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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS/EXERCICE NOUVEAUX HORIZONS

Getting It Together: Group Cohesion Theory and Practice in the Canadian Forces

By/par Major R.K. Gupta

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ABSTRACT

Teamwork is considered vital to mission success in the military, yet Canadian Forces leaders are generally not attuned to how the social and behavioural sciences can assist in forming and sustaining more effective teams. As a result, the Canadian Forces suffer from outmoded thinking on the subject of cohesion, which is generally considered the most important group variable. This paper begins by offering an operational definition of cohesion that is appropriate for a military context. It then breaks down the construct of cohesion into its constituent parts, based on two different models. Finally, it illustrates the dissonance between practice and theory by exploring two myths pertaining to military cohesion: the importance of personnel stability, and the relationship between social cohesion and performance.

*It is not enough to acquire wisdom, it is necessary to employ it.*¹

— Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Finibus* (50 B.C.)

Introduction

“Since the profession of arms can be practiced only collectively, the military ethos places a high value on teamwork in its training and socialization activities.”² This unequivocal statement, taken from the summary of the capstone manual *Duty With Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, reflects the generally held and deeply rooted belief in the military that teamwork is vital to mission success. Given such a belief, one would expect military leaders to actively seek to improve their understanding of how groups work as a means of enhancing teamwork and ultimately boosting operational effectiveness. Yet judging from what is being published in the Canadian Forces’ professional journals, it seems that the concerns of the current leadership revolve principally around force structure, doctrine, and equipment issues. There appears to be little overt interest in exploring how the social and behavioural sciences can assist in forming and sustaining more effective teams.

One possible explanation for the lack of professional discourse on the subject of group dynamics is that most military leaders believe they already know how to instill and stimulate teamwork, and that any further discussion on the topic is moot. After all, the Canadian Forces introduce fundamental leadership and management theory in the early development of all officers and junior leaders, and the military environment affords many opportunities to build on those lessons through both personal observation and practice. Yet the failure of multiple layers

¹*The Macmillan book of proverbs, maxims, and famous phrases*, 2539.

²Department of National Defence, *Summary of Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2003), 15.

of leadership to read the prevailing unit climate prior to and during Canadian peace support operations in Somalia (1993) and Bakovici (1994), and the subsequent breakdown in discipline on both those missions, serve as a vivid reminder that not all military leaders share a common understanding of the variables that influence group processes.³

Based on the premise that theory should always inform practice, this paper will address some of the myths and misconceptions surrounding what is generally considered the most important, and the most studied, small group variable: cohesion.⁴ It will make the case that although the results of pertinent research on group cohesion are readily available, the Canadian Forces continue to suffer from outmoded thinking on the subject. The discussion will begin by offering an operational definition of cohesion that is appropriate for a military context. Next, the construct of cohesion will be broken down into its constituent parts, based on two scientific models. Finally, this paper will illustrate the dissonance between claim and fact by exploring two enduring myths pertaining to group cohesion.

³Donna Winslow, "Misplaced Loyalties: Military Culture and the Breakdown of Discipline in Two Peace Operations," in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, ed. Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 303-304. Canadian troops were charged with serious abuses in Somalia, including the death of a 16-year-old Somali youth following a brutal beating and torture. In Bakovici, soldiers reported various incidents of misconduct including alcohol misuse, sexual misconduct, insubordination, violence, and black market activities. Winslow notes in her analysis that group cohesion can sometimes become so intense that it can subvert the goals of the military organization and undermine discipline.

⁴Albert Carron, "Cohesion in sport teams and exercise groups: An overview of 15 years of research," *Congrès National de la Société Française de la Psychologie du Sport* (Paris : Institut National du Sport et de l'Education Physique, 2000); available from <http://www.unicaen.fr/unicaen/sfps/actes-congres2000-1.html>; Internet; accessed 22 September 2003.

