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TOWARDS A HYBRID APPROACH: SENIOR LEADER TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE SIGNAL CORPS

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Exercise Solo Flight

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Maj Chad Johannes

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TOWARDS A HYBRID APPROACH: SENIOR LEADER TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE SIGNAL CORPS

Hide not your Talents, they for Use were made. What's a Sun-Dial in the shade!

- Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1750

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the 1997 McKinsey consulting report coined the term *the war for talent*, the subject of talent management came to the forefront and has fascinated both practitioners and academics alike.¹ The booming economy of the late 1990's led to a marked shortage in the skilled labour required for companies to be successful. This trend continues today and the pending retirement of baby boomers from the workforce is set to create an even more profound gap in the labour market that will only intensify this "war".

Although in a different battleground than they are used to, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has to contend with the same labour pool shortages as their civilian counterparts, while additionally constrained by the fact that they are operating in a closed labour system with extremely limited ability to replace senior personnel with outside hiring practices.² It is within this backdrop that the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (RCCS) finds itself as it endeavours to manage its critical human resource requirements in an intelligent manner nested within the CAF and Canadian Army (CA) personnel management processes.

¹ Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones and Beth Axelrod, *The War for Talent*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001), 1.

² Alan Okros, "Becoming an Employer of Choice: Human Resource Challenges within DND and the CF," in *The Public Management of Defence in Canada*, ed. Craig Stone (Toronto: Breakout Education Network, 2009), 159.

In response to these challenges, and recognizing a current gap, the RCCS has recently launched a personnel management initiative consisting of a “talent management” process focused on the Lieutenant-Colonel rank under its “Senior Personnel Management Strategy.”³ In providing awareness of this initiative, a request was put forth for any feedback that would help the Corps improve its senior personnel management process.

This paper seeks to answer that call through providing a recommendation on whether the Corps’ Lieutenant-Colonel talent management process should be “exclusive” (focused on relatively few individuals) or “inclusive” (focused on all individuals). This paper will contend that the RCCS should consider implementing a hybrid talent management process to develop and maintain a strong cadre of officers to ensure its long-term success.

In order to provide this recommendation, a review of talent management through the latest academic journals and published research, CAF and allied research papers and doctrine, as well as CAF strategic guidance and pending initiatives was conducted. Noting the overwhelming emphasis of academic and practitioner literature on the subject of talent management is focused on the private domain, caution should be made in directly applying this knowledge towards a military context. With this being said, as much of the academic underpinnings for talent management stem from the study of basic human and organizational behaviours, it is likely that many of the findings remain applicable across contexts.⁴

³ S.M. Parsons, *Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Senior Personnel Management Strategy*, (Canadian Army HQ: file 4700-1 (D RCCS), 14 December 2017).

⁴ Peter Cappelli and J.R. Keller, “Talent Management; Conceptual Approaches and Practical Challenges,” *The Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* (2014): 306.

Defining Talent Management

The concept of talent management often struggles with the fact that there is no universally agreed upon definition. In 2015, widely recognized talent management scholar, Eva Gallardo-Gallardo, led a team in a “bibliometrics and content analysis” of hundreds of peer-reviewed academic journals to evaluate the state of the talent management field.⁵ They discovered that there was a “mishmash” of definitions being used throughout the literature, and ultimately concluded that the field remains in a “growing” state with considerable academic work to be done before reaching maturity.⁶ As a result, there are no universally accepted “best practices” with which to resolve the inclusive versus exclusive debate.

With the understanding that nearly two decades of academic literature has had difficulty in defining what precisely is meant by the term “talent management”, then it can perhaps be forgiven that practitioner approaches to the use of the term can vary widely. In fact, distinguished organization psychology and military leadership expert Alan Okros indicates that the CAF’s Succession Management process is in essence a synonym for “talent management.”⁷ Although succession management is a large part of the foundation of the Signal Corps’ view on personnel management, the Corps’ perspective is somewhat different. Within the RCCS personnel management strategy there are currently three primary components: succession planning, position management, and talent management.⁸ Succession planning is based on the formal CA process focused on meeting the needs of the CAF and CA by placing the “most

⁵ Eva Gallardo-Gallardo, S. Nijs, N. Dries and P. Gallo, "Towards an understanding of talent management as a phenomenon-driven field using bibliometric and content analysis," *Human Resource Management Review* 25, no.3 (2015): 265.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 291, 293.

