EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

Work-Life Balance: Implementing Flexible Initiatives to Improve Retention and Complete Integration of Women in the Canadian Forces

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"Like most large companies, the military faces a war for talent - that is, a battle to recruit and retain officers and enlisted personnel with the intellectual flexibility, technical abilities and communication skills needed today. If it does not fundamentally rethink the way it attracts, develops and retains people, it will lose this war."

David McCormick[i]

In the last decade the Canadian Forces (CF) has become more representative of society and more responsive to cultural expectations and social dynamics of the workforce writ large. Nowhere has this been more profound than the degree to which gender integration has dominated the political landscape and shaped workforce policies and practices within the CF. Although many argue that complete integration has not yet taken place, there has been considerable progress since women became peacetime members of the CF in 1949.[ii] Representation of female personnel has increased significantly,[iii] however, female attrition rates continue to be higher than that of male service members.[iv] This raises questions/concerns about the degree of progress made, as well as possible organizational catalysts for gender-specific attrition.

Entering the 21st century, the Canadian Forces, like many NATO defence forces, is poised on the brink of a personnel crisis, with current personnel shortfalls,[v] projected attrition of an aging workforce[vi] and a "highly competitive labour market" for the recruitment of new members.[vii] Efforts to increase the diversity of the CF and to be an employer of choice for the nexus generation[viii] are fraught with challenges. Declining Canadian propensity to join the military,[ix] previous downsizing and a 6-7 percent annual rate of attrition[x] has resulted in significant personnel shortfalls at a time when the operational and personal tempo of the CF

has seldom been higher.[xi] There are many Human Resource (HR) initiatives underway to identify triggers for attrition and devise policy changes to stem the tides of personnel leaving the organization.[xii] Nonetheless, catalysts for attrition that have been better recognized but to date largely ignored remain without remedy. Work-life imbalance has long been an issue for women in uniform, with real or perceived incompatibility between military and family roles often cited as a reason for leaving.[xiii] Today, it is evident that work-life balance and family stability are significant concerns for both men and women throughout the labour market, including the CF; however, the negative impact on job satisfaction, stress levels and overall happiness appear to be amplified for women.[xiv]

Clearly, employers have an opportunity to improve employee "quality of life" (QOL), productivity, commitment, and retention by improving work-life balance. The Canadian Forces is no exception. While the full range of contributing factors in a member's decision to leave the CF today are not fully understood, we do know that many leave because of increased need for family stability, an expression of work-life imbalance.[xv] We also know that women in the CF are even more likely to leave the organization due to difficulty balancing work/family responsibilities.[xvi] Given the current and projected personnel shortfalls, increased flexibility in the HR management framework is imperative.

The Canadian Forces needs to develop and implement innovative and flexible initiatives to assist its members with work-family balance and the business case for doing so hinges on four requirements. First, the CF has a social contract with its members to provide a suitable QOL for uniformed personnel and their families, as underscored by the 89 QOL

recommendations of the 1998 Report of the Standing Committee of National Defence and Veterans Affairs (SCONDVA).[xvii] Second, such initiatives will improve retention of valuable trained personnel, which (with recruiting) is an essential element of maintaining operational readiness.[xviii] Third, such initiatives will be particularly helpful in increasing the retention of women, which is critical to the complete integration of women across all rank levels in all occupations.[xix] And fourth, effective work-life balance programs enhance recruitment by increasing interest from prospective enrollees that expect increased flexibility in their work environment in exchange for military service to their country.[xx]

