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***NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED***

**RISK AVERSION AND COMMAND**

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**OCTOBER / OCTOBRE 2004**

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***NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED*****RISK AVERSION AND COMMAND****ABSTRACT**

The CF espouses the virtues of *auftragstaktik* or mission command, yet our risk-averse culture precludes its effective implementation as a command philosophy.

Following a description of *auftragstaktik*, this approach is then compared with *befehlstaktik* and micro-management. The impact of environmental and systemic factors that promote risk aversion are examined, with a view to their impact on command style. Finally, observations and statements are reviewed that point to risk-aversion as a serious problem in western militaries in general, and in the CF in particular.

## INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Forces (CF) has participated in a remarkable number and variety of operations during the last fifteen years. This activity has led to a great deal of critical reflection on how best to train and employ our military. With experience in operations ranging from relatively benign peacekeeping missions to high intensity combat, the command and control of the CF has received a great deal of attention. As advances in technology drive improvements to sensors and communications, commanders receive more, but not always better, information on which to base their decisions and subsequent orders. Further, a commander's potential span of control has likewise increased thanks to technical improvements.

As we attempt to exploit the plethora of information available to us, we face the same challenges as our fathers. Coping with uncertainty or chaos in combat is nothing new, and neither is the dilemma of determining just how much supervision is appropriate in a given circumstance. To solve old problems, the CF turned to an old solution: *auftragstaktik*, or mission command. This paper will argue that while the CF espouses the virtues of *auftragstaktik*, our risk-averse culture precludes its effective implementation as a command philosophy.

This paper will begin with a description of how risk tolerant commanders employ *auftragstaktik*, as opposed to the opposite approach - *befehlstaktik*. The leadership styles that support or oppose *auftragstaktik* will be reviewed, and then contrasted with

*befehlstaktik* and micro-management. After examining the CF's policy on mission command, the paper will consider the level of risk tolerance in the CF. Evidence and arguments will be presented that, based on environmental and systemic factors, make it reasonable to expect that the CF would have a risk-averse culture. Finally, observations and statements will be reviewed that point to risk-aversion as a serious problem in western militaries in general, and in the CF in particular.

Before entering into a discussion on risk aversion, it is important to distinguish this phenomenon from risk management. Whereas CF doctrine directs that one should not accept unnecessary risks, it is expected that certain (necessary) risks must be accepted to conduct military operations.<sup>1</sup> Further, CF policy clearly states that risk management does not support "...a zero defect mindset..."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, this paper will focus on commanders who fail to take those risks necessary for the efficient conduct of operations.<sup>3</sup>

### **AUFTRAGSTAKTIK – MISSION COMMAND**

Never tell people *how* to do things. Tell them *what* to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of National Defence. B-GJ-005-502/FP-000 *Risk Management for CF Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2002-11-06), 2-1.

<sup>2</sup> DND, *Risk Management for CF Operations*, 2-1.

<sup>3</sup> While in both this sentence, and previously in this paragraph reference is made to the conduct of operations, CF doctrine (citations above) clearly indicates that risk management principles apply equally to training as well as operations. For simplicity, only operations are referred to here.

General George S. Patton<sup>4</sup>

If General Patton had made that quote fifty years later, he might have suggested that telling people *how* to do something is no different than programming a robot. If the actual circumstances do not perfectly match those anticipated, then it is likely that the execution of the task will become derailed. However, if one tells a subordinate *what* is desired, then he can adapt to the unexpected. Thus, there will be a much greater likelihood that the desired result will be achieved, though perhaps via unanticipated means. This is the essence of what the Germans originally termed *auftragstaktik*, or mission command.<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian Army defines mission command as “the philosophy of command that decentralizes decisions and fosters initiative...”<sup>6</sup> Successful implementation of mission command begins with the superior making his objectives perfectly clear to the subordinate.<sup>7</sup> The importance of this first step cannot be overstated. Further, the commander must frame his objectives by providing the broader context of his intentions.<sup>8</sup> Given the importance of clear understanding, some practitioners of mission command

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<sup>4</sup> A.L.W. Vogelaar and E.-H. Kramer, “Mission Command in Ambiguous Situations” in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, eds. Carol McCann & Ross Pigeau, 217-231 (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2000), 217.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 270.

<sup>6</sup> Department of National Defence. B-GL-300-003/FP-000 *LAND FORCE COMMAND* (Ottawa: DAD Canada, 1996-07-21), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Robert B. Polk, “A Critique of the Boyd Theory – Is It Relevant to the Army?” *Defense Analysis*, Vol 16 no 3 (Dec 2000): 267.

<sup>8</sup> Vogelaar and Kramer, “Mission Command...,” 219.

have had their subordinates read back the commander's objectives to make absolutely sure there was no misunderstanding.<sup>9</sup>

Having established a shared intent, it is then the commander's duty to step back and allow the subordinate sufficient freedom of action to accomplish the mission. It is this aspect that is so crucial for successful implementation of mission command, yet so difficult for so many to carry out. Unless the commander has been inculcated early on with the principles of mission command, then the act of faith required to stand back and not interfere can be exceptionally difficult.<sup>10</sup> Some commanders may mistakenly believe that more control equals better control. While this approach attempts to eliminate uncertainty and thus assure a predictable outcome, it fails to recognize the reality of operations, as

...there must be a realization that a certain amount of confusion and waste are, owing to the great uncertainty involved, inevitable in war; and that such confusion is not inconstant with, and may indeed be a prerequisite for, results.<sup>11</sup>

Further, a strong case can be made that even in peacetime we must cope with chaos. The sheer volume of information available to senior commanders will result in a similarly high level of uncertainty and confusion. Accordingly, the quest for information surety is as much folly in peace as it is in war.

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<sup>9</sup> William McAndrew, "Operational Art and the Canadian Army's Way of War" in

Directly related to the issue of uncertainty is the matter of risk tolerance; this too can be a problem for traditional military cultures.<sup>12</sup> When a commander stands back and allows subordinates the freedom to choose their own way to the objective, he must be able to accept that subordinates will make mistakes.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, subordinates must be willing to accept the risk that bold actions may result in mistakes.<sup>14</sup> That mistakes were not only tolerated but also expected by commanders was the hallmark of the original concept of *auftragstaktik*. Further, subordinates were censured for overcautious behaviour. It was considered worse to be unwilling to make a risky decision than to take appropriate risks and fail.<sup>15</sup>

To summarize, effective implementation of mission command requires clear communications, mutual trust between commanders and subordinates, and risk tolerance. With a firm appreciation of what mission command is, we shall now look at what it is not. A clear understanding of these boundaries will frame our discussion and provide a context for the CF's culture and practices.