Defining cohesion

Different disciplines define group cohesion in different ways. In fact, the academic literature recognizes that researchers have a difficult time conceptualizing cohesion, probably because the phenomenon has more than one dimension and can therefore be studied under many different guises.⁵ Organizational behaviourists, for example, study individual, team, and structural characteristics that influence behaviour within organizations. They often describe cohesion as “the degree to which members are attracted to and motivated to remain part of a group.”⁶ In this context, the effectiveness of a group is considered to be a function of how persons in that group value their membership and strive to maintain positive relationships with other group members.

This idea of cohesiveness as an affective orientation can be traced back to the work of Leon Festinger and his contemporaries at the University of Michigan’s Research Center for Group Dynamics. In 1950, Festinger developed what is still today considered the seminal definition of cohesion, which he portrayed as

the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group. These forces may depend on the attractiveness or unattractiveness of either the prestige of the group, members of the group, or the activities in which the group engages.⁷

Festinger’s conceptualization, however, grew out of a study of the social relationships in informal and voluntarily constituted groups: while his definition is often cited in works focusing on motivation in organizations, its relevance in a military setting is suspect.⁸

⁵John Levine and Richard Moreland, “Progress in small group research,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 41 (January 1990): 603.

⁶John Schermerhorn, James Hunt, and Richard Osborn, *Managing Organizational Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 249.

⁷Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter, and Kurt Back, *Social Pressure in Informal Groups: A Study of Human Factors in Housing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 274.

Sport and exercise psychologists view group cohesion differently than organizational behaviourists. Their field of study revolves around the psychological factors that are associated with participation and performance in physical activity, but they typically focus on two areas: helping athletes improve their performance, and understanding how participation in physical activity affects an individual's well being. The most widely cited definition of cohesion in contemporary sport and exercise literature was put forward by Albert Carron, a professor of kinesiology at the University of Western Ontario, who describes it as “the dynamic, multidimensional process by which a group sticks together and remains united in pursuit of goals and objectives, and/or satisfaction of group members affective needs.”⁹

This definition implicitly makes a positive association between team cohesion and team success. Carron and others have hypothesized that the type of sport influences the strength of that association: cohesion enhances success in high interaction sports such as basketball or football, but has little impact on coacting sports such as baseball or bowling.¹⁰ A meta-analytic integration of previous studies has since borne out that hypothesis, however it has also demonstrated that the cohesion-performance link is significantly stronger in sports teams than in other types of groups, including the military.¹¹ This serves as a reminder that while there are some similarities between military teams and sports teams, there are also clear differences,

⁸National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy, Options and Assessment* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1993), 287.

⁹Albert Carron, Lawrence Brawley, and Neil Widmeyer, “The measurement of cohesiveness in sport groups,” in *Advances in sport and exercise psychology measurement*, ed. Joan Duda (Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology, 1998), 214.

¹⁰Albert Carron, Steven Bray, and Mark Eys, “Team cohesion and team success in sport,” *Journal of Sports Sciences* 20, no. 2 (February 2002) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.montana.edu/craigs/team%20cohesion.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 October 2003. In a coacting sport, the group goal is accomplished by having each individual perform his task(s) more or less independently of the performance of others.

particularly with regard to the complexity of the environment within which individuals are expected to interact.¹²

It is in recognition of this unique environment that military psychologists have devised their own definition of cohesion. Based largely on the pioneering work of Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz with soldiers of the German Wehrmacht, military definitions of cohesion tend to emphasize the integrative quality of relationships within a group that serve to buffer the negative effects of stress and other disruptive forces and enable its members to carry on with their assigned tasks and missions.¹³ A popular definition of military cohesion, currently in use by the U.S. military, describes the phenomenon as “the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission.”¹⁴ This characterization of cohesion underlines that social bonding in the military is ultimately irrelevant if soldiers lose sight of the combat mission.