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE PRIVATE/PUBLIC SECTORS

Not surprisingly, the dilemma that the CF now faces in terms of recruiting and retaining personnel has its roots in both the private and public sectors. Having weathered the storms of downsizing and corporate transformation through the 1990s, prospective public and private sector employees are now often in the drivers seat, as low unemployment rates and pending retirement of a wave of baby boomers put employers on the cusp of a "severe skilled-labour gap".[xxi] However, most would argue that whatever advantage has been gained in this seller's (employee) market has been hard won. In the last 20 years, the annual time spent at work has increased by 63 hours (1.5 weeks extra) and leisure activities have decreased by 33 percent.[xxii] While technology has afforded productivity gains to many, it has also blurred the lines between work and home, as more personnel complete unpaid work during evenings and weekends.[xxiii] For employees in today's lean corporate structures, job security may be fleeting, and workloads more demanding than ever before. It is not surprising then, that role

overload and work to family interference have become commonplace and have had a significant adverse effect on employee productivity and retention.[xxiv]

So what really is work-life balance, and how does it relate to employee quality of life? Work-life balance has been defined as our respective ability to juggle an individually prescribed number of work and non-work roles, such as boss, mother, spouse, daughter, and community volunteer.[xxv] To the degree that the demands in one arena impede the ability to perform in another, an individual experiences work-life conflict, which may include role overload and either "work to family" (WTF) or "family to work" (FTW) role interference.[xxvi] For example, these types of work-life conflict occur when (in the same order): an office is short-staffed, but each individual must work to maintain the same overall productivity levels; work deadlines prevent an individual from participating in scheduled family activities; and problems with childcare necessitate a temporary reduction in work hours. Ultimately, all aspects of work-life conflict adversely effect both the individual and the organization.

A 2001 analysis of trends in work-life balance for federal department employees, included respondents from the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. The study examined changes in work-life balance over the 1990s, the impact on QOL and workplace productivity, organizational contributors to work-life imbalance, and recommended actions to correct them.[xxvii] Identified trends included: increased work-life conflict, which had a negative impact on employee and organizational performance, and employee health and well-being; parenthood continuing to be more difficult for women than

men; role overload increasing with the number of role demands; and increasing work to family interference when there were conflicting role demands.[xxviii]

There are many social/demographic reasons for the increased difficulties with work-life balance. By 1996, there were 1.1 million Canadian lone-parent households, with four of five households headed by women and half of those working outside the home, and as of 1998, 64 percent of Canadian families had two income earners.[xxix] Add to this the growing "sandwich generation" now faced with childcare and eldercare responsibilities during their prime wage earning years,[xxx] and the increase in work-life conflict is not surprising.

The impact of work life imbalance can be quite severe. From an organizational perspective, this translates into reduced productivity and commitment to the organization as individuals struggle with rising stress levels, decreased job satisfaction, and depressed moods because of role imbalance.[xxxi] It has been demonstrated that Canadian personnel with high (versus low) work-life conflict have missed more than twice as much work per year, and that the incremental absenteeism associated with work-life imbalance has "…cost Canadian companies about $4 billion a year in direct costs."[xxxii]

While work-life balance needs are diverse, there are a number of key drivers for assisting personnel with potential role conflict and interference: flexibility and control; management support; organizational culture; and performance measurement.[xxxiii] Employees who have sufficient flexibility and control of their work hours and location (i.e., flexible work hours, telework) are better able to balance organizational and personal requirements.

Management support or lack thereof, is a particularly strong predictor of work-life conflict levels. Those with supportive, innovative supervisors are better able to cope with existing conflict, or make use of alternate work strategies to reduce role overload and interference, whether via use of sanctioned work-life programs or by informal arrangements. Likewise, it is critical that the organizational culture supports work-life balance via creation of appropriate programs/policies, encouragement of their use, and monitoring to ensure they address imbalances and that users are not penalized for their participation. Finally, organizations should execute a performance measurement regime to assess program usage and attainment of desired results (i.e., reduced absenteeism, turnover). Managers should be held accountable for results, funding of initiatives should be based on their relative contribution to workforce stability and productivity, and leaders must identify and remove barriers to program usage (i.e., non-supportive supervisors, penalties) before assuming there is no need for the initiative. Monitoring should enhance identification of user requirements so the program/policy objectives are well defined and implementation is results-oriented.

