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EXPERIENCE IN OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PILLAR IN PERIL

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ABSTRACT

Canada's Officer Professional Development System (OPDS) supports the mission of the officer corps by developing the abilities of all officers to excel. The OPDS is based on four development pillars, education, training, experience and self-development, that together, guide the officer through a series of instruction, schooling and on-the-job experiences necessary to develop leader skills and competencies over the course of a professional life. OPDS directives and forward looking OPD 2020 initiatives acknowledge and proclaim the necessity to manage the OPD pillars as complementary activities. Due to resource limitations and the lack of a comprehensive OPD management framework, however, the experience pillar is now in competition with the other pillars vice being part of a comprehensive development programme.

This essay argues that the CF must manage all professional development activities within the OPDS as a *system of systems*, with the experience pillar as a key element of the professional development strategy. It concludes that the experience pillar is the determining factor in an officer's confidence and competence. It finds that the experience pillar is eroding, that there exists no unified approach to managing its role and relationship to other development pillars, and that the application of resources to experience opportunities does not receive the same visibility as that enjoyed by the training and education pillars. The paper suggests those policy and environmental characteristics necessary to properly manage experience within the OPDS as a system of systems. Finally, it concludes that it is time to reestablish the stature of experience as an essential element of an OPD programme that benefits the individual while serving the needs of the CF as a whole.

EXPERIENCE IN OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PILLAR IN PERIL

Experience is the anchor that secures professional excellence. As one of the four pillars of the Officer Professional Development System (OPDS), experience, like its education, training, and self-development counterparts, must be programmed, planned and shaped to maximize an individual's development opportunities, while delivering competent and credible leaders to the Canadian Forces (CF).

The CF officer is a member of a profession that "requires a competence in its members involving continuous intensive preparation by way of education, training, self-development, and practical experience in all aspects of the modern profession of arms."[1] The OPDS supports the mission of the officer corps by developing the abilities of all officers to excel in command. This factor is the pre-eminent precept that guides the conduct of OPD. The OPDS defines experience as the milieu in which training and education is contextualized, built upon, expanded, and reinforced through the repetition of practical day to day affairs. The OPDS further divides experience into employment, operational and command domains. Employment experience relates to the management of personnel, resources, and activities in the day to day affairs of the CF. Operational experience refers to the benefits gained from operational duty, be that realistic and demanding collective training or actual operations themselves. This type of experience focuses on warfighting skills and competencies. It is impossible to replicate elsewhere, and has profound implications on an individual's capacity to effectively command. Command experience can be garnered in employment and operational environments. This experience revolves around the accumulation of time in command positions that reinforces the ability to lead

and direct subordinates. The OPDS recognizes command experience as pivotal in the development of the professional officer, but it prefaces this assertion with a warning that not all will be afforded the opportunity to command due to the limited numbers of command opportunities that the CF can provide.[2]

While the OPDS highlights those types of experience required to develop the professional officer, and directs the training and education events supporting the application of leadership and command, it does not establish a system whereby an individual is guaranteed to acquire the requisite experience. Neither does it define how that experience is to be integrated into the developmental whole. In an era where calls for greater skills abound, and where OPD initiatives demand a greater investment in schoolhouse training and education, the pressures on an individual officer's time have become enormous. The CF risks denying its officers the opportunity to gain experience because it has not established a means to balance training and education demands with essential experience needs. Without a balanced development effort, officers will find themselves on an endless treadmill of training and education, with insufficient opportunity to command to and practise leadership and their wartime craft with their soldiers, sailors and airmen and women, in their units under realistic operational conditions.

This essay argues that the CF must manage all professional development activities within the OPDS as a *system of systems*, with the experience pillar as a key element of the professional development strategy. It finds that experience is recognized as an important developmental pillar but that there exists no means to quantify or qualify its value within the OPDS as a whole. Experience is important but it is not managed in harmony with its training and education counterparts. Experience is important but it has no unified champion in its management.

Experience is important but it is not resourced in balance with other PD activities. Finally, experience is important but its value is not capitalized upon through a productive learning environment supported by consistent unified individual and institutional feedback.

This essay concludes that experience opportunities are critical to the development of leader qualities and command competencies demanded today and into the future. Indeed, it is the source of the confidence and competence essential to effectively command. The essay exposes the trends in the OPD environment that are impinging upon opportunities for valuable experience and highlights potential consequences. It makes the case for experience as the most critical activity on the road to professional competence and argues the need for a policy to manage experience within the system of OPD. Finally, the essay presents elements of the framework necessary to ensure that experience becomes a truly developmental event that benefits both the individual and the CF as a whole.

THE DEMAND FOR NEW SKILLS

There is a plethora of material calling for new leader skills for military professionals in the 21st century. Vision 2020 tells us that the full spectrum demands and tactical-strategic compression of operations that characterized the 1990's will continue to prevail. Operations will include an integrated civil-military dimension at the tactical level and combatants will present themselves in military and non-military forms..[3] Lieutenant-General Dallaire writes that classic warfare skills are not enough to meet contemporary and future needs and that officers must expand their skills to include a whole new lexicon of action verbs to deal with those operations

our government is likely to send us to conduct. Multi-agency teambuilding, cultural awareness, and superior communications skills are some of the new tools he argues that are needed.[4]

As expressed in General Krulak's *Three Block War*, "the inescapable lesson of … recent operations, whether humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, or traditional warfighting, is that their outcome may hinge on decisions made by small unit leaders and by actions taken at the lowest level".[5] This increased level of small unit responsibility and authority requires superior reasoning and decision-making skills at the lowest levels. These factors demand the early development of the meta-cognitive attributes essential to dealing effectively with those complex scenarios characterized by General Krulak.

