrices Test.”

cultural assumptions. It lacks inclusivity for ethnic and cultural diversity, making it inadequate for measuring a holistic view of intelligence in leadership contexts.⁶⁷

A Fall 2024 email communication to prospective promotion candidates from the Office of Director of Military Careers vaguely describes the scoring process for leadership assessments:

The results from each of the evidence-based assessments of character will be converted to a numerical score in an objective and scientific manner by Departmental selection experts. The score will be incorporated into the [National Selection Board] scoring criteria for this and future Promotion Years, as applicable. Individual scores are not shared with the chain of command.⁶⁸

While presented as objective and scientific, this approach reinforces a culture of compliance rather than empowerment. The process discourages initiative, reflection, and dialogue by reducing complex aspects of character and leadership to numerical scores, removed from contextual interpretation and opaque to those being evaluated. Leaders are not empowered to engage with their development, understand their impact, or participate meaningfully in shaping the institution's future. Instead, leadership potential becomes measured and managed by others, rather than cultivated from within.

Regardless of the statistical ambiguity these assessments render, exploiting these methods does not adequately acknowledge or reward leaders who prioritize long-term vision over short-term operational success. Additionally, any system designed to measure past *Performance* and *Potential* performance, as the current Personnel Appraisal Program (PAR) maintains, remains a program with a finite mindset. Sinek argues that the worst leaders will often succeed, but at a cost to the institution.⁶⁹ A performance-driven approach reflects a finite mindset, where success is defined by short-term operational effectiveness rather than enduring institutional transformation. Like NASA before the Columbia disaster, the CAF risks prioritizing immediate

⁶⁷ Gonthier, "Cross-Cultural Differences in Visuo-Spatial Processing and the Culture-Fairness of Visuo-Spatial Intelligence Tests"; Brown and Day, "The Difference Isn't Black and White."

⁶⁸ Abdullahi, "National Selection Board Promotion Year 2025," August 29, 2024.

⁶⁹ Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 228.

performance metrics over the more profound cultural shifts required for sustained success.

Sinek's concept of the infinite mindset challenges this approach, arguing that organizations must move beyond short-term wins and instead focus on long-term viability, adaptability, and the well-being of their people.⁷⁰ Leaders with an infinite mindset recognize that the measure of success is not immediate compliance but the ability to foster an environment where people feel safe, valued, and empowered to challenge the *status quo*.

When performance evaluations remain disconnected from transformational leadership, the CAF risks producing a generation of technically proficient leaders who can execute missions but lack the capacity, or mandate, to empower others and drive cultural evolution. Leadership becomes transactional rather than transformational, reinforcing the *status quo* rather than challenging it. Systemic failures become inevitable when leaders are assessed solely on short-term outcomes rather than their ability to foster environments where people are encouraged to question assumptions, innovate boldly, and live shared institutional values.⁷¹ Similar to NASA's pre-Columbia leadership, this system discourages dissent from subordinates and reinforces hierarchical control, prioritizing short-term production schedules over long-term institutional sustainability and cultural evolution. This means that leaders are not solely responsible for the organizational transformation, but they are responsible to create safe spaces and foster others to act as agents of change. If empowerment is ignored, the CAF's cultural evolution will suffer the same fate as Columbia, launched with great ambition but doomed to fail, because the new culture will lack the legitimacy needed for sustainability: the shared values that define what is acceptable (normative) and the deep beliefs that make those values feel natural and taken for granted (cultural-cognitive). Leadership that embodies an infinite mindset will transform the CAF but is

⁷⁰ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 130.

⁷¹ Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 229.

not the only obstacle. Even the most empowered leaders cannot transform a culture without a unifying sense of direction. In the next chapter, we turn to the absence of a singular, articulated vision in the CAF, a failure that leaves both leaders and members navigating without purpose, undermining cohesion and long-term cultural evolution.

Are we choosing leaders to preserve the institution, or transform it?

CHAPTER 4: LOSING FOCUS: NO VISION OF TOMORROW

A vision is not a ‘nice to have’—it is a ‘must-have.’ Without a sensible and appealing vision, transformation efforts can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects.

- John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*

What kind of organization must we become to inspire belief, rather than forcing compliance? A clearly articulated vision is the foundation of any successful institutional transformation. The organization’s *just cause* provides direction, unifies efforts, and establishes a shared understanding of purpose.⁷² However, the CAF lacks a singular, enduring vision that aligns with its cultural transformation goals. Over the past two decades, the CAF’s vision has evolved *ad hoc*, adding narrative layers of ethos, strategy, and policy that, rather than providing clarity of vision and purpose, have caused confusion further stonewalling organization learning and leadership growth. The absence of a coherent vision weakens institutional identity and undermines efforts to foster profound, systemic change.⁷³ Without empowering leadership to streamline and champion a unified direction, the CAF remains trapped in a cycle of reactionary bureaucratic reform, unable to establish a long-term, transformative purpose.

The CAF’s ethos first articulated in *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, provided a foundational statement of military values and professional identity.⁷⁴ This document emphasized duty, integrity, and loyalty as guiding principles for military conduct. While it served as a cultural touchstone, it was not a comprehensive strategic vision. It defined what the CAF stood for but did not offer a forward-looking blueprint for institutional evolution. The ethos remained mostly unchanged in the 2009 re-write, failing to adapt to emerging cultural

⁷² Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 47.

⁷³ Kotter, “Why Transformation Efforts Fail.”

⁷⁴ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, “Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada,” 2003.

and operational challenges.⁷⁵ In subsequent years, additional policies and strategic frameworks were introduced to address various crises and cultural deficiencies, yet none successfully built upon or redefined the CAF's core vision. Instead, they layered new priorities on top of old frameworks without integrating into a cohesive narrative. The result was a fragmented strategic landscape where different branches of the CAF interpreted and pursued cultural change in divergent ways, without a shared, unifying purpose.

Complexity Without Cohesion

Rather than refining a singular vision, the CAF's approach to institutional guidance has been to issue a multitude of documents that each attempt to address different facets of organizational identity and reform. Among these are the *Canada First Defence Strategy* (2008), *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (2017), *the Path to Dignity and Respect* (2020), *Ethos - Trusted to Serve* (2022), *Fighting Spirit* (2024), *Our North Strong And Free (ONSAF)* (2024), and various culture-specific initiatives, such as Operation HONOUR. While these efforts addressed essential aspects of the CAF's evolution, their coexistence without a unifying framework has created an overly bureaucratic and sometimes contradictory strategic landscape.

For example, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* established broad priorities for military readiness and personnel development but did not deeply engage with the cultural transformation required to address systemic misconduct and institutional trust issues.⁷⁶ In contrast, the *Path to Dignity and Respect* sought to provide a culture change roadmap following Operation HONOUR's termination. Still, this focused vision was not embedded within an overarching institutional framework, making it challenging to implement in a way that resonated across the entire

⁷⁵ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009.

⁷⁶ National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged*.

organization. The result is an environment where cultural transformation is treated as a parallel effort rather than an integral component of the CAF's strategic direction.

This fragmented approach dilutes accountability, as different levels of leadership prioritize other aspects of these documents based on individual needs rather than a shared long-term goal. Without a singular institutional vision, leadership lacks a definitive framework to align policies, behaviours, and priorities. This absence of cohesion weakens the CAF's ability to instill confidence and commitment in its members, who often perceive reform efforts as transient and disconnected rather than as part of a meaningful and enduring transformation.

Strategic Drift and Leadership Ambiguity

The consequences of not having a singular, well-defined vision are significant. First, it results in strategic drift, where the institution shifts focus based on external pressures rather than a stable, guiding purpose. This has been evident in the CAF's responses to crises, such as sexual misconduct scandals, where policy measures like Operation HONOUR were introduced as reactive solutions but lacked the long-term cultural-cognitive transformation necessary for sustained change. The lack of a unifying vision means that each crisis is met with an isolated policy rather than a structured, values-driven response.

Second, the absence of a singular vision weakens leadership effectiveness. Without a clearly articulated institutional purpose, leaders at all levels struggle to interpret and implement cultural reforms consistently. This leads to ambiguity in expectations, resistance to change, and difficulties in measuring progress. The CAF's current approach to performance evaluation, which focuses heavily on operational execution rather than cultural leadership, further compounds this problem. When leadership is evaluated based on short-term mission success

rather than its ability to empower members, cultivate institutional learning, and align behaviour with a unifying vision, it diminishes the incentive to drive meaningful transformation.

The dangers of a fragmented vision and a finite mindset are not new challenges; they are recurring patterns that, if left unaddressed, perpetuate systemic failures in organizational learning, leadership mindset, and cultural transformation. For the CAF, the inability to embrace the third loop of organizational learning has resulted in a cycle of reactive policy responses, confined to single- and double-loop frameworks. These responses ask the wrong questions, entrench top-down directive leadership, and obscure the emergence of a unifying vision capable of guiding meaningful evolution. NASA faced a similar reckoning with the Columbia disaster, yet the warning signs had long been embedded in the organizational culture that enabled the Challenger accident 17 years earlier. Likewise, the Deschamps report did not mark the beginning of failure but exposed long-standing institutional inertia. It served as a critical opportunity to break from finite-minded, compliance-driven responses, an opportunity the CAF failed to seize. The report stands not only as a grim reminder of unresolved cultural issues, but as a missed invitation to pursue deep, values-based transformation. Understanding why this opportunity was lost is essential to charting any credible path forward, one that addresses the persistent shortcomings in vision and leadership that continue to undermine the CAF's potential for meaningful transformation.

Without a shared sense of purpose, are we inspiring others or managing drift?

CHAPTER 5: THE DESCHAMPS REPORT: A CATALYST FOR SUPERFICIAL CHANGE

My God, Thiokol, When do you want me to launch — next April?

- Lawrence Mulloy, NASA shuttle program manager, 27 January 1986

If expertise can be ignored, warnings dismissed, and truth silenced: what kind of learning is that? On the evening of January 27, 1986, NASA and Morton Thiokol executives held a tense teleconference about launching the Challenger shuttle in freezing weather.⁷⁷ The stakes were life and death. External pressures loomed large, and delaying the high-profile mission was politically and financially costly.⁷⁸ Despite engineers' warnings about the catastrophic risks posed by brittle O-ring seals, the organization succumbed to institutional processes.⁷⁹ With no singular force with the requisite knowledge empowered to stop the launch, accountability evaporated. Seven astronauts boarded the shuttle the following day, unaware of the doomed debate that sealed their fate. Seventy-three seconds after liftoff, the shuttle disintegrated in the sky.

The Challenger disaster was not merely a failure of engineering, it was a failure of culture, cognition, and courage. Leaders were unable, or unwilling, to reconcile performance pressure with ethical risk. Communication broke down. Expertise was sidelined. Organizational memory failed. Most fatally, no one was empowered to say no. This institutional breakdown offers a stark analogy to the CAF's failure to transform after the 2015 Deschamps Report. Despite widespread recognition of systemic misconduct, the CAF did not undergo the kind of cultural reckoning the moment demanded. This chapter examines that failure, not as a lapse in policy or willpower, but as a collapse of institutional learning. Drawing on Kotter's change framework, Scott's institutional theory, and the concept of organizational learning, this chapter

⁷⁷ Raval, "Challenger: A Management Failure —."

⁷⁸ Moore, "When Politeness Is Fatal: Technical Communication and the Challenger Accident," 276.

⁷⁹ Gross and Walzer, "The Challenger Disaster And The Revival Of Rhetoric In Organizational Life," 84.

argues that the CAF failed to act and *learn how to learn*. It did not just lack urgency or a guiding coalition; it lacked the deep, identity-level reflection necessary for a paradigm shift. Without a clear and compelling vision, mechanisms to embed that vision in lived practice, and an infinite mindset capable of sustaining long-term evolution, the CAF remains vulnerable to repeating the same failures. This chapter unpacks why that transformation stalled and what will be required for the institution to move forward, not in words but in meaning and behaviour.

A History of Allegations

The Deschamps Report did not emerge in a vacuum. The CAF faced significant cultural challenges rooted in systemic barriers and historical resistance to transformation. Key events, leadership scandals, and structural issues have shaped the institution's struggle with a paradigm shift. Over twenty years of inappropriate sexual conduct have been documented.⁸⁰ By 1998, a report in Maclean's magazine revealed shocking narratives from former members, highlighting the prevalence of sexual assault and misconduct within the CAF, further tarnishing the military's reputation.⁸¹ The Deschamps report was commissioned in response to these persistent concerns about misconduct within the organization. The CAF faced a long list of transgressions from its personnel, and the political elite were feeling increased pressure from Canadian society, which undoubtedly viewed the prevalence of any sexual misconduct within the military as unacceptable.

⁸⁰ “1993, Personal Harassment in the Canadian Forces Survey; 1995, B. R. Thompson, Harassment in Air Command; 1998, J. E. Adams-Roy, Regular Forces; 1998, J. E. Adams-Roy, Reserve Forces; 2006, D. A. Jenkins, Harassment and Policy Program Evaluation” quoted in Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

⁸¹ Maclean's, “Rape in the Military.”

External Damnation

Justice Deschamps' mandate was to evaluate institutional mechanisms to address misconduct. Still, her findings exposed something more troubling: the normalization of sexualized behaviour within training environments, the institutionalization of silence, and a deep schism in how male and female members experienced military life.⁸² For many women, harassment was the norm; for many men, it was dismissed as exaggerated or irrelevant.⁸³ Instead of a system capable of protecting its members, the review uncovered an institution steeped in a culture of sexual misconduct where sexualized language, inappropriate jokes, innuendos, and unwelcome physical contact were not only tolerated but normalized.⁸⁴ Based on the convergence of numerous accounts and the analysis of institutional structures, the conclusions pointed Deschamps to a pervasive problem that requires comprehensive cultural change.⁸⁵

To address these issues, the Deschamps Report noted the organization historically defaulted to institutional processes, policy changes, new reporting mechanisms, and training modules, rather than committing to a cultural reckoning.⁸⁶ This was not a failure of execution but a failure to internalize the need for evolution. It reflected what Scott identifies as a collapse of the cultural-cognitive pillar: the inability of institutional actors to reimagine their roles, assumptions, and shared meanings.⁸⁷ When transformation depends not just on transforming norms (behaviours), but on altering reflexes and beliefs (cultural-cognitive), the absence of members' internalization ensures inertia.

⁸² Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

⁸³ Deschamps.

⁸⁴ Deschamps.

⁸⁵ English, "Corruption in the Canadian Military?"

⁸⁶ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

⁸⁷ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

The report exposed misconduct as early as basic training, when military ethos and professionalism should be instilled, and accountability for actions should be established.⁸⁸ Trainers, entrusted with shaping recruits and engendering them to the CAF culture, instead engaged in inappropriate behaviour, including derogatory language and exploitative sexual encounters with trainees.⁸⁹ By normalizing deviant behaviours among recruits, early in their indoctrination, the organization institutionalized a culture of fear and silence. This reflects a breakdown in psychological safety and the internalization of damaging norms within the cultural-cognitive pillar of the institution. Recruits didn't just see silence as expected; they came to view it as *the way things are*.

Questioning the Methodology

Deschamps' critics will point to the weaknesses of the qualitative methodology, subjective accounts, anecdotal evidence, and lack of statistical validity. Detractors may argue that Justice Deschamps' background in law could lead to conclusions based solely on a *standard beyond a reasonable doubt*. The Deschamps report acknowledges its limitations, stating that its objective is not to assess individual cases or assign blame but to examine the CAF's broader culture and systemic issues contributing to sexual misconduct.⁹⁰ As Scott reminds us, legitimacy in institutions stems not only from rules (regulative pillar) or shared norms (normative pillar), but from culturally shared understandings of reality (cultural-cognitive pillar).⁹¹ The report utilizes a preponderance of evidence standard to establish the pervasiveness of a sexualized culture within the CAF.⁹² Deschamps was measuring perception, culture, and belief. These are

⁸⁸ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

⁸⁹ Deschamps.

⁹⁰ Deschamps.