But what happens when work-life imbalance is unchecked and individuals leave the organization? It has been estimated that the organizational cost of employee turnover is 0.5 to 1.5 times the incumbent's annual salary,[xxxiv] and for senior executives it can be as much as three times that salary.[xxxv] However, the cost of workforce attrition has two components, the incremental cost of hiring a replacement and the loss of productivity during the intervening period when replacements are recruited, trained and indoctrinated to the organization. Initiatives that increase retention will by definition decrease personnel operating costs

associated with recruitment, training and professional development, which could be subsequently reinvested in sustained work-life balance programs.

Given today's trend for a decreased level of commitment of Canadian personnel to their current employers,[xxxvi] as well as the considerable cost of workforce attrition, employers are starting to pay greater attention to measures of employee commitment versus employee satisfaction. This is not surprising given current research indicating that more committed employees are willing to "go the extra mile" for employers and customers alike, are more productive and report an intent to stay with the company for several years, even if offered slightly higher pay for comparable work.[xxxvii] Given that the top driver of employee commitment "was management's recognition of the importance of personal and family life",[xxxviii] retention efforts should recognize work-life balance initiatives as a key enabler for success.

In large, US-based studies, women have sent a clear message to employers: difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities is their number one complaint.[xxxix] Working mothers have identified work flexibility as the most significant contributor to happiness, and many are prepared to defer increased pay and other bonuses in order to secure more work flexibility.[xl] In only seven years, male and female employees have become twice as likely to trade monetary incentives for improved work-life balance, and "…55 % of 18-34 year olds [now] consider extended leave and sabbaticals as a key workplace benefit."[xli] And just as these initiatives can increase workplace retention, their absence or discontinuation can increase attrition. Where companies have been proactive with such programs, monitoring of

user participation has underscored employee intent to leave the company if existing flex-work arrangements were suspended.[xlii]

Work-life balance initiatives include a broad range of programs/policies in varying degrees of use throughout the labour market. The most well-known of these are flexible work arrangements (FWAs), which "…include:

- Telework (working from home or a remote office)
- Flextime (changing the start and end times of the work day)
- Job sharing (sharing a full-time position with another employee)
- Compressed work week (working full-time hours in fewer than five days) [and]
- Part-time [work] (reducing the number of hours worked each day or week)…."[xliii]

Other offerings include paid leave days for personal/family reasons, on-site or subsidized childcare, eldercare services, employee assistance programs and leaves of absence for maternity, professional development or personal sabbaticals. All programs will not fit within the operational context of all organizations, or be suitable for all occupations therein. What is important is that employers develop workplace programs that respond to pervasive employee needs, and/or provide a menu of optional benefits that can respond to individual requirements for work-life balance.

To effectively implement work-life balance initiatives, they must be seen as universal issues that affect women, rather than women's issues.[xliv] This focus does not dilute their importance to women, particularly those working in a male-dominated environment[xlv] where articulation of work-balance deficiencies may be less culturally acceptable. This emphasis on universal application addresses fears that flexible work policies are inequitable, placing women's needs above their male counterparts or parental needs above those of single

personnel. While personnel policies are created for all members of the organization, there is an implicit understanding that application of a specific policy may be exercised by relatively few. In the

case of work-life balance, a flexible portfolio of initiatives could respond to a diverse range of needs of single, married and common-law personnel, with or without children.

Work-life balance initiatives are responsive to influential societal changes. These include: an aging workforce; a growing requirement for dual income earners within a family; an increasing number of single parent families; a growing "sandwich generation" with both childcare and eldercare responsibilities during prime wage-earning years; and increased demand for flexibility and balance from the nexus generation. The workforce at large is more stressed, translating into increased absenteeism, extended use of the health care system, and decreased work productivity, ultimately impeding both job and overall life satisfaction. Work-life initiatives currently in use in the private and public sectors highlight an opportunity to improve the QOL of employees, which increases individual productivity and retention, and ultimately, organization effectiveness.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE CANADIAN FORCES

To what degree is work-life conflict an issue in the military, and can similar work-life balance initiatives be introduced to improve QOL, retention, integration of women and recruiting in the CF?