The Canadian Forces currently have two distinct definitions of cohesion on the books. The last review of military leadership doctrine dates back to the 1970s and led to the publication of two volumes: the *Junior Leaders Manual* and *The Professional Officer*, often referred to collectively as the CFP 131 series. These publications, which are still in use today, were originally aimed at correcting a training deficiency in human relations, leadership, and management that was perceived

¹¹Brian Mullen and Carolyn Copper, “The Relation Between Group Cohesiveness and Performance: An Integration,” *Psychological Bulletin* 115, no. 2 (March 1994): 224. Meta-analysis is a sophisticated statistical technique used for combining results of related yet independent studies.

¹²Mullen and Copper offer several plausible explanations for the differences between sports teams and other groups: for example, it may be that the salience and legitimacy of standards serve to moderate the effect of cohesion on performance, or perhaps the success or failure of a group’s performance may be more vivid and distinct for sports groups than for others. *Ibid.*, 224.

¹³Shils and Janowitz sought to understand why some units and individuals fought against insurmountable odds while others surrendered or ran away. Contrary to the prevailing opinion at the time, they claimed that face-to-face relationships, rather than ideology, regulated conduct in battle. Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1948): 280-292.

¹⁴John H. Johns, *et al*, *Cohesion in the US Military* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1984), 9.

by the individual Services to be a major factor in attrition.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, therefore, the manuals favor the affective component that is characteristic of an organizational behaviour approach when they describe cohesion as “the degree to which members favourably identify themselves with the group.”¹⁶

Obviously dissatisfied with the managerial tone of this tri-Service initiative, the Army published its own leadership manual in 1988 under the title *Leadership in Land Combat*. Intended for use in conjunction with the CFP 131 series of manuals, the Army’s publication explicitly set forth to target the “development of combat leadership skills by junior leaders in the Armed Forces, specifically the army.”¹⁷ Throughout the volume, *Leadership in Land Combat* encourages military leaders to be wary of the recommendations of group theory as they apply to organizational and academic settings by emphasizing the distinctiveness of the combat environment. The following passage illustrates well the publication’s central theme:

The most common error in applying the models of industrial psychology to the Army is to assume that the conditions of the battlefield are similar to those on the factory floor. The principles [*sic*] of human behaviour are constant; however, the changing situations in battle are unique and require unique solutions. Generalized modes of motivation and leadership which do not consider the nature of the land battlefield are of marginal use in preparing leaders for war.¹⁸

Curiously enough, although the manual devotes an entire section to the examination of the importance and essential nature of cohesion in army units, it never actually defines cohesion.¹⁹ By default, readers are left with the CFP 131 series’ “organizational behavior” interpretation.

¹⁵Department of National Defence, A-PD-131-001/PT-001 *Leadership, Volume 1, Junior Leaders’ Manual* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1973), I-1.

¹⁶Department of National Defence, A-PD-131-002/PT-001 *Leadership, Volume 2, The Professional Officer* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1973), 5-9.

¹⁷Department of National Defence, B-GL-318-015/PT-001 *Leadership in Land Combat, Volume 15, Military Training* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1988), i, 1-2.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, A-1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Chapter 4, 5-9.

This oversight was corrected in the latest iteration of Canadian Army doctrine, outlined in the keystone Land Force manual *Command*. Published in 1996, *Command* was the first Canadian doctrinal manual to clearly articulate the ideas associated with manoeuvre warfare theory by introducing an approach that seeks to achieve success by shattering an opponent's moral and physical cohesion rather than by destroying him physically through incremental attrition. Not surprisingly, the manual also defines cohesion in manoeuvrist terms:

At its simplest, cohesion is unity. It is a quality that binds together constituent parts thereby providing resilience against dislocation and disruption. It minimizes vulnerability to defeat in detail and the adverse effects of pre-emption.²⁰

Its sister manual, *Conduct of Land Operations*, was published two years later and builds on this foundation by adding

Cohesion comprises the general identification with a common aim or purpose, the means to concentrate force in a coordinated and timely manner and the maintenance of high morale. Cohesion reflects the unity of effort in the force. It includes the influence of a well articulated commander's intent focused at a common goal, the motivation and *esprit de corps* of the force and also the physical components necessary to integrate and apply combat power.²¹

Canadian Army doctrine, then, views cohesion as something that comprises both a psychological and a physical component, thereby taking the phenomenon outside the sole purview of the social sciences. It further complicates the issue by equating cohesion to combat potential, rather than treating it as a variable of combat power.

