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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**COMPETENCY-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR
STRATEGIC-LEVEL MILITARY LEADERSHIP**

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COMPETENCY-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STRATEGIC-LEVEL MILITARY LEADERSHIP

“In a global environment where change is the only constant, successful organizations ensure their leaders are adaptable, innovative and knowledgeable. The breadth and depth of our commitments, the complexity of demands placed upon us and the enormous consequences of failure make this especially true for the Canadian Forces”.¹

INTRODUCTION

The decade of the 1990s, which formed the frame of reference for this observation by Brigadier-General Lemieux,² was one of great challenge for the Canadian Forces (CF) and, by extension, its strategic leaders. Indeed, the challenges were of such a magnitude that the period came to be referred to by some as the “decade of darkness.”

The confluence of the end of the Cold War and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, coupled with the resultant and almost universal demand within western democracies for a ‘peace dividend’, would prove to have significant consequences for the militaries of these countries. Canada would be no exception. Indeed, the challenge for the military in Canada was exacerbated even more by the decision of the government of the day (and aggressively pursued by subsequent governments) to tackle the challenges of the large and growing national debt and annual deficits.

¹ Lemieux, Brigadier-General Charles, *The Strategic Leaders Program*, Ottawa, February 24, 2003

² Brigadier-General Lemieux served as Special Advisor to the Chief of the Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces on General and Flag Officer Professional Development from 1999-2003

This attack on the debt and deficits began with full force with promulgation of the 1989, a budget which ‘laid waste’ to the 1987 White Paper and its vision of 90,000 regular and 90,000 reservists, along with a virtual ‘dream list’ of capital procurements.

These changing geo-political and economic circumstances should have provided the strategic leadership with a clear signal that the CF would have to adapt and to literally ‘re-invent’ itself. As a ‘consumer’ of forty per cent of the discretionary spending available at that time to the government, the Department of National Defence (DND) loomed as a target rich environment. Yet the department and the forces failed to adapt to this changing reality.³ General Maurice Baril, former Chief of the Defence Staff, confirmed this assessment in his introduction to “Canadian Officership in the 21st Century”:

“Here at home we are slow to understand and adapt to large-scale societal demands associated with the end of the Cold War and, therefore, were not prepared to meet these demands”.⁴

As a consequence of this failure by the senior military and civilian leadership of the department, the CF found itself very much in a reactive mode throughout the nineties and, lacking any form of strategy, unable to fend off successive budget cuts and force reductions. Thus, the CF emerged from the decade essentially in a survival and barely sustainable mode. It also emerged from the decade with a cohort of strategic leaders whose principal competency appeared to be ‘managing scarcity’.⁵ Simply stated, the

³ This perspective on the decade of the 1990s derives from notes on a presentation to NSSC Courses by Lieutenant-General (retired) F.R. Sutherland

⁴ Canadian Department of National Defence, *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020)*, Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2001. p iii

⁵ Department of National Defence. *Achieving Administrative Efficiency*. Report to the Minister of National Defence. Ottawa, 2003

leadership had failed to discharge what General Gordon Sullivan characterized as the key responsibility of strategic leaders - specifically "...to create the future".⁶

This paper will assert that, to ensure the availability of general and flag officers possessed of the strategic leadership competencies required to meet the ongoing transformation challenges – to create the future – a more competency-based model of professional development, including career management and professional military education, is required.

OUTLINE

To make the case for competency-based development of strategic leaders in the CF, the paper will first describe strategic leadership roles and examine the competencies determined to be prerequisite for effective strategic military leadership. This section will build upon the Senior Leaders Project carried out by Brigadier-General Lemieux and, subsequently, research conducted by the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI). Research on strategic leadership conducted by the US Army and in the private sector will also be reviewed. The current system of professional development (PD), including professional military education (PME) and career management (CM), will then be examined. Finally, recommendations for improvements to the system, assessed as necessary to enable the future cohort of senior CF leaders to develop the strategic level competencies they require, will be presented.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ROLES

“Strategic leadership is the process used by a leader to effect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive and building consensus

⁶ Sullivan, General G.R. and Harper, M., *Hope is Not A Method*, New York, N.Y. 1996, p.6

within a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment which is marked by opportunities and threats”.⁷

The principal responsibility of the officers who discharge the strategic leadership function in the Canadian Forces is to lead the institution.⁸ In so doing they “... have significant influence on the CF as an institution, its members, the development and implementation of CF policy, the integration of CF/DND policy and the representation of the CF within the domestic and international an international security environments”.⁹

The roles they discharge in leading the institution are detailed in Canadian Forces Leadership documentation and include:

- Adapting to the external environment, through strategic forecasting, planning and the initiation of strategic change.
- Achieving internal alignment, through the communication of strategic intent, formalization of policy and doctrine, control of activities and resources and performance measurement.
- Influencing the external environment, through direct advice, partnerships or cooperative arrangements, public affairs activities and professional networks.
- Exercising stewardship of the profession, through the strengthening of professional capabilities and culture.¹⁰

These roles are mirrored in their articulation in the United States Army War College (USAWC) Strategic Leadership Primer.¹¹ They are:

- Provide vision.

⁷ Department of Command, Leadership and Management, U.S. Army War College (DCLM), *Strategic Leadership Primer*, Carlisle Barracks PA. 1998, p.5

⁸ Note: It is acknowledged that in the DND organizational construct, the strategic level “Defence Team” comprises not only the Chief of the Defence Staff and his senior general and flag officers, but also the Deputy Minister and his Assistant Deputy Ministers. However, for the purposes of this paper, only the military element of the strategic level leadership will be examined.

⁹ Canadian Forces Leadership Institute Draft, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution*, Kingston, 2005

¹⁰ A-PA-005-000/AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces*, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Ottawa, 2005, p. 100

¹¹ USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer, p. 44

- Shape culture.
- Represent the organization.
- Lead and Manage change.

These roles are expressed succinctly by Lieutenant-General Chilcoat, former President of the National Defense University, as follows.

“The **strategic leader** provides vision and focus, masters command and peer leadership skills, inspires others to think and act and coordinates ends, ways and means”.¹²

From the foregoing, it is readily evident that a great deal is asked of the strategic military leader, no less in peacetime than in times of conflict. The environment in which they lead is one of multiple constituencies, both inside and external to the organization. These constituencies often represent different and competing agendas, making it difficult to achieve unity of purpose and unity of effort, even in pursuit of a shared and agreed vision. Exacerbating the challenge and, as already noted, the environment is also one of virtual perpetual change – political, technical and sociological. Given this wide array of roles and the challenges confronting the strategic leader, what are the competencies he/she requires to succeed?

COMPETENCIES