⁷ Alan Okros, "Becoming an Employer of Choice....," 167.

⁸ S.M. Parsons, *Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Senior Personnel ...*, 14 December 2017; Note that RCCS identifies a fourth aspect, mentoring, with a formal program to be stood up shortly. For clarity’s purposes mentoring was omitted.

suitable person, in the right position, at the right time.”⁹ Position management consists of the responsibilities of career managers, including the day-to-day management of the assigned positions required to be manned and the appropriate assignment of career courses.¹⁰ Finally, RCCS talent management is currently viewed as a link between these two functions with a focus on an individual’s “professional and personal needs” so they “can attain their goals within the CAF and the Corps”.¹¹ All three of these functions overlap and interact with each other in a somewhat intricate process that sees the Director of the RCCS as a central figure in how the overall personnel management process functions from a Corps perspective.

AN EXCLUSIVE FOCUS TO RCCS TALENT MANAGEMENT

In reviewing the exclusive approach as an option for RCCS senior leader talent management, it will first be shown that this approach would best align with the most commonly employed civilian approach as well as the current CA succession planning system. Second, it will be suggested that this approach represents the most judicious use of resources in developing key talent, and that this investment will in turn increase the personal commitment and work effort of selected individuals. Next, it will be argued that this individualized focus will help to retain the key members identified as being vital to the future success of the institution. Finally, a number of potential drawbacks will be presented including the potential of overlooking key talents, the danger of establishing career expectations that will be difficult to meet, and the potential negative effects on those not selected to be talent managed.

⁹ Department of National Defence, Land Force Command Order 11-79, *Army Succession Planning* (National Defence Headquarters Ottawa: Canadian Army, 2012), 2; Department of National Defence Director of Signals, *Signals Succession Planning Process* (National Defence Headquarters Ottawa: Canadian Army, 2012), 1.

¹⁰ S.M. Parsons, *Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Senior Personnel...*, 14 December 2017.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Alignment with Common Practice and CA Succession Planning

In Gollardo *et al.*'s 2015 review of empirical talent management research, they conclude that the exclusive approach is indeed the most common method employed by companies.¹² They further find that prominent talent management scholars David Collings and Kamel Mellahi's definition is the most commonly cited:¹³

...we view an organizational talent management strategy as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization.¹⁴

The current CA approach to succession management very closely aligns with Collings and Mellahi's definition. In terms of identifying key positions, the CA's succession management plan outlines a number of senior officer key command appointments that it endeavours to fill through the Short-Term Succession Plan that looks out three posting seasons (three years).¹⁵ The key to the development of an officer "talent pool" is through the Long-Term Succession plan which looks out 5-10 years and assigns "tiers" to officers based on their assessed long-term

¹² Eva Gallardo-Gallardo and Marian Thunnissen, "Standing on the shoulders of giants? A critical review of empirical talent management research," *Employee Relations* 38, no. 1 (2016): 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴ David Collings and Kamel Mellahi, "Strategic Talent Management: A review and research agenda," *Human Resource Management Review* 19, no. 4 (2009): 305.

¹⁵ Department of National Defence, Land Force Command Order 11-79..., Annex B, Appendix 4.

potential.¹⁶ The Long-Term Succession planning list is subsequently used to develop the identified officers through the provision of relevant courses and career development opportunities. In identifying key strategic positions and key personnel to fill them, it can be seen that the Army's Succession management system closely resembles the most common talent management models currently employed by the majority of companies. As a result, aligning the RCCS Lieutenant-Colonel talent management system with an exclusive focus on the key individuals feeding into Army Succession planning is a sensible approach.

Judicious Use of Resources

An exclusive approach to talent management would allow RCCS to focus limited resources on the development of key personnel. Indeed, the Collings and Mellahi model posits that leaders should be focused solely on those “high-potential and high-performing” personnel in order to “facilitate a more deliberate utilization of organization resources.”¹⁷ Although empirical evidence is relatively sparse in this area, University of Brussels' Jolyn Gelen and her team's 2013 review of both talent management and human resources management literature indeed identifies that it is believed that the focus of resources on key employees “results in a higher return on development investments than when resources are allocated equally.”¹⁸ The currently proposed RCCS talent management system focuses on only tiered Lieutenant-Colonels, providing a specific focus on a subset of the overall population. This allows the assigned Colonel “talent managers” to provide more concentrated efforts on this relatively small group of

¹⁶ Department of National Defence, Land Force Command Order 11-79..., Annex A.