The antithesis of mission command is control by detailed orders, described by the German army as *befehlstaktik*.<sup>16</sup> *Befehlstaktik* tells the subordinate how to accomplish the task; thus it leaves little room for subordinate commanders to react to unexpected circumstances. However, it has the advantage of achieving a high degree of unity of

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<sup>12</sup> Polk, "A Critique of the Boyd Theory...", 267.

<sup>13</sup> Robert R. Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*. (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1991) 116.

<sup>14</sup> Polk, "A Critique of the Boyd Theory...", 267.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.



effort.<sup>17</sup> Depending on the nature of the task, the consequences of failure, the competence of the subordinates, or the time available; it may be the ideal method of command. When faced with a high-risk situation, or leading inexperienced subordinates, adopting a *befehlstaktik* approach may well be required, if not essential. The command of an inter-continental ballistic missile attack presents an ideal case in point. In less extreme situations there is the potential for middle ground; thus, some situations may require a blending of the *befehlstaktik* and *auftragstaktik*.<sup>18</sup>

Varying leadership styles will support these command philosophies. The CF has adopted a leadership model that identifies a array of influencing behaviors, ranging from

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<sup>16</sup> Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>18</sup> Allan D. English, *The Operational Art: Theory, Practice, and Implications for the Future* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, Teaching Resource Paper, 2003), 9.

authoritarian to laissez-faire, as shown in the diagram below:<sup>19</sup>

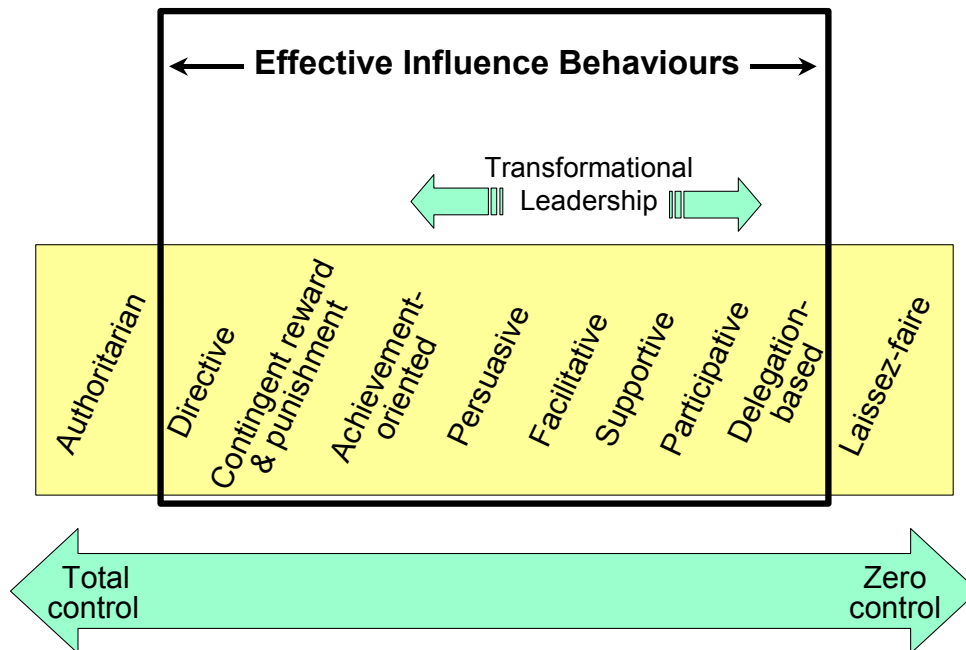


Figure 1 Spectrum of leader influence behaviours<sup>18</sup>

As indicated on the diagram, the CF only considers Directive through Delegation-based as effective leadership behaviours.<sup>20</sup> Within that range, Delegation-based leadership requires competent subordinates, willing to receive the leader's delegated authority, thus it supports *auftragstaktik*.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, Directive leadership supports *befehlstaktik*.<sup>22</sup> As one works across the spectrum, the different behaviours can be

<sup>19</sup> Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (DRAFT) (Ottawa: DND Canada, 9 Jun 04 Draft), Fig 5-2, 5-10. While *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations* cites three sources for this model, it is not clear which primary sources were used to construct this diagram. Likewise, it is unclear if this diagram is simply a copy of one found in a primary source.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig 5-2, 5-10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-11.

distinguished by the “...amount of control exercised by the leader.”<sup>23</sup> Outside the range of effective behaviours, Authoritarian leadership “...is manifested in unreasonable demands, aggressive pressure tactics, an insistence on unquestioning obedience, and close supervision.”<sup>24</sup> Focusing solely on the aspect of “close supervision,” it is suggested that authoritarian leadership “...reflects a lack of trust in the reliability of subordinates and/or a lack of respect for their capabilities and intrinsic worth.”<sup>25</sup>

The matter of trust is particularly germane to the practice of *auftragstaktik*. As previously discussed, commanders practicing mission command must be sufficiently risk tolerant to trust that their subordinates will act appropriately without detailed instructions. Although there will be situations that demand *befehlstaktik*, supported by a directive leadership style, the focus of this paper is on situations that warrant greater delegation of authority. Accordingly, this paper is concerned with commanders who fail to delegate sufficient control, and, therefore centralize decision making at a level higher than necessary. Assuming these commanders do not employ “...aggressive pressure tactics, [and maintain] an insistence on unquestioning obedience...”<sup>26</sup> then they are simply micro-managing, instead of exercising authoritarian leadership.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Intro-2.

Micro-managers draw strength from organizational structures with high degrees of centralization.<sup>28</sup> Given an obsession with certainty, they provide specific instructions when tasking subordinates. They carefully monitor the execution of their instructions, and track all activities and outcomes with the finest attention to detail. Micro-managers flourish in what are technically referred to as Mechanistic structures. Sociologists describe such organizations as being highly centralized, and are

...characterized by many rules and procedures, limited decision making at lower levels, large hierarchies of people in specialized roles, and vertical rather than horizontal communication flows. Tasks are rigidly defined and are altered only when sanctioned by higher authorities.<sup>29</sup>

Micro-managing has a number of disadvantages that offset the benefits of certainty and outcome predictability. First, any chance that the subordinate will use his initiative to develop a better approach to solving a given problem will be lost. Worse still, when taken to the extreme, some “work rules become so convoluted that organizational efficiency would decline if they were actually followed as prescribed.”<sup>30</sup> Second, the subordinates will perceive that neither are they trusted nor is their initiative valued, leading to their overall alienation and loss of self-worth. This is hardly the desired outcome if an organization such as the CF wants to be seen as offering a “career of choice.”<sup>31</sup> Third, supervisors who micro-manage are wasting their time by “working

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<sup>28</sup> Steven L McShane, *Canadian Organizational Behaviour*. 3rd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1998) 466.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

<sup>31</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Officership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Detailed Analysis and Strategy for Launching Implementation (Officership 2020)* (Ottawa: NDHQ, March 2001), 1-32.

below their pay grade.” When senior supervisors fail to delegate effectively, they end up doing both their own work, and that of their subordinates - what is sometime referred to as “...ordering about their subordinates’ subordinates.”<sup>32</sup> This leads to mounting stress levels and eventual burnout. Worse yet it slows the rate of activity and increases the risk failure.<sup>33</sup> Finally, if we accept the maxim that “the apple rarely falls far from the tree,” the micro-manager sets an exceptionally poor example for his subordinates, one that they are likely to emulate. In organizations that espouse support for mission command, micro-managing superiors will set a contradictory example that incites cynicism and mistrust.