⁹¹ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

⁹² Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

the cognitive roots of an organization's identity and are far more complicated to transform than regulative policies.

Justice Deschamps' concerns about underreporting in the CAF could be rebuked by those who argue the issue is not unique to the CAF, and rather, is a societal problem. However, the report highlights CAF-specific barriers to reporting, such as:

...fear of negative repercussions for career progression, including being removed from the unit, is one of the most important reasons why members do not report such incidents. Victims expressed concern about not being believed, being stigmatized as weak, labeled as a trouble-maker, subjected to retaliation by peers and supervisors, or diagnosed as unfit for work. There is also a strong perception that the complaint process lacks confidentiality. Underlying all of these concerns is a deep mistrust that the chain of command will take such complaints seriously. Members are less likely to be willing to report incidents of sexual harassment and assault in a context in which there is a general perception that it is permissible to objectify women's bodies, make unwelcome and hurtful jokes about sexual interactions with female members, and cast aspersions on the capabilities of female members.⁹³

Given the concerns noted through the methodology, it is fair to assume that the CAF has specifically created barriers unique to its culture that subsequently make under-reporting a reality. Deschamps does not argue that under-reporting is more prevalent in the CAF than in Canadian society; the report acknowledges the widespread nature of the problem within the institution and focuses her analysis on the specific cultural and structural factors that contribute to underreporting and hinder efforts to address sexual misconduct.

Counterarguments may be considered regarding the directives for the Deschamps report. "The mandate of the ERA was to examine CAF policies, procedures and programs in relation to sexual harassment and sexual assault, including the effectiveness with which these policies are currently being implemented."⁹⁴ If examined in a vacuum without historical knowledge of the incidents that drove the requirement for it to be conducted, the mandate implies that sexual misconduct exists in the CAF. Although the *prevalence* of this misconduct is unknown, the

⁹³ Deschamps.

⁹⁴ Deschamps.

leading hypotheses could steer the team to over-represent the *pervasiveness* of the issue, only seeking members who validate the situation. This is akin to sampling bias, where studies use non-representative samples of the population to derive their results. Once representatives are determined, the study may utilize framing questions to lead or shape a participant's response. Confirmation bias may unintentionally seek evidence that supports pre-existing beliefs.

However, a Statistics Canada survey validated the report's findings quantitatively the following year, confirming widespread misconduct and pervasive underreporting.⁹⁵

Although the Statistics Canada (StatsCan) Survey demonstrated the quantitative results within its methodology, the StatsCan methodology still suffered from unavoidable confirmation bias.

The target population was 81,700 individuals in the Regular Force and the Primary Reserves. Of these, 43,442 submitted a completed questionnaire. Regular Force members, who were the focus of this analytical report, had a higher response rate (61%) than those in the Primary Reserves (36%). Response rates were higher among women than men both for Regular Force members (70% versus 60%) and Primary Reservists (46% versus 33%).⁹⁶

While 61% of the regular force responded to the questionnaire, 70% of the women responded, while only 60% of the men responded.⁹⁷ Suppose women are more likely in society to experience sexual misconduct. In that case, these returns support the notion that those who had experienced sexual misconduct were disproportionately likely to respond to the survey. Therefore, they provided a larger sample than those who had not experienced the events. While StatsCan did give a weighting to the responses to dissect the prevalence within the Regular Forces and Reserves, it does not indicate if weighting was applied to the prevalence of responses within the genders, potentially skewing the reported prevalence (17%) to be higher than the actual figures. This skew may result directly from confirmation bias, leading the survey to over-represent the

⁹⁵ Government of Canada, "Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016."

⁹⁶ Statistics Canada, "Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016."

⁹⁷ Statistics Canada.

occurrence of incidents. Put another way, as Justice Deschamps noted, many men *underestimated* the issue's significance, perceiving it as akin to challenges faced in wider Canadian society.

Alternatively, suppose the issue isn't underestimated, but simply not experienced by many members. Presume 40% of men and 30% of women who didn't respond either haven't witnessed misconduct or unknowingly perpetuate it. In that case, they may dismiss the voluntary survey as irrelevant, leaving responses primarily from those with direct experience and skewing the data. If *these suppositions* are accurate, the survey results suggest a wider prevalence of misconduct in the CAF than the reported numbers, over 1/5th of members. Finally, instead of averaging the values to say 17% of respondents, it is also possible that only 11% of the CAF experienced misconduct.⁹⁸

While it would be naïve to believe the *entire* population of non-respondents respond that they had *never* experienced this behaviour, to borrow evidence standard from Justice Deschamps, likely, the statistics are not a perfect reflection of the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the CAF. Still, it exists above a rate of zero! Although some may question response biases and statistical weighting, these critiques miss the point. Whether the prevalence of misconduct is 17% or 11%, transformation cannot wait for perfect data. As the Deschamps report noted, the organization created unique institutional barriers, fear of retaliation, lack of confidentiality, and mistrust of leadership, which ensured reporting barriers.⁹⁹ These were not unconnected peripheral issues. They were a symptom of the cultural problem!

⁹⁸ The results indicated 7385 of the 43,442 respondents had been victims of sexual misconduct representing 17% of the respondents. If the entire surveyed group of 81,700 had responded and only 7385 were affected, this would represent ~11% of the population. Statistics Canada.

⁹⁹ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

To downplay these findings by fixating on methodological flaws is to repeat the errors of the Challenger case: privileging bureaucratic comfort over institutional ethics. Transformation requires more than recognizing policy gaps. It demands reimagining how authority, trust, and identity are understood within the organization. It requires what Simon Sinek calls an infinite mindset, the commitment to purpose without end state, and a willingness to prioritize long-term ethical integrity over short-term procedural success.¹⁰⁰ The bottom line is that any form of misconduct, sexual or otherwise, does not represent the CAF's primary principle: "Respect the Dignity of All Persons," and no methodological argument justifies this behaviour in the organization.¹⁰¹

The CAF's Barriers to Evolution

The Deschamps Report was intended to serve as a watershed moment for the CAF, a catalyzing event that exposed deeply rooted cultural pathologies and called for immediate organizational evolution. Yet despite the clarity of its findings and the urgency of its recommendations, the institutional transformation fell short. To understand why, one must go beyond the report's contents and examine the CAF's response through the lens of transformation theory, leadership, and organizational behaviour. Using Kotter's 8-step change model and Scott's institutional pillars, this section diagnoses why the CAF failed to seize the moment and what this failure reveals about the deeper cultural, cognitive, and philosophical gaps in the CAF's ability to learn and evolve.

¹⁰⁰ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

¹⁰¹ National Defence, "Values & Ethos | Canadian Armed Forces."

Establishing a Sense of Urgency

The Deschamps Report created a moment of crisis, a necessary precondition for transformation. Kotter notes that successful change efforts begin with a palpable sense of urgency, often provoked by a destabilizing event.¹⁰² The report's exposure of widespread misconduct and the inadequacy of internal processes should have galvanized the organization. Deschamps effectively exposes the *prevalence* of sexual misconduct within the CAF, meticulously documenting its pervasiveness and devastating impact. She lays bare a *say-do gap*, a glaring disconnect between the CAF's high professional standards and the lived reality of many members:

The [External Review Authority] found a disjunction between the high professional standards established by the CAF's policies on inappropriate sexual conduct, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, and the reality experienced by many members day-to-day.¹⁰³

This institution-wide hypocrisy fueled deep mistrust in the chain of command, reinforcing the failure of existing policies. Deschamps leaves no doubt that the CAF's handling of sexual misconduct is broken. While the urgency was unmistakable, the Organization's response was filtered through a finite mindset that prioritized institutional reputation over meaningful transformation. Deschamps created the conditions, but the CAF approached her findings as another reputational threat rather than a cultural inflection point. Instead of launching a sustained journey of institutional learning, the Organization defaulted to risk aversion and surface-level interventions.

Meanwhile, NASA engineers recognized the urgency of the O-ring failure, but their warnings were ignored by leadership, drowned out by external pressures to launch on schedule. The urgency to meet a deadline overtook the urgency to prevent disaster. Safety concerns were

¹⁰² Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 6.

¹⁰³ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

acknowledged, then dismissed, a chilling example of how organizational culture pays lip service to stated priorities.

Kotter warns that transformation demands a sense of urgency so strong that people are willing to step beyond their roles, challenge authority, and make sacrifices.¹⁰⁴ Without it, change remains superficial and temporary. Like NASA's misplaced urgency, the CAF's response risks becoming another exercise in optics over action. Unless leaders embrace urgency as a personal and institutional imperative and unless they drive change with the same intensity that NASA pursued its launch schedule, the CAF's sexual misconduct will persist, and its institutional culture will suffer.

Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition

Kotter's model emphasizes the importance of a credible and committed coalition to lead change. The alliance should possess the authority, credibility, and resources to drive the transformation.¹⁰⁵ Deschamps noted leadership turnover, inconsistent messaging, and fragmented lines of authority as key contributors that undermined cohesion.¹⁰⁶ While the CAF formed the Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct and several high-level committees, these lacked the empowerment and continuity necessary to lead systemic transformation. Justice Deschamps noted: "Interviewees also expressed skepticism about unit-led training because of the common view that those carrying out the training were often themselves complicit in the prohibited conduct."¹⁰⁷ Critically, members of the CAF's coalitions often lacked sufficient positional

¹⁰⁴ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

¹⁰⁶ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹⁰⁷ Deschamps.

authority or were not perceived as legitimate change agents by those within the broader organization.

The Challenger leadership's decision-making process was flawed, with their managers overruling the subject matter experts (the engineers). Kotter would insist: "Only teams with the right composition and sufficient trust among members can be highly effective under these new circumstances."¹⁰⁸ The team responsible for the launch decision lacked the necessary mix of perspectives, including the unwavering commitment to safety. In contrast, a coalition rooted in a shared, future-oriented vision, a hallmark of the infinite mindset, would have prioritized trust, continuity, and distributed leadership.

Developing a Vision and Strategy

Kotter's third step in leading change is developing a clear and compelling vision that is easily understood, effectively communicated, and capable of inspiring action.¹⁰⁹ A strong vision unites people toward a common goal, ensuring that transformation is not just a concept but an inspiring, tangible destination. The Deschamps report called for "comprehensive cultural change", but does not hold a mandate to assign a unifying vision to the CAF.¹¹⁰ Deschamps alludes to this in Recommendations 2 and 6, referencing the need for a strategic plan focused on the CAF's future state.¹¹¹ However, no such vision will emerge within the organization. Instead, the institution delivers disconnected initiatives and programs that proliferate without an overarching narrative. This absence of a unifying strategic direction reflects what Scott would describe as a lack of cultural-cognitive alignment.¹¹² Without shared beliefs and purpose,

¹⁰⁸ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 57.

¹⁰⁹ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

¹¹⁰ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹¹¹ Deschamps.

¹¹² Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

members of the organization defaulted to existing mental models that reinforced the *status quo*. An infinite mindset would have compelled leadership to craft a vision not constrained by short-term metrics or performance indicators, but by a more profound commitment to enduring principles. In 2009, the CAF published *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, a document that set a vision for military professionalism, emphasizing responsibility, expertise, identity, and military ethos.¹¹³ At its core, it established *relevance* as essential to the CAF's future, arguing that its legitimacy depended on public trust, operational effectiveness, and adherence to core values: duty, loyalty, integrity, and courage. While this publication provided a double-loop framework, it didn't support organizational learning, failing to ask: *How do we know the right things to do?*

NASA errantly mistook its vision for a destination, *reaching the moon*, rather than a guide, allowing the pursuit of deadlines to override the principles that should have grounded its decisions.¹¹⁴ Vision is not merely a planning artifact; it is the philosophical anchor that gives meaning to transformation.

Communicating the Change Vision

The Deschamps report was a powerful communication tool. By exposing the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct in the CAF, it forced the issue into the public eye and created the conditions for transformation. However, bringing a problem to light is not the same as embedding a vision for lasting change. Even where programs like Operation HONOUR attempted to change culture, the failure to clearly and consistently communicate a singular unifying vision impeded buy-in. Kotter warns that even when the first three steps of change are

¹¹³ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009.

¹¹⁴ Raval, "Challenger: A Management Failure –."

executed well, the sheer scale of transformation often overwhelms organizations.¹¹⁵ The CAF's management is historically reactive and defensive, aimed at controlling damage rather than inspiring change.¹¹⁶ Communication channels lack feedback loops, and frontline members are not engaged in shaping the transformation narrative.

... that many interviewees reported facing difficulties resolving complaints at the lowest level, the ERA found that attempts to escalate complaints to a higher level were also largely unsuccessful. Although several COs advised the ERA that the CAF has an open door policy, many interviewees described this as an unrealistic option. Too many NCOs are seen as part of the boys' club and concerned more with protecting the reputation of their unit than supporting a victim. Interviewees further reported that, groomed by NCOs, junior officers often turn a blind eye to inappropriate sexual conduct. Moreover, not only is it seriously frowned upon to skip a level in the chain of command, but there also appears to be only a small number of exceptionally open COs who would be prepared to act on a complaint of sexual harassment in a meaningful way when a complainant skips one or more levels of the chain of command.¹¹⁷

Kotter notes: "Nothing undermines the communication of a change vision more than behaviour on the part of key players that seems inconsistent with the vision."¹¹⁸ The result was organizational cynicism, a key indicator of cultural stagnation. Organizational learning cannot occur without two-way communication. Communication is not a one-time event but a sustained effort to maintain momentum, commitment, and clarity.¹¹⁹ In this context, communication is not simply disseminating policy; it is the foundation of psychological safety, where dialogue fosters reflection and accountability.

Empowering Broad-Based Action

Justice Deschamps noted the CAF struggled to remove barriers to change.¹²⁰ Hierarchical rigidity, fear of reprisal, and unclear reporting structures created inertia. The reports written conclusion highlights the responsibility of leadership to be the focal point of change:

¹¹⁵ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 89.

¹¹⁶ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces"; English, "Corruption in the Canadian Military?"

¹¹⁷ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹¹⁸ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail," 100.

¹¹⁹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 92.

¹²⁰ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

Therefore, CAF leaders are responsible for change. Leaders must not only serve as role models but also intervene personally where inappropriate conduct occurs. Senior leaders, in particular, must drive the process of cultural reform by engaging in initiatives to prevent inappropriate sexual conduct.¹²¹

While the report calls for change, drawing on Scott's framework, this change must address more than just the regulative aspects of the institution (like policies); it must also transform the normative (shared values and beliefs) and cultural-cognitive (taken-for-granted assumptions) dimensions to be genuinely effective.¹²² Kotter stresses the need to empower individuals at all levels to act on the vision by removing obstacles, providing necessary resources, and encouraging risk-taking.¹²³ It takes individuals at every level to actively redefine what is acceptable and expected, requiring open dialogue, education, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.¹²⁴

First and foremost, the ERA heard that fear of negative repercussions for career progression is one of the most serious reasons why members do not report incidents of either sexual harassment or sexual assault. In particular, a common response to allegations of sexual harassment or sexual assault seems to be to remove victims from their unit, which is generally perceived as punishing the victim. This is only one of the numerous negative career consequences reported by victims; others included not obtaining a hoped-for posting, not being deployed during the course of the investigation, or being required to miss training. As one contributor summarized, "the consequences of reporting are frightening."¹²⁵

Justice Arbour's observations underscore that many members of the CAF lacked the psychological safety to challenge problematic norms or advocate for change. Scott's regulative and normative pillars: rules, roles, and expectations, remained intact, reinforcing compliance over innovation.¹²⁶ Deschamps painted the systemic silencing of victims and protectors alike, a pattern mirrored in Boeing's 737 MAX failures, where whistleblowers were ignored, and operational concerns were buried under production metrics.¹²⁷ In both cases, cultural norms

¹²¹ Deschamps.

¹²² Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

¹²³ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

¹²⁴ Bonin et al., "Culture Change Can Fix the Talent Shortage in the Military."