Over the past decade, Canada's military has had its share of growing pains and lessons learned in dealing with such hot spots as Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Kosovo. There has been a fairly universal acknowledgement of some of some of the CF's significant tactical successes. However, leadership shortcomings and a public, as well as internal scrutiny into the inner workings of the CF has caused the Forces to identify the need to regain the initiative in developing leaders for today, tomorrow and the future.[6] The CDS, on reflecting on the demands of the last decade, has found that part of the Officer Corps was broken and that relying on "experience in and of itself was not enough".[7] In this light, in 1999 General Baril directed Lieutenant-General Dallaire to articulate the deficiencies and requirements in leadership skills of the officer corps considered necessary to complement the CF's vision for 2020. With this mandate, an OPD 2020 team was formed and has developed a departmental strategy to "articulate the foundation for the reform – intellectual, moral and professional – of the Canadian Forces Officer Corps with the anticipated needs of 2020 in mind".[8]

6/41/

THE STRATEGY FOR OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The OPDS is a mature system that acknowledges the need to integrate the four professional development pillars to deliver competent and confident leaders at all levels of the CF. It describes education as the cornerstone of the system and as the determining factor in subsequent employment, training, and education. The training pillar focuses on individual training related to the needs of the CF, individual environments and branches and trades as prescribed in qualification specifications (QS). Experience is motivated to develop leadership and command abilities through practical application of knowledge and skills. Self-development is left to the individual to conduct based on one's own goals and self-motivation.

Leader skills and qualities are developed through four development periods (DP). DP 1

OPDS Management is led by a CF level OPD Council under the CDS, who is the Departmental authority for OPD. Assistant Deputy Minister Human Resources Military (ADM (HR Mil)) provides policy and guidance, the managing authorities include the ECSs and ADM (HR Mil), and Commander Canadian Forces Recruiting, Education and Training System (CFRETS) acts as the system manager and advisor to the OPD council.[10] While the OPD system document identifies the need to balance the development pillars, it provides no guidance on how this is to be achieved. ADM (HR Mil) is mandated to operate the OPDS as an integrated whole. and ECSs are mandated to deliver their part of the system and to monitor quality assurance. The system manager, Commander CFRETS, is a line commander as well as a coordinator, and is responsible for the delivery of the CF centralized training and education component (and institutions) on which the environments depend. Consequently, the system manager's products, including the OPDS document and its supporting working group reports, focus the vast majority of their effort on directing training and education objectives. They have a "courses completed" vice "competency demonstrated" approach to career progression, and provide no detailed guidance on how to deal with employment experience.[11] This integration does occur within branches and environments, between career managers, Commanding Officers and the ECSs, however, this approach fails to address the requisite balance of an individual officer's time in each of the development pillars. As a result, when new demands for professional development resources are being considered, there is no forum to reconcile needs across the full spectrum and to prioritize development activities for the system as a whole.

Those involved in the OPDS have done yeoman's service to develop it this far. They are now being further challenged to evolve the system to meet the demands of the CF vision for

2020. OPD 2020, as described earlier, recognizes in its vision statement the need to balance the pillars and to provide for individual development through flexible delivery and dynamic learning strategies such as mentoring while on the job. The document refers repeatedly to the need to create unprecedented levels of skill and knowledge in the future officer corps through continuing education *and* practical experience and directs the OPDS to ensure balance between the four supporting pillars. Like the OPDS, however, OPD 2020 initiatives are predominantly training and education centric. Indeed, the programme's key initiatives relating to governance and implementation are entirely education focussed.[12] *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century* places the successful implementation of the programme largely on the shoulders of the General/Flag Officer Corps. It directs them to ensure that the appropriate "emphasis and institutional support (is) placed on the importance of officers attaining the requisite experience and education required to fulfil their duties and responsibilities and to be given the opportunity of learning and improvement."[13] Giving this responsibility to the General Officer corps as a whole is so wide a mandate as to be no mandate at all. Like the OPDS, OPD 2020 does not provide the framework needed to direct and choreograph the balance between experience and the three other development pillars.

An Alternative View

"Whether an organization will realize the full potential of its leadership is a leadership issue."[14]

Criticisms of the OPDS and OPD 2020 do not diminish what they have achieved and are intended to achieve. Indeed, few western OPDS have been able to find the correct marriage

between experience and training and education. The US has come closest to the mark by building a doctrine-based system that guides all players involved in the OPD process. The US Army recognizes three pillars that link military values to leader development objectives: institutional training and education, operational assignments, and self-development. [15] Training and education provide the theoretical basis for learning while operational assignments provide the venue to turn theory into practise and to evolve ideas into competencies.. The US Army promotes operational experience as the means to acquire and demonstrate the confidence and competence required for more complex and higher assignments. Leader doctrine mandates the chain of command to develop their subordinates, on the job, by offering challenging assignments, providing critical assessments, and by coaching and developing them in the application of their skills.[16]

The US Army leader development system (as described in Department of the Army 350-58, Leader Development for America's Army) functions on two principles: the need to properly sequence training/education, operational assignments and self development opportunities, and the establishment of progressive and sequential career development models. Of their system's twelve imperatives, three deal directly with experience. These include the need to provide the critical experiences needed for the future, the need to resource and conduct unit and formation collective training opportunities to generate unit based learning experiences, and the assignment of leaders based on leader development priorities and needs – not fair share or fill the hole arrangements. US doctrine claims quite clearly that "leaders … develop over time through a carefully designed progression of schools, job experiences, and individual initiated activities … where a continuing cycle of education and training, experience, assessment, feedback and

reinforcement and remediation occurs."[17] As well, during the process, the US doctrine places responsibility for leader development equally at the feet of the leaders of the education and training system, the chain of command, and the leaders themselves. When unfolding the American system, a progressive path is evident that links specific types of work place, command and operational experiences amongst training and education events. This path is supported by clear policies and guidelines that speak to the flow between the developmental pillars and the conditions within each, in particular the job experiences that must be met to generate the necessary developmental opportunities.[18]

The British and Australian Armies are attempting to create professional development systems that effectively integrate experience with training and education. The most interesting is that of the Australian Officer Corps where the focus is on *effectiveness* as the end state vice *development* which is the means to achieve it. The Australian Army Officer Professional Effectiveness strategy seeks "to enhance the Army's effectiveness while providing more satisfying careers for its officers".[19] From the Australian perspective, this initiative focuses on the degree to which the officer contributes to their country's warfighting capability. It depends on how work and careers are managed to support both *institutional and individual* goals, and is as much about increasing *opportunities to use the officer's abilities* as about the abilities per se.