To summarize, *auftragstaktik* requires risk-tolerant leaders in order to accept the uncertainty that comes from delegating authority to their subordinates. Conversely, *befehlstaktik*, an equally valid command philosophy, involves little or no delegation of authority. The decision to practice either, or to blend these approaches, will depend on the given circumstances. However, when leaders fail to delegate an appropriate level of authority commensurate with the situation at hand, they become micro-managers. With a firm understanding of what *auftragstaktik* is, and is not, we shall now review the CF’s policy on mission command.

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<sup>32</sup> Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 270.

<sup>33</sup> Colonel William J. Neumann, “Generals Doing Generals’ Work” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Securities Studies Course Paper, 2000), 22.

## CF POLICY ON MISSION COMMAND

First weigh the considerations, then take the risks.

Helmuth von Moltke<sup>34</sup>

The CF's present policy supporting mission command and risk tolerance could not be clearer. Beginning with the military as a whole, the Chief of Defence Staff's Strategic Operating Concept provides an over-arching core vision for the entire CF. Of seven attributes that articulate this vision, the second is particularly relevant to this paper: "The CF will possess a command climate that emphasizes mission command – the decentralized execution of operations within the context of command intent."<sup>35</sup> In describing this attribute, the vision stresses the benefits of decentralized execution, pointing out the potential for subordinate commanders to develop innovative solutions in a timely manner.<sup>36</sup> Further, risk tolerance is espoused in the same section, "Misfortunes or errors must be accepted as a cost of acting boldly in an uncertain environment."<sup>37</sup>

As with the CF's vision, the Officer Corps' vision describes a similarly risk tolerant culture that is entirely supportive of mission command techniques:

Leading by example, fully accountable, they are dedicated to their subordinates and inspire loyalty and mutual trust. They possess the spirit

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<sup>34</sup> The Quotations Page <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/2904.html> Internet Accessed 9 September 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Department of National Defence, *CF Strategic Operating Concept, Draft 4.4* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, DCDS, 21 May 2004), 16/40.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 16/40.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17/40.

and expertise to succeed in a wide range of operations. These officers of high intellectual ability operate effectively in a technological and information-rich environment. With an understanding of national policies, military doctrine and their application to diverse national and international circumstances, they will *boldly accept the risk and ambiguity inherent in the demands of their profession*. [emphasis added] They embrace the military ethos, understand and apply the appropriate levels of force, and draw strength from the values and aspirations of the pluralistic nation they serve. They welcome challenge and serve with courage and integrity.<sup>38</sup>

Moving from esoteric vision statements to very concrete direction, we see that the message remains consistent in the guidance presented in *CF Operations*, the keystone joint doctrine publication. In describing the six principles of command, it cites the critical role that Freedom of Action plays in fostering initiative and sensible risk taking:

Once a task or mission has been established and the necessary orders have been given, subordinate commanders must be permitted maximum freedom to take initiative and exercise their skills and knowledge of the local situation in the planning and conduct of the operation.<sup>39</sup>

While *CF Operations* refrains from using the term micro-management, the message is clear when it explains,

Perhaps the greatest threat to freedom of action at the operational level is the capability, through information technology, to over-control operations from the strategic level, especially when they have a high media profile. This tendency must be resisted in order to ensure the commanders maintain an appropriate degree of authority and flexibility to respond quickly to changing circumstances....Clear and simple orders with clearly understood commander's intent enable subordinates to

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<sup>38</sup> DND, *Officership 2020 - Detailed Analysis*..., ii.

<sup>39</sup> DND, *CF Operations*, 2-4.

exercise initiative and flexibility while pursuing the commander's goals and priorities.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, both the CF's and the Officer Corps' core visions are consistent with the direction embedded within our capstone Joint Doctrine publication. The CF is intent on practicing mission command. Commanders are to shun micro-management and risk aversion. Instead, commanders are directed to accept the necessary risks. They are reminded that honest mistakes will happen; explaining that the benefits of decentralization outweigh the disadvantages of over-controlling. We shall now consider the CF's culture, with a view to how well it can support the stated policy on mission command.

### **RISK TOLERANCE IN THE CF**

A danger in arguing the thesis of this paper is that it could very easily deteriorate into an exercise of faultfinding and mudslinging. One could simply offer a number of examples of risk aversion and micro-management as proof of the overall culture of the organization. Such a negative approach will not be followed. Regrettably, little empirical research has been published on the risk tolerance of organizations, and only a very small portion focuses on the CF in particular. Further, of the material consulted,<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-8.

<sup>41</sup> See Vogelaar and Kramer, "Mission Command..." 228,229; English, *The Operational Art...*, 39; John Kiszely, "Meaning of Manoeuvre," RUSI 143, no 6 (Dec 1998), 36-40. quoted in English, *The Operational Art...*, 13; Desmond Morton, *Understanding Canadian Defence* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), 186; David A Adams, "Chance Second Chances," *United States Naval Institute. Proceedings* (Annapolis: Jun 1998. Vol 124, Iss. 6), 65-69; Brigadier General (Ret) Stanley Cherrie "The Human in Command A Personal View" in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, eds. Carol McCann & Ross Pigeau, 17-28 (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2000), 20, 21; Carol



the majority simply report perceptions of an organization's culture, vice providing well-founded conclusions regarding its character. This is not surprising, as the risk tolerance of an organization is a very complex matter to assess, and is very much driven by context. For example, even the most decentralized organizations with empowered employees will likely adopt formalized processes for safety or occupational health matters.

Accordingly, to make an objective assessment of the CF's culture, we shall first conduct a profiling exercise. In effect, we will review indicators that should predict what type of risk culture we have in the CF. We shall look to three broad areas:

- a. Risk aversion as a phenomenon within the greater society.
- b. How the CF's environment specifically encourages and enables risk-averse behaviour.
- c. Why certain individuals who are naturally predisposed to risk aversion may be attracted to pursuing a full career in the CF.