¹²⁵ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹²⁶ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

¹²⁷ Staff, "Boeing Put under Senate Scrutiny during Back-to-Back Hearings on Aircraft Maker's Safety Culture."

punished truth-telling, and leadership defined “empowerment” not as responsibility, but as permission from above. Empowerment is the outcome of an infinite mindset: it requires relinquishing control to cultivate trust, and it demands that leaders model vulnerability, curiosity, and learning as strategic imperatives. Without empowerment, even the most compelling vision will falter under institutional inertia and cultural resistance.

Generating Short-Term Wins

Kotter argues that short-term wins are crucial for successful organizational change. These wins prove that the transformation works, rewards change agents, refines the vision, undermines resisters, keeps bosses on board, and, most importantly, builds momentum.¹²⁸ Without wins, change efforts risk stalling, losing credibility, or collapsing under institutional inertia. The Deschamps report can be considered a small win for the CAF’s evolution. It exists because institutional transformation was deemed necessary. It was highly publicized, acknowledged the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct, and established a clear call for reform. However, the report found a widespread perception, particularly among lower ranks, “that such conduct is generally ignored, or even condoned, by the chain of command.”¹²⁹ This lack of accountability created a sense of impunity for perpetrators and revealed a profound lack of trust within the CAF.¹³⁰ The organization's efforts failed to build credibility or reinforce a narrative of progress. Leaving members doubting leadership’s ability or willingness to address sexual misconduct, and ultimately, unable to generate wins.

Symbolic gestures, like public statements or new task forces, are not anchored in a compelling strategic direction; they represent single- or double-loop narratives. Devoid of a

¹²⁸ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 127.

¹²⁹ Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

¹³⁰ Deschamps.

unifying vision, early wins for the CAF were scattershot, short-lived, disconnected, and ultimately meaningless. Kotter notes that a decisive short-term win must be visible, unambiguous, and directly tied to the change effort.¹³¹ An infinitely-minded leader would have prioritized wins that cultivated cultural learning, experiments that invited *reflection*, validated new behaviours, and reinforced shared purpose.

Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

The Deschamps Report calls for sweeping *cultural change* and Kotter argues organizational transformation is not a single event but a process of compounding progress that forms evolution.¹³² To ensure sustainable transformation, the CAF must celebrate and communicate early wins to reinforce momentum, leverage small victories to drive systemic reform and integrate new behaviours into institutional norms until they become self-sustaining.¹³³ Kotter defines consolidating gains by emphasizing the credibility gained from early successes to tackle more challenging aspects of the transformation.¹³⁴ He stresses the need to consolidate improvements and use the credibility gained from short-term wins to drive a paradigm shift. Small victories are not isolated achievements; they are fuel for exponential growth. The organization reverts to legacy practices when initiatives are not scaled or integrated. This mirrors the NASA Challenger era, where initial reforms were not sustained, and cultural inertia resumed until the Columbia disaster forced a paradigm shift. The lesson is key: only when the institution embeds learning, continuous feedback, systems thinking, and a vision of collective responsibility does transformation become possible.

¹³¹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 126.

¹³² Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, 24.

¹³³ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, chap. 9.

¹³⁴ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

Scott's institutional theory provides a roadmap for how institutional transformation compounds over time. The CAF's initial wins, such as policy reforms, reinforce the regulative pillar (formal rules and policies), but only represent single- and double-loop learning events.¹³⁵ These early wins shift the normative pillar as individuals adopt and internalize new expectations.¹³⁶ Over time, as new behaviours become habitual, they become embedded in the cultural-cognitive pillar, making the change automatic, self-sustaining, and deeply rooted in the CAF's identity. For an institution achieving triple-loop learning, it would reframe this shift, not by acknowledging the transformation but by asking the question: *How can we fundamentally redefine the CAF's purpose, values, and identity to ensure that our organizational transformation is sustained and evolves in alignment with future challenges and societal expectations?*

Scott's institutional theory provides a framework for understanding how changes, driven by Kotter's methods and the need to create wins, can become deeply embedded and self-sustaining over time. By understanding the dynamics of the three pillars of institutions, organizations can strategically create changes that *compound* and lead to an organizational paradigm shift through organizational learning.

Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Scott's cultural-cognitive pillar highlights the difficulty of transforming deeply held beliefs and assumptions.¹³⁷ Deschamps demonstrates how the CAF attempted to shift belief

¹³⁵ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*; Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning II*.

¹³⁶ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

¹³⁷ Scott.

through policy without first shifting behaviour, a reversal of how cultural learning unfolds in Scott's model.¹³⁸

Skilled professionals with expertise in training in the area of sexual harassment and sexual assault need to be involved to ensure that the right tone and appropriate examples are used. In addition, it was clear to the ERA that one-time lectures and on-line training are inadequate. Sufficient time must be devoted to training if it is to contribute to cultural change, and regular face-to-face sessions to discuss sexual harassment and sexual assault should be mandatory. Training should include a variety of interactive techniques, as well as concrete examples to help members understand the scope of acceptable behaviour.¹³⁹

Without sustained leadership modelling, reinforcement mechanisms, and trust, the organization could not internalize new values. Whenever progress appeared as transformation at the surface, it was, in likelihood, temporary superficial compliance. Organizational learning is iterative; it depends on failure, feedback, and follow-through.¹⁴⁰ Anchoring organizational evolution requires a mindset that embraces learning as the mission, not as a means to an end, but as the end itself.

The Deschamps report and later the Arbour Report echo this diagnosis: transformation is not solely a leadership problem; it's a culture problem.¹⁴¹ And yet, culture cannot evolve without leadership, and leadership cannot be transformed without a paradigm shift. Such a shift must be anchored in a *just cause: a single, unifying vision* that gives meaning to the transformation. The CAF failed to recognize that cultural evolution is an iterative, behaviour-first process that demands modelling, empowerment, and accountability. Like NASA pre-Columbia, the CAF risks repeating past disasters by institutionalizing denial and decorum over discomfort and discovery. Transformational efforts begin not with consensus facilitators (*yes-men*) but with leaders empowered to act. Just as vision gives NASA its philosophical coherence, it must do the same for the CAF. Without it, the institution cannot evolve; it can only adapt reactively, one

¹³⁸ Scott.

¹³⁹ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹⁴⁰ Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning II*.

¹⁴¹ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review"; Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

scandal at a time. The organization must anchor its transformation in their *unifying vision*, cultivate values-based leadership, and embed institutional learning into every level of its culture. The shift to an infinite mindset that prioritizes long-term trust over short-term reputation and learning over performance must serve as the foundation of this transformation. Without this, the organization will continue to mistake control for progress, manage crisis through regulative functions like Operation HONOUR, and miss the opportunity to evolve from a regulative culture to one of learning and discovery.

CHAPTER 6: OPERATION HONOUR: A FAMILIAR RESPONSE

When we lead with finite thinking in an infinite game, we end up playing to win rather than to last.
- Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*

Is it transformative if it is following orders? In the early morning of October 29, 2018, Lion Air Flight 610, a Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, began its taxi with 181 passengers and seven crew members on board.¹⁴² The new co-pilot had received a wake-up call 75 minutes prior, and the captain was battling the flu. While human conditions contributed to the accident, unbeknownst to the crew, Boeing sealed their fate in a boardroom years earlier. As they struggled with inexperience, confusion and poor communication, the aircraft's flaws ultimately led to their demise. Eleven minutes and 22 seconds after takeoff, 188 lives were tragically extinguished in an instant.

For nearly a century, Boeing was the gold standard in aviation. It espoused the values of a strong culture and a steadfast vision to achieve engineering excellence.¹⁴³

William Boeing created the commercial aviation industry. For the next century, Boeing was the leading producer, based on its excellence in aircraft design and safety. Boeing's problems today date back to former CEO Philip Condit, who made two ill-fated decisions that dramatically changed Boeing's culture. The first was acquiring archrival McDonnell Douglas in 1997, a leader in military aviation with its fighter jets and Boeing's major competitor in commercial aviation. In contrast to Boeing's culture of engineering excellence, McDonnell Douglas focused on cost-cutting and upgrading older airplane models at the expense of all-new aircraft. Secondly, in 2001 Condit moved Boeing's headquarters from its original home in Seattle to Chicago—all to gain \$60 million in state and local tax credits over 20 years. With none of its businesses based in Chicago, the move separated Boeing's corporate executives from its engineering and product decisions and alienated its Seattle-based engineers.¹⁴⁴

After Condit's resignation in 2003, the new CEO, Stonecipher, immediately attempted to transform Boeing's culture. He stated, “When people say I changed the culture of Boeing, that was the intent so that it is run like a business rather than a great engineering firm.”¹⁴⁵ In applying

¹⁴² Potkin, “Lion Air Final Moments: Recording Details Stress, Confusion in Cockpit.”

¹⁴³ Boeing Corp, “Boeing to Intensify Technical Career Development for Engineering Workforce.”

¹⁴⁴ George, “Why Boeing's Problems with the 737 MAX Began More Than 25 Years Ago.”

¹⁴⁵ George.

a finite mindset to *win at business*, Stonecipher didn't just ignore the historical vision; he reinforced Boeing's regulatory processes. Prioritizing short-term profits over long-term excellence led to decisions that directly contributed to the disaster.

In their immediate response to the tragedy, Boeing's board of directors formed an Aerospace Safety Committee. "The committee's primary responsibility is to oversee and ensure the safe design, development, manufacture, production, operation, maintenance and delivery of the company's aerospace products and services."¹⁴⁶ This regulative response maintains the corporate decision to maximize profits. It mirrors the CAF's initial response to the Deschamps report, which focused on policy changes rather than transforming institutional culture.

Despite the Deschamps Report identifying that the CAF had ineffectively applied past policies designed to subvert undesirable behaviour, the report recommends additional clarity in future policies.

While the ERA found that mere policy change is not, in itself, sufficient to address the problem of inappropriate sexual conduct in the CAF, policies do constitute a key tool upon which CAF leadership can rely to guide the conduct of members. Definitions are central pillars in any policy. They provide important guidance to members about how to conduct themselves by circumscribing what is permissible, and what is subject to sanction. Yet the ERA found that the definitions of both sexual harassment and of sexual misconduct in the DAOD policies are ineffective at clearly articulating a standard of behaviour that best protects the dignity and security of members.¹⁴⁷

Additionally, Deschamps makes it clear that "*policy change is not, in and of itself, sufficient*", suggesting that a comprehensive cultural shift is required to address the misconduct.¹⁴⁸ Then, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Lawson, commissioned the report due to external pressures.¹⁴⁹ He messaged outwardly that the CAF accepted the results, but privately remained critical.¹⁵⁰ In the short period that followed before his retirement, the CDS appeared on television

¹⁴⁶ Cook, "Boeing Forms New Safety Committee."

¹⁴⁷ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹⁴⁸ Deschamps.

¹⁴⁹ Deschamps.

¹⁵⁰ Loop, "Canada's Top Soldier Privately Doubted A Scathing Report On Sexual Misconduct, Documents Show."

stating: "It would be a trite answer, but it's because we're biologically wired in a certain way, and there will be those who believe it is a reasonable thing to press themselves and their desires on others. It's not the way it should be."¹⁵¹ Generalizing the misconduct as a *boys will be boys* attitude, this tone-deaf response downplayed the severity of the issue and led to his immediate retraction of the statement.¹⁵² While attempting to protect the institution, General Lawson made it abundantly clear: the organization's culture is rotten and stagnant.

Where Policy Defeats Transformation

Following General Lawson's retirement, new CDS General Vance quickly "accepted all ten recommendations and committed to implementing them as rapidly and effectively as possible."¹⁵³ Gen Vance impressed the urgency of the problem, stating:

This is a serious matter. Whether you are a leader, a subordinate or a peer, any form of harmful sexual behaviour undermines who we are, is a threat to morale, is a threat to operational readiness and is a threat to this institution. It stops now. Consider this my first order to all members of the CAF.¹⁵⁴

There was a renewed sense of optimism in the period that followed this rhetoric. The CAF's Strategic Response Team (SRT), established in January 2016, directly responded to the crisis, mirroring Boeing's regulatory approach to safety concerns. The following month, they released their first progress report on addressing inappropriate sexual behaviour, highlighting the initial progress.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Cudmore, "Military Sexual Misconduct Due to 'biological Wiring,' Gen. Tom Lawson Tells CBC News | CBC News."

¹⁵² "Canada's Military Chief Apologizes for 'Biological' Wiring Remark on Sexual Misconduct | Globalnews.ca."

¹⁵³ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces First Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁵⁴ Wyld, "Gen. Jonathan Vance Says Sexual Harassment 'Stops Now'"; Young, "'It Stops Now': New Defence Chief Promises to Fight Sexual Misconduct in Military."

¹⁵⁵ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces First Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour"; Defence, "The Path to Dignity and Respect."

Operation HONOUR presented “the mission to eliminate harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour within the CAF.”¹⁵⁶ The militarized operation to address organizational transformation initially aimed to achieve this ambitious goal through four key lines of effort.¹⁵⁷ *Understanding the problem* required acknowledging the need for an in-depth comprehension of the root causes and the full extent of sexual misconduct within the CAF. *Responding to incidents* demanded the implementation of robust protocols and support systems to address reported incidents and provide justice to victims effectively. This involved enhancing investigative processes, ensuring timely responses, and holding perpetrators accountable. *Improving support for CAF members affected by sexual misconduct* mandated comprehensive care and resources to individuals impacted by sexual misconduct, including mental health services, legal aid, and career support. *Rapidly modifying harmful behaviours* suggested proactive measures to educate members, foster a culture of respect, and cultivate a zero-tolerance environment to prevent future occurrences. This considers initiatives such as mandatory training programs, awareness campaigns, and promoting bystander intervention.

Operation SHORTCOMINGS

Ultimately, several factors led to Operation HONOUR's failure to be a mainstay and saviour of the CAF's culture. While providing support, the SMRC raised feelings of *ontological insecurity* in members of the CAF, who perceived the SMRC as not entirely independent from organizational reach. This perception undermines trust and introduces uncertainty about whether the institution will act fairly and impartially.¹⁵⁸ As individuals seek predictability and stability in their social environments, the perception that the SMRC lacks independence erodes this sense of

¹⁵⁶ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

¹⁵⁷ Defence, “About Operation HONOUR,” April 9, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Kinnvall, “Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security.”

security, hinders efforts to address sexual misconduct effectively and furthers a culture of distrust.¹⁵⁹ As Deschamps noted, the CAF had developed institutional barriers to hinder reporting.¹⁶⁰ The need for *securitized subjectivity*, or an intensified search for one stable identity, can increase in an environment of uncertainty, as members become less likely to report incidents, fearing repercussions or a lack of support.¹⁶¹

Using Kotter's *Eight-Step Process for Leading Change* as a diagnostic lens demonstrates that many initial steps were undertaken; urgency was established, a guiding coalition was formed, and short-term wins were visible, but the deeper elements of transformation were left unfulfilled. In the wake of Deschamps, General Vance issued a powerful proclamation: "It stops now. Consider this my first order."¹⁶² This declaration conveyed a sense of urgency, which Kotter identifies as the first step in transformation. Generals Vance and Lawson moved quickly to appoint LGen Whitecross and RAdm Bennett, forming a Guiding Coalition (Step 2), and established the SRT and SMRC as formal responses. These steps reflect early compliance with Kotter's model, but the initiative lacks the empowerment and continuity necessary to lead systemic transformation.

Scott's regulative pillar, comprising rules, policies, and formal authority, was weakened from the SMRC's structural positioning. Although it reported to the Deputy Minister, members saw it as an extension of the CAF, reducing confidence in its regulatory independence. This disconnect between formal structure and perceived autonomy undermined trust in the institution's ability to enforce Operation HONOUR's mandates fairly. Kotter's fourth step, communicating the vision, was also undercut. Despite 36 town halls and widespread policy

¹⁵⁹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."

¹⁶⁰ Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

¹⁶¹ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security."

¹⁶² Young, "'It Stops Now': New Defence Chief Promises to Fight Sexual Misconduct in Military."

dissemination, the initiative's intent never resonated across the ranks.¹⁶³ Awareness was high, but belief in the mission's sincerity remained low.