While Australian DPs are markedly similar to those of the CF, they are highly employment focussed with the thrust of training and education being enablers to employment opportunities. DP 2 focuses on leading troops in combat related functions. DP 3 recognizes that some will command and some will not, and provides opportunities for career specialization (command or staff streams). Finally, DP 4 supports both senior tactical command appointees

(for those who are command selected) while developing strategic level leaders for employment where they can make the best contribution.[20] Clear guidelines and direction on employment (time and conditions) underwrite the entire strategy at each development phase. For example, officers will spend a minimum of six years in the rank of Captain and senior officers a minimum of two to five years of tenure in executive appointments. Unlike the development focussed Canadian system, the Australian view focuses both on developing *and* using the talents and skills developed over time, and does not seek to shoehorn all officers into the same mold. In their own words, the Australian Army Officer Professional Effectiveness programme will "deliver improved officer effectiveness and organizational effectiveness through increased focus on strategic leadership, greater specialization and longer job tenure".[21]

THE CASE FOR EXPERIENCE

"Out of the unusual application to duty comes the power to lead others in the doing of it"[22]

General S.L.A. Marshall

The need to make a case for experience to those charged with PD responsibilities would be about as necessary as having to convince Smoky the Bear not to play with matches. In a perfect world where one could have all things, time for training, quality education, an abundance of employment opportunity, and time for reflection and self-study, this would indeed be the case. However, as evidenced by demands for new skills and the increased breadth of professional competencies required, the pillars of training, education and experience, let alone self-development, are competing for ever diminishing resources, in particular time.

The Anecdotal Case for the Experience Pillar

"Constant practise leads to brisk, precise and reliable leadership"[23]

Successful commanders and historians have contributed directly and indirectly to the case for experience, however, this contribution has largely been anecdotal. The historian's pre-occupation has normally been with the events of wars themselves while relatively little is written on the details of training and developments that preceded them.[24] This hopefully will not diminish the strength of their observations on the subject.

In his dissertation on *Training for Uncertainty*, Hodges postulates that leaders need to develop intuitive and creative skills to deal with operational decision-making. In his research he referred to two renowned Wehrmacht officers who pointed to self-confidence as an essential attribute for battle leadership. To them, self-confidence is the "wellspring from which flows his (the leader's) willingness to assume responsibility and exercise his initiative".[25] As proffered by General Dubik, it is experience and practise that provide leaders with the skills, self-confidence, and mental flexibility they need to make decisions and use their initiative in battle.[26] Experience is a critical to developing the ability to lead effectively in the face of uncertainty.

A study of Patton as an innovator in information operations concludes that successful commanders possess an intuition that enables them to be at the right place at the right time of battle to exert his/her personal force to influence the outcome. Nowowiejski asks rhetorically how a commander gains the qualities of adaptability, intuition and imagination their positions require and concludes that experience gained through education *and* employment are the most likely sources to enhance these qualities. He concludes that "certainly no one is born with them

(qualities) because intuition alone is a quality that can only be developed by experience. Intuition is the ability to form the remaining elements of experience from a partially completed mental picture, based upon seeing the elements of the completed picture before. A wealth of experience makes the elements of the picture more easily recognizable."[27] Peter Senge supports this notion by identifying the subconscious as the vehicle that assimilates hundreds of feedback mechanisms simultaneously, allowing the mind to integrate detail and dynamic complexity together. Senge concludes that "this is why practise is so important, for any meaningful interplay of conscious and subconscious, practise is essential. Conceptual learning is not enough."[28]

In his research into *Tactical Intuition*, Major Brian Reinwald found three common traits among the many descriptions of intuition: the phenomena of unconscious thought, a heavy reliance on experience-based knowledge, and a comprehensive unrestrained thought process.[29] He found a strong correlation between a commander's intuition and tactical combat success and offered that "in peace it (intuition) is trivial … in war the lifeblood of command decision and the precursor of victory."[30] As presented by Nowowiejski, Patton developed, through aggressive self-study and application in operations, a uniquely keen level of vision and intuition that guided him successfully throughout his commands.[31] According to Nye in *The Patton Mind*, the source of Patton's genius was in his library *and* on-the-job learning, rather than the school system.[32] Repetitive troop assignments, demanding and realistic training, a substantive and concentrated professional military education (PME) and broad personal education are determining factors in developing intuition.[33]

Following two years of commanding the US Army's opposing force (OPFOR – a soviet styled Regiment used to fight force on force contests against US Army formations at their National Training Center), Colonel James E. Zenol concluded that experience was his best teacher and was the "most efficient lubricant to overcome the friction of war". Short of war, he states, "repetitive, tough, realistic training is the best way to build in commanders the skills of battle command."[34] General Frederick M Franks attributes the US Army's transformation and success in the Gulf War to the inculcation of a common doctrine and the soldiers' and their leaders' battle experiences earned during repeated drilling through the Combat Training Centers (CTC) against the likes of James Zenol's OPFOR.[35] Based on his personal experiences in CTCs, commanding VII Corps, and in Vietnam, General Franks knew that despite the wide range of communication systems available to him, his place in the Gulf War was forward. He dealt face-to-face with his subordinate commanders to ensure they had a common feel for the battle and the way ahead. Less than 50% of his command was exercised over technical means.[36] Like Patton before him, Franks' experience guided his intuition in Battle Command.