The Army probably never meant to apply this definition of cohesion literally, intending it instead as a doctrinal statement to be used for guiding strategic or operational actions in support of its objectives. For example, the keystone publication *Canada's Army*, which serves as the

²⁰Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 *Land Force Command* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1996), 156. The British Army uses precisely the same definition in its keystone doctrine manual ADP 1 *Operations*, published two years earlier.

²¹Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-001/FP-000 *Conduct of Land Operations – Operational Level Doctrine for the Canadian Army* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1996), 16.

basic source document for the training and instruction of Land forces, asserts that “cohesion is the most important requirement of a combat force” and that “the overriding aim in battle is to do everything, both morally and physically, to break the cohesion of the enemy, while at the same time protecting and enhancing the cohesion of one’s own forces.”²² Based on the historical examples used to illustrate these statements, it is clear that the Army espouses the Clausewitzian view of cohesion as the connection that results from an orderly subordination of the physical and moral components of a military force to a unitary purpose.

Unfortunately, such a figurative explication of cohesion often falls short when applied to real world situations. This explains why the authors of *Advancing with Purpose*, the Army’s latest statement of strategic objectives, felt it necessary to offer two alternate definitions of cohesion in its glossary: the Concise Oxford’s interpretation (cohesion as the “tendency to remain united”), and the U.S. military’s description, presented earlier in this section.²³ Quite tellingly, the glossary prefaces the American description with a qualifier that implies that it is the Canadian Army’s preferred definition of cohesion in a military context. The Army Commander’s vision includes protecting the cohesion of his soldiers “through sharing a collective covenant of trust and common understanding of explicit and implicit intent,” and *Advancing with Purpose* calls for the development and implementation of specific measures and indicators for that cohesion; obviously, nothing in the current departmental lexicon provides a fitting starting point.²⁴

It is clear, then, that the Canadian Forces do not have a suitable definition of group cohesion on the books. This paper will therefore use the American military’s definition, that is

²²Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-000/FP-000 *Canada’s Army: We Stand on Guard for Thee* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), 39-40.

²³Department of National Defence, *Advancing With Purpose: The Army Strategy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2002), 32.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 13, 29.

to say that it will refer to cohesion as “the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission.”²⁵

The many dimensions of cohesion

As mentioned at the beginning of the preceding section, cohesion is not a unitary construct – many factors affect how and why a group sticks together. In trying to come up with a framework for studying cohesion, researchers have developed distinct conceptualizations of the phenomenon that largely reflect their idiosyncratic needs and available resources.²⁶ Two of these conceptualizations have special relevance for Canadian military leaders: Carron’s model, which as previously noted is based on the consideration of sport teams, and the U.S. Army Research Institute’s (ARI) model, which is predicated on the study of military units.²⁷ Carron’s model is important because it underpins the measurement of cohesion in the Canadian Forces’ Unit Morale Profile.²⁸ The ARI construct, on the other hand, is the preferred conceptualization of military cohesion in most of the academic literature on the subject.

²⁵There still is no definitive interpretation of cohesion shared by the applied research community, let alone a common definition for military cohesion. A very good discussion of how the concept has evolved over time and recommendations for a future definition is contained in Guy Siebold, “The Evolution in the Measurement of Cohesion,” *Military Psychology* 11, no. 1 (1999): 5-26.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences is based in Alexandria, Virginia. It is the American Army's lead research laboratory for training, leader development, and personnel research. Their cohesion research program focuses at the squad and platoon levels. Siebold, *The Evolution of the Measurement of Cohesion*, 17.