Quality Of Life (QOL)

Anecdotal data, media coverage and internal QOL research all confirm that the end of the 20th century culminated in a significant loss of confidence in senior leadership within the CF,[xlvi] often with neither military members nor their families receiving the support that they required. To date, the CF has implemented 55 of 89 recommendations tabled by SCONDVA in the House of Commons.[xlvii] Yet while members believe that pay increases and initiatives such as the Post-Living Differential and Compassionate Travel Assistance are important improvements, there are still concerns that not enough is being done to improve overall family support, and that other initiatives may not be adequately advertised to promote their effective use.[xlviii] With the exception of extended parental leave benefits, Family Care Assistance (to offset costs of childcare during deployment), and the two financial benefits noted above, the CF has done little to implement work-life balance issues in a focused, comprehensive manner. Furthermore, beyond a recent survey on workplace daycare requirements,[xlix] the CF has not measured the demand for work-life balance programs in a way that is meaningful and responsive to serving CF members.

Based on recent research, service members identified three target areas for the improvement of QOL, and by extension, increased retention of personnel. Improved salary and benefits were at the top of the list, followed by improvements to the posting process (i.e., more choice, better notification, longer tour lengths) and work conditions.[l] Family stability and support were noted as prominent issues that touched on many specific areas, particularly

the ability to improve work-life balance with reduced workloads, operational deployments,

and

postings.[li] And like our civilian counterparts, personnel in uniform indicated a willingness to forgo salary and benefits packages in exchange for qualitative user-driven initiatives.

Retention/Attrition

CF attrition rates have not changed dramatically in the last few years. Our current total attrition of 6-7 percent[lii] is nearly half that experienced by defence forces in Australia, US and New Zealand forces,[liii] and slightly below turnover estimates for the Canadian private sector.[liv] However, two thirds of our attrition is on an unscheduled, voluntary basis,[lv] and as such, represents a golden opportunity for improved organizational stability if we can entice these personnel to remain in uniform. Identifying the most effective means to achieve this is no easy feat, given that "… everything we do impacts on retention."[lvi]

For some time, there has been interest in what motivates personnel to leave the military, assessed primarily via qualitative unit-level exit interviews and quantitative results using the Canadian Forces Attrition Information Questionnaire (CFAIQ).[lvii] A recent study reviewed CF attrition data from 1992 to 1999. Of the 33,103 voluntary releases during this period, CFAIQ data were only collected from about 30 percent of those leaving.[lviii] Key factors associated with those respondents' decision to leave were issues related to: workplace fairness; family; civilian opportunities; career issues; and posting issues.[lix] Although family issues such as separation and stability were of concern to 18-20 percent each of navy, army and air force respondents, these concerns as well as staying home to raise a family dominated the decision by women to leave the military.[lx] The only exception to this was a significant

proportion leaving to go back to school, presumably due to their reported concerns about

MOC obsolescence and posting issues,[lxi] however, it is possible that education was a means to

obtain employment that better supports work-life balance.

Attrition is not new. What is noteworthy today is the incremental impact a modest

increase in unscheduled attrition has on force generation and quality of life for personnel who

remain. For those members trying to satisfy both individual and incremental workloads in

organizations lean in established positions and cut further by "gapped" positions that can't be

filled due to serious personnel shortfalls, work conditions are also a dissatisfier.[lxii] Unlike the

private sector, the cost of attrition in the military is not well quantified, but it is no less

significant to the state of organizational wellness and operational readiness. Incremental costs

and lost productivity are far more pronounced in the military, where entry-level personnel

must be recruited, trained and complete lengthy cycles of professional development and

consolidation before they can begin to replace seasoned personnel. Recognizing that today's

catalysts for attrition can often be attributed to global, MOC or unit-specific factors, a range

of mitigating actions is required for CF-wide, MOC-specific, or unit-level implementation.