In a study on the creation of Battle Commanders, Reisweber remarks that battle command, like operational art, is "difficult ... to define, although most would know it when they see it."[37] In US terms, Battle Command is the expert ability to see the battlefield, visualize an end-state, and communicate intent to make the end-state a reality. There is ample evidence, Reisweber writes, "to suggest that battle command skills are a function of not only raw talent, but years of practice, experience and maturation."[38] The qualities necessary to practise battle command are cognitive complexity (the ability to deal with relational complexity, see in the abstract, and make decisions) and behavioral complexity (the ability to perform, communicate

and influence others to do). While their principles can be taught, it is the assignment to challenging duties and work roles requiring an upward revision of thinking, envisioning and behavior that is critical to their development.[39] General George C. Marshall wrote that high-level thinking skills were developed through extensive experience solving many different types of problems and being in a position to make clear decisions.[40] Experience, supported by an educational foundation, is critical to the development of cognitive and behavioral complexity.

A rare study on Combat Command was conducted to determine the consequences of experienced versus inexperienced leadership during the battles of the Chosin reservoir in Korea in 1950.[41] In Kirkland's research on the subject he discovered that all of the US Marine Division and Regimental Commanders had commanded in combat during WWII, however, 79% of their Army counterparts had no such experience. During the ensuing operations at that time, the US Marines managed to fight their way out of the Chinese encirclement while the Army units were defeated or their cohesion destroyed. Kirkland concluded that the knowledge that came from experience was directly useful in solving the practical problems of battle, in particular during periods of severe situational and environmental stress. During this campaign, the indirect benefit of experience was the confidence of leaders to stand-up to superiors and authorities and to exercise the moral authority to make arguments effecting successful combat operations stick. As this situation demonstrated, there is no time to train combat commanders to be effective after hostilities begin. Experience is a determining factor in developing leaders who are confident and competent in their knowledge and abilities.

On the role of peacetime leadership in developing wartime commanders, Major Daniel Roper noted that exceptional leaders did not simply appear on battlefields but that they develop

over years of work, laborious efforts and preparations to be ready for those few critical moments in combat.[42] He recounts how a US Military Academy report found that the most salient predictor of a successful combat commander was successful peacetime command, particularly at the unit level. This experience, however, had to be shaped in an environment of decision making under pressure if it was to be deemed a contribution to an individual's development. Commanders could fail in tasks and deeds while still being successful in their professional development needs. Churchill himself was a proponent of experience and considered the lessons he learned from his mistakes as instrumental to his success as a leader in war. In his own words he proclaimed: "success is going from failure to failure without ... loss of enthusiasm".[43]

The final note on what could be a pleasant but unending journey on the anecdotal case for experience will be left to a more junior member of the officer team. Captain Robert A. Jones, USMC writes: "No professional military education, sand table drill, or battle study will teach a company commander the lessons he will internalize after conducting a fully supported live fire run on Range 400 at Twentynine Palms or going full tilt for a week in a free-play exercise like BATTLE GRIFFIN. Standing around a TacWar board … simply does not replicate the physical discomfort, counterproductive stimuli, sleep deprivation, and uncertainty that can influence decision-making."[44]

On an anecdotal basis, then, the obvious value of experience can be tied to the qualities and skills demanded of contemporary and future leaders. Confidence, cognitive and behavioral complexity, intuition, leadership in the face of uncertainty, and professional competence are just some of the attributes that can be honed only through experience, experience that must be garnered before leaders command soldiers, sailors and airmen and women in battle.

17/41/

A Case for Experience – The Researchers' View

"If you really want to learn to do your work – go to the line" [45]

Ardant du Picq

There does not exist a plethora of research on the value of experience versus other developmental means, however some have attempted to look at the subject from a scientific perspective. In 1996, Stephen Zaccaro, a member of the US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, published a comprehensive dissertation on the *Models and Theories of Executive Leadership* with a view to discovering the determinants for successful senior and executive level leadership. The report substantiated our earlier anecdotal conclusions on the qualities and characteristics required: conceptual complexity, behavioral complexity, strategic decision-making, and visionary or inspirational leadership.[46] In his investigation of a number of conceptual leadership models that support the formulation and demonstration of these qualities, Zaccaro touched on the subject of developmental requirements and offered some useful contributions to the experience dimension. He found, like Churchill before him, that *cognitive complexity* could not be developed purely from study, but that individuals need to experience failure in the real world in order to expand their intellectual horizons and develop new ways of thinking. According to Zaccaro, this can only be achieved through planned assignments to more and more challenging work roles, where a mentor is available to assist the leader in the more complicated environment in which he/she is working. [47] Theorists challenge as well the effectiveness of changing *behavior* through education when the operating environment is so likely to be different from the training domain. They conclude that behavior is best developed

through work related experience, a supportive work environment and constructive reflection on that experience.[48]

Visionary leadership, otherwise referred to as transformational leadership, is based on a lifetime of contributions that include: learning how to deal with one's emotions; reflection on previous leadership opportunities and experiences; the willingness and actual engagement in developmental activities; and an attitude wherein the leader regards experiences as learning events and reflects on them as such. Zaccaro's research finds that the principles of transformational leadership can be taught, but that its results must be realized in practise.[49]

Zaccaro's research offers the thought that effective senior executive development requires "training and practise that push the leader to the limits of his/her retained schemes and ways of behaving; (for) when these are inadequate those who succeed do so by developing new schemes and behavioral patterns."[50] Not to leave us guessing on how training and practise experiences can be structured, he refers to the work of several behavioral scientists to proffer five types of employment experience that can generate this learning environment. These include the assignment to jobs that deal with: transitioning the leader (adding pressure to the leader by assigning them unfamiliar responsibilities); creating change (the leader is responsible for significant portions of institutional change); high levels of responsibility (including dealing with high stakes, job overload, handling external pressure); nonauthority relationships (success depends on getting the job done without the explicit authority to carry it out); and obstacles (such as adverse business conditions, lack of top-down and personnel support and even working with a difficult boss).[51] One can legitimately claim that these conditions reflect an average day in the life of the Canadian staff officer, however, their successful application relies upon the fact that

they are prescribed for developmental purposes. Moreover, the leader must be supported by a mentoring approach that fosters introspection, feedback and mechanisms to register the value of the learning experience.