¹⁷ David Collings and Kamel Mellahi, "Strategic Talent Management...", 306.

¹⁸ Jolyn Gelens, N. Dries, J. Hofmans, and R. Pepermans, "The role of perceived organizational justice in shaping the outcomes of talent management: A research agenda," *Human Resource Management Review* 23, no. 4 (2013): 350.

individuals. As presented earlier, this approach neatly aligns with the CA's succession management plan and enables the provision of relevant experiences and training to those slated to take up key positions in the future.

Fostering Commitment and Work Effort

Focusing limited resources on select senior leaders will likely result in an increased commitment and work ethic from this key demographic. Gelens *et al.* followed up their 2013 literary analysis with a 2014 empirical study of 203 employees in a large Belgium company examining the effects of an exclusive approach focused on talented employees. They found that those identified and developed as high potential employees exhibited higher levels of job satisfaction and work effort.¹⁹ This result is not surprising as social exchange theory suggests that a perceived increase in support from an organization will naturally solicit a reciprocal positive reaction from the member.²⁰ A similar finding was found by academic researchers Chay Hoon Lee and Norman Bruvold when they sampled 405 nurses in the US and Singapore and found that the perception of development investment increased their morale and dedication to the organization.²¹ This highlights the importance of differentially investing in the key RCCS senior leaders that are relied upon for the Corps' future success to ensure they remain invested in the organization. The focus of key resources on this exclusive group is a significant means of ensuring this commitment and work effort.

¹⁹ Jolyn Gelens, J. Hofmans, N. Dries, and R. Pepermans. "Talent Management and organizational justice: Employee reactions to high potential identification." *Human Resource Management Journal* 24, no. 2 (2014): 167-172.

²⁰ Maria Christina Meyers, "Talent Management: Towards a more inclusive understanding," *Tijdschrift voor HRM* 16, no. 12 (2016): 3.

²¹ Chay Hoon Lee and Norman T. Bruvold, "Creating value for employees: investment in employee development," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 14, no. 6 (2003): 997.

Impact on Retention

In addition to increasing the commitment of members, an exclusive approach to senior leader RCCS talent management would decrease the likelihood of key personnel leaving the organization. Prominent talent management scholar Ingmar Bjorkman *et al.* researched the effects of talent identification on employee attitudes through the study of 769 managers and professionals in nine multinational corporations. They found that those who were aware of their “talent” status demonstrated both increased commitment to the organization and lower turnover intentions.²² This indicates that if key RCCS senior leaders recognize that the organization is committed to them, it will promote a sense of duty to continue with the relationship. In an example from a military context, management professor Mark Jordan *et al.* surveyed 517 U.S. cadets and found that the main contributor to their decision to sign a contract with the military was the level of perceived organizational support.²³ These findings indicate that the amount of support the organization provides a member will likely have a significant impact on his or her turnover intentions. By focusing the limited resources on a few key RCCS leaders, it is expected that they will perceive a correspondingly higher level of organizational support which will in turn increase the chances of retaining these key personnel.

Drawbacks to the Exclusive Approach

Although there are several potential advantages to an exclusive approach, there are also a number of possible drawbacks. First, there is the risk of missing out on developing key talent. In

²² Bjorkman, Ingmar, Mats Ehrnrooth, Kristiina Makela, Adam Smale, and Jennie Sumelius. “Talent or Not? Employee Reactions to Talent Identification.” *Human Resource Management* 52, no. 2 (2013): 207.