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Off "Do the Right Thing! Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire in the 1990s" in *Warrior Chiefs*, eds Bernd Horn & Stephen Harris, 335-346, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), 342; Brigadier-General Ken C. Hague "Strategic Thinking General/Flag Officers: The Role of Education" in *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, eds Bernd Horn & Stephen Harris, 507-520 (St. Catherines: Vanwell, 2001), 514; Lieutenant Colonel W. Wild, *Army Culture* (NDHQ Ottawa DLP3-4: file 1080-1-6004, July 1997), 10; Bercuson Somalia 112; Debra L Nelson and James Campbell Quick, *Organizational Behaviour: Foundations, Realities and Challenges*. 540-1 Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing, 1999. 540-1 quoted in English, *Understanding Military Culture...*, 77; Bernd Horn, "Wrestling With an Enigma," *Contemporary Issues in Officership: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2000), 132; J.L Granatstein, *A Paper Prepared for the Minister of National Defence: For Efficient and Effective Military Forces* (Canadian Institute of International Affairs: March 25, 1997), 15; DND, *Officership 2020 - Detailed Analysis...*, I-12, 14, 30, 31.

Finally, we will review evidence of risk aversion in other western militaries in general, and then specifically in the CF. The intention is to provide both circumstantial evidence (paragraphs a through c above), with direct evidence provided in the latter part, thus drawing the reader to the conclusion that the CF's culture ought to be, and in fact is, risk-averse.

### **Risk Aversion in Society**

In developed countries our tolerance for physical risk has steadily decreased as our ability to eliminate threats to our well being has increased. "Things that would not trouble sub-Saharan Africans for an instant, frighten us."<sup>42</sup> Whereas our grandparents did not think twice about buying fresh beef from a neighbouring farmer, we would never dream of taking such flagrant risks. We insist that government certified inspectors, working in approved facilities, inspect our meat before sale. From seemingly sensible concerns regarding very serious hazards (e.g., government oversight of nuclear power production) our risk-aversion can permeate into the minutia of everyday life. Elderly ladies are barred from bringing knitting needles aboard commercial aircraft for fear of they may be used as a terrorist's weapon.<sup>43</sup> Our overwhelming concerns for the

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<sup>42</sup> Oliver Letwin, speech published on the British Conservative Party's web site: [http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj\\_id=115360&speeches=1](http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj_id=115360&speeches=1); Internet Accessed 9 September 2004.

<sup>43</sup> The author witnessed a woman in her seventies have her knitting needles seized (with the explanation that the seizure was required for the safety of the flight) in November 2001. While it was possible that another younger and stronger passenger could have used the needles as a weapon, it seems unlikely that a would-be terrorist, when planning a hijack operation, would assume there would be passengers on his planned flight carrying such instruments. Further, knitting needles would make a

elimination of all potential hazards borders on hysteria. Accordingly, when a mishap does occur, we immediately look to blame the responsible party.<sup>44</sup> If an incident was preventable, then is it not reasonable to demand compensation from the erring party?

This aspect of seeking compensation or other retribution for perceived wrongdoing has had a significant impact on military command. As society has become increasingly litigious, the threat of legal liability for hazards has been a catalyst for a plethora of health and safety regulations. The prohibition of smoking in the workplace is a case in point. Save for a few individuals on the fringe of rational debate,<sup>45</sup> society has long understood that second hand smoke is a serious health risk.<sup>46</sup> However, private and public employers did not take action to safeguard their employees until they faced the threat of litigation. It was the fear of being held financially responsible for employees' smoke related illness that encouraged employers to eliminate smoking in the workplace.<sup>47</sup>

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marginally effective weapon, given their inherent flexibility and relatively dull point. The point of this example is that the security precautions were disproportionately restrictive (risk-averse) given the potential threat. Other similar seizures have been observed in North American airports since 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Letwin, speech published on the British Conservative Party's web site: [http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj\\_id=115360&speeches=1](http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj_id=115360&speeches=1); Internet Accessed 9 September 2004.

<sup>45</sup> For example, The United Pro Choice Smokers Rights Newsletter, published at: <http://www.smokersclubinc.com/modules.php?name=Encyclopedia&op=content&tid=1> argue that smoking does not present significant health risks. Internet Accessed 26 September 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Canadian Cancer Society web site: [http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172\\_10139\\_\\_langId-en,00.html](http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172_10139__langId-en,00.html); Internet Accessed 26 September 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Windsor Essex County Health Unit web site: <http://www.wehealthunit.org/content.asp?Topic=Healthy%20Living&ID=103&SubTopic=Tobacco>; Internet Accessed 26 September 2004. It states "The Tobacco Control Act, the Smoking In The Workplace Act, and delegated powers to municipalities under the Municipal Act 2001 are all part of the Ontario Tobacco Strategy aimed at reducing the use of tobacco in the province, and in the longer term reducing the health related costs that come from tobacco use. In total, over 80% of Ontario residents are currently covered by some manner of smoking regulation bylaw.

Fear of litigation drives governments and the private sector to adopt ever-increasingly risk-averse policies. The pace of change is accelerated thanks to the impact of modern communications – the CNN effect. “Sections of the media, always ready to appeal to the instinct to make others responsible for our misfortunes, serve as cheerleaders of the blame culture – by pointing the finger.”<sup>48</sup>

Unlike the private sector, governments have more to fear than only the potential financial loss resulting from civil action. Governments fear the loss of public support as much if not more so than financial considerations. Accordingly, politicians, and those who seek their favour, must consider how the public as a whole might perceive their actions. This is a particular concern in western democracies. Opposition parties stand ready to exploit even minor failures, isolated scandals, or any other potentially embarrassing event that could be exploited to discredit the governing party. “Media pressures induce paranoia in politicians who are often amongst the first to be pointed at, and who therefore protect themselves by introducing regulations as if risk could be abolished by law.”<sup>49</sup>

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In August 2002 Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board awarded compensation to an Ottawa area waitress for being exposed to Environmental Tobacco Smoke over a period of 40 years. Heather Crowe, a lifelong non-smoker, was diagnosed with a lung tumour normally only found in smokers. Her case has been deemed terminal by her doctors. With the awarding of benefits to Ms. Crowe, it's expected the potential liability that ETS exposure brings with it will encourage more businesses and municipalities to be receptive to going smoke free.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver Letwin, speech published on the British Conservative Party's web site: [http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj\\_id=115360&speeches=1](http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/news/article.cfm?obj_id=115360&speeches=1); Internet Accessed 9 September 2004.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, While Mr. Letwin is speaking of the prevention of physical risks, it applies equally to the prevention of government failures or scandals.