While not targeted to deal with the tension between experience and education demands, Zaccaro's work does offer clues on their preferred relationship. With respect to the levels of development, he concludes that junior level development is highly experienced based, while senior development, given a solid junior level foundation, is more influenced by school-based education and training supported by employment to shape new conceptual skills.[52] Bass in *Transformational Leadership* supports the notion of junior level experience and found that relevant previous experience added 20% to the prediction of performance of company commanders in the US Army.[53] While it has been proven that schooling can be mind broadening, it does not typically have an impact on conceptual capacity. Schooling does, however, facilitate the requisite conceptual shifts and, when paired with associated experiences, allows their practise to become embedded qualities. If Zaccaro contributes any one thought on this subject it is the conclusion that education and experience pillars need to be integrated and nurtured as a system of systems.[54]

Perhaps the seminal piece on experience in professional development is that produced by Morgan McCall in his book *High Flyers: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. McCall reinforces Zaccaro's conclusions and offers advice on how experience-based development can be achieved within an organization. He places the responsibility for professional development squarely at the feet of line managers (the chain of command) and proffers that "the primary classroom for developing leader skills is on-the-job experience and that this critical resource is

controlled by line (officers) … not by staff."[55] He writes that allowing a "survival of the fittest" approach to senior executive development eats at an organization's seed corn and can be potentially wasteful of talent.[56] It is not necessary to repeat his case for the merits of executive development, however, it is worthy to note that his model for developing executives focuses on programmed assignments as the object of professional development. In order for the experience pillar to be effective, however, coaching, mentoring and a business strategy that sees developed leaders, vice products, as its outputs must support it.[57] McCall's greatest contribution to this discussion is on the requirements of an experience-based leader development model.[58] We will return to this point when exploring PD policies later in this essay.

As presented earlier, the merits of experience-based learning remain self-evident. It is particularly important to return to its value and balance with other PD demands when this pillar is threatened. Is the CF in a potential experience crisis? While there is no empirical data to conclude one way or the other, trends in other militaries that share the same strategic pressures as the CF, as well as a subjective look at our own trends are instructive on this matter.

The Erosion of Experience

"An army requires leaders who have the firmness of decision of command proceeding from habit."[59]

Ardant du Picq

In a US Army study on training needs assessments for Battalion Commanders, Steven Stewart discovered that during the late 1980s, Brigade Commanders found their subordinate

Commanding Officers' greatest weaknesses to be technical and tactical competence and their capacity to delegate and take risks.[60] They described successful commanders as those who were able to let go, a capacity related to the individual's emotional maturity and development. Most interestingly, however, is the report's conclusion that the foundation for this competence is a solid basis of collective training, balanced with individual training, and that collective training, was competing in time and effort with other developmental vehicles.[61]

Concerned with US Army commander claims of an eventual degradation in the tactical competence of future leaders, US Army Forces Command sponsored a RAND study to reveal changes to the experience base of the US Army officer corps. Their 1999 report reflected the concerns of many whom had a stake in US Army effectiveness. From Congress' perspective: "we are developing a breed of commanders who are less and less experienced at doing their thing than they ever were before."[62] The Secretary of the Army was concerned over the fact that the US Army could be eating away at the seed corn of a competent warfighting force. He expressed his feelings this way: "because junior officers no longer execute the full training strategy, they will lack the necessary experience when they are Battalion and Brigade Commanders in the future."[63]

With these perceptions in mind, RAND researchers conducted a wide ranging review of the US Army approach to OPD and focussed in on the experience trends of the decade since the Gulf War. They reported favorably on the US approach to PD while pointing out the inseparable linkages between education, training and employment experience. They reinforced the point that education provides the what and why, while on-the-job experience provides the how – the how knowledge being tacit and a factor that increases with experience in a given domain.[64] They

found through their interviews that subordinates' attitudes and perceptions rather than leader behavior were the determining factors in a unit's performance. Soldiers' attitudes were most influenced by trust between the leaders and followers, and that *trust was based on the leaders tactical expertise*, a quality that, when lives are on the line, is "crucial to unit integrity and faithful execution of directives."[65]

While the balance of the RAND report supports the earlier conclusions of our behavioral scientists, its findings on the growing unit level experience gap are the most instructive. RAND researchers found that there has been a significant decline in US Army unit level opportunities to practise their skills in operational settings. They attribute this phenomena to the demands of contemporary operational tempo, lower rates of unit training, and changing career patterns. Were the required leader skills from 1990 to 1999 to have remained unchanged, the researchers would have offered a form of quantifiable "delta" to the resulting levels of leader expertise. As they discovered, however, demands in leader qualities and skills have increased, and they can only report on the fact that there is a growing skill gap that cannot be quantified.[66] They conclude that the tactical competence of the officer corps rests on bolstering the oversight of the conduct of unit assignments and establishing feedback mechanisms to develop individual and collective competencies. Although the RAND report dealt uniquely with the tactical level within an Army context, its conclusions can apply to the experience pillar as a whole and the relationship to other development pillars as well.[67] A more thorough understanding of the developmental value of unit (employment) time would certainly improve judgements about any required changes to the OPDS as a whole and permit informed decisions on the relative balance of effort between its supporting pillars.