²³ Mark H. Jordan, T. J. Gabriel, Russell Teasley, Wendy J. Walker, and Mike Schraeder, “An Integrative Approach to Identifying Factors Related to Long-Term Career Commitments,” *Career Development International* 20, no. 2 (2015): 175.

the case of the CA, it is widely recognized that there are well-established “career tracks”, and it becomes difficult to recover if one veers off course. For example, refusal of a key appointment is often considered as a “desire to not progress” and normally results in being removed from the succession planning process.²⁴ Regardless of the talent an individual may possess, they risk no longer being talent managed and this potential subsequently goes unrealized. Second, it has been shown that by investing in an exclusive group, a form of psychological contract is established which can lead to a sense of entitlement that may be difficult to fulfill.²⁵ As a result, care must be taken to clearly communicate with members of this group to ensure the perceived psychological contract is not broken. Lastly, there have been findings that an exclusive approach can have negative effects on those not identified as amongst the exclusive grouping.²⁶ If the RCCS senior leaders not identified as talents decrease their performance there are clearly ramifications on the effective functioning of the Corps. Consequently, the potential benefits of an exclusive program need to be weighed against the potential drawbacks on the excluded population.

AN INCLUSIVE FOCUS TO RCCS TALENT MANAGEMENT

In reviewing the inclusive approach as an option for RCCS Lieutenant-Colonel talent management, it will first be shown that there is an increasing trend towards this approach in both civilian and military contexts. Second, it will suggest that this approach would allow the realization of the full potential of the entire Lieutenant-Colonel cohort. Next, it will indicate how this approach would force the Corps to better understand the talents at its disposal and better

²⁴ Department of National Defence, Land Force Command Order 11-79..., 13-14.

²⁵ Violetta Khoreva, and Vlad Vaiman, "Intent vs. action: talented employees and leadership development," *Personnel Review* 44, no. 2 (2015): 213.

²⁶ A. R. Malik, and P. Singh, “‘High potential’ programs: Let’s hear it for ‘B’ players,” *Human Resource Management Review* 24 (2014), 336.

employ them to increase personal and organizational productivity. Finally, the likely drawbacks will be presented including a diffused focus from key succession planned personnel and the amount of resources it would take to fully realized.

Trend to Inclusive Focus

As opposed to the exclusive approaches that focus on a few key individuals, the inclusive approach is based on an appreciation that all employees have talent and that organizations have a responsibility to develop this potential and employ them in a way that allows them to realize their maximum potential.²⁷ Unfortunately empirical research with respect to the inclusive approach is currently even more limited than with the exclusive approach. Regardless, a survey of 321 human resources managers in 49 countries by prominent inclusive talent management proponent Maria Meyers revealed that inclusive and exclusive approaches are viewed as having relatively equal merit.²⁸ Indeed, the inclusive and exclusive debate has been one of the hottest topics in academia in the last decade.²⁹

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that military talent management systems should indeed be interested in leveraging the inclusive approach. A 2015 White Paper by the American Army's Human Dimension Capabilities Development Task Force (HDCDTF) acknowledged the inclusive versus exclusive debate, ultimately declaring they consider talent to be the "...unique intersection of skills, knowledge and behaviors in every person... represents far

²⁷ Stephen Swailes, Yvonne Downs, and Kevin Orr, "Conceptualising Inclusive Talent Management: Potential, Possibilities and Practicalities," *Human Resource Development International* 17, no. 5 (2014): 533.

²⁸ Maria Christina Meyers, *From essence to excellence: a strengths-based approach to talent management*, (Tilburg: Glideprint, 2015), 94-107.

²⁹ N. Dries, "Talent management, from a phenomenon to theory," *Human Resource Management Review* 23, no. 4 (2013): 269.

more than the training, education and experiences provided by the Army.”³⁰ This White Paper further recommended that the talent management model created by Michael Colarusso and Davis Lyle be used as the core of the future American Army process.³¹ This 2015 model was developed for the American Army after extensive internal analysis plus the use of “mutually reinforcing finds of academic, government, DoD and Army studies spanning several decades.”³² This demonstrates that a detailed US Army review is leading them to consider a more inclusive talent management focus. This developing interest from a military perspective suggests that it is an approach worthy of due consideration when developing a talent management strategy.

Realizing the Full Potential of the Cohort

In considering an inclusive approach, it is suggested that an inclusive model would help the RCCS realize the maximum potential out of all senior leaders. Highly regarded talent management academic Stephen Swailes *et al.* argue that instead of focusing on a select few key individuals, it would be more productive to focus on leveraging the talents of everyone in the organization.³³ This claim makes intuitive sense in the RCCS context when considering that there are many senior officers that would not be talent managed under an exclusive system as a result of not being tiered in the succession planning process.³⁴ This includes officers who have failed to meet one of the required thresholds for factors such as years of service remaining, language requirements, or formal education. It would also include officers who, for a myriad of

³⁰ Department of the Army, White Paper, *Talent Management in the Army: Review, Comment, and Recommendation on Talent Management Models*, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Publishing Office, 2015), 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³² Michael J. Colarusso and Davis S. Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2014), 169.