²⁸Arni Ahronson and Carolin Eberman, *Understanding Leadership and Teams in the Military Context*, Report prepared for the Director Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: Ahronson & Associates, 2002), 18. The Unit Morale Profile, which is still in development, is designed to collect information about issues such as work motivation and satisfaction, feelings about leadership, and perceptions of unit cohesion. For more information, see Department of National Defense, “DHRRE: OEL addresses psychological side of units, operations,” *Canadian Forces Personnel Newsletter* 1/03, 29 January 2003 [publication on-line]; available from http://www.forces.gc.ca/hr/cfpn/engraph/1_03/1_03_dhrre-oel_e.asp; Internet; accessed 15 January 2004.

Carron and his colleagues propose a conceptual model of cohesion that distinguishes between “group integration” and “individual attraction to the group.”²⁹ Group integration reflects individual team members’ perceptions about the workings of the team as a whole, based on the collective degree of congruity with group activities. Individual attraction to the group, as the designation suggests, mirrors individual motivation to remain part of the group as well as personal feelings about the team.

Their model adds another dimension by including task and social cohesion. Task cohesion refers to the shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the whole group. High task cohesion is contingent on having members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve that goal. Social cohesion alludes to the strength of the emotional bonds of caring and closeness among group members. A group displays high social cohesion if its members like each other, prefer to spend time together, and enjoy each other’s company.³⁰

For their part, the ARI researchers define cohesion in terms of the “degree to which mechanisms of social control operant in a unit maintain a structured pattern of social relationships between unit members, individually and collectively, necessary to achieve the unit’s purpose.”³¹ Their conceptualization of the phenomenon distinguishes itself from Carron’s by the fact that it is not restricted to peer bonding (a consequence of the sport research

²⁹ Albert Carron, Neil Widmeyer, and Lawrence Brawley, “The development of an instrument to assess cohesion in sports teams: The Group Environment Questionnaire,” *Journal of Sport Psychology* 7 (1985): 244-266. As noted previously in this discussion, Carron defines cohesion as “the dynamic, multidimensional process by which a group sticks together and remains united in pursuit of goals and objectives, and/or satisfaction of group members affective needs.”

³⁰ National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy...*, 291.

³¹ Siebold, *The Evolution in the Measurement of Cohesion*, 18. This definition is consistent with the description proposed in this paper at the end of the previous section.

antecedents of the latter construct): ARI also includes hierarchical bonding as well as the ties that bind the group to the unit.

The ARI model does share a commonality with Carron's conceptualization, however, since it too distinguishes a task ("instrumental") and a social ("emotive") facet. These aspects are combined with the three basic components in order to differentiate between horizontal cohesion (peer bonding and teamwork), vertical cohesion (leader caring and competence), and organizational cohesion (pride and shared goals).³²

Appropriate tools, such as questionnaires and scales, have been developed and validated for the full range of combinations in both constructs, but the topic of measurement lies outside the scope of this paper. It is however important to note that when discussing cohesion in qualitative terms, the concept is often reduced to a simplified representation along one of only two planes: horizontal and vertical cohesion, i.e. the bond among peers and the bond between leaders and subordinates, or task and social cohesion, i.e. the bond resulting from the shared commitment to achieving a goal and the affective bonds between members.

Myths and Misconceptions

Few Canadian Forces leaders are aware of the multidimensionality of group cohesion, for one very simple reason: there is no mention of the scientific conceptualizations of the phenomenon in any of the departmental doctrine or training publications. As a result, much of what they "know" about cohesion actually has no basis in science. Multiple definitions of cohesion in the existing manuals constitute one barrier to promoting better understanding of this

³²For a more detailed description of the construct, see Guy Siebold and Dennis Kelly, *Development of the Combat Platoon Cohesion Questionnaire* (Alexandria: ARI, 1988), 1-61.

phenomenon. Lessons borrowed out of context from the management section of the local bookstore can have an equally detrimental effect. Then there is the persuasive power of anecdote and narrative: from first-person historical accounts to Hollywood depictions in television and film, dramatic portrayals of success or failure in small group cohesion can be very compelling, yet largely devoid of scientific merit.³³