Given the current focus on improving retention, and ongoing concerns associated with

gender differences in attrition, there is renewed interest in quantifying why personnel leave

the military, ultimately, so that appropriate action is taken to increase retention of highly

skilled, accomplished professionals. However, today's data represent only ten percent of

those leaving the CF, so identified trends are not necessarily representative of overall attrition

triggers. Research is further constrained by the CFAIQ instrument, which may not identify

adequate attrition factors for assessment, as well as respondent motivation to disclose specific

reasons for leaving the CF if they have lost faith in the chain of command. Focus groups have

now been held to identify additional factors not previously measured in the CFAIQ, such as

specific training deficiencies, disillusionment with leadership action/inaction, and the social

contract for the care/well being of subordinates.[lxiii] Proposed amendments to the CFAIQ tool

and expanded data collection will improve identification of future attrition trends. However,

this will do little to provide immediate direction for retention initiatives, let alone provide

incentive to stay for serving personnel already contemplating release.

Since the CF opened the floodgates for voluntary release under the Force Reduction

Programs of 1993-1996, many more personnel have elected to leave the organization than

anticipated, leaving significant shortfalls across the system. Over the last decade, personnel

releases have quantitatively outstripped enrollees each year, leaving a huge gap in trained,

seasoned uniformed personnel.[lxiv] By 2000, the CF had dropped from a regular force ceiling

of 60,000 personnel to a revised ceiling of 58,500. As of September 2001, the CF had a

"trained effective strength" (TES) of only 52,300 personnel, or 90 percent of total military

personnel, and it is estimated this could "drop to [a TES] below 80 percent by 2004."[lxv]

Despite an aggressive recruiting campaign with annual targets of at least 7,000 recruits for the

next three years, to date the goals appear unrealistic[lxvi] and largely unresponsive to the

changing work-life expectations that are partially responsible for ongoing attrition in the

organization. While critical contributors, recruiting initiatives alone are incapable of

addressing the personnel crisis. Therefore, it is also essential that the organization stop the

drain of senior uniformed members by identifying changes that would enhance the probability

of retention and move on those initiatives as soon as possible. Timely implementation of work-life balance initiatives represent just such an opportunity for improved operational readiness and sustainment.

Gender Integration

Women in uniform have witnessed considerable change since being officially introduced as members of a peacetime Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 1949, when married women were precluded from enrollment and pregnancy was cause for mandatory release. Although initially limited to clerical/nursing duties, a fixed ceiling of 1500 members and in 1965 representing only 1.4 percent of the total force,[lxvii] by 1975 women were only excluded from serving in combat positions, at sea and at remote locations, and represented just under six percent of the military.[lxviii]

Yet it is legislative change that has truly paved the way for gender integration in the CF. The first change was the 1978 Human Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in employment practices on the basis of gender (among other characteristics), with the exception of "bona fide" occupational requirements.[lxix] Second, was the 1986 Employment Equity (EE) Act, for which the CF endorsed establishment of advisory groups to consult with uniformed members of three of four "designated groups" (DGs): women, visible minorities and aboriginal peoples.[lxx] In 1996 the Act was proclaimed with application to the CF as a federal employer, and since then, environmental-specific targets for recruiting of women have been established.[lxxi] The watershed event for gender integration occurred in 1989, when "… a

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal directed that the Canadian Forces (CF) remove all discriminatory employment barriers and fully integrate women into all occupations."[lxxii] While the CF has made progress in complying with the Tribunal direction to complete this integration process within ten years, the 1999 assessment of the Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal was that "… the Tribunal objectives have not been met... [the Commission was] disappointed over the pace of integration…. [and by] any definition of 'full integration', the numbers demonstrated that it has yet to be achieved…".[lxxiii]