³³ Swailes, Downs, and Orr, "Conceptualising Inclusive Talent Management...", 531.

³⁴ S.M. Parsons, *Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Senior Personnel...*, 14 December 2017.

personal reasons, have had to once refuse to take up a key position. Meyers argues that ignoring a subset of the workforce essentially “wastes” their talents.³⁵ In the case of Lieutenant-Colonels, this represents a waste of talent for an individual who has roughly two decades worth of investment into their development. This non-tiered senior leader population represents a talent pool that, under an inclusive system, would be developed and provided the experiential opportunities necessary to maximize their potential.

Better Understanding of the Talent Base

In addition to maximizing their potential, focusing on all individuals would enable the Corps to better understand its talent base and the competencies at its disposal. Swailes *et al.* contend that a key feature of inclusive talent management is that it forces organizations to evaluate their talents.³⁶ While the RCCS has been incrementally increasing its understanding of all their Captains and Majors through the establishment of a Regional Senior Signal Officer (RSSO) construct, the recent talent management system for Lieutenant-Colonels is currently focused on only those who are tiered.³⁷ As a result, there remain a significant number of senior leaders whose talent profiles and competencies would not be collected. In reviewing Human Resource efforts within the CF, Okros identifies that “...the CF human resources system lacks the person- or job-specific information to actually make decisions at the individual level...”³⁸ It is apparent that the CAF is not alone in this regard, as in their review from the American Army

³⁵ Meyers, *From essence to excellence...*, 3.

³⁶ Swailes, Downs, and Orr, "Conceptualising Inclusive Talent Management...", 536.

³⁷ Department of National Defence, Director of Signals, *Regional Senior Signal Officer/NCM (RSSO/RSSNCM)* (National Defence Headquarters Ottawa: Canadian Army, 2013); S.M. Parsons, *Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Senior Personnel Management Strategy* (Canadian Army HQ: file 4700-1 (D RCCS), 14 December 2017).

³⁸ Alan Okros, "Becoming an Employer of Choice...", 171.

perspective Colarusso and Lyle offer that the “Army does not manage officer talent because it lacks effective mechanisms for revealing and capturing those talents”³⁹ This highlights the institutional gaps that exists in terms of assessing and managing the specific talents of individuals. This gap represents an area where the RCCS could invest in trying to “close the gap” until an institutional solution materializes. If the RCCS was to engage on an inclusive talent management approach for senior leaders, whereby each individual gets thoroughly assessed, they would be able to identify the specific competencies of each of their Lieutenant-Colonels.

This understanding of the strengths possessed by all senior leaders would allow the RCCS to best leverage the skillsets of their personnel to increase the Corps’ performance. Academic literature points to the benefits of positive psychology when people are allowed to focus on their strengths, identified by Meyers *et al.* as those “characteristics that energize rather than exhaust.”⁴⁰ Although culturally the military looks to employ people in different avenues in the name of making “well rounded” officers, there is a case to be made for employing people in positions where their specific strengths are most beneficial. In fact, the RCCS has even more leeway with the employment of those senior leaders who are not on the tiering list as they do not have the institutional “checks in the box” to be moved through for advancement. Subsequently, there is an opportunity to enable specific career streams and individualized paths. Meyers *et al.* contend that by understanding and leveraging the specific talents of each employee, they will naturally learn quicker which ultimately results in higher productivity.⁴¹ Especially in a Corps with such a diverse employment profile, working towards aligning people with what they are naturally good at through talent management into specific and individualized career streams

³⁹ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management...*, 34.

⁴⁰ Maria Christina Meyers, “Talent Management: Towards a more inclusive understanding,” *Tijdschrift voor HRM* 16, no. 12 (2016): 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

should be a priority consideration. Through the understanding of the individual talent profiles, the RCCS will be able to ensure senior leaders are employed in “best fit” positions that will be mutually beneficial to both the individual and the Corps.