Given that the military is a government institution; the electorate views military failures, real or perceived, as government failures. Under the provisions of the National Defence Act, the Government of Canada appoints the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as the senior ranking officer in the CF. Thus, he must maintain the Government's confidence if he is to retain his appointment. Accordingly, the political ramifications of a given decision could affect the CDS's judgment on otherwise purely military matters. Further, as all members of the CF are under the CDS's command, the CDS's concerns should become his subordinates' concerns. Thus, it is in the best interests of all officers to ensure they take no chances that could potentially lead to political embarrassment.<sup>50</sup>

The threshold at which a problem within a military becomes a serious concern for a federal government should be commensurate with the size of the country. Put another way, consider two nations - one large and one small. Assume both national leaders have the same mental and physical capacity to oversee the activities of their respective government. Assuming the smaller country's government is proportionately smaller, the leader of the smaller country should have the capacity to meddle deeper into the minutia of the military's business (as well as any other ministry) than his counterpart with a broader span of control. The media will magnify this effect for two reasons; first, the number of national television broadcasting networks does not necessarily vary proportionately with the size of a country and thus the ability to investigate and publicize

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<sup>50</sup> Department of National Defence. *Debrief The Leaders* (Ottawa: NDHQ, May 2001), 8.

the same proportion of government activities decreases as countries get larger.<sup>51</sup> Second, even when there are a greater number of media organizations within a given country, they all tend to focus their coverage on the same key stories.<sup>52</sup> Thus, one would expect that minor matters that would not generate significant media or government interest in a large country such as the USA, would receive greater attention in Canada. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect senior Canadian officers would be more politically sensitive than their counterparts from larger nations. While the Treasury Board has not made comparisons with other countries, it has observed how readily political sensitivities are transferred to senior bureaucrats in various Departments throughout the Canadian Federal Government.<sup>53</sup> How this phenomenon affects military command is the subject of the next section.

### **Risk Tolerance in the Military Environment – *Better Safe than Sorry***

Within the CF, there are two key factors that foster a risk-averse culture. First, our promotion policy encourage officers to avoid risk. Second, the application of modern communication capabilities facilitates micro-management.

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<sup>51</sup> As an example, the web sites: <http://www.journalismnet.com/tv/canada.htm> and <http://www.journalismnet.com/tv/us.html> lists three major television news networks in Canada (CBC, CTV and CPAC), versus six for the United States (CSPAN, PBS, CNN, NBC, NBC, CBS). Thus, the USA, a country with roughly ten times the population of Canada (and with well more than ten times the number of military personnel), has only twice the number of major news networks. Internet accessed 27 October 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Cori E. Dauber, keynote presentation to AMSC 7, 29 September 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Department of National Defence. *Debrief The Leaders* (Ottawa: NDHQ, May 2001), 8.

Promotion Policies. The CF's promotion policy, like that found in most western militaries, is proudly based on merit vice seniority. Promotion boards take great pains to see that both performance and potential are fairly graded, in order to ensure that officers receive an objective ranking. However, our process, like many others, depends upon fair and accurate individual reporting. Regrettably, this is not the case as CF Personal Evaluation Reports (PERs) suffer from score inflation.<sup>54</sup> This makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to identify the strongest candidates based upon reported performance and potential.<sup>55</sup> Truly average officers can thank PER inflation for scores that are roughly equal to those of their outstanding colleagues. As PER scores become less significant, the promotion board ranking is skewed towards individual qualifications (education, military and linguistic) and experience. This leads to a situation whereby those who simply plod their way safely through their careers can rise to the highest ranks. Effectively, they "...make up in tact and conformity what they lack in enterprise and initiative."<sup>56</sup> While PER inflation tends to lump the good in with the better and the best, it provides no protection for mistakes. Indeed, in such a competitive environment even an

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<sup>54</sup> CDA Institute for Security and Defence Studies *Proceedings of the XIII Annual Seminar* (Ottawa, ON, January 1997) Dr. Sandy Cotton's remarks on *Ethics, Morale and Leadership in the Canadian Forces*. While Dr Cotton simply states that "The integrity of the appraisal system has been compromised," score inflation is seen as the principal problem. Lessons Learned reports from recent Promotion Boards continue to cite inflation as the number one shortcoming of the PERs reviewed. See Department of National Defence Message, AIR COMMAND 03/04 PERSONNEL APPRAISAL SYSTEM (PER) POLICY CANAIRGEN 003/04 CAS 007 031530Z FEB 04, para 2B.

<sup>55</sup> CF annual evaluation reports divide the assessment into two main sections, the first reports on the member's performance during the year, the second assesses the member's potential based on observed performance. For simplicity, subsequent references to performance will imply the individual's overall assessment (i.e. the sum of both performance and potential).

<sup>56</sup> Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Random House, 1976), 245.

isolated incident or minor failure can result in a career killing average (or worse) PER. This leads to a zero-defects mentality, exacerbated by short tour lengths.<sup>57</sup> Within a large unit or formation it can take years to realize the benefits of a senior commander's vision, leadership and dedication. On the other hand, one mistake can result in nearly instantaneous negative recognition, especially if the incident reflects poorly on the government and thus raises strong media interest. A 1993 study agreed that politically sensitive, risk-averse behaviour was more conducive to promotion than was strong performance:

Our findings regarding current patterns of leadership in the military suggest that many top level officers might have been promoted on the basis of their transactional abilities to work well in the system.<sup>58</sup>

Communication Technology. The proliferation of information technology is the second major factor encouraging risk-averse behaviour in the CF. Of primary concern is its impact on command and control. Modern systems have completely altered our ability to direct the actions of subordinates; they allow us to micromanage to an extent never before dreamed possible.<sup>59</sup> Today, superiors have the capacity to monitor their subordinates' actions in real time, and provide continuous guidance to ensure mistakes are avoided. Further, thanks to web-based orders, regulations, and standard operating

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<sup>57</sup> Allan D. English, *The Operational Art: Theory, Practice, and Implications for the Future* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, Teaching Resource Paper, 2003), 39.

<sup>58</sup> CDA Institute for Security and Defence Studies *Proceedings of the XIII Annual Seminar* (Ottawa, ON, January 1997) Dr. Sandy Cotton's remarks on *Ethics, Morale and Leadership in the Canadian Forces*.



procedures can be amended as frequently as the commander desires. Previous concerns for the time and cost demands associated with amending hard-copy publication are gone. This capability promotes leadership through regulation - an order can be written in response to any observed or anticipated problem or failure. Thus, “improved” communications and electronic publication methods produce an environment that discourages initiative and leadership based on mutual trust. Instead, it supports a highly formalized structure and the proliferation of risk-intolerant strategies. As opposed to an organic structure that would favour mission command,<sup>60</sup> today’s environment is a micro-manager’s dream come true.