One year after implementation, the committee released a second report that underscored the challenges ahead while maintaining a positive tone. It details expanded victim support options and increased awareness due to leadership engagement. The report acknowledges that transforming deeply ingrained cultural attitudes takes time and points to research and policy development as foundational work for long-term evolution, but recognizes that challenges still lie ahead. The assessment is consistent with the idea that evolution takes time and requires more than new rules or policies.

The third report maintained a cautiously optimistic tone. It recognized improved reporting mechanisms and an uptick in data analysis, but acknowledged that "cultural change will take years to instill and consolidate."¹⁶⁴ The tone is measured, acknowledging progress while emphasizing the limitations of the initial approach; the report concedes that future progress requires "engendering the shifts in cultural norms that are required to achieve the mission of Operation HONOUR also requires engagement on a range of broader issues across our institution as well as doctrine and policy change."¹⁶⁵ While framed as progress, this admission reflected the early realization that the CAF's regulatory and procedural responses did not penetrate the normative and cultural-cognitive layers.

By the fourth report, the tone shifted notably. The CAF conceded that Operation HONOUR's focus on eliminating harmful behaviours needed to evolve toward a broader strategy

¹⁶³ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Second Progress Report Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁶⁴ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Third Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁶⁵ Defence.

for institutional transformation.¹⁶⁶ Despite the awareness campaigns and policy refinement, members still lacked trust in the system, and deep-seated attitudes remained intact.

The third truth of sexual misconduct-related culture change is that while [sic]behaviors can be impacted in the short-term through linear, punitive-based methods, the behaviour reverts to the previous level once direct oversight is removed. Enduring change is only achieved by reshaping attitudes and beliefs. To change the way members act, the CAF must change the way members think—and this is a gradual process measured in years rather than weeks or months. Stated succinctly, instigating and normalizing such enduring transformation requires a significant and sustained investment in effort and time. There are no shortcuts.¹⁶⁷

This shift in tone was a tacit acknowledgement that the initiatives linear, top-down approach had not delivered the required cultural evolution. While useful snapshots of the CAF's self-assessment, these reviews ultimately reinforced the paper's central thesis: the institution responded with finite-minded, compliance-driven mechanisms rather than an infinite mindset capable of redefining its culture and purpose. While sincere, these progress reports illustrate a deeper misalignment within the institution that reinforced distrust and insecurity rather than resolution.

The rapid establishment of the SMRC in September 2015 was intended as a tangible demonstration of the CAF's commitment to supporting victims.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the first SRT report indicated that leaders have been given the authority to take decisive action, including removing members from their positions.

The Chief of the Defence Staff made it very clear in his orders that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and leaders were to be held accountable. Decisive action demonstrates this direction and there have been Commanding Officers and leaders relieved of their positions upon notice of inappropriate behaviour.¹⁶⁹

There were encouraging indications that Operation HONOUR positively impacted CAF members' willingness to report incidents, underscoring the empowerment members began to

¹⁶⁶ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Progress Report #4 Addressing Sexual Misconduct."

¹⁶⁷ Defence.

¹⁶⁸ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces First Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁶⁹ Defence.

feel.¹⁷⁰ The short-term wins that Kotter suggests are visible, unambiguous, and related to the change effort were evident.¹⁷¹ Operation HONOUR aimed to increase awareness of harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour. The fact that almost all (98%) of Regular Force members stated they were aware of Operation HONOUR could be considered a victory.¹⁷² However, awareness alone is not a concrete performance improvement, so it may not qualify as the kind of unambiguous win needed to demonstrate meaningful transformation.¹⁷³ The development and delivery of training programs at all levels of the CAF, while issuing directives and clarifying policies related to sexual misconduct, were steps taken to demonstrate action.¹⁷⁴

Incorporating Veldman and Willmott's perspective on social ontology adds another layer to this understanding. Their work emphasizes that social realities, such as the perceived independence of an organization, are constructed and contested through various discourses and power relations.¹⁷⁵ The perception of the SMRC's lack of autonomy can be seen as a result of how its role and function are broadly framed within the CAF. While the CAF did not overtly deny the SMRC's independence, it did not consistently emphasize it. This absence of reinforcement allowed the dominant discourse, which viewed the SMRC as an internal arm of the CAF, to persist. Indicating a failure of Scott's *cultural-cognitive pillar*, the shared beliefs and assumptions within the CAF created a reality that conflicted with the official intentions of Operation HONOUR.

Additionally, the normative pillar, which reflects values and expectations, remained largely misaligned. The CAF's cultural commitment to operational excellence and its traditional

¹⁷⁰ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Third Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁷¹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 125.

¹⁷² Statistics Canada, "Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016."

¹⁷³ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 126.

¹⁷⁴ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces First Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour."

¹⁷⁵ Veldman and Willmott, "Social Ontology and the Modern Corporation."

focus on mission readiness, as articulated in *Duty with Honour and Strong, Secure, Engaged*, were not fundamentally reoriented to integrate Operation HONOUR as a central value.¹⁷⁶ As a result, initiatives to combat sexual misconduct appeared peripheral to the CAF's identity. This normative misalignment further eroded the cultural legitimacy of Operation HONOUR, weakening its ability to drive lasting transformation. Although Operation HONOUR aimed to align with CAF's core values like duty, loyalty, integrity, and courage, it lacked the visionary clarity Kotter describes in Step 3.¹⁷⁷ The effort remained compartmentalized and reactive without a unifying purpose that inspires shared commitment.

Feelings of ontological insecurity were exacerbated as CAF members perceived Operation HONOUR to be unstable and insincere. The initiative was frequently mocked, reinforcing a collective belief that it was performative rather than substantive.¹⁷⁸ According to Mitzen, ontological security stems from stability and predictability, qualities that Operation HONOUR failed to instill.¹⁷⁹ As a result, members struggled to reconcile their identities within a system they viewed as inconsistent and untrustworthy. The CAF's failure to fully communicate the SMRC's independence and inability to embed the initiative within its core values and beliefs reinforced a social reality where entities like the SMRC were seen as serving institutional interests rather than individual well-being.

While Operation HONOUR was framed as an important initiative, it was never the CAF's existential purpose. The strategic policies *Duty with Honour and Strong, Secure, Engaged*

¹⁷⁶ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces First Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour"; Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009; Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change - John Kotter*.

¹⁷⁸ Taber, "The Canadian Armed Forces: Battling between Operation HONOUR and Operation Hop on Her."

¹⁷⁹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."

reinforced a mission defined by defence and operational excellence.¹⁸⁰ Though aligned with these documents in principle, Operation HONOUR functioned as a targeted response to a specific issue, lacking the systemic reinforcement across Scott's three pillars and the vision and coalition-building of Kotter's change model, necessary to institutionalize cultural evolution.

A Vision Without Anchoring

Despite the urgency declared by General Vance, "It stops now", Operation HONOUR lacked the strategic clarity and coherence necessary to unite the institution behind a shared cultural transformation.¹⁸¹ Kotter's third step, crafting a compelling vision, was never fully realized. Framed in militaristic terms: Operation HONOUR, the initiative communicated urgency but not enduring purpose. It mobilized short-term compliance but failed to inspire long-term conviction. According to Kotter, a compelling vision must unite people behind a common goal, and yet, no unifying message or narrative ever emerged to anchor Operation HONOUR within the identity of the CAF.¹⁸²

Applying Scott's institutional theory, the initiative heavily reinforced the regulative pillar: formal policies, new reporting mechanisms, training programs, and directives.¹⁸³ However, it failed to embed these changes in the normative (shared values) or the cultural-cognitive (underlying assumptions and beliefs). This imbalance prevented a paradigm shift. Without internalization, behavioural transformation could not become habitual or self-sustaining.

¹⁸⁰ This definition is an amalgamation of Duty with Honour emphasizing the CAF's fundamental obligation to serve Canada with integrity, excellence, and professionalism while underscoring the role of operational effectiveness as central to military professionalism. Whereas Strong, Secure, Engaged further solidified this vision by articulating how the CAF must ensure national security and uphold Canadian interests globally. Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009; Defence, "Strong, Secure, Engaged."

¹⁸¹ Wyld, "Gen. Jonathan Vance Says Sexual Harassment 'Stops Now.'"

¹⁸² Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

¹⁸³ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

The CAF's foundational documents affirm the military's operational purpose and professional values. Operation HONOUR attempted to align itself with these values, yet never redefined the institutional purpose around inclusivity, respect, and dignity.¹⁸⁴ Instead, it remained layered onto a system designed for operational effectiveness, not reconstructed as part of an infinite vision for cultural evolution.

As with Boeing's formation of a safety committee following the 737 MAX tragedies, Operation HONOUR became a finite-minded, regulatory fix rather than a values-based movement. It updated protocols and messaging but lacked the deeper reflection necessary for institutional learning. Kotter's vision stage remained unfulfilled. From an organizational learning perspective, it stalled in single-loop. The organization adjusted behaviour without questioning the assumptions that governed it, asking only: *Are we doing things right?*

Vision, too, was absent. There was no compelling *Just Cause*, no bold articulation of why this transformation mattered beyond compliance. Without this, the CAF could not rally its members. As Covey warns, when organizations focus on transforming behaviours without addressing the paradigms that shape them, they merely "hack at the leaves."¹⁸⁵ The triple-loop learning question was missing: *How do we know the right things to do?* This misalignment caused friction. Institutional layering without vision bred confusion and resistance. When perceived as top-down command orders, the initiative alienated frontline members, eroding trust and morale.¹⁸⁶ Transformation cannot be imposed; it must be co-created. Cultural transformation must align with the identity and lived experience of its members.

¹⁸⁴ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada," 2009.

¹⁸⁵ Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 57.

¹⁸⁶ Petersen and Bartel, "When Culture and Change Collide In Higher Education."

The numerical increase in sexual offence complaints investigated by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service for the first six months of 2016 could be interpreted as a positive indicator “that military members were more aware of the problem and more confident in stepping forward and reporting incidents.”¹⁸⁷ However, increased reporting does not necessarily equate to a *win*, as it also reflects the continued occurrence of harmful behaviour. The Office of the Auditor General concluded that the duty to report had negative consequences, discouraging victims to come forward:

..we found that some members still did not feel safe and supported. For example, the duty to report all incidents of inappropriate sexual behaviour increased the number of cases reported by a third party, even if the victim was not ready to come forward at that time. Moreover, the Military Police had to conduct an initial investigation of all reports, regardless of a victim’s preference to resolve the issue informally. This discouraged some victims from coming forward. Many victims also did not understand or have confidence in the complaint systems.¹⁸⁸

Ultimately, declaring victory too soon, without fully anchoring transformation in the organizational culture, allows misconduct to creep back in and undermine the effort.¹⁸⁹ These results reinforced the limits of a regulative strategy unsupported by deeper institutional alignment. Without anchoring transformation in the cultural-cognitive foundation, how members make sense of their roles, duties, and purpose, transformation was superficial. Operation HONOUR’s failure was not a failure of effort but strategic integration. It lacked a clear vision, did not embed its principles into institutional identity, and failed to engage members in a shared cultural evolution. Without coherence between vision, institutional design, and member identity, the initiative fragmented, an object lesson in the importance of infinite-minded leadership.

¹⁸⁷ Defence, “Canadian Armed Forces Second Progress Report Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour.”

¹⁸⁸ Government of Canada, “Report 5—Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour—Canadian Armed Forces.”

¹⁸⁹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 13.

Avoidable Tragedies

Initially introduced as an analogy for finite-minded leadership, the Boeing case further underscores the consequences of mistaking regulatory action for cultural transformation. On March 10, 2019, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, another Boeing 737 MAX, plunged into the ground six minutes after takeoff, killing all 157 people on board.¹⁹⁰ It was a grim confirmation that the issues leading to the Lion Air crash had not been addressed. A year before the two disasters, Boeing had been made fully aware of the MCAS system's fatal flaws but chose not to ground the aircraft.¹⁹¹ Instead, leadership opted for a public relations strategy, reassuring airlines, regulators, and the public that the 737 MAX was safe.¹⁹²

Internally, Boeing executives resisted calls for immediate software updates or a more rigorous pilot training program, fearing that such measures would delay deliveries and drive up costs.¹⁹³ In congressional hearings, it was later revealed that Boeing had lobbied aggressively to avoid additional pilot training requirements, which would have reduced the aircraft's cost-competitiveness against Airbus.¹⁹⁴ Astoundingly, even after the Ethiopian Airlines crash, Boeing's CEO continued to downplay the severity of the crisis, prioritizing shareholder confidence over meaningful reform.¹⁹⁵

This reactive, regulation-focused response mirrored the CAF's approach to cultural crises. Just as Boeing created the Aerospace Safety Committee to signal compliance rather than enact genuine safety reforms, the CAF introduced policies and oversight bodies to respond to the

¹⁹⁰ Wise, "What Passengers Experienced on the Ethiopian Airlines Flight."

¹⁹¹ Leggett, "Boeing Admits Knowing of 737 Max Problem"; "Hearing Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure."

¹⁹² Boeing Corp, "Boeing Statement on Lion Air Flight JT 610 Investigation."

¹⁹³ Gates, Miletich, and Kamb, "Boeing Rejected 737 MAX Safety Upgrades before Fatal Crashes, Whistleblower Says."

¹⁹⁴ "Hearing Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure."

¹⁹⁵ April 2019, "ANALYSIS."

Deschamps report without tackling the root cultural issues that enable misconduct. These efforts reinforced the regulative pillar without fully engaging the normative or cultural-cognitive dimensions of the institution. In both cases, leadership placed institutional reputation and operational continuity above the fundamental safety and trust of those relying on them. When leadership loses sight of institutional purpose and fails to act from a place of infinite-minded vision, it risks losing its people and maintaining institutional continuity.

The Failure of Short-Term Finite Thinking

Operation Honour was unable to consolidate gains and produce widespread transformation. The *small victories*, such as the militarized framework and new departments like the SMRC, represent regulative responses. These measures, relying heavily on policies, education, and training, encountered inherent limitations in effectively shifting deeply entrenched attitudes and behaviours. While Scott emphasizes that the three pillars are interconnected, a change in one pillar often requires changes in the others to be effective.¹⁹⁶ Despite policy reforms, the limited impact of these measures reflects an enduring gap between formal commitments and cultural realities.

The CAF attempted to effect lasting transformation to the normative and cultural-cognitive dimensions using increased engagement, feedback, and leadership modelling with minimal success. However, new approaches are fragile until transformations sink deeply into the culture. Kotter suggests an organization can take over 10 years to instill a new culture.¹⁹⁷ While Operation HONOUR implemented strategies to address these dimensions of CAF culture, its

¹⁹⁶ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

¹⁹⁷ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 13.

regulative efforts were hampered by resistance, trust issues, and leadership failures, preventing the desired widespread transformation.

The misalignment between policy and institutional purpose created friction among its members. Some leaders viewed Operation HONOUR as a secondary effort that, while important, could not supersede operational imperatives. This tension reveals the limits of a finite mindset and the dangers of layering transformation onto an unchanged core identity. Cultural evolution requires integration into the fabric of the institution rather than being treated as an ancillary program, a transformation that must be reflected in the organization's vision.

Operation HONOUR's limitations demonstrate the challenges of implementing organizational transformation in a large hierarchical organization like the CAF. While the initiative raised awareness and provided support mechanisms, it struggled to fully empower members due to resistance, leadership misconduct, and a persistent lack of trust. After six years, Operation HONOUR culminated in March 2021.¹⁹⁸ While it brought some positive changes, it failed to achieve its ambitious goal of eliminating sexual misconduct in the CAF. Its shortcomings highlight the deep-seated nature of the cultural problems within the military and the need for a more transformative and holistic approach, one that shifts from single- and double-loop adjustments to triple-loop learning, where values are redefined, identity is reconstituted, and evolution becomes possible.

¹⁹⁸ Defence, "About Operation HONOUR," April 9, 2018.

CHAPTER 7: THE ARBOUR REPORT: CATALYST, CAUTION, OR COLLAPSE?

The CAF is repeating the same mistakes as in 2015. Following the same playbook... And none of it is well informed and considered.