Drawbacks to the Inclusive Approach

The major drawback to a purely inclusive approach to talent management is that if everyone is treated equally, then many of the potential advantages of an exclusive approach for top talents are potentially negated. By not focusing resources on the key leaders that are expected to fulfill increasingly strategically important roles in the organization, there is a risk that they will not be developed fully and may have more propensity to leave the organization. Indeed, in their Harvard Business Review Article titled “How to Keep Your Top Talent” Jean Martin and Conrad Schmidt advocate for extensive engagement with an organization’s key talent to keep them engaged, as they are the most likely to find alternate employment if not catered to.⁴² Finally, it would take a considerable investment of time and resources to effectively manage the entire cohort of RCCS senior leaders in this fashion. Indeed, as significant portions of the overall personnel management system are held at the CAF and CA levels, some of the resources that would be required to fully implement this type of system fall outside of the ability of the Signal Corps to manage.

⁴² Jean Martin and Conrad Schmidt, “How to Keep Your Top Talent,” (*Harvard Business Review* 2010): 3.

A CALL FOR A HYBRID APPROACH

In presenting a hybrid approach, it will be argued that the Signal Corps can do aspects of each approach in order to better position itself for the future. It will first be established that for pragmatic reasons the RCCS needs to maintain an exclusive approach for the tiered officers in accordance with the CA succession planning process. It will next be established that there are significant indicators that an institutional move towards a more inclusive approach is underway, and that RCCS efforts to gather information on key competencies of all members in accordance with an inclusive approach would allow for better talent management of the entire cohort. It will then be established that retention is a significant concern for RCCS Lieutenant-Colonels and that an inclusive talent management focus that establishes rewarding and personally fulfilling career paths will assist in addressing this vital personnel management challenge.

Maintaining an Exclusive Focus

In developing an approach for the RCCS senior leader talent management, it is important to understand the environmental considerations and constraints that are in place. In terms of approach, the Corps needs to work within the current personnel system, policies and norms at the CAF and CA levels. In their review of a number of Lithuanian companies and their approaches to talent management, Asta Savanevičienė and Birutė Vilčiauskaitė highlighted this requirement for a mutually supportive relationship between a company's talent management approach and their culture, value and organizational strategy.⁴³ Clearly the Signal Corps need to align with the CA, and indeed the CAF, personnel management systems.

⁴³Asta Savanevičienė, and Birutė Vilčiauskaitė, "Practical Application of Exclusive and Inclusive Talent Management Strategy in Companies," *Business, Management and Education* 15, no. 2 (2017): 247.

Subsequently, any strategy put forward with respect to talent management needs to respect the current succession planning process and work within the limits it presents. Limitations in terms of how many spaces are available on key courses, as well as constraints on how many “key” positions are available need to be respected. This, combined with a relatively fixed organizational structure, complete with less desirable positions that need to be manned, puts limits on how well each individual’s potential is able to be realized. As a result, it is important for the RCCS to continue to engage with and support the “exclusive talents” to continue to operate within the system that is in place.

Move to a More Inclusive Approach

Although critically important to work within the current CAF personnel management system, it is prudent to look towards the future in developing a near-term approach to talent management. In the case of the CAF personnel management, there are a number of indicators that there are pending shifts towards a more inclusive, people-focused approach. Canada’s new defence policy, *Strong Secure Engaged*, highlights that in order to compete within the competitive workforce environment that “the Canadian Armed Forces will become more personalized in its administrative and leadership approach.”⁴⁴ With the impending retirement of baby boomers and the anticipated talent shortages that this will cause at executive levels, this makes talent management of senior leaders even more vital to organizational success. The implementation of this more personalized system is being developed by the CAF through “The Journey” initiative that seeks to make personnel management more flexible to enhance the

⁴⁴ Department of National Defence, *Canada’s Defence Policy: Strong, Secure, Engaged*, (Ottawa, ON: Canada Communications Group, 2017), 22

experience of military members.⁴⁵ Proposed changes to create more flexibility for individuals, including the ability to fluidly leave and re-enter military service, will certainly put a strain on the current rigid personnel system, making it reasonable to assume that there will need to be changes made at the institutional level to adapt to these shifting dynamics.