Lieutenant General Holder of Gulf War fame provides the most succinct assessment of the state of expertise being generated by the US Army today. He notes that schooling paints all officers with a light tactical brush but "does not develop intuitive commanders with advanced tactical understanding firmly grounded in the art of war." He observes that leaders in combat will have the same amount of battlefield vision as they have warfighting expertise, and that the US Army's current leader development programme focuses on developing competent and confident leaders – not warfighting experts.[68]

The US experiences described here are analogous to the Canadian reality. Strategic and operational conditions over the 1990s have been similar and the effects of operational demands and limited resources are leading to a potential crisis in the maintenance of tactical excellence across the spectrum of conflict. Indeed, the current drive to reform the OPDS through new initiatives such as the DP1 enhanced leadership model (ELM), a new approach to delivering DP 3 Command and Staff training, and the potential to lengthen DP 4 to a year long National Securities Study Course are all adding tension to the education versus experience balance. To illustrate the point, DP1 will grow from an average of 47 to 77 weeks, thus compressing the DP 2 window to 11.5 years from and average of 14 years. For the Army, the combined DP 2 and 3 course load grows to 58 weeks from 55 and the fallout of DP 3 and 4 developments has yet to be entirely factored into the equation. When demands for a degreed and bilingual officer corps and post-graduate education for senior officers are added onto the bill, the balance of career time remaining available for employment experience becomes even more constrained.[69] The issue here is not the recognized need for these QS based PME opportunities. The issue is that the OPD model and its management framework provide no vehicle to quantify the balance of training and

education time versus employment experience, nor do they qualify the relative merits of these separate but interdependent pillars. Without this holistic perspective, education and training demands will continue to be over represented by the centralized training and education delivery staffs (who represent the systems manager team) while the case for experience-based OPD suffers from a lack of visibility and unified approach at the OPD council level.

The case for employment based experience remains as solid as ever before. Indeed, in a world where conflict resolution requires near-immediate readiness, we cannot depend on long mobilization periods to inculcate leaders with the experience their competencies demand. The OPDS must remain vigilant of the demonstrated balance between experience and its supporting developmental pillars. Unprogrammed and unguided experience, however, does not add a lot of value to the professional development process. Like its training and education counterparts, experience must have a focus, be regulated and integrated into the PD whole. Unlike training and education, the development and management of experience opportunities is almost entirely a chain of command issue, not a training or education system issue. In this light, let us turn to exploring the elements of an OPD policy that embeds experience into the PD whole.

AN EXPERIENCED BASED OPD POLICY AND ENVIRONMENT

A Framework Policy on Experience

"Commanders … are to be guided by their own experience or genius … generalship is only acquired by experience and the study of the campaign of the great captains."[70]

Napoleon

McCall has formulated a model for successful employment based development. In *High Flyers* he describes the optimal solution for leader development as one that is based on the conscious and systematic development of talent. First, a clear statement of strategic aims including development as a priority, acceptance of risk, establishment of work opportunities for an experience base, and willing senior level participation must lead policy. Second, experience opportunities must be linked to strategic objectives, they must be defined in terms of what is available and what they teach, and the organization must identify what it can generate internally as well as what must be generated by other means. Third, the model must seek to assess talent as it relates to potential senior level ability. In particular there must be the early identification of a leader's ability to learn from experience, the integration of an individual's development objectives into annual assessments, and a corporate ability to monitor an individual's development over time.[71] A comparison of these attributes against the current OPDS, OPD 2020 and the Canadian Forces Personnel Assessment System (CFPAS) indicate that a majority of these elements exist in one form or another within the OPD and personnel management systems. They are not, however, tied together in a policy or management framework that links them in the manner suggested by McCall.

McCall's model, by his own admission, must be supported within an environment where lessons are driven home through self-reflection, assessment, coaching and mentoring. Much has been written on mentoring and coaching, however within the CF there is little in terms of definition of these activities, nor who should perform them and how. Coaching has been defined as a superior to subordinate activity that focuses on the here and now feedback on a subordinate's performance and development.[72] The CFPAS provides the basis for coaching

through the quarterly personnel development reviews (PDRs) and clearly establishes coaching as a chain of command responsibility. The application of this responsibility remains personality based and is unlikely to achieve consistent results without clear inculcation of coaching skills within the community of leaders.[73]

Mentoring, on the other hand, is a "process used to develop the thinking skills and frames of reference for the sequential and progressive development of the leader."[74] Most mentoring relationships have a career and psychosocial basis. Career mentoring focuses on the provision of challenging assignments, exposure and visibility of the leader, and a certain amount of sponsorship and protection by the sponsor. Psychosocial mentoring focuses on role modeling, counseling, and a degree of friendship between the mentor and his/her mentored.[75] Successful mentoring is conducted outside of the chain of command, and mentors are schooled in how to perform this highly influential duty.[76] By the nature of the activity, mentoring may seem to violate institutional command and control assumptions. If it is to be supported, policy must prescribe its place in the chain of command, and most importantly, the institution must recognize and accept the individual and organization risks that mentoring entails. This implies that the organization *must decide between the development of the leader and the guarantee of productivity* as the institution's objective.[77]

General Ulmer's expose on 21st century military leadership posits a similar but more system's oriented view on best practises for leader development. He argues strongly for early employment opportunities that support leader development. He supports a codified doctrine on leadership and leader behavior and a system whereby leadership qualities and behaviors are monitored and fed back to the individual. He makes the case for developmental feedback and

mentoring and points out contemporary shortcomings in mentoring policies and procedures and skills, as well as the lack of a better informed feedback mechanism based on a 360 degree review of a leader's performance. The institution must take steps to measure the organizational climate, thus allowing it to be pro-active in maintaining a learning environment and leaders need to be educated in techniques for measuring individual and group effectiveness. Ulmer points out the risks inherent in a single source view for promotion decisions (that of the immediate superior) and recommends a move to a more holistic assessment framework for promotion decisions (he estimates that at least 20% of commanders are failures in their appointments, however these may remain undetected in the contemporary top down assessment framework).[78]