### **Intrinsic Predisposition**

The key to being a good manager is keeping the people who hate me away from those who are still undecided.

Casey Stengel<sup>61</sup>

Having looked at how society as a whole and the military environment in particular inhibits mission command, we shall now look at the commanders themselves. Does military service attract officers predisposed towards risk-averse behaviour? We shall focus on those officers who pursue a full career, as it is the long-serving officers

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<sup>59</sup> Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann “Redefining Command and Control” in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, eds. Carol McCann & Ross Pigeau, 163-184 (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2000), 177.

<sup>60</sup> McShane, *Canadian Organizational Behaviour*, 466.

<sup>61</sup> The Quotations Page <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/1376.html> Internet Accessed 9 September 2004.

who will attain the highest ranks, and thus have the greatest impact on the CF's culture as a whole.

The section could potentially draw the ire of those who consider a career in the military as a vocation vice an occupation. In no way is it meant to suggest that only risk-averse individuals choose to serve a full career. The nature of military service will also attract risk tolerant officers acting on a sense of duty or who achieve the self-fulfillment that comes from facing the extraordinary challenges inherent in the CF.

Financial Security. Salary and employment conditions provide an excellent reason for risk-averse officers to choose to serve a full career in the CF. On the negative side, CF officers will never have the opportunity to make the very high salaries possible in the private sector.<sup>62</sup> However, unlike their civilian colleagues, their continued employment is exceptionally secure. Along with security, CF salary increases are

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<sup>62</sup> As a comparison, the following pay ranges for the most senior officers (save for the CDS) are published in the CF Compensation And Benefits Instruction 204.205:

Rank	Low	High
Colonel	88,100	103,800
Brigadier-General	101,000	118,900
Major-General	122,900	144,700
Lieutenant-General	140,200	165,000

To these figures, these officers would receive an additional amount, known as Performance Pay, which would range from roughly 4 to 10 percent of their base pay. In comparison to these figures above, "CEOs in the manufacturing business in the Greater Toronto Area, on average, will earn \$710,400 this year, including a bonus of \$362,400. High-tech chief executives will make \$418,100, including a \$214,900 bonus. That's according to the annual Executive Compensation Survey released yesterday by the Toronto Board of Trade. The average total compensation for chief executive officers in the GTA is \$409,300, up from \$354,000 last year." As reported by Madhavi Acharya, Toronto Star Business Reporter, *The Toronto Star*, 18 October 2000.

predictable.<sup>63</sup> Further, officers can plan with confidence when they will retire, and thanks to the CF's defined-benefit pension plan, they can accurately predict their retirement income.<sup>64</sup> To use an analogy from the investment field, choosing a military career is the equivalent to buying Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs), whereas a civilian career can be likened to speculating on equities. Unlike investing in equities, you have virtually no chance of becoming rich buying GICs, but at least you will never lose your principal. Thus, the relative stability and security of a military career presents an attractive option for the risk-averse officer.

On the other hand, it would be unlikely that risk tolerant officers would perceive the financial uncertainty of civilian employment as a barrier to early retirement from the CF. Indeed, if undeterred by the potential risks, such officers may even be drawn by the higher financial rewards possible with civilian employment. Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that from a purely financial standpoint (having predictable remuneration and job security), the CF should retain more risk averse than risk tolerant officers.

Self-esteem. The second aspect relating to an officer's predisposition to risk aversion is his self-esteem, or more importantly his lack thereof. Behavioural science links the incidence of risk aversion to low self-esteem and cites the relationship to an

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<sup>63</sup> CF Compensation And Benefits Instruction 204 outlines incentive pay increases.

<sup>64</sup> See the CF Pension Calculator at [http://www.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/dapp/pensionCalculator\\_e.asp?sel=cal#](http://www.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/dapp/pensionCalculator_e.asp?sel=cal#) Internet accessed 27 October 2004.

unhealthy fear of failure.<sup>65</sup> Individuals so afflicted are said to suffer from pathological achievement-motivation.<sup>66</sup> This is in contrast to healthy achievement-motivation, in which one's focus is on achieving success, vice avoiding failure.<sup>67</sup> Individuals with pathological achievement-motivation are attracted to military service, thanks to an environment that rewards conformity and obedience. As described in the previous section, risk taking is not a prerequisite for success; instead conformity and obedience are rewarded. Accordingly, officers with low self-esteem and thus who harbour an unhealthy need for social approval are attracted to the recognition that comes with promotion.<sup>68</sup> That such recognition can be achieved in a financially secure environment makes a full military career even more attractive. Dr. Norman Dixon sums it up most eloquently:

...there are features of older military organizations which attract individuals with pathological achievement-motivation. Thus the 'fear of failure' syndrome not only determines vocational selection but by its very nature facilitates acceptance and promotion within the military organization...<sup>69</sup>

For if one plays it carefully, the military, in contrast to the world of commerce, offers achievement without tears. Stick to the rule book, do nothing without explicit approval from the next higher up, always conform, never offend your superiors, and you will float serenely if a trifle slowly upwards – a blimp in both senses of the word.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Coping.org, *Tools for Coping with Life's Stressors*; <http://www.coping.org/growth/esteem.htm>; Internet accessed 17 September 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, 238.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

This is not to suggest that self-confident officers will not remain in the CF. Indeed, lacking quantitative data on the matter, it is reasonable to assume that strong, well-adjusted officers might choose a military career for the reasons of duty and self-fulfillment already suggested. However, given the factors described above, officers with lower self-esteem and unhealthy achievement-motivation should, to a greater degree than officers with higher self-esteem, be deterred by the uncertainty of a career in the private sector. On the other hand, a greater proportion of self-confident officers, having faith in their ability to cope with whatever might come their way, should not fear the greater uncertainty of a civilian career, and thus should pursue civilian employment more readily than their risk-averse peers.<sup>71</sup>

### **Stated Opinions**

We have reviewed environmental factors that may foster a risk-averse culture, or encourage those officers so inclined to remain in the military. We shall now review evidence that suggest such a culture does in fact exist. Before looking at the CF specifically, we will consider the plight of our closest Allies. We are certainly not the only western military that on the one hand professes its support for mission command, yet on the other hand finds itself mired in a risk-averse climate.

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<sup>71</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications Inc, 2004), 19.