Although the RCCS could wait for changes to be made at the CAF level before taking action, taking action now to gather information on the key competencies of senior leadership will better position the Corps for transformation. There will be a change to the current CAF personnel evaluation process as the current Canadian Forces Personnel Appraisal System (CFPAS) transitions to what will be known as the Personnel Appraisal and Talent Management System (PATMS).⁴⁶ One of the key elements to be included in the PATMS is a focus on individual competencies including skills, abilities and values.⁴⁷ In viewing the trend towards this more individualized focus, it supports the idea that collecting more detailed individualized data would align with the overall CAF direction moving forward. Collecting data on the key competencies of the senior leaders through an inclusive talent management system is a great way to lean-forward in preparing for this shift.

A Focus on Retention

Retention is a significant issue when it comes to senior leaders in the Signal Corps. As confirmed in a 2017 auditor general report, the CAF continues to struggle with issues of

⁴⁵ “The Journey,” Journey team briefing to AFCX PowerPoint presentation, (Ottawa, Ontario, 13 January 2017), 4-5.

⁴⁶ Michelle MacArthur, *Briefing Deck to GI Conference - Personnel Appraisal and Talent Management System (PATMS)* (National Defence Headquarters Ottawa: Director General Military Careers, 15 November 2016), 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

retention, especially when it comes to highly specialized, trained and experienced personnel.⁴⁸

Within the Signal Corps, the latest Signals Annual Military Occupational Review (AMOR) input indicates that the officer trade is “stressed” as it is currently manned at 85%.⁴⁹ Within this, it indicates the Lieutenant-Colonel rank is short over 12% of its preferred manning level.⁵⁰

Although promotions are an avenue available to fill this vacancy, this simply shifts the manning shortfalls from other rank levels and does not address the exodus of talent and experience of these senior leaders. Another key factor that needs to be overcome when retaining Lieutenant-Colonel talent is the fact that it is at this level where many of them secure their pensions at the end of their contracts, a recognized point in a soldier’s career where retention can be problematic.⁵¹ Combined with the increasing demand in the civilian market due to the generational shift, this creates a potential “perfect storm” which could fuel attrition. Although not unique to the Signal Corps, as people are at the heart of everything it does, retention is a issue it cannot afford to ignore.

An increased personal touch through an inclusive focus to senior leader talent management would likely assist in addressing these issues with attrition. The 2013 Canadian Forces exit survey indicated that career management was one of the major dissatisfiers for senior

⁴⁸ Kevin Sorenson, Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 5, Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention-National Defence, of the Fall 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada. Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada: Chapter 2 - National Defence - Military Recruiting and Retention*, (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, June 2017), 12-13.

⁴⁹ Prince, Marc, “Signals input for AMOR 18,” PowerPoint presentation (Ottawa, Ontario, April 2018), 1; Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces 2013-14 Departmental Performance Report*, Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, 2014, 33; The 2013-2014 Departmental Performance Report indicates a trade to be considered stressed when it is below 90% manning.

⁵⁰ Prince, Marc, “Signals input for AMOR 18...,” 1.

⁵¹ Nancy Otis and Michelle Straver, *Review of Attrition and Retention Research for the Canadian Forces* (Defence Research & Development Canada - Centre for Operational Research and Analysis: Technical Memorandum TM 2008-030, 2008), 29-30.

members, with one-third pointing to this system as a factor leading to their departure.⁵² Additionally, career management was the second-highest cited reason for senior officers deciding to leave the CF behind “other employment”.⁵³ This is not surprising considering the current CA approach to succession planning suffers from the same US Army issue noted by Colarusso and Lyle in that, in not selecting individuals for succession, the “Army has powerfully signaled that it is not interested in the career of nonselectees, even though it may desire several more years of service from each.”⁵⁴ Ceasing to engage in the talent management of skilled and experienced senior personnel simply because they are not on a tiering list is not a sound practice.