To further compound the problem, research has shown that the accuracy of military leaders' assessment of the climate in their unit generally varies inversely with both their rank (which correlates with social distance from subordinates) and their subjective level of confidence.³⁴ Self-deception – the active misrepresentation of reality to the conscious mind – is an everyday occurrence, and without objective indicators, supervisors are likely to remain oblivious to problems within their own command.³⁵ In the absence of specific measures of group cohesion, it is at least essential to be aware of some of the more prevalent misconceptions surrounding the phenomenon.³⁶

³³National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy...*, 285. For an illustration of the impact of anecdotal evidence in social psychology and medicine, see Gina Kolata, "Scientific Myths That Are Too Good to Die," *The New York Times*, 6 December 1998, 18; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/library/review/120698science-myths-review.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2004.

³⁴Walter Korpi, "A note on the ability of military leaders to assess opinions in their units," *Acta Sociologica* 8 (1965): 293-303.

³⁵"People tend to hold overly favorable views of their abilities in many social and intellectual domains.... This overestimation occurs, in part, because people who are in these domains suffer a dual burden: Not only do these people reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the metacognitive ability to realize it." Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6 (1999): 1121. Ironically, many researchers believe that there is a biological basis for self-deception and that the phenomenon actually improves fighting ability and motivational strength. See Richard Wrangham, "Is Military Incompetence Adaptive?" *Evolution and Human Behavior* 20, no. 1 (1999): 3-18.

³⁶The Unit Climate Profile is still under development. Currently, there are no systematic procedures or guidelines available for assessing group dynamics in garrison. LGen Richard Hillier, *Army Social Science Research Programme 03-04* (Chief of the Land Staff: file 5762-2 (DLPS 4), 12 June 2003).

Take, for example, the myth surrounding the importance of personnel stability. Increased time spent together is generally considered to facilitate interpersonal communication, which in turn sets the stage for the development of both task and social cohesion.³⁷ The impact of personnel stability on cohesion at the unit level has been a hot topic with the U.S. Army since Vietnam, with such personnel policies as six-month command tenures, twelve-month tours and individual rotations being blamed for “the passivity and lack of cohesion that characterized most units in the latter stages” of the war.³⁸ Canadian Forces leaders have expressed similar concerns with regard to the negative impact of “ad hocery” on unit cohesion: the dramatic rise in operational tempo over the past decade combined with a lack of personnel has led to the propensity to raise *ad hoc* groups for overseas deployments, groups that are perceived to be less cohesive than formed units.³⁹

This impression of familiarity as being essential to cohesiveness (and implicitly effectiveness), though seemingly logical, has no scientific basis. For example, cohesion research has clearly shown that as long as the individuals are competent in their duty positions, randomly formed tank crews, composed of soldiers who do not even know each other, can perform just as well as crews that have been training together for a significant amount of time. In fact, over time, the latter group’s performance actually begins to degrade faster than the newer group’s

³⁷Paul Bartone, *et al*, “Factors Influencing Small-Unit Cohesion in Norwegian Navy Officer Cadets,” *Military Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2002): 7.

³⁸Christopher Straub, *The Unit First: Keeping the Promise of Cohesion* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1988), 4.

³⁹Gen Charles Lemieux, “Articulating the Vision of the Canadian Officer Corps of 2020: Understanding the Leadership and Ethical Challenges,” *Canadian Military Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 34.

performance.⁴⁰ Research surrounding civilian flight crews reveals a similar trend: although newly formed crews need a minimum of time to establish effective communication, after just a few days the randomly formed teams are just as proficient as the more stable crews. They can also maintain their level of proficiency longer than the fixed crews.⁴¹

This is consistent with the American experience with their COHORT program of the early 1980s.⁴² Largely as a result of the “lessons learned” from Vietnam, COHORT aimed at keeping soldiers together from their time of entry in the Army until the end of their initial three-year term. The Army believed that the resulting personnel stability would facilitate the development and maintenance of cohesion, and consequently raise skill and readiness levels. A tremendous amount of energy was invested into sustaining this initiative, yet in the final analysis there was no discernable difference in performance between COHORT and non-COHORT units.⁴³