As pointed out in the US Army's training needs assessment, outside of actual combat, collective training provides the most challenging developmental environment and should be the focus of operational leader development.[79] Collective training must be integrated within the experience pillar in a quantitative form (time and events) that permits some means of qualifying (skills and competence) the progression of the individual concerned. The contemporary unit employment record is a manual system that fails to provide an objective or even qualitative view of collective training events. The Army's draft of CFP 308, Training Canada's Army, is taking the first steps towards integrating the management of unit individual and collective training and their integration with operational tasks. On the other hand, doctrine has yet to answer the question of how an individual's development is managed within this view of collective capabilities, or how the training and operational cycles can be integrated with the education pillar.[80]

Training doctrine has much to do with maximizing the developmental value of collective training events. Here again, CFP 308 makes progress by demanding a progressive approach to training events, a clear progression through preparation to planning and execution and the mandatory evaluation and after-action-review (AAR) process that drives the lessons home. In *Hope Is Not A Method*, General Sullivan touts the AAR as the single most substantial development in the US Army collective training methodology. The AAR is not a critique. It is, however, a means to establish success or failure. As he writes: "In the AAR process, the establishment of success or failure, sometimes in a very precise (and painful) way, is only a tool with which to learn."[81]

As described earlier, training time continues to be compressed due to a wide range of demands and resource limitations. Policy must set requisite collective training experiences for individual leaders, as well as units, and must set the conditions under which collective training will be conducted. A random approach to the execution of collective training events fails to capture the full value of these critical and expensive opportunities to learn. As declared by one author "it is more beneficial to train three tasks with rehearsal and AAR than to train five tasks without".[82] As well, policy must either lengthen an individual's tenure in a key assignment or raise the rate at which units train to ensure the appropriate learning experiences are generated.[83]

Perhaps the most durable policy initiative supporting an experienced-based OPDS is in the prescription of experiences required before higher level training, education or appointments (including promotions) are considered. The Australian Army has demonstrated the feasibility of building such a model and the US has instituted this approach in the form of Joint education and employment for senior officer advancement under the Goldwater-Nichols Act.[84] Indeed, our

own General Evraire recommends reduction in the turmoil in field and staff postings by longer tour lengths and a degree of specialization such as that within the Australian model.[85]

To support this and other initiatives, however, the OPD council must take control of the experience pillar of the OPDS. The council must develop the means to quantify *and* qualify the requisite experience events mentioned earlier, develop and institute a monitoring and feedback mechanism, and regulate the balance of resources (time in particular) that are invested in the supporting PD pillars. A more precise understanding of what units are actually able to provide would improve judgements about any required changes in the OPDS and support informed decisions on the balance of PD efforts as a whole.[86] The OPD council must be served by a staff that can reach across and monitor all developmental pillars and report objectively and accurately on PD issues. This staff should not be responsible for the management of any one or more of the supporting development programmes, but must focus instead on serving the needs of the council. In a manpower constrained CF this remains a challenge, however, the benefits of maintaining a balanced, objective picture with independent coordination capability merit a move in this direction.

Policy on its own will not guarantee effective PD. To be effective, policy must exist within an environment that accepts risk and the notion of learning by doing. This environment cannot be generated by policy alone. Let us turn now to look at some of the challenges to creating a true learning environment that supports professional development.

The Learning Environment

"The purpose … is to correct mistakes and learn from the … experience, not cover up mistakes for fear of public censure. … the elimination of such fear is the first prerequisite for learning."[87]

Martin van Creveld

General Sullivan is justifiably proud of the US Army's transformation during the last two decades of the 20th century. As he correctly points out, the learning leader gains and sustains the learning initiative by building a learning environment. This environment, however, must be monitored and evolved in kind with cultural, technological and strategic change. Accordingly, General Sullivan offers the theory of a *leader action cycle* that sustains the initiative in a learning environment. The cycle is not only characterized by types of activities and strategic aims, but more importantly prescribes a set of attitudes that must prevail for success to be achieved. The leader action cycle is initiated by defining the learning environment it is intended to create. This requires a clear understanding of current events and trends, the separation of the important from the unimportant, and the creation of context and a shared vision focusing on intellectual and physical development for the future. Teaching follows through repetition and demonstrated values. General Sullivan points out here that explaining is often more important than directing, and listening more important than talking. The cycle is completed by shaping the environment through lessons from the past, demonstrating the way ahead through the careful selection of projects and reinforcement of success, and adjustments to the course of learning based on lessons learned.[88]

Hodges characterizes the learning environment as one in which leaders are willing to exercise their initiative, mutual trust based on technical and tactical skills and leader behavior is established, and a consistent philosophy for learning is shared between garrison and the field. He summarizes this point by proclaiming that "treating soldiers with dignity and respect starts with establishing a command climate that promotes learning, allows honest mistakes, and encourages open communications and disagreement without fear of retribution."[89]

Leaders are actively engaged in the learning environment through their personal participation and demonstrated example. They must recognize their own and their subordinate's experience gaps and find ways to fill them that don't necessarily impose on already stressed line and staff organizations.[90] More importantly, leaders must decide on whether they are appointing individuals to positions of responsibility as a means to develop them or as a means to achieve short-term productivity. This choice involves the assumption of risk of short term failures in exchange for longer term leader development, an attribute that is not necessarily rewarded in a zero-defect, risk averse institution. There is little empirical evidence to demonstrate that this attitude prevails or is largely supported by the CF chain of command today. While the reluctance to assume unnecessary risk in combat operations is understandable, the CF can become much more risk tolerant in its peacetime training and conduct of staff activities. Regretfully, Canada's military remains quite conservative in most regards and, as pointed out by McCall, "conservative approaches teach people to be conservative."[91]

As discussed in the section on an OPD policy framework, the learning environment is sustained through regular and credible sessions of coaching, mentoring and multi-rater feedback and assessment. A policy on these activities is not enough; institutional leadership must be

skilled in their application, must have a unified orientation in their execution, and must link them to the organization's as well as the individual's development needs.[92] Here again, the chain of command prevails in the successful application of the OPD system, as it should.