Following their experience in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia as a member of UNPROFOR, Dutch forces concluded that such missions, particularly those with high political sensitivity, were not well suited for mission command.<sup>72</sup> They found that frequent rotation of individuals within the force made it particularly difficult to establish common intent and develop the strong bonds of trust between commanders and subordinates. The result was

...commanders could never be absolutely certain whether a member of one their subunits might not, under stress, react in an unexpected or irrational way...a commander could not afford any risks. Therefore, superior commanders strictly controlled their subordinates' behaviour.<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, the nature of the mission meant that there was strategic sensitivity to actions at the lowest tactical level, and that sensitivity played a large part in determining the leadership style. However, it is equally clear that the senior Dutch commanders were simply not comfortable with uncertainty. Their *strict control of their subordinates' behaviour* gave senior commanders the potentially false sense of security that they could predict how their subordinates would react to every situation.

Citing the impact of short tour lengths and competitive promotion policies, Dr Allan English notes the trend towards a "culture of zero tolerance for mistakes."<sup>74</sup> English cites the United Kingdom's Assistant Chief of Defence Staff, Major General John Kiszely when he stated that the practice of Operational Art requires:

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<sup>72</sup> Vogelaar and Kramer, "Mission Command..." 229.

... commanders who ...can apply originality and imagination to problem solving; and are risk takers happy in the chaos and uncertainty of war. But he admonished that “This may require a change in ethos greater than that which is achievable given peacetime promotion policies.”<sup>75</sup>

Our American ally appears to suffer from the same malaise, again owing to the fear that a single mistake could ruin one’s promotion prospects. David Adams explains that the US Navy’s leadership problems stem from “...a belief that to be successful, individuals, commands, and institutions must appear error free.”<sup>76</sup> While it is asserted that this is an institutional problem that affects every member of the Navy, from seaman to admiral,<sup>77</sup> the focus is on the deleterious impact on the Officer Corps. “Today’s zero-defects mentality-which says it is worse to make a mistake than to admit one-must be eradicated if the U.S. Navy is to continue to build strong naval officers.”<sup>78</sup>

Brigadier General (Retired) Stanley Cherrie concludes that the US Army faces similar challenges within its officer corps:

...the fact that the majority of the senior leaders in the US Army are unwilling to handle situations involving risk. We claim to be an institution that is willing to accept risk, but my assessment is that we don’t have any risk takers at all...I have actually seen leaders who structure their methods ...to erect ‘firewalls’ between themselves and any issue known to

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>74</sup> English, *The Operational Art...*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> John Kiszely, “Meaning of Manoeuvre,” RUSI 143, no 6 (Dec 1998), 36-40. quoted in English, *The Operational Art...*, 13.

<sup>76</sup> David A Adams, “Chance Second Chances,” *United States Naval Institute. Proceedings* (Annapolis: Jun 1998. Vol 124, Iss. 6), 65-69.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-69

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-69.

be risky or controversial. This tactic permits them, what in the back rooms, is jokingly referred to as plausible deniability.<sup>79</sup>

In light of the risk aversion that General Cherrie asserts is rampant in the US Army, it is not surprising that he also states that “micromanagement is rife among the majority of senior leaders with whom I have served.”<sup>80</sup>

Given that we maintain close ties with the UK and the USA, that we share a similar cultural heritage, and that the CF regularly adopts British and American doctrine, tactics and procedures, we should expect that we would face similar problems. Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire agrees. He expressed similar views to his British and American counterparts, blaming a risk-averse culture for his inability to promote the delegation of authority to subordinate commanders. He argued that the mid-1990s was a time of crisis for the CF, made worse by risk-averse leadership, “It was very, very nasty.”<sup>81</sup> Dallaire points out that a culture of micro-management in the CF extends to the highest levels. It is suggested that that his fellow generals at National Defence Headquarters failed to delegate tasks that rightfully should have been completed by subordinates.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Brigadier General (Ret) Stanley Cherrie “The Human in Command A Personal View” in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, eds. Carol McCann & Ross Pigeau, 17-28 (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2000), 20.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Carol Off “Do the Right Thing! Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire in the 1990s” in *Warrior Chiefs*, eds Bernd Horn & Stephen Harris, 335-346, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), 342.

<sup>82</sup> Brigadier-General Ken C. Hague “Strategic Thinking General/Flag Officers: The Role of Education” in *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, eds Bernd Horn & Stephen Harris, 507-520 (St. Catherines: Vanwell, 2001), 514.



Dallaire's concerns are echoed by survey results from the same period that indicate "a widespread lack of confidence in its [CF's] leadership."<sup>83</sup> In particular, the officers are again the focus of the problem as pointed out by responses to the NCM Professional Development Working Group study: "...NCMs feel that they lack the support of an officer corps more concerned with ticket punching than doing their job."<sup>84</sup> Once again we see that promotion practices are cited as the root of the problem, "It is the managerial, ass-covering, political skills that lead to promotion."<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, English concludes:

...the CF exhibits many of the same characteristics of non-adaptive culture identified in the US military today .... Once again a lack of trust seems to have developed between superiors and subordinates, partially due to careerism, an unwarranted 'can-do' attitude, and the evidence of a business ethos on the part of some leaders....And once again we have evidence of cautious leaders who try and protect their own interests by behaving insularly, politically, and bureaucratically, and valuing orderly and risk-reducing management processes much more highly than leadership initiatives.<sup>86</sup>

Colonel Bernd Horn makes a similar finding regarding the lack of risk tolerance in the CF. He is pessimistic that the CF can transform into an organization that accepts that honest mistakes will not only occur but be tolerated. He asserts that senior officers

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<sup>83</sup> Allan D. English, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective*. Study Prepared for the Defence and Civil Institute for Environmental Medicine (Toronto: Department of National Defence, DCIEM, 2001), 75.

<sup>84</sup> Lieutenant Colonel W. Wild, *Army Culture* (NDHQ Ottawa DLP3-4: file 1080-1-6004, July 1997), 10.

<sup>85</sup> David Bercuson, *Significant Incident: Canada's Army, the Airborne, and the Murder in Somalia* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), 112.

must not only preach the principals of risk tolerance, they must lead by example, yet “...in the Canadian Forces of today, this is a substantial hurdle to cross. The prevailing culture is one of political correctness, risk aversion and zero tolerance of mistakes.”<sup>87</sup>

Colonel Horn’s sentiments are echoed by Dr. Jack Granatstein who states, “The single most serious problem faced by the CF is that the ‘politically correct’ and safe way of doing things is not the best way to train a military that can fight and win wars.”<sup>88</sup> Dr.