Does this mean that the Canadian Forces could still function effectively if the fighting force consisted simply of an inventory of troops with a variety of equipment, weapons and skills, to be task organized as required and on a moment’s notice? Certainly not. What it does suggest, however, is that concern over cohesion must not become an obstacle to leaning in that direction should future circumstances require it.⁴⁴ There are alternatives to disproportionately lengthening

⁴⁰ Ward Keesling, *Effects of Personnel Turbulence on Tank Crew Gunnery Performance: A Review of the Literature* (Alexandria: ARI, 1995), 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² COHORT is an acronym for “Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training.”

⁴³ Mark Vaitkus, *Unit Manning System: Human Dimensions Field Evaluation of COHORT Company Replacement Model* (Heidelberg: WRAIR, 1994), 58-60.

⁴⁴ The Army is actively exploring the possibility of moving towards a modular field force structure that would employ self-contained, combined-arms units capable either of independent action or of “plugging-in” to larger formations. To ensure cohesion however, it plans to retain the sub-unit as the basic building block.

the time spent together in the pre-deployment phase if leaders are simply seeking to counter the potential detrimental effects of “ad hocery” on cohesion (after all, an extended pre-deployment phase can introduce its own force generation problems). For example, leaders could focus on ensuring that individual augmentees are proficient at their assigned tasks *before* they join a unit that is preparing to deploy overseas.

Another common misconception about cohesion is that stronger social bonding leads to better performance. Getting soldiers to spend time together in a social setting by organizing sports competitions or simply by encouraging them to frequent each other outside of duty hours is widely believed to deepen an individual’s interest in the group socially, which in turn should lead to bonding that can transfer back to the unit in the form of increased performance. Yet a better understanding of group theory would alert military leaders to the fact that stronger social cohesion does not guarantee a parallel improvement in task cohesion. In fact, under some conditions, quite the opposite can occur.

Strong horizontal cohesion which causes the formation of subgroups or cliques that do not share the same values or goals as the organization (i.e. groups that are not vertically cohesive), can lead to mission failure; a classic example of this in the civilian world is that of a union enforcing “work to rule” at a plant. By the same token, a group may have strong horizontal and vertical cohesion within its ranks, but shun external groups or individuals thereby creating a problem for the larger organization. Although perhaps counter-intuitive, this is why moderate social cohesion is often preferable to the alternative: as long as task cohesion is strong, it is not necessary for soldiers to like each other in order for them to get the job done.⁴⁵

Department of National Defence, *Future Force: Concepts for Future Army Capabilities*, (Kingston: Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts, 2003), 175.

⁴⁵National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy...*, 330.

Conclusion

Many military leaders who have a passion for their craft seem oddly cavalier about how they approach the science of team building. Much of the blame for this state of affairs lies squarely at the feet of the Canadian Forces as an institution: although great strides have been made by the applied research community in understanding the nature of group cohesion and its antecedents, the phenomenon appears to be an undervalued area of professional inquiry in the military. Canadian military doctrine, for its part, contributes little in the way of useful guidance for the individuals who are expected to create and maintain commitment to the mission amongst those they lead. Given that research findings on military cohesion often defy conventional wisdom, to expect results in such a context is at best unproductive and, in extreme cases, can imply the risk of mission failure.

Insisting that leadership doctrine reflect current scientific theory should therefore not be viewed as a pedantic vagary. Clausewitz reminds us that for one who seeks guidance in self-education, good military theory “will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls.”⁴⁶ The Canadian Forces’ view of cohesion has not evolved significantly in 30 years, and consequently its leaders’ perceptions and understanding lag far behind current scientific knowledge. If the military as a profession truly believes in the importance of teamwork, then it is essential that it communicate that scientific knowledge effectively to its membership at large, possibly stimulating a healthy curiosity about group

⁴⁶Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. an

dynamics in the process. Once that is done, it will be up to military leaders, as professionals, to revisit the issue and update their team building skills in order to reconcile practice with theory.

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