In simple terms, the holistic application of a professional development philosophy requires an institutionalized framework that defines and guides the parts and the whole of professional development activities. The framework must include a structure that drives and regulates policy and objectives, and an executing body that is inclusive of academic and training institutions, training and education staffs, as well as the chain of command. The prosecution of professional development activities must be carried out in an environment that is demonstrably risk tolerant, communicative, and able to observe and apply lessons learned to improving the development environment.

CONCLUSION

"The challenge is to move into the 21st Century with a good record of practise, not just a solid platform of theory."[93]

General Ulmer

Demands of the last decade and of the decades to come will require new and improved officer skills. These require an increased investment in the officer's intellectual and physical capacity, as well as highly adaptive and creative behavioral qualities. Canada's OPDS and intentions for OPD 2020 recognize these demands and conclude that they must be developed within a system that includes training, education, experience and self-development. The

shortcoming with the Canadian approach, however, is that the OPDS and its 2020 strategies deal almost exclusively with training and education and provide no formal policy nor regulation to the management of experience as a key component to OPD.

The case for experience-based OPD is overwhelming. Subjective analysis finds that experience is the key element from which an individual derives his/her confidence and competence to perform. Only with this experience based confidence is a leader able to act decisively and develop the cognitive and behavioral complexity that effective visioning and communicating demand. The research community supports subjective views by situating schooling as a mind broadening activity that supports experienced based learning. Leaders learn through failure and success. It is by doing and deciding that they fully develop their conceptual capacity. Researchers add that in order for experience to be of value to leader development, it must be planned and programmed with a development objective. More importantly, the chain of command must assume ownership of the experience-based development and be accountable to support their subordinates' development through coaching, mentoring and assessment feedback.

Even as an acknowledged pillar of OPD, employment experience is becoming more and more limited due to increased demands for schoolhouse learning, operational tempo, and contemporary demands on our most valuable non-human resource – time. The U.S. has found that operational employment experience at the tactical level is on the decline, and given the growing skill requirement, an experience gap has formed and is continuing to expand at an alarming rate. Canada shares the strategic and environmental circumstances that affect the U.S. and is without a doubt in the same experience gap dilemma.

While western militaries on the whole recognize the importance of experience to OPD, only a few have managed to embed its regulation into their OPDS. Australia has elected to focus on leader effectiveness as the object of PD and has adopted policies that direct employment types and times for each development phase. Australia acknowledges that not all are suited or able to command and accommodates this reality by providing a mid-career opportunity for employment specialization that serves both the individual's development goals and the institution's need for effective leaders at senior levels. While unofficially applied within some branches and trades within the CF, a formal approach in this light would do much to remove the confusion from mid-career career management and focus the development of our more senior officers.

The U.S. has the most developed OPDS. They link training to education and employment at each development phase, with a focus on clear mandatory requirements for experience at every level. The programming of experience opportunities is a shared chain of command and personnel management system responsibility, but the management of experience opportunities to include coaching and assessment feedback is a clear chain of command obligation. The U.S. OPDS is unique in the degree to which experience opportunities are managed, mandated, regulated and administered by all OPD participants.

The CF must now establish employment experience as the key leader development pillar of the OPDS. This can only be done by expanding the policy and management framework that regulates the OPD to include, in a clear and explicit way, professional development staffs, schoolhouses, and the chain of command as part of the OPD team. Experience objectives must be linked to institutional as well as individual development objectives and their opportunities must be managed to ensure that both the individual and the CF benefit from each employment

opportunity. While the OPDS team has a key role to play in regulating and mandating experience events, it is the chain of command that determines how effectively they are applied through coaching, assessment and mentoring. This responsibility requires a clear articulation of the role and responsibility of the chain of command in our own OPD. Perhaps more importantly, the employment environment must be shaped to accommodate experience-based learning. A zero defect, risk averse approach is the anathema to an effective learning environment. If the development of an effective officer corps is indeed the legacy of current military leadership, then they must lead, by their example, in establishing this learning environment.

The CF has taken great strides towards a holistic and comprehensive OPDS and is working to shape the OPD environment to guide the development of our future leaders. The current approach, however, fails to act on the stated import of experience within the system. There exists no means to quantify or qualify the absolute or relative merits of each of the PD pillars. OPD Council is served by a staff that shares both responsibilities to manage the system as a whole as well as line responsibilities to deliver key parts of the education and training pillars. There is a clear conflict of demands on this staff and the critical function they perform. The management framework that directs and guides employment experience within the OPD is ad-hoc and can not regulate the design for a balanced set of professional development pillars as a system of systems. Finally, new initiatives and demands on PD time are eroding those limited experience opportunities that exist today and are contributing to a growing and alarmingly unquantifiable experience gap. Contemporary and future conflict require immediate leader readiness, that is competent and confident leaders who have gained the trust of their subordinates through their demonstrated ability to deal with the conflict environment. The CF must do more

than speak rhetorically of experience in its OPDS. The CF must act on its stated importance of experience-based development and manage it, with its supporting pillars, as a system of systems serving both individual and institutional operational effectiveness.

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38/41/

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