Desmond Morton places risk aversion in a practical context when he states,

...the ‘shadows’ that always worry selection boards.... Shadows fell on officers who took risks, made mistakes, challenged orthodoxy, embarrassed superiors or cleaned up messes left by others.... Peacetime advancement came to smooth, attractive officers with well managed careers.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly there is strong consensus that promotion policies are to blame for careerist activities that in turn spawn risk aversion. However, others have argued that the shift away from basic leadership techniques towards management theories and processes, especially at higher headquarters, has also had an impact by stifling initiative:

A similar top-down process is evident currently when abundant initiative and creative energy at the unit level is smothered if not

<sup>86</sup> Debra L Nelson and James Campbell Quick, *Organizational Behaviour: Foundations, Realities and Challenges*. 540-1 (Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing, 1999), 540-1 quoted in English, *Understanding Military Culture...*, 77

<sup>87</sup> Bernd Horn, “Wrestling With an Enigma,” *Contemporary Issues in Officership: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2000), 132.

<sup>88</sup> J.L Granatstein, *A Paper Prepared for the Minister of National Defence: For Efficient and Effective Military Forces* (Canadian Institute of International Affairs, March 25, 1997), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Desmond Morton, *Understanding Canadian Defence* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), 186.

extinguished when otherwise intelligent and skilled individuals are plugged into an over structured managerial system at NDHQ.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most revealing, are official statements from the CF itself. As a means of providing supporting information to the strategic guidance offered in Officership 2020, a number of “Capability Gaps” (a euphemism for shortcomings) were identified in a follow-on detailed analysis.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, some of the language in this document is notably non-committal, for example:

...there is widespread belief throughout the Officer Corps that the whole system is risk-averse. The Debrief the Leaders study found that officers of all ranks felt they would be ‘hung out to dry’ if they took risky decisions subsequently determined to be mistaken.<sup>92</sup>

The use of the term “belief” suggests the author is reluctant to affirm that a risk-averse culture actually exists. However, he goes on to describe a Secondary Capability Gap that notes “Responsible risk taking [is] not encouraged.”<sup>93</sup> Later in the same document, a “Key Initiative [to] Strengthen [the] Military Ethos,” states that “The following activities are required...develop an environment in which mistakes are tolerated and leaders are willing to admit and share errors so that all members of the institution may learn from them...”<sup>94</sup> The use of the future tense makes it clear that in 2001, the Vice Chief of Defence Staff was concerned that risk aversion existed and was an obstacle that prevented the CF from developing into a Learning Organization.

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<sup>90</sup> Bill McAndrew, “Canadian Officership: An Overview” in *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, eds Bernd Horn & Stephen Harris, 37-68 (St. Catherines: Vanwell, 2001), 66.

<sup>91</sup> DND, *Officership 2020 - Detailed Analysis...*, I-12.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, I-14.

## CONCLUSION

We set the stage for this discussion by describing *auftragstaktik*, or mission command. In particular, we identified the key components required for its effective implementation: clear objectives effectively communicated, mutual trust between superior and subordinate, and a risk tolerant culture. Contrasting mission command with *befehlstaktik*, we found that the former focused on telling the subordinate what the objective was, not how to achieve it, whereas the latter followed the opposite tack. Considering the attributes, advantages and disadvantages of each approach, the selection of the ideal command philosophy would be situation dependant. Alternatively, it might be a hybrid of *auftragstaktik* and *befehlstaktik*. We then considered micro-management, that is to say situations where leaders failed to delegate sufficiently under the circumstances. Further, we identified the telltale characteristics of organizations that favour micro-management.

Establishing the CF's policy on mission command was a simple matter, given the ample direction available in national publications and directives. Official guidance makes it clear that the CF favours mission command. Further, the CF in general and officers in particular are directed to shun risk-aversion and micro-management in order to foster a culture of sensible risk taking.

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, I-14.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, I-30, 31.

Lacking an instrument that can be injected into the CF to take a quantitative measurement of risk aversion (and thus the propensity to follow the principles of mission command), the final section provided two types of evidence, indirect and direct. First, to build a profile of the CF's culture, indirect evidence was offered that suggests that risk aversion should be prevalent in the CF. Noting that society as a whole has become increasingly risk averse, we then considered how this phenomenon would cause governments to fear electorate reprisals for any failure, real or perceived. In turn, government departments, including the military, become increasingly politically sensitive. Consequently, a risk-averse culture develops among senior department leaders. Looking specifically at the military environment, two factors were identified that increase the probability of risk aversion. First, promotion policies reward risk-averse behavior, and second, communication technology enables it. Finally, we examined why intrinsically risk-averse individuals would be attracted to serving a full career in the CF.

In considering the direct evidence, we see that the CF has a great deal in common with other western militaries. Criticism by Canadian scholars and senior Canadian officers of the CF is consistent with that leveled at our allies. They cite risk aversion as a serious problem affecting leadership in general, and mission command in particular. A consistent theme emerges from Canadian and allied sources, namely the relationship between promotion policies and prolific risk aversion.

Finally, the most convincing evidence of all comes from an official CF document; *Officership 2020*. The CF acknowledged mistrust within the officer corps, and that its

risk-averse culture discourages sensible risk taking. Accordingly, while the CF professes its support of mission command, widespread application will be difficult without a wholesale shift towards a more risk tolerant culture.

### **Towards a “Riskier” Future**

Notwithstanding our dilemma, we have at least recognized the problem. That the CF’s strategic guidance has acknowledged these shortcomings and directed the shift is an important first step in the right direction. Further, with the emphasis on Distributed Leadership, the CF is encouraged to adopt a leadership model that supports greater risk tolerance and empowerment of subordinates.<sup>95</sup> Having articulated the problem and the desired outcome, the long and slow process of cultural change can begin.<sup>96</sup> In order to facilitate behavioural change, the CF should seriously reconsider its information management policies, particularly as they relate to the promulgation of orders and directives. Commanders at all levels should be rewarded for reducing their written orders to only those absolutely required for the safe and effective completion of the mission at hand. Simultaneously, all subordinates must accept the greater responsibility demanded when detailed direction is lacking. Indeed, subordinates need to understand that simply avoiding actions that violate published orders is not an excuse for failing to apply common sense, or act ethically and responsibly. While some (both leaders and followers)

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<sup>95</sup> Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (DRAFT) (Ottawa: DND Canada, 9 Jun 04 Draft), 8-5.

<sup>96</sup> English, *The Operational Art...*, 44.

may be uncomfortable with the greater degree of delegation being proposed, this approach is both consistent with our Strategic Direction and supports *auftragstaktik*. Most importantly, by engaging and exploiting the strengths of the entire team, this approach will reduce the long-term risk of mission failure for the CF as a whole.

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