Today, women are employed without restriction and have been employed in all theaters and operations, including the Persian Gulf War, UN missions worldwide, and most recently, in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. Policies reflect the full role of women in the CF, environmental clothing and equipment are now designed suitable for both genders, and physical standards are either gender-free or gender-fair.[lxxiv] In comparison with other NATO defence forces, the CF has an enviable record in terms of both the breadth (by occupation and environment) and level (participation) of employment of women.[lxxv] In a recent US study, Canada was recognized as one of the most integrated defence forces (followed by the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway) with respect to personnel numbers, career limitations, and synchronization of personnel policy and practice.[lxxvi] However, being a relative world leader in gender integration does not presume that complete integration has been achieved. As shown in Table 1, representation of women in uniform has increased less than 2 percent overall in the last fourteen years (from 9.9 to 11.7 percent), and is still low amongst senior positions and ranks,[lxxvii] suggesting that there may be possible gender barriers that discourage long-term retention.

Table 1: Overall Female Representation [lxxviii]

	1989	**1998**	**2002**
Officer	9.3%	11.8%	13.7%
NCM	10.0%	10.5%	11.1%
Total	9.9%	10.8%	11.7%

The Canadian Forces today continues to be a male-dominated environment. Although it is recognized that the organization falls well short of the 29 percent target for women, of primary concern is the continued trend for higher overall rates of attrition for women across most occupational groups, as noted in Table 2. This is particularly true for female officers and NCMs serving in Regular Force Combat Arms and Naval Operational/Technical occupational groups. Although attrition rates have improved over the last three years, [lxxix] there are still roughly 2-3 times more women than men leaving the army, and twice as many women leaving "hard sea" occupations.

Table 2: Average Attrition Rates by Occupational Group (1989-2001) [lxxx]

OCCUPATIONAL GROUP	OFFICERS		NCMS	
	Female	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Combat Arms	12.5%	6.2%	25.1%	9.2%
Naval Operational/Technical	12.9%	6.8%	14.2%	7.5%
Air Operational/Technical	8.7%	7.6%	6.2%	6.7%
Engineering/Communications	8.7%	7.8%	9.0%	7.3%
Medical/Dental	9.2%	9.7%	8.7%	7.5%
Support	7.2%	7.2%	7.6%	7.5%
Total	8.8%	7.5%	8.1%	7.7%

While there may be many environmental/MOC-specific reasons for this attrition, it is quite possible that work-life balance plays a significant role given the cumulative effort and stress associated with long/frequent deployments. With small relative numbers of women in the CF, any increase in attrition has a disproportionate impact in reducing their overall representation at higher rank levels, where a significant number of years service is required before eligibility gates are cleared, irrespective of performance and individual merit.

Regardless of the increased breadth of roles that women have assumed outside the home, and specifically in the military, they still typically retain primary responsibility as caregivers (child care/elder care), as well as household management.[lxxxi] The stress associated with these often conflicting roles is compounded by societal norms that still imply that a woman's primary responsibility should be to her family,[lxxxii] and an organizational culture that may question the completeness of her professional commitment once she marries and/or has children.[lxxxiii] Initiatives to improve work-life balance help address role conflict on an individual level, and over time the cumulative impact of helping women better integrate a military career with their personal/family responsibilities should minimize the real/perceived relationship between family status and attrition of female personnel.

Work-life balance has been a long-standing concern for female uniformed personnel. Despite being raised in focus groups and studies since the early 90s it has not resulted in significant improvement,[lxxxiv] particularly in view of the increased work-life pressures throughout society. At that time, the need for flexible work arrangements (FWAs) was

identified, including not only flextime, but the potential to shift between full and part-time status via the Reserves/Militia during the early years of raising a family. These issues, along with a more technologically sound argument for telework (periodic/part-time) continue to be raised.[lxxxv] With the exception of government mandated extension of parental leave and associated financial benefits, none of these FWAs have been progressed on more than a conceptual or ad hoc basis for uniformed personnel. Unlike civilian personnel in the Department, the CF has no formal policy for telework or compressed work weeks for military personnel. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few personnel have ever received approval for either FWA except on a very limited ad hoc basis, typically for education/training rather than family balance purposes, and even then it has usually been reserved for senior personnel. Understandably, this approach reflects a military culture that places a high value on "face time" at the workplace and remains leery of both the capability for and optics of individual off-site productivity, particularly when identifying and quantifying measurable outputs has been challenging enough in some arenas.