While the Signal Corps is not able to change the current CA succession planning process, with increased awareness of individual competencies and ambitions it could better guide relevant and rewarding career paths that encourage senior leaders to remain in the organization. Although such a process may not be able to address the inherent issues with the current system in terms of the propensity to promote those who have served in succession-planned command positions, it would help signal to the “nonselectees” that their talents and contributions are indeed valued and required. In a review of attrition and retention in the CAF, the retention model proposed highlighted the importance of breeding organizational commitment through perceived organizational support and job satisfaction.⁵⁵ If the Corps invests the resources to engage with all of their senior leader talent, it will better enable the management of specializations, the appreciation of personal aspirations, and ultimately the identification of appropriate fulfilling career streams. In turn, talented members who may not be included in the formal succession

⁵² Natasha Parfyonova, Tatjana-Ilica Blas, and Suzanne Simpson, *The Canadian Forces Exit Survey*, (Defence Research & Development Canada - Centre for Operational Research and Analysis: DGMPRA CR 2013-009, 2013), 62.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management...*, 50.

⁵⁵ Otis and Straver, *Review of Attrition and Retention...*, 15.

planning process will still receive the organizational support required to ensure they have personally satisfying job options. In cases where promotion is not likely as a result of their status in the succession planning process, satisfying employment with continued personal growth in an appealing career stream will limit the probability that they will look towards other career options.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to provide a recommendation on whether RCCS Lieutenant-Colonel talent management would be best served through an exclusive or inclusive approach. First, it reviewed the merits of an exclusive system focused on only select key individuals and established that it would be an excellent fit within the current CA succession management framework as well as align well with the most common practices in the private sector. It further showed how an exclusive approach would be an efficient use of resources, increase the commitment of selected talents, and assist in retaining these key personnel.

Second, this paper reviewed the potential advantages of an inclusive system and highlighted the fact that there is an increasing trend towards this type of approach in both civilian and military domains. It was put forth that an inclusive approach would allow for the realization of the potential of the entire senior leader group, as opposed to just a small subset, and that this method would better enable the Corps to understand the full range of talents and capabilities available for employment. It was then presented that this increased understanding of individual capabilities would allow the RCCS to employ their senior leaders in a manner that would increase personal and, by extension, organizational productivity.

Finally, it was asserted that the RCCS should consider implementing a hybrid model of the two presented approaches in order to leverage the strengths of each. As the RCCS has to fit into the CAF and CA personnel management approaches, it was suggested that in the development of its future leaders it has little choice but to align with the current succession planning process and thereby focus limited resource and key positions on select personnel. It was then presented that there are a number of key institutional policies and initiatives that support a move towards a more inclusive system in the near future. This movement was shown to support the case for the RCCS to gather more individualized talent profiles for each member. It was then highlighted that attrition remains a significant concern with respect to Lieutenant-Colonels in the Signal Corps. Through leveraging aspects of the inclusive approach by making use of the information on the key competencies and aspirations of each member of the Corps, challenging and fulfilling career paths that would discourage attrition could be developed.

Although it was out of the scope for this paper to develop any specific implementation plan, there are a number of considerations presented that could help better inform the next iteration of Lieutenant-Colonel talent management in the Signal Corps. Recognizing that there are always finite amounts of time and resources available to commit to any initiative, this paper maintains that an increased emphasis in the management of the RCCS's senior leadership is an investment that would reap long-term benefits. Indeed, if the Signal Corps chooses to adopt a more inclusive talent management structure for all its personnel, this type of culture change should start from the top with this type of change to its approach to senior leadership personnel management.

As the field of talent management is expected to rapidly shift from a growing to a mature field of study, more empirical evidence is likely to emerge to better inform future CAF talent

management endeavours.⁵⁶ While this paper focused specifically on the short-term requirements for an individual branch, a larger project investigating emerging talent management approaches for the CA, or even proposals for the CAF as a whole, based on the emerging evidence from academia, private practitioners and military allies would be informative.

It has been over two decades since the concept of talent management was first brought to light and there remain numerous questions about how organizations can best manage this important human resource function.⁵⁷ Although some researchers assign the beginnings of talent management as it is known today to military origins, there are indicators that it is time for a change to the legacy approach.⁵⁸ The retiring of the baby-boomer generation, and the shifting social dynamics that come with the generations that follow make for a challenging environment for the attraction, promotion, and retention of talent. If there is going to be an increasingly intense war for talent, it is one that the RCSS, and indeed the CAF, can ill afford to lose.

⁵⁶ Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, “Standing on the shoulders of giants?...”, 32.

⁵⁷ Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, *The War for Talent...*, 1.

⁵⁸ Cappelli and Keller, “Talent Management; Conceptual Approaches...”, 311-312, 323.

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