- Justice Louise Arbour, CAF Independent External Comprehensive Review (2022)

If every reform follows the same playbook, are we becoming who we need to be, or who we've always been? On March 10, 2019, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crashed just minutes after takeoff, killing all 157 people on board.¹⁹⁹ It was the second fatal accident involving the Boeing 737 MAX in less than five months, following the crash of Lion Air Flight 610.²⁰⁰ Investigations quickly revealed that both disasters were caused by a malfunctioning flight control system known as Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS).²⁰¹ Boeing was aware of MCAS issues for four and a half months before the Lion Air incident.²⁰² Executives failed to take decisive corrective action, allowing the same fatal flaw to persist.²⁰³ Regulatory bodies, airline operators, and the flying public placed trust in Boeing's assurances that the aircraft was safe, highlighting the dangers of institutional inertia and a culture resistant to deep introspection.²⁰⁴ Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 serves as a poignant reminder that organizations that fail to learn inevitably leads to history repeating itself.

The release of the Arbour Report in 2022 presents another opportunity to mark a turning point for the CAF, a potential catalyst for institutional evolution rather than another chapter of regulatory response. It challenges the organization to move beyond the compliance-focused, finite-minded reactions that followed the Deschamps Report and engage in deeper, institutional

¹⁹⁹ Wise, "What Passengers Experienced on the Ethiopian Airlines Flight"; Leggett, "Boeing Admits Knowing of 737 Max Problem."

²⁰⁰ Potkin, "Lion Air Final Moments: Recording Details Stress, Confusion in Cockpit."

²⁰¹ Wise, "What Passengers Experienced on the Ethiopian Airlines Flight"; April 2019, "ANALYSIS."

²⁰² Leggett, "Boeing Admits Knowing of 737 Max Problem."

²⁰³ Gates, Miletich, and Kamb, "Boeing Rejected 737 MAX Safety Upgrades before Fatal Crashes, Whistleblower Says."

²⁰⁴ George, "Why Boeing's Problems with the 737 MAX Began More Than 25 Years Ago."

learning. To do so, the CAF must confront its persistent failure to *learn how to learn*. This means moving past superficial policy and process changes and instead questioning the assumptions, values, and cultural norms that sustain dysfunction. Without engaging in triple-loop learning, where the institution reflects not only on what it does and how it does it, but *why it does it* and what kind of organization it wants to become, cultural evolution will remain elusive.

Like its predecessor, the Deschamps Report, Arbour's findings exposed deep-rooted issues within the CAF's culture, particularly its continued mishandling of sexual misconduct and accountability.²⁰⁵ However, the outcome from the Deschamps report cautions against assuming a damning report will be the catalyst for cultural transformation. The CAF finds itself in a similar situation to NASA following the Columbia disaster, or Boeing after Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, a second damning review offering the catalyst to transform their learning. Even so, transformation requires more than policy adjustments; it demands a shift in organizational mindset, the dismantling of outdated paradigms, and a commitment to learning at the deepest institutional levels. It requires a third loop of Organizational learning. Only one of these institutions recognized their moment as a catalyst for deep transformation; the other remains mired in reputational repair. The CAF now stands at that same inflection point; where culture change hinges not on new policies, but on its capacity for organizational learning. The Arbour report remains a live test: will the CAF continue to treat symptoms with structure, or will it finally *strike at the roots* by reframing its identity and purpose? Put succinctly, will the CAF *drift* with Boeing or *learn to learn* with NASA?

²⁰⁵ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review"; Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces."

Compliance Based Reforms

The Arbour Report, like Deschamps before it, identified the persistence of sexual misconduct despite successive waves of regulatory intervention.²⁰⁶ Where the Deschamps report focused solely on sexual misconduct, Arbour differed in mandate and focus, examining “the institutional shortcomings and structural impediments that have allowed” the persistence of sexual misconduct despite previous efforts to correct it.²⁰⁷ The first significant difference is that Arbour’s mandate “required examination of the handling of sexual misconduct by the military justice system,” which was explicitly prohibited in Justice Deschamps’ mandate.²⁰⁸ Justice Arbour was also tasked with scrutinizing the CAF’s “recruitment, training, performance evaluation, posting, and promotion systems.”²⁰⁹ The report explicitly states that this had not been done before.²¹⁰

Justice Arbour’s report explicitly states that it “will not focus on the already clear picture painted by the Deschamps Report.”²¹¹ Instead, it leverages the findings of Deschamps, the Heyder and Beattie class actions, surveys, and media stories as a starting point.²¹² While Deschamps provided initial recommendations, Arbour delves deeper into the systemic issues preventing institutional transformation. In essence, the Deschamps Report defined the problem of sexual misconduct in the CAF and made recommendations for addressing it. At the same time,

²⁰⁶ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁰⁷ Arbour.

²⁰⁸ Arbour.

²⁰⁹ Arbour.

²¹⁰ Arbour.

²¹¹ Arbour; Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

²¹² Defence, “Heyder Beattie Final Settlement Agreement”; Burke and Brewster, “A Military in Crisis”; Statistics Canada, “Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016”; Statistics Canada, “Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2018”; Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

the Arbour Report was mandated to analyze why those issues persisted despite previous efforts to eliminate them from the Organization.

Leadership incentives in military institutions often prioritize short-term achievements over long-term stability when approaching problems with an operational mindset, seeking a defined end state or measurable outcomes to an evolutionary problem. In the corporate realm, executives often prioritize immediate financial gains, sometimes at the expense of the organization's long-term health. For instance, former Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg was terminated in December 2019 amid the 737 MAX crisis. Despite the circumstances, he departed with compensation and pension benefits totaling approximately \$62 million, despite not receiving severance pay as consequence for his actions in the scandal.²¹³ This substantial payout, following decisions that prioritized stock performance over safety, underscores a corporate culture that rewards short-term financial metrics over sustainable, long-term prosperity.

Similarly, in military contexts, leadership evaluations often emphasize performance during an officer's tenure, with less regard for the institution's future trajectory. Retired U.S. Navy Captain David Marquet observed that naval commanders are assessed based on their ship's performance up to their departure from command, with little accountability for subsequent outcomes:

In the Navy system, captains are graded on how well their ships perform up to the day they depart; not a day longer. After that it becomes someone else's problem. I thought about that. On every submarine and ship, and in every squadron and battalion, hundreds of captains were making thousands of decisions to optimize the performance of their commands for their tour and their tour alone. If they did anything for the long run, it was because of an enlightened sense of duty, not because there was anything in the system that rewarded them for it.²¹⁴

²¹³ Shepardson and Rucinski, "Boeing's Ousted CEO Departs with \$62 Million, Even without Severance Pay."

²¹⁴ Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*, 14.

This policy prioritizes decision-making that focuses on achieving immediate results rather than long-term effectiveness. This pattern is evident in the CAF, where Arbour's assessment highlights a culture that prioritizes institutional reputation over individual accountability.²¹⁵ The fear of reprisal for reporting misconduct, the persistence of old boys' club mentalities, and the reluctance to empower external oversight all reinforce a closed, self-protective system. These systems remain trapped in single-loop learning, asking how to improve processes rather than confronting the deeper question of why the system enables the problem.

In response to systemic issues, the CAF has historically introduced additional layers of rules and policies. However, without addressing the underlying cultural norms and values, these measures risk being superficial, failing to effect meaningful, lasting transformation. Arbour explicitly criticizes the CAF's tendency to rely on layering more rules and policies without addressing the underlying issues. She quotes a retired senior officer stating:

The CAF is repeating the same mistakes as in 2015. Following the same playbook. The term used is 'add women and stir.' Rush to publish direction and guidance and do stuff. And none of it is well informed and considered" Every problem must have a solution... The solution must be immediate and actionable. It matters little whether it actually fixes the problem, particularly if the problem is ill-defined and poorly understood, not unlike culture change. The response is a flurry of activities usually consisting of making lists, charts, inventories and PowerPoint presentations, as well as enacting new orders, policies and directives on top of an already complex structure. In a more ambitious move or, more likely as a result of public pressure, the leadership will respond with an operation, like Operation HONOUR, or a new high-level position, like the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC), a Level 1 (L1) organization reporting directly to the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).²¹⁶

Whether it be Operation Honour, CPCC, or any other response, the CAF as an institution does not demonstrate a willingness to *solve* complex problems. The organizational belief is that the processes for developing new policies have been effective, so why change? However, it is demonstrated that policies, including the CAF's strict duty to report incidents of sexual misconduct, a seemingly strong regulatory measure, are criticized for potentially deterring

²¹⁵ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

²¹⁶ Arbour.

reporting and undermining the goals of programs like *restorative engagement*.²¹⁷ Arbour advocates that the primary reasons “for under-reporting are mainly due to the anticipation of negative consequences”, and that simply reiterating the duty to report does not alleviate these fears; “it merely adds another one: the fear of punishment for not reporting.”²¹⁸ This suggests that even well-intentioned regulations can have unintended negative consequences if not considered within the broader cultural context and the needs of individuals affected.

Arbour also identifies that the CAF exists under a “numbing” number of rules and weak compliance.²¹⁹ The addition of more regulative policies in response to a symptom (sexual misconduct), to treat a problem (cultural norms), underscores this approach. As Arbour highlights, “If you hold a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”²²⁰ Boeing’s regulatory response after Lion Air mirrored this tactic. Rather than grounding the 737 MAX immediately, Boeing reinforced a belief that the existing system was fundamentally sound, failing to recognize the issue wasn’t just with their MCAS, but pervasive within their culture. Boeing operates under the assumption that compliance with existing regulations is sufficient, failing to address the more profound, structural issues that have allowed critical failures to persist.²²¹ The regulatory bodies that support the airline industry provide strict rules and guidance for any aviation mishap. As an institution, bound by compliance with these regulations, Boeing believed that following the rules, even if they were bending the will of the regulatory bodies, was sufficient to prove it was unimpeachable in the face of the accidents.²²² Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 hammered this nail home.

²¹⁷ Defence, “Restorative Engagement Program.”

²¹⁸ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²¹⁹ Arbour.

²²⁰ Arbour.

²²¹ George, “Why Boeing’s Problems with the 737 MAX Began More Than 25 Years Ago.”

²²² George.

While regulations and policies are essential tools, they are insufficient to address deeply ingrained cultural issues or complex systemic failures. The addition of more rules and the assumption of compliance do not automatically equate to a shift in mindset or behaviour within an organization. The parallel between the CAF's duty to report and Boeing's reliance on aviation regulations underscores the crucial need for organizations to examine beyond surface-level compliance and address the fundamental cultural and structural factors that enable problems to persist. As Scott suggested, we must change the norms, not the regulations, to change the culture.²²³ Beyond policies, Scott argues that institutions are shaped by their norms and values, which dictate what behaviours are rewarded or discouraged.²²⁴ Following the Arbour report, the CAF risks repeating the same mistakes: layering new policies on top of an unchanged organizational mindset.

Wicked Problems Require Infinite Minds

Arbour's assessment of the CAF's response mechanisms echoes a broader challenge in institutional reform: the difficulty of addressing what scholars call 'wicked problems.' These challenges defy simple solutions because they are deeply interconnected, context-dependent, and resistant to resolution through conventional means.²²⁵ Arbour captures this tension in the CAF:

Even though the problems faced by the CAF are difficult and complex, my referencing the expression "a wicked problem" should not be viewed as defeatist. These problems are not impossible to solve. But solving them has not been made easier by the CAF's procedures which are unduly complex and opaque. One case in point is the CAF's handling of the concept of "sexual misconduct" and its definition, which I discuss below. The number of documents, rules, directives, policies and orders is numbing. Indeed, the spirit of the rule of law is eroded, rather than reinforced, by the existence of a multitude of regulations but weak compliance with the fundamental ones.²²⁶

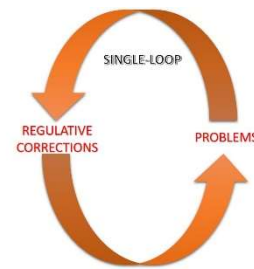
²²³ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

²²⁴ Scott.

²²⁵ Horst W. J. Rittel and Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning."

²²⁶ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

Justice Arbour highlights that its complexity does not render it immutable to change. Rittel and Webber’s original conceptualization of wicked problems in 1973 categorizes problems that cannot be solved in the traditional sense because they are symptoms of deeper systemic issues, lack clear endpoints, and require continuous adaptation.²²⁷ In other words, wicked problems rarely have an obvious endpoint, lack quick tests for solutions or outcomes, are unique, and are symptoms of other problems.²²⁸ This demands a shift in approach, not just more policies, but a fundamental rethinking of how institutions learn and evolve. This is where the infinite mindset’s focus on continuous progress and long-term horizons rather than achieving fixed, final solutions becomes essential. Unlike finite strategies that aim to *fix* problems through compliance and regulation, an infinite mindset embraces continuous progress, systemic adaptation, and long-term transformation. Organizations that fail to internalize this reality, whether Boeing after their 737 MAX disasters or the CAF in the wake of repeated cultural transgressions, will remain stuck in cycles of single-loop (Figure 5) corrections that do not address the root causes of dysfunction. An infinite mindset recognizes work is ongoing, and treating a symptom (Sexual Misconduct) is not the solution. Therefore, wicked problems require infinite mindsets to overcome their barriers.



Are we doing things right?

Figure 5: Single-Loop Learning

The Gaps in Arbour

As this paper analyzes the catalysts (Deschamps, Arbour reports) and examines the effectiveness of applied corrections (Operation HONOUR, The Path to Dignity and Respect),

²²⁷ Horst W. J. Rittel and Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning.”

²²⁸ Horst W. J. Rittel and Webber.

Arbour scrutinizes the existing systems and provides a potential roadmap for achieving cultural transformation. Kotter warns that urgency must be sustained beyond the initial outcry.²²⁹ The Arbour Report itself serves as a burning platform, highlighting the failures of past reforms. Boeing's experience following the Lion Air incident highlights the risk of false urgency, where institutions appear to act decisively but fail to address fundamental issues. The CAF's challenge was to ensure that urgency does not dissipate once public attention fades; however, like Boeing, their belief that Operation HONOUR was sufficient as a regulatory measure to address the core issue was finite-minded. While subsequent transgressions by senior leadership were acknowledged with shock and disdain, the new leaders responded by espousing the validity of their Operation HONOUR.²³⁰ Eventually recognizing this mechanism was insufficient, the CAF pivoted in 2020, remaining within its existing regulatory framework and using single-loop thinking to change Operation Honour.²³¹ Calling the issue a "*Wicked Problem*" and rebranding it "*The Path to Dignity and Respect*," they attempted to recreate a sense of urgency for the problem.²³² As VCDS LGen Rouleau proclaimed:

It established the frame of reference in black and white language, outlining the strategic framework for this vexing problem and how we must address it as a modern military. It establishes the plan going forward for the specific things we should do.²³³

Unfortunately, leadership in "the CAF is repeating the same mistakes as in 2015. Following the same playbook... And none of it is well informed and considered."²³⁴ Changes were being made, but they failed to recognize that the regulatory practices remained insufficient to alter the cultural

²²⁹ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

²³⁰ Brumwell, "Gen. Jonathan Vance Discusses the SMRC and Operation Honour."

²³¹ Defence, "About Operation HONOUR," April 9, 2018.

²³² Brewster, "DND Calls Sexual Misconduct in Military a 'Wicked Problem,' Seeks Long-Term Solutions."

²³³ Brewster.

²³⁴ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

norms that Scott prescribed.²³⁵ Arbour's report provided the organization with *another urgent* catalyst to regain traction following this wayward pivot and move toward long-term transformation. By drawing attention to the failures of past initiatives, Arbour explicitly references the shortcomings of previous efforts, such as the Standards for Harassment and Racism Program (SHARP) and Operation HONOUR.²³⁶ With the report pointing out that these initiatives "did not have the enduring impact expected" and that the CAF "had not yet fully accomplished what it intended" through Operation HONOUR, Arbour created a sense that the current trajectory was insufficient and that a more urgent and practical approach was needed.²³⁷

Arbour's review, through its scope, initial findings, and the immediate reaction it elicited, was a significant catalyst for a sense of urgency within the CAF and the broader government regarding the need to address sexual misconduct and enact meaningful culture change.²³⁸ She achieved this by exposing past efforts' inadequacies and highlighting the problem's persistence, thereby making the *status quo* appear unacceptable and the need for decisive action more pressing. Thus, it aligned with Kotter's initial crucial step in the change process.

Coalition Confusion

Kotter's second step emphasizes assembling a powerful guiding coalition composed of individuals who possess sufficient authority, credibility, and influence to lead the change effort. This coalition needs to work together as a team with a shared vision and commitment to the transformation. Arbour's approach, by its very nature as an independent external review, inherently involved engaging with a wide range of stakeholders across different levels within the

²³⁵ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

²³⁶ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

²³⁷ Arbour.

²³⁸ Defence, "Minister of National Defence's Report to Parliament on Culture Change Reforms in Response to Former Supreme Court Justice Arbour's Recommendations."

Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).²³⁹ This engagement can be viewed as a means of indirectly fostering elements of a potential guiding coalition by identifying key stakeholders, raising awareness and shared understanding, providing an external mandate for change, and securing ministerial support.

While Arbour's role was primarily that of a reviewer and not an internal change leader, there might have been opportunities to facilitate the formation of a powerful guiding coalition more directly through formal identification and convening of change leaders. Kotter emphasizes the need for a *powerful group* to lead the change.²⁴⁰ In 2021, the CAF initiated the formation of CPCC, arguing “the current crisis must be viewed as a catalyst to establish comprehensive strategies to create a healthier, safer and more inclusive organizational culture.”²⁴¹ The directive goes on to state:

Our first step will be the establishment of the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture as part of the National Defence Headquarters. The Chief Professional Conduct and Culture will be a Lieutenant-General/Vice-Admiral and the Deputy Chief Professional Conduct and Culture a Public Servant at the Assistant Deputy Minister level. The composition of this new organisation will be inclusive of members of all ranks and classifications and will emulate the diversity the Defence Team aspires to achieve. Resources will be assigned to achieve Initial Operational Capability (IOC) and begin the process of analysis and planning to address the flaws in our system described above. Subsequently, the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture will be responsible to provide recommendations on how this new organisation will achieve Full Operational Capability (FOC) and become the single Functional Authority (FA) for professional conduct and culture – unifying, integrating, and coordinating all associated programs, policies, and activities across the DND and the CAF.²⁴²

Arbour notes the creation of the CPCC as the “new functional authority for culture change, including in relation to sexual misconduct”.²⁴³ She mentions learning about its existence on the same day as her appointment, which she considers “symptomatic of a broader issue” regarding the implementation of past recommendations.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁴⁰ Kotter, “Why Transformation Efforts Fail.”

²⁴¹ Defence, “CDS/DM Initiating Directive for Professional Conduct and Culture.”

²⁴² Defence.

²⁴³ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁴⁴ Arbour.

In some respects, the Arbour report acknowledges the CPCC as the guiding authority. Arbour's recommendation #12 assigns responsibility for "training and prevention of sexual misconduct" to the CPCC, while emphasizing the need for consultation with the SMRC.²⁴⁵ However, Arbour acknowledges that the SMRC questioned whether it or the CPCC should take the lead on specific functions, particularly regarding expert guidance and advice on sexual misconduct. She ultimately opines "that the SMRC should remain the centre of expertise on sexual misconduct" but that the scope of its mandate in this regard should be reviewed in light of the CPCC's existence.²⁴⁶ It is in this manner that ambiguity is created, leading to a questioning of the guiding coalition.

From Kotter's perspective, such ambiguity could be problematic. If there is uncertainty about who holds the ultimate authority and expertise in addressing sexual misconduct, it could hinder the formation of a strong, unified guiding coalition.²⁴⁷ A strong coalition requires clarity in roles and responsibilities to function effectively as a team with a shared vision.²⁴⁸ The questioning of roles between the CPCC and the SMRC might also indicate a potential lack of a completely unified *vision* at the leadership level regarding how to tackle sexual misconduct. Kotter emphasizes the need for the guiding coalition to develop and communicate a clear vision of the future.²⁴⁹ While Arbour recognized the formation of CPCC as critical to the transformation, the failure to capitalize and solidify their position through a direct

²⁴⁵ Arbour Recommendation #12: "The ownership of training and prevention of sexual misconduct should be transferred to the CPCC. The CPCC should continue to consult the SMRC on the development of program content, delivery and methods of evaluation for sexual misconduct, but the SMRC should not be engaged in actual program delivery or monitoring." Arbour.

²⁴⁶ Arbour.

²⁴⁷ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

²⁴⁸ Kotter.

²⁴⁹ Kotter.

recommendation misses Kotter's emphasis on the need for clear roles, responsibilities, and a shared vision within the leadership driving the change to ensure its success.

Strategy Without Substance

Arbour addresses aspects related to Kotter's third step, "Developing a vision and strategy," but does so critically, focusing on past shortcomings and ongoing challenges rather than highlighting a clear, compelling vision and strategy currently in place.²⁵⁰ This focus should be concerning to the institution. Arbour's role as independent reviewer is not to assign a vision to the CAF. Still, there are instances where the report highlights the CAF's ambiguity and attention to a vision that fell short of the mark. The report acknowledges that the CAF has attempted to create a vision and strategy to address sexual misconduct.²⁵¹ Chapter 4 discussed the ambiguity of this vision and its place within the framework of the CAF's multitude of conflicting visions, arguing its overall value to organizational evolution. Operation HONOUR itself had a mission to "eliminate harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour" within the CAF and outlined preliminary aims.²⁵² It also progressed through phases, including the development of a comprehensive strategy and action plan. Furthermore, the existence of the "Operation HONOUR Strategic Campaign Plan 2025" and the "Operation HONOUR Performance Measurement Framework" indicates an attempt to establish a long-term plan and monitor its progress.²⁵³ However, Chapter 3 reinforced that the measurement of an infinite end-state provides neither value nor relevance to the conversation. While acknowledging the existence of Operation HONOUR and its strategic documents, Arbour's report emphasizes that several problems identified by the Deschamps

²⁵⁰ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review"; Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change - John Kotter*.

²⁵¹ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

²⁵² Defence, "About Operation HONOUR," April 9, 2018.

²⁵³ Defence, "The Path to Dignity and Respect."

Report remained even after three years of Operation HONOUR.²⁵⁴ This suggests a potential disconnect between the vision and strategy, as well as the implementation and impact on the ground. The report notes that many actions “were reduced to a ‘*check the box*’ exercise,” indicating a failure to deeply embed the intended vision and strategy within the organization.²⁵⁵ Ultimately, as Arbour’s report highlights, the CAF remains reactive to issues, adapting or creating regulations in response to a crisis, rather than instilling a vision that avoids the symptoms of a more significant problem.

When thinking about culture change in response to the sexual misconduct crisis, the CAF leadership seems to have been incapable of examining which aspects of its culture have been the most deficient. In none of the initiatives it has launched, is there a single reflection on whether its insular, hierarchical structures may have facilitated the abuse of power that characterizes most sexual misconduct. Instead, the focus has been on mapping steps, pathways and activities, and turning to periodic external reviewers (such as Justice Deschamps, Justice Morris Fish, the Auditor General of Canada (AG) and me), whose recommendations are then the subject of lists, charts, inventories and PowerPoint presentations. This formulaic, perfunctory method of operating is ill-suited to the present problem.²⁵⁶

Arbour's assessment points to a significant failure in developing and effectively communicating a clear and compelling vision for change within the DND/CAF, particularly in the context of Operation HONOUR. While the establishment of the CPCC represents a potential step towards developing and communicating a future vision, Arbour's report primarily underscores the past and present deficiencies in this critical aspect of organizational transformation.

Justice Arbour doesn't explicitly insist that leaders “walk the talk” as Kotter suggests, her criticisms imply the absence of leadership that embodies the vision.²⁵⁷ The continued prevalence of sexual misconduct suggests that leadership behaviour may not have consistently reflected the intended vision of a respectful and professional environment. Arbour’s report highlights the consequences of poorly communicated or absent visions, including a lack of buy-in, superficial

²⁵⁴ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁵⁵ Arbour.

²⁵⁶ Arbour.

²⁵⁷ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 98.

implementation of initiatives, and the persistence of the very problems the vision sought to address. Arbour implies that future success hinges on the DND/CAF's ability to develop a clear, unified, and consistently communicated vision for a respectful and professional culture, backed by leadership actions.

Reflex Without Reflection

Justice Arbour implicitly argues that removing barriers is crucial for empowering employees to drive change within the DND/CAF. The pervasive fear of reprisal discourages reporting and action. The report highlights findings regarding factors influencing “a CAF member's decision not to report sexual misconduct,” including the “fear [of] reprisals ... [and] the fear that their career will suffer consequences from their reporting the incident”.²⁵⁸

Addressing hierarchical power dynamics is crucial for dismantling structures that facilitate abuse and silence. While Kotter argues that formal structures can hinder action, this highlights a challenge in an environment with a pervasive hierarchical system, such as the military.²⁵⁹ Finally, by ensuring trusted and effective reporting mechanisms, Arbour suggests we will empower individuals to come forward without fear.²⁶⁰ Addressing all these impediments should allow the CAF to align with Kotter's fifth step and facilitate broad-based employee participation in a meaningful cultural transformation.

Kotter suggests generating short-term wins to emphasize the importance of creating visible, unambiguous performance improvements early in a change initiative, thereby building momentum and reinforcing efforts.²⁶¹ While Arbour doesn't explicitly detail short-term wins, her

²⁵⁸ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁵⁹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change - John Kotter*, 10.

²⁶⁰ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁶¹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change - John Kotter*, 128.

report highlights the lack of tangible progress in the CAF's past attempts to address misconduct, suggesting a failure to generate such wins. While the Minister's swift acceptance of Arbour's interim recommendations may be seen as an initial leadership win, it does not necessarily indicate a broad organizational transformation.

Arbour's report strongly aligns with Kotter's seventh step by advocating for ongoing and deepening change. While Kotter suggests that the organization leverage the short-term gains, there are few to herald in Arbour's scathing report.²⁶² Her recommendations for long-term systemic reforms, continuous monitoring, and addressing fundamental issues demonstrate the need to build upon any initial progress to achieve lasting cultural transformation. She implicitly cautions against complacency, as seen in her critique of past superficial efforts.

The Arbour report's ultimate goal is a profound cultural shift within the CAF. Kotter's final step focuses on embedding changes into the organization's norms and values to ensure sustainability.²⁶³ The report's recommendations, targeting policies, performance evaluations, and succession planning, aim to embed new behaviours and values, ensuring that changes become part of the institution's fabric rather than temporary fixes.²⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the CAF has little to celebrate in the late stages of the framework in terms of short-term systemic achievements and their embedding within institutional norms.

The analysis of the CAF's response to sexual misconduct, through the lens of Arbour's report and Kotter's change framework, highlights a recurring pattern of reactive measures that fail to create lasting cultural transformation. Arbour's critique of past initiatives, from SHARP to Operation HONOUR, underscores how the CAF has repeatedly relied on regulatory adjustments

²⁶² Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter; Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

²⁶³ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 15.

²⁶⁴ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

and external reviews while neglecting more profound institutional transformations. This approach, characterized by single and double-loop thinking, has proven insufficient to dismantle entrenched norms and values that enable misconduct.

Kotter's framework demonstrates that sustained urgency and a strong guiding coalition are essential to meaningful reform. The CAF's establishment of the CPCC reflects an attempt to centralize leadership on professional conduct and culture. Still, Arbour's assessment reveals ambiguity in its authority, raising concerns about the clarity and cohesion of the guiding coalition. Without clearly defined leadership roles and a shared vision, the institution risks repeating past failures. This ambiguity reflects a deeper issue: a finite mindset prioritizing structural solutions over cultural understanding.

Without a clear vision and empowered coalition, the CAF defaults to reassigning authority rather than redefining purpose, an institutional behaviour that aspires to double-loop (Figure 6) learning but remains constrained by the same underlying assumptions. The creation of the CPCC reflects an effort to ask; *Are we doing the right things*, a step beyond procedural fixes?

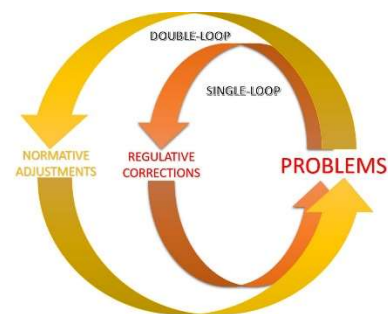
Yet without challenging the deeper paradigms that shape culture and identity, such as hierarchical rigidity or the fear of dissent, the initiative risks stalling before reaching triple-loop learning.

Leadership continues to seek improvement within

existing frameworks, reinforcing bureaucratic

inertia and failing to transform the institutional mindset that enables dysfunction in the first

place. Without a shift toward triple-loop learning, where assumptions are challenged and



Are we doing the right things?

Figure 6: Double-Loop Learning

organizational identity is re-examined, the CPCC risks becoming another symbolic reform rather than a catalyst for evolution. Cultural evolution demands the courage to ask who leads and why.

Furthermore, Arbour's findings align with Kotter's emphasis on removing barriers and empowering individuals to drive change. The CAF's hierarchical structure and fear of reprisal stifle reporting and accountability, preventing genuine cultural evolution. As Kotter prescribes, the lack of short-term wins has further hindered momentum, leaving the organization vulnerable to perpetual stagnation.

The CAF's challenge is not merely policy refinement but fundamental cultural transformation. Arbour's report highlights the organization's reliance on external reviews and procedural fixes, rather than fostering profound, values-based transformation.²⁶⁵ Kotter's steps emphasize the importance of integrating change into the institution's fabric, ensuring that reforms endure beyond leadership transitions and public scrutiny.²⁶⁶ Ultimately, the Arbour report serves as both an indictment of past failures and a renewed catalyst for transformation. The CAF's ability to implement its recommendations effectively, beyond performative compliance, will determine whether the organization can achieve lasting change or continue a cycle of superficial reform. To break this cycle, leadership must move beyond crisis-driven responses and commit to an enduring, values-based vision for a culture of accountability and respect.

Are we prepared to confront the uncomfortable truth that the institution we built is incapable of becoming the one we need?

²⁶⁵ Arbour.

²⁶⁶ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter, 16.

CHAPTER 8: A CALL FOR EVOLUTION

The first light of dawn spilled over the roadways surrounding the Mega in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, casting long shadows as the group jogged in tight formation. Their sneakers struck the pavement in steady rhythm, breath visible in the cool morning air. Across the road, other platoons passed in mirrored discipline, each dressed the same, moving with the same purpose, yet carrying their own unique energy.

Jogging alongside, the directing staff's sharp and steady voice rang out: "What do we do?"

Without hesitation, the group responded in unison, firm and resolute: "We learn to lead!"

She called out again, louder this time, feeding off their momentum: "How do we lead?"

"By inspiring others!" came the echo, stronger now, carried by conviction.

"Who do we inspire?" she demanded, her voice rising above the rhythm of shoes and breath.

"Every generation!" the group shouted, now running with purpose.

Then the final question, the one that quieted even the wind, every word paused for cadence, drawn more forcefully than the last: "Why - do - we - lead!?"

A beat passed, and in cadence with their footfalls, the answer came, bold, unshaken, and clear:

"To defend peace and freedom!"

With that, the group surged forward in a sprint, embodying a creed. In that moment, their movement was more than physical; it was generational. Their words didn't just echo across the roadway; they echoed through time, rooted in tradition, driven by vision, and aimed toward a future worth leading.

- A Vision of the Future, Author Fiction

What must we unlearn if every attempt at reform brings us back to where we started?

Each chapter opened with a question, giving the space between to inspire thought and reflection.

These were not rhetorical flourishes; they were friction points, invitations to pause, reflect, and

reconsider: *What if our beliefs are the problem? What if every reform is just a repeat? What if what made us successful in the past is the root of our problem?* The purpose was not to conclude,

but to begin anew. These questions were not designed to guide the reader through a familiar

argument, but to disturb the certainty that sustains institutional inertia. In this final chapter, the

questions culminate, as indicators of the uncomfortable challenges that must emerge to achieve the organizational evolution.

The CAF's struggle to establish a singular, unifying vision is ultimately a lack of visionary leadership. Simon Sinek argues in *The Infinite Game* that organizations must adopt an

infinite mindset.²⁶⁷ This paper argued that an infinite mindset prioritizes long-term institutional health over immediate, tactical successes. Visionary leaders do not react to challenges; they anticipate and shape the future. They recognize that cultural transformation is not a program but a paradigm shift in how an institution perceives itself and how it operates. A visionary mindset means functioning inside the third loop of organizational learning. Without leaders who embrace this mindset and lead from the third loop, the CAF will continue perpetuating a cycle of reactionary reforms without achieving organizational evolution.

We Learn to Lead, Inspiring Generations to Defend Peace and Freedom

The solution to achieving this mindset begins with a vision. This vision must be clear, inclusive, and embedded in both operational excellence and cultural integrity. It must go beyond fragmented policy documents and define a *singular unifying* narrative that resonates across the entire institution. Leadership and all members must actively champion this vision, reinforced through evaluations, and communicate it consistently to create a shared sense of purpose among all members. Until this unifying vision is accepted, adopted, and embodied, the CAF will continue to struggle with change, instead of inspiring members and achieving cultural evolution. The absence of a coherent unifying vision is more than an administrative oversight; it is a strategic liability. Vision is not a slogan; it is an organization's moral and operational compass. As Simon Sinek writes, organizations thrive not when they chase short-term wins, but when they commit to a *just cause*, a guiding, unending pursuit that inspires people to sacrifice, persist, and lead purposefully.²⁶⁸ Sinek's guidance aligns with behavioural psychologist John Kotter's 8-step model of organizational change.²⁶⁹ Kotter advocated that transformation begins with urgency,

²⁶⁷ Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

²⁶⁸ Sinek, 190.

²⁶⁹ Kotter, OverDrive, and OverDrive ebook, *Leading Change* - John Kotter.

gains strength through a unified coalition, takes direction from *a clear vision and strategy*, and depends on consistent, compelling communication to take root. The institution must remove obstacles to the new vision, create short-term wins, consolidate gains, and eventually seed the transformation, embedding the culture so deeply that it becomes the reflex, not the regulation.

An Infinite Vision

We Learn to Lead, Inspiring Generations to Defend Peace and Freedom is a deliberately concise and forward-looking vision. It reflects the infinite mindset necessary to sustain institutional relevance and cultural coherence in a rapidly changing world. Beginning with *We*, it affirms a collective commitment to continuous learning, transformational leadership, and teamwork, while also speaking to the legacy CAF members will leave behind and the future that awaits those yet to join.

This focus on learning is not new. The CAF, by the nature of warfare and changing political climate, is a lifelong learning institution. *Duty with Honour* (2009) was “intended to be both inspirational and educational,” establishing the “intellectual and doctrinal foundation for professional development across the CAF”.²⁷⁰ Its successor, *Trusted to Serve* (2022), continues in that role, offering guiding principles that shape the continuous learning environment maintained through the Canadian Forces Professional Development System.²⁷¹

Critically, this proposed vision moves beyond institutional survival. It seeks to inspire future generations, not only within the CAF, but among citizens of all nations, recognizing a duty that transcends today’s operational tasks and speaks to the long-term well-being of tomorrow’s

²⁷⁰ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, “Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada,” 2009.

²⁷¹ Canada. Department of National Defence and Government of Canada Publications Online, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve*.

Canadians and the global community. In this way, it functions as a *Just Cause*: a unifying, enduring purpose that offers direction in uncertainty, sustains commitment through adversity, and invites all members to serve something greater than themselves.

Boeing has yet to recognize their opportunity to transform offering many stark lessons in what happens when vision is missing, constrained, or ignored. A company built with a vision of engineering excellence is now mired in controversy as it contravenes its purpose and stated vision. Boeing will remain adrift until it recognizes it is an engineering firm, not an aircraft manufacturer. NASA's Columbia disaster in 2003 was not just a technical failure; it was systemic. Despite lessons learned from the Challenger tragedy 17 years prior, NASA failed to transform its organizational mindset in that time. It remained trapped in a finite game, focused on mission cadence, bureaucracy, and image, rather than evolving into a learning institution with a vision beyond launch schedules. Only after losing Columbia and facing external funding pressures did NASA recognize the catalyst to adopt triple-loop learning, rethinking policies, processes, identity, and purpose. NASA asked: *How do we know what the right things are?* It found that purpose within its vision: "To improve life here. To extend life to there. To find life beyond."²⁷² Much like a pre-Columbia NASA or Boeing, the CAF risks repeating this error if it continues to pursue compliance-based reforms that are absent a transformational vision that is lived, not laminated in ethics manuals.

Like NASA post Columbia, the CAF still has time to choose transformation over inertia, but that window is closing. It must decide whether to continue managing crises within a finite system or rise to the challenge of becoming a learning institution. The question is no longer:

²⁷² NASA, "NASA Strategic Plan 2003."

what must we do? The organization must ask: *who must we become to learn to lead through a unifying vision, and what are we willing to sacrifice to stay true to that identity?*

Compliance to Conviction

Creating a vision is easy; selecting values, through published ethos and doctrine, have been formulated through decades of institutional transformations. The challenge facing the CAF is living this vision. The reshaping of institutional systems that actively inhibit leaders from inspiring others through the shared vision. For example, the CAF's evaluation and promotion system, born from decades of rules-based, performance-driven metrics, remains locked in a finite mindset. It rewards technical proficiency, risk aversion, challenges empowerment, and supports conformity to precedent. It produces leaders who rise not because they inspire but because they comply. Arbour noted that the regulatory environment has become numbing, dense in process, and thin in purpose.²⁷³ This kind of structure cannot nurture leaders willing to act on principle when doing so comes at a professional cost. And it will come at a cost to the early adopters. To transform the CAF into a values-driven, vision-aligned institution, it must be willing to confront the deeply ingrained habits and hidden incentives that maintain the *status quo*.

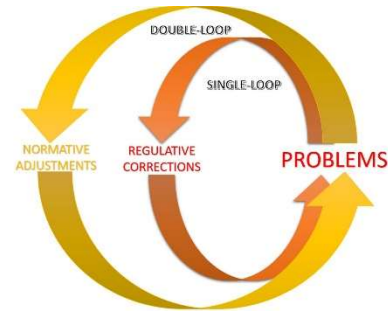
Are we building a system that selects leaders who embody our vision, or one that filters out those courageous enough to live it?

Identity Over Process

The solution is not impossible to enable but requires a paradigm shift in institutional identity. Leadership must be prepared to walk away from systems that no longer serve the vision. That includes abandoning outdated rules and norms, even when deeply entrenched in our

²⁷³ Arbour, "Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review."

collective memory or imposed by external bodies. These rules are sunk costs. If they don't serve the new vision, they must be discarded. That means releasing performative compliance in favour of purpose. It means evaluating leaders not solely by their ability to avoid mistakes, but by their courage to take risks in defence of the institution's highest ideals: its membership. The CAF cannot allow other priorities, such as operational tempo, boys-club loyalties, or short-



Are we doing the right things?

Figure 7: Double-Loop Learning

term reconstitution goals, to overshadow ethical values-based leadership. Certain behaviours must become non-negotiable, with the only recourse being a swift removal from the organizations membership. Mechanisms that pervert this ability need to be addressed; the CAF cannot proceed by changing its identity within the rules-based framework it has operated within, or it will remain in Single-Loop learning. It cannot create a new mechanism to address this singular issue, or it remains in (Figure 7) Double-Loop learning. The organization cannot say it is vision-driven and reward those who contradict that vision for achievement, expedience, or personal gain.

Are we the kind of institution that protects its systems, or the kind of institution that protects its people?

The Burden of Letting Go

In *Turn the Ship Around*, Retired Naval Captain David Marquet posed the question every leader must answer: “What are you willing to personally risk” to lead differently?²⁷⁴ To learn to

²⁷⁴ Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*, 65.

lead and inspire generations means accepting personal risk. It requires caring deeply about the mission and the people, while letting go of your attachment to bureaucratic safety. As Azar's research suggests, human behaviour is driven less by logic and more by social pressures.²⁷⁵ We often make decisions counter to our best interests to conform to societal norms and protect our image.²⁷⁶

This instinct is rooted in our evolutionary past. The foundation of these social pressures can be traced to tribal living.²⁷⁷ In tribal societies, survival depended on cooperation and group cohesion. Losing social standing meant exile, and in that context, death. Today, this same impulse drives a deep fear of alienation. It's not irrational thinking that most threatens bold decision-making, but the risk of losing status when making rational choices that defy the groups' norms.²⁷⁸

The organization must harness this dynamic. If social pressure shapes behaviour, outside-the-box, value-driven leadership must earn social capital. That means celebrating, not punishing, leaders who take principled risks, even if they fail. Senior leaders must be willing to put their careers on the line to uphold the vision, defying external pressures to conform to outdated ideals. Anything less is not leadership; it is management. Cultural evolution requires confronting uncomfortable truths and modelling the courage to inspire and endure a paradigm shift.

The CAF processes stifle initiatives and trains leaders to survive the system, not transform it. Is this an identity the CAF strives for? Letting go of control, micromanagement, top-down authority, and the cult of personality requires immense emotional maturity. This maturity can be fostered, but without it, we remain a system of permission, not empowerment.

²⁷⁵ Azar, "The Implications of Tipping for Economics and Management."

²⁷⁶ Benabou and Tirole, "Incentives and Prosocial Behavior."

²⁷⁷ List, *The Voltage Effect*, 190.

²⁷⁸ List, 190.

Marquet frames this mantra as the leader-leader mentality; a focus that removes the top-down hierarchy (leader-follower), instills confidence in subordinates to lead the organization, and eliminates the reliance on the chain of command for instruction. It demands that leaders retain full responsibility while trusting others with the power to act. For many senior leaders, this is an uncomfortable idea.

Are we developing leaders to protect the institution as it is, or to transform it into what it must become?

Seeking Excellence or Avoiding Mistakes

Efficiency and effectiveness are not leadership metrics but are often cited when discussing personnel evaluations of leaders. Marquet asked whether our institutions are seeking excellence or avoiding mistakes? In the CAF, the responses to catalysts such as Deschamps and Arbour, through mechanisms like Op Honour, operate under a risk-avoidant mentality. Not because they lack courage, but because the system punishes mistakes more severely than it rewards bold leadership. Arbour highlights a “culture of silence” where individuals fear “retaliation by denial of opportunities, [sic]ostracization and various informal punishments inflicted by peers” for reporting wrongdoing.²⁷⁹ This demonstrates a system that punishes those who step outside the norm and challenge existing practices, which may be perceived as a mistake by their peers or superiors. In short, the CAFs performance appraisals and promotion boards prioritize operational competence and reputational safety. They rarely ask: Did this leader embody our values? Did they inspire? Did they challenge contradictory norms? Scott reminds us that transformation doesn’t occur without challenging and changing those norms.²⁸⁰ Kotter

²⁷⁹ Arbour, “Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.”

²⁸⁰ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

argues that transformation cannot succeed in a culture that critiques failure more than celebrates success.²⁸¹ Yet the CAF rewards those who play it safe and perform effectively and marginalize those who disrupt unsuccessfully, even when that disruption aligns with core values. To live the vision, the CAF must rewire the incentives that guide leadership behaviour. That begins with reframing its evaluation systems.

Are our leaders being assessed for their ability to uphold and embody the vision? Or are they being judged on outdated metrics that reflect a visionless, reactive past? What unspoken values are our current systems reinforcing? What kind of leadership identity are we cultivating, and is it one that future generations will trust, follow, or even recognize?

Strengthening Proficiency in Leader-Leader

The shift toward a values-based leadership model in the CAF must not come at the expense of technical expertise. Technical competence becomes even more critical as authority is decentralized. As David Marquet explains;

...the insight that came to me was that as authority is delegated, technical knowledge at all levels takes on a greater importance. There is an extra burden for technical competence. If all you need to do is what you are told, then you don't need to understand your craft. However, as your ability to make decisions increases, then you need intimate technical knowledge on which to base those decisions.²⁸²

This reinforces the imperative that leadership development and technical mastery must evolve together, decentralized decision-making is only effective when leaders at every level are equipped not just with judgment, but with deep expertise to act independently and responsibly.

Mission Command, a philosophy rooted in decentralized execution and empowerment, assumes this competence.²⁸³ It demands that members understand their roles and possess the

²⁸¹ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

²⁸² Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*, 209.

²⁸³ Carpenter, "Command and Control of Joint Air Operations through Mission Command."

technical acumen to make sound decisions independently. This leader-leader model does not devalue expertise; it enhances it. It builds a culture where technical knowledge is not siloed but shared, where leaders teach, inspire, and develop others to apply their knowledge creatively and ethically. Leadership becomes the bridge that elevates technical ability from personal mastery to collective success. However, Marquet's caution is clear:

This was going to be hard. We would have to train our guys to a higher level of technical competence if we wanted to give them more authority... Control without competence is chaos. At times like this, I felt an impulse to just say screw it, it's not worth it, let's just go back to the leader-follower model. That will save me a lot of time and trouble in training.²⁸⁴

Failure to account for an expertise gap warns that the best intentions to decentralize leadership can falter if the institution fails to invest in the technical development of its people simultaneously. Therefore, the only sustainable path forward is a holistic leadership model where competence, character, and influence are equally nurtured. Technical excellence will always be a foundation of the CAF's mission, but its enduring strength will come from leaders who inspire others to continuously learn to lead.

What if we selected our leaders for their ability to make others, not just themselves, technically and ethically excellent?

²⁸⁴ Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*, 211.

*Avoiding Verschlimmbessern*²⁸⁵

The recent modifications to the CAF evaluation system represents the early stages of transformation, but they remain confined to single- and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning focuses on improving performance within the existing system: *How can we assess better, while still doing what we've always done?* Even where the PAR introduces values-based competencies, it still operates under a performance and potential model, grounded in operational requirements and often interpreted through subjective, hierarchical lenses.

Engaging in double-loop learning (Figure 8), the CAF shifted evaluations

based on the metrics of values-based

Meta-Competencies. Here, the CAF

asks: *Are we measuring the right things?*

While this may appear evolutionary, the

competencies and facets are derived from performative skills such as “Analytical Thinking” or

“Personnel and Resource Management”.²⁸⁶ Further, these competencies are broken into

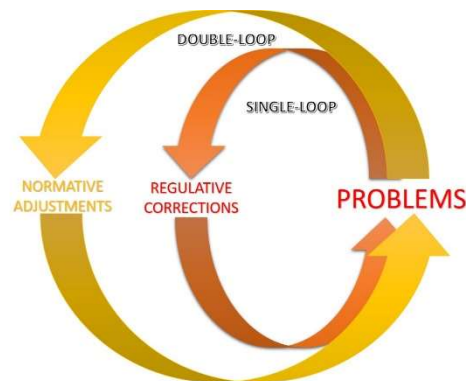
behavioural indicators rooted in performance. “Balances the allocation of scarce resources...” or

“...engages in inductive reasoning” may be helpful, but they risk reducing leadership to outputs

and transactions, not transformations.²⁸⁷ Additionally, the supervisor's numerical application of

the competencies remains wholly subjective. While a complete removal of performance cannot

provide adequate feedback to members, focusing on the performative nature of the institutional



Are we doing the right things?

Figure 8: Double-Loop Learning

²⁸⁵ Translation from German: to make something worse by trying to improve it.

²⁸⁶ Excerpts taken from the Maj/LCdr Competency One-Pager Defence, “Performance and Competency Evaluation (PaCE).”

²⁸⁷ Excerpts taken from the Maj/LCdr Competency One-Pager Defence.

requirements demonstrates a pressure on the member to *balance* the institution's requirements against their *subordinate leaders'* needs.

Are we still evaluating leadership with the same assumptions that created the culture we seek to transform?

Learn to Walk the Talk

If the CAF is to evolve and walk the talk of *learn to lead, inspiring generations*, it must adopt an infinite mindset and commit to triple-loop learning (Figure 9).²⁸⁸ Reasoning with *how do we know the right things to do?* It becomes an extension to consider: *Who are we, and who do we want to be?* It is not about doing things better or even choosing better things to do; it is about rethinking the very identity of leadership in the entire organization.

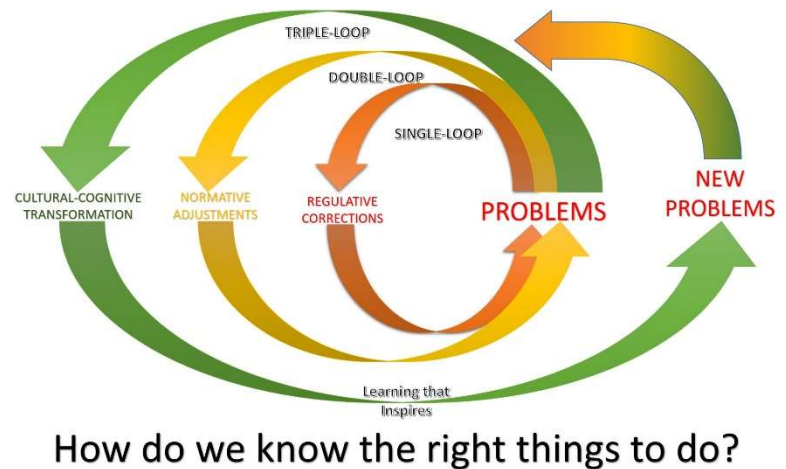


Figure 9: Triple-Loop Learning

This is where Marquet's leader-leader philosophy becomes critical. In a leader-leader model, the goal is not to create more followers, but more leaders. Evaluation need not reflect how well someone performs in isolation, but how effectively they build leadership in others. It is no longer sufficient for evaluations to flow from the top down. At the same time, Bate suggests, "Leaders are not victims of culture. We shape culture. We drive it."²⁸⁹ For leader-leader models, leadership remains in the driver's seat but must achieve buy-in to keep the passengers from

²⁸⁸ "Walk the Talk" is a term used frequently by Marquet when describing living the values, not just espousing them. Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*.

²⁸⁹ Bowen and Bate, "Cohesion, Performance, and Readiness."

exiting the bus. Empowerment (leader-leader) is key to gaining this buy-in. Kotter stresses the need for a “guiding coalition” beyond senior management, mobilizing influencers, informal leaders, and frontline members to challenge outdated norms.²⁹⁰ Finally, Hubbart suggests that 70% of organizational transformation efforts fail due to stakeholder buy-in.²⁹¹ Transformation efforts become empty rhetoric rather than reality without a broad-based leader-leader empowerment model. Therefore, in the CAF’s context, developing others doesn’t become a competency once achieving senior ranks; it becomes the Meta-Meta-Competency for the institution, at *every rank*.

What would an evaluation system look like if designed not to measure compliance, but to cultivate character and inspire trust across generations?

The Courage to Be Seen

A bold step toward triple-loop learning would be to introduce 360-degree feedback in partnership with the PAR, for all ranks, with mandatory transparency for senior leadership positions. This is not simply about improving performance, it is about rebuilding trust in a system where too many members feel unheard, unvalued, and disconnected from those who lead them. The absence of mechanisms for subordinates to safely and honestly evaluate their leaders has contributed to a climate of institutional distrust. Those who hold authority must have the courage to be evaluated by the very people they lead, not only because it improves trust and sharpens their effectiveness, but because it signals integrity, humility, and earned legitimacy.

This kind of accountability would mark a significant cultural shift. For those who have advanced in a system that never required subordinates' perspectives, such transparency will feel

²⁹⁰ Kotter, “Why Transformation Efforts Fail.”

²⁹¹ Hubbart, “Organizational Change.”

uncomfortable. Yet leadership at the highest levels demands emotional maturity, the capacity to sit with discomfort rather than avoid it. As Hubbart argues, the greatest barriers to institutional change are not systems or structures, but the human tendency to resist truths when it demands personal or collective change:

There may be no truer truth than how difficult it can be to accept the truth under any circumstance. Furthermore, acceptance of truth, the semantics of truth-telling (Stokke 2014), and buy-in (Kotter and Whitehead 2010) are arguably the most significant obstacles to short-and long-term organizational change movement success. Indeed, to many, accepting that something about us as individuals or as a collective organization may be wrong may be highly unpalatable. This is especially true when accepting delinquency(ies) may necessitate significant personal and/or organizational change (Kotter 2012; Levine and Cohen 2018). Despite these potential discomforts, truth and buy-in are critical and unavoidable steps in the organizational change process. This is important because avoiding the truth restrains our ability to grow, change, develop, and evolve as individuals or as an organization.²⁹²

The willingness to face hard truths, to hear what others actually experience and perceive, may be unpalatable, but it is indispensable. Avoiding those truths only reinforces stagnation. In contrast, confronting them becomes the very condition for growth, change, and evolution, both for individuals and the institution.

Those who hold institutional authority should have the courage to be evaluated by the leaders they lead, not only because it makes them better, but because it builds trust throughout the organization. Leaders who have built teams grounded in trust, lived the values they promote, and inspired those around them will welcome this process as a validation of their leadership. A 360-degree review, in that context, becomes a source of pride, not punishment. It sends a clear message to junior members: leadership in the CAF is not defined by positional power, but by earned legitimacy. As Hubbart reminds us, growth requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. The CAF cannot evolve unless it builds an environment where honest

²⁹² Hubbart.

feedback is welcomed, not feared, and where legitimacy is earned, not assumed. Only then can leadership move from control to credibility, and from authority to trust.

Finally, transparency in senior leader evaluations builds institutional credibility. It shows that the CAF does not operate in silos or shadows, it gives younger members and the public a tangible, aspirational model for what good leadership looks like, and demonstrates to external influences that the institution leads and operates beyond reproach. It *inspires generations* into a culture of continuous *learning*, where feedback is normalized, expected, and celebrated.

If we genuinely believe leadership is about building others, then what does it say about us if we fear being seen by those we claim to lead?

Infinite-Minded Leadership

Marquet challenges us to stop thinking about leadership as control.²⁹³ Values-based leadership is not about knowing more, being right, or avoiding mistakes. It's about creating conditions where others thrive, initiative is not feared, and mistakes are met with reflection, not retribution. Too much of our evaluation culture is defined by error reduction rather than leader development. We measure success by what didn't go wrong, not by what was boldly attempted. This is a hallmark of a finite mindset, a system that punishes risk, stifles innovation, and teaches leaders to play it safe. To evolve, evaluations must shift focus from how well a leader manages tasks to how well they empower others. This evolution will not be easy. Many will resist due to sunk costs: belief in legacy systems, fear of exposure, or attachment to power structures that have served them. But if we are serious about transformation, we must call those costs what they are, sunk. They do not align with our vision. And any policy, process, or habit that does not

²⁹³ Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, *Turn the Ship around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*, 53.

support our stated identity must be released to flourish elsewhere while holding the laggards accountable. Triple-loop learning requires rebuilding the system based on who we want to become, not who we've been or currently are. The leader who inspires, empowers, and transforms must be our new archetype, and our institutional systems must reflect that.

The recent transformations to the CAF comply with single- and double-loop learning within the organization, yet, for cultural evolution to be cultivated better questions must be asked that force the organization to learn and to transform. In a leader-leader environment, leader-follower processes become an obsolete requirement. When leadership is distributed and trust is embedded into the institution's fabric, the emphasis must shift from how well a member performs according to institutional demands to how authentically and consistently they lead according to institutional values. The current system still privileges performative excellence over principled leadership. This reinforces a finite mindset where leaders are conditioned to *look good, fit in*, or *get results* rather than act in ways that align with our stated ethos. The CAF may say it wants leaders who lead with courage and integrity. Still, when evaluation systems reward compliance, familiarity, and short-term outputs, the message is clear: *what matters most is what can be measured*. And what can be measured is often only a fraction of what matters.

What if we stopped asking how well someone fits the system and started asking whether the system reflects the kind of leadership we value?

The Emancipation Proclamation

Throughout this paper, the language of empowerment has been used. But to borrow from Marquet, the deeper shift we require is not merely empowerment, it is emancipation.

Emancipation is fundamentally different from empowerment. With emancipation we are recognizing the inherent genius, energy and creativity in all people, and allowing those talents to emerge. We realize that we don't have the power to give these talents to others, or 'empower' them to use them, or the power to prevent them from coming out. Emancipation results when teams have been given decision-making control and have the additional characteristics of competence and clarity. You know you have an emancipated team when you no longer need to empower them. Indeed, you no longer have the ability to empower them because they are not relying on you as their source of power.²⁹⁴

Empowerment suggests leaders grant authority; emancipation requires that we dismantle the structures that make such permission necessary in the first place. Leader-leader is not about empowerment; it is about emancipation. Empowerment implies a giver and a receiver; emancipation suggests a system no longer dependent on permission to lead. This is an unsettling proposition for many leaders because it reimagines their roles, identities, and abilities to control. However, emancipation is precisely what a values-based organization demands. It means trusting people to perform tasks *and* shape culture. Not just meeting standards, but questioning their validity. They will follow values while living boldly, even when it is uncomfortable. This is the paradigm shift the CAF must undergo, emphasizing organizational ownership rather than enhanced oversight.

Senior leaders face an even more significant challenge. They must navigate institutional inertia and external political pressures that conflict with long-term transformation. In democratic institutions, military leadership operates within a framework of civilian oversight and shifting political mandates. This reality cannot be ignored. But neither can it excuse stagnation. Visionary leaders must learn to operate with integrity in that tension, defending institutional values without becoming partisan, and championing a long-term vision even when the political cycle rewards short-term optics. The courage to lead in this model means knowing when to speak truth to power, protect the institution from external overreach, and align operational reality with moral

²⁹⁴ Marquet, OverDrive audiobook, and OverDrive, 335.

responsibility. Meaningful transformation depends on changing internal systems as well as senior leaders who model principled leadership even when it costs political favour or professional certainty.

What does it mean to lead with courage when the systems above us reward silence, and the systems below us depend on our voice?

From Survival to Service

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn reminds us that every paradigm shift begins with discomfort, a break from tradition, a rupture in established thinking.²⁹⁵ Copernicus did not simply improve the prevailing model of the universe; he redefined our place within it. But even that seismic shift was not the final word. Centuries later, Edwin Hubble expanded that view, showing us that the universe was not just heliocentric but vast, dynamic, and expanding, requiring another transformation in understanding our place in the cosmos. Organizational evolution is not a rejection of previous truths, but their refinement in light of new understanding. The CAF must embrace this: not change for its own sake, but transformation grounded in the best of what came before, reshaped to serve who we must become. Steven R. Covey echoed this sentiment: "Paradigm shifts move us from one way of seeing the world to another."²⁹⁶ The CAF requires precisely this: *a paradigm shift in defining and re-developing its world*. It is not just a new way of doing things, but a new way of seeing the institution, its people, and its purpose. Such a shift challenges deeply held assumptions, especially in an institution that is technically proficient and operationally complex. In high-expertise environments, precedent, standardization, and control often shape culture. Transformation in these contexts can feel like a

²⁹⁵ Richards et al., *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*.

²⁹⁶ Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 40.

threat to operational integrity. However, a paradigm shift does not erase technical excellence; it reorients it around a higher, more human purpose.

Marquet challenges us to stop thinking about leadership as control. Value-based leadership is not about knowing more, being right, or avoiding mistakes. If the CAF wants to live its unifying vision, it must do more than modify evaluation criteria. It must redefine why it evaluates, what it rewards, and who it considers exemplary. This requires not just a new system, but a new identity. The path ahead is really hard. However, it is the only path to break free from the gravity of finite thinking. As the Columbia disaster showed us, even the most advanced institutions fail when prioritizing process over purpose and compliance over courage.

NASA offers a case study in what is possible. After the loss of Columbia, they were forced to confront the fact that the organizational culture that led to Challenger's destruction had remained largely intact. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board found the same issues: suppression of dissenting voices, deference to schedule, and an illusion of technical infallibility.²⁹⁷ NASA's transformation was not sparked by new technology but by an existential need to rediscover purpose. They shifted from a bureaucracy obsessed with launch cadence to a learning institution guided by a broader exploration vision. Instead of asking: *How do we get to space?* they began asking third-loop questions like: *What do we do when we get there?*

The Deschamps and Arbour reports function as similar catalysts for the CAF. Like NASA, the CAF has faced irrefutable evidence that its systems have failed to protect its people and promote its purpose. The difference is that the CAF still has time to evolve organically, without waiting for external collapse or irreversible harm. But that window is closing. Boeing is their cautionary tale: a company that once prided itself on engineering excellence has become

²⁹⁷ NASA, "Columbia Accident Investigation Board."

synonymous with crisis, not because it lacked skill, but because it betrayed its identity. The cost of not transforming is not just cultural, it is reputational, operational, and moral. If the CAF continues to treat culture as compliance rather than identity, it risks becoming an institution that survives without service.

Are we prepared to redefine success, not as adherence to precedent, but as fidelity to purpose, even when that threatens the very systems that built us?

It is not enough to restructure systems or update policies. Transformation demands that organizations confront who they are, what they believe, and how they lead. This paper has explored the conditions necessary for organizational evolution: leadership grounded in values, a unifying vision, accountability through authentic evaluation, and a cultural identity strong enough to withstand disruption. But there is still *much* work to do.

The CAF must now ask harder questions. Demands that reach beyond frameworks and into the heart of the organizational identity. How does it develop organizational courage? How do we mentor leaders *through* discomfort, not around it? How do we dismantle the bureaucratic reflexes that stifle initiative and protect the status quo? Emancipation from those constraints is uncomfortable, because it threatens hierarchy, certainty, and control. But without it, the institution will never breathe the air of trust, nor inspire the next generation to serve.

These challenges begin with vision, leadership, and the courage to evolve in the third loop. As Kotter reminds us, urgency fades without conviction.²⁹⁸ As Covey and Kuhn teach, paradigm shifts begin not with strategy, but with a new way of seeing our world.²⁹⁹ As Sinek argues, lasting institutions are rooted in a *Just Cause*, an enduring reason to act beyond self-

²⁹⁸ Kotter, "Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

²⁹⁹ Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*; Richards et al., *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*.

interest.³⁰⁰ And as Professor Carse made clear, finite systems seek to win, but infinite ones exist to continue the game.³⁰¹ The CAF must shift: from control to contribution, from survival to service.

Shifting systems is necessary, but insufficient without a shift in beliefs and behaviours, what Scott identifies as the cultural-cognitive pillar.³⁰² It is at this deepest level that sustained transformation takes root, when new ways of thinking become reflexive beliefs. Gruenert and Whitaker suggest culture is shaped by what we celebrate, what we tolerate, and what we refuse to ignore.³⁰³ For the CAF, culture is not transformed by command, it is shaped by what we model, what we mentor, and what we repeat. When integrity is prioritized, when leaders demonstrate personal courage, and when junior members see values lived rather than laminated, belief becomes reflex. And reflex, not compliance, is the mark of a culture transformed.

In the end, institutions do not evolve by preserving what made them powerful. They evolve by daring to become what makes them worthy. This is why the CAF must root itself in a vision that transcends policies and generations: *We Learn to Lead, Inspiring Generations to Defend Peace and Freedom*. A vision is not a slogan, it is a commitment, to serve not only the mission, but the future. To lead through inspiration and integrity. And to learn, not just for technical competence, but for cultural transformation, institutional trust, and an infinite mindset. This is the organizational identity that must be *earned*. Once this evolution is achieved: *How do we know the right thing to do, NEXT?*

³⁰⁰ Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*.

³⁰¹ Carse, Overdrive, and Overdrive ebook, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*.

³⁰² Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*.

³⁰³ Gruenert and Whitaker, *School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform It*, 13.

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