Work life balance is a key issue in retention, and studies of the nexus generation that we aim to recruit from suggest it is a significantly higher priority to them. Addressing work-life balance is essential to improving retention of both today's personnel and tomorrow's recruits that we are about to invest considerable time and money training. In the past, women have typically been the driving force behind new or expanded programs to address work-life balance concerns; however, they truly benefit all personnel despite their diverse range of needs. While serving female personnel may be more responsive to such initiatives today, research indicates that gender differences may be eroding. In essence, work-life balance

initiatives that foster improved retention of female personnel will support all personnel objectives, and in fact may significantly increase the representation of women in the military. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that we often lose female personnel in their child-rearing years due to an actual/perceived inability to balance family responsibilities (i.e., mother, primary caregiver) with their military duties, or their actual/perceived career limitations once they have assumed such family responsibilities. Ironically, it is unlikely that the attrition associated with work-life imbalance will be addressed until we institute FWAs and other innovative personnel programs that invite participation, and provide testimonials from serving members to demonstrate that their program use did not preclude advancement. Likewise, it is unlikely that we will significantly increase the representation of women in the Canadian Forces unless we can demonstrate the value of career length service and the probable achievability of fully integrating their professional and personal/family responsibilities.

Indeed, identifying work-life balance programs is not enough. Leaders need to effect real cultural change if the organization is to move along a continuum of developmental milestones, from a "family forgetful" to a "family supportive" environment.[lxxxvi] Instead of an organizational posture that views work-life balance as a women's issue, today's uniformed workforce, and the one now enrolling, expects supportive policies and programs that are proactive and interactive with the unique needs of each military family.

It has been said that the military may "… recruit the individual, but retains the family…."[lxxxvii] In today's CF, more than fifty percent of personnel are parents and about ten percent of those are single parents.[lxxxviii] Research tells us that these groups (particularly the

women within them) are in the high end of the spectrum of work-life conflict; however, it is clear that a model for increased work flexibility would be of benefit to all personnel, regardless of marital or parental status. Without doubt, work-life balance is relevant and critical to military readiness and sustainment, and we need to move beyond conceptual models for this support.

To improve work-life balance in the CF requires concerted effort to identify critical imbalances and a range of actions to correct them. This can be achieved over a longer term by internal surveys of CF personnel, focus groups with target personnel most likely to leave for these reasons, and improved data collection and analysis of attrition trends and triggers for both those that leave the service, and those that have recently left. However, today there are likely candidates for change that may provide "quick hits" for improved work-life balance in a more immediate sense, where policy change would be more subtle, and demand and impact would overcome bureaucratic pragmatism and cultural barriers to change. Two such examples are telework and flex-time. A key enabler for change in these areas is the availability of established policies for these two initiatives for civilians in DND today. It is recognized that such FWAs are neither needed, nor appropriate or achievable across the full spectrum of military career employment, particularly deployments periods. There are, however, significant windows of opportunity where the "fit" between individual and organizational requirements would support this. Given appropriate implementation support and program measurement/monitoring, action in these areas would address internal dissatisfaction from members previously unsupported in such requests, and send a signal for

improved work-life balance support to the military at large. Rapid implementation of these initiatives would secure smaller "successes", enhancing FWA credibility and lending support to more complex initiatives such as extended leaves of absence and a more seamless transfer of personnel to and from full and part-time service with the Reserves/Militia.

> **"Employers who make an investment in their labour force don't squander that investment. There are not many managers who are going to let somebody steal the Xerox machine, which is worth $30,000 to $35,000 nowadays. And to be unresponsive to the family circumstances of an employee is exactly the same as letting a valuable piece of equipment leave the building."**
>
> **Bob Glossop[lxxxix]**

CONCLUSION

Given that work-life policies and programs are relatively new in both the private and public sectors, leaders must not only be prepared to accept and adopt such programs but also actively champion their implementation in the CF. The inference that such programs are exclusively for women, or that flexible arrangements are inequitable and don't provide a positive contribution to the "bottom-line", or for the military, to operational effectiveness, are myths that must be challenged with hard facts and effective communications.

Programs that promote work-life balance typically result in improved job satisfaction. The increased ability of an individual to control their work load, schedule and work location results in better planning and opportunity for synchronization of personal and organizational requirements. These personnel are more satisfied, more dedicated and more prepared to give back to the organization when extra effort is required. The end-result is better productivity, reduced turnover, less absenteeism and use of sick leave, which decreases overall personnel costs and enhances organizational effectiveness. In the case of the private sector, the net gain

is improved corporate profitability; in the military context, the net gain is improved operational readiness and sustainment.

Work-life balance initiatives will also improve attraction rates, since prospective employees consider the CF not only for the career opportunity and sense of adventure it may afford, but also for the social contract the CF affirms to them in exchange for their commitment to "serve Canada before self".[xc] Unless individuals believe that they and their families will be fully supported by the organization, recruiting growth will not bear fruit in the long term. We can ill afford to be either naive or slow to respond to current warning signals, particularly given the pending personnel crisis and the amplified impact of additional unscheduled attrition on operational effectiveness and force readiness. However, one cannot assume that work-life balance initiatives are a panacea to cure the ills of workforce turnover. Even in the most progressive organizations, work-life programs will achieve nothing unless they are responsive to actual versus perceived employee requirements, and are delivered in an environment that encourages rather than covertly penalizes their use.

The arguments for a more flexible approach to work-life balance in the Canadian Forces are compelling. First, there is a moral or social imperative to look after the people that we have brought into the organization. If we are to optimize the effectiveness of personnel in uniform, then we must be prepared to develop and nurture them as individuals, rather than apply a one size fits all approach to human resource management. This implies that we must be prepared to effectively execute a social contract not only with the individual, but with the family that they support and share their lives with. Through a series of events in the 1980s and early '90s, that mutual sense of trust and commitment has been broken, albeit not irreparably. As a result, there has been increased dissatisfaction with leadership within the military, and a corresponding decrease in individual commitment to and satisfaction with a career in the CF. If our personnel are to continue to take on the challenging operations witnessed to date, then we must be prepared to match this dedication and commitment with innovation and flexibility in our work-life policies. Otherwise, this personal tempo cannot be sustained and both individuals and the overall organization will eventually be broken.

Second, there is a powerful business case for transformational change in how we both manage and support our force. It is not known how many of today's serving personnel are contemplating a career change if organizational change is not forthcoming. Despite a number of demographic trends that will also drive attrition rates in the coming years, both qualitative and quantitative studies tell us that how we respond to growing challenges with work-life balance will do much to either stem or swell the tides to follow. More compelling, our gut should tell us that it is our obligation to take action now to improve the quality of life of our personnel, and in doing so, improve the health and sustainability of our organization. Work-life imbalance associated with role overload and work-to-family interference brings with it increased stress levels, physical health problems, and decreased work and global life satisfaction levels... all of which erode personal productivity, commitment and ultimately, retention and overall force readiness. Work-life balance initiatives can help reverse these trends and in doing so, increase overall retention and the representation of women in uniform.

No matter how successful, it is clear that aggressive recruiting targets cannot immediately replace a trained, highly efficient cadre of professional sailors, soldiers, and airmen without the prerequisite training and career development. The necessary knowledge transfer cannot take place if long-serving members do not stay to participate in this process. Likewise, new enrollees are not likely to remain in uniform if quality of life and work-life balance are not core organizational practices. The case for action is compelling and the time to act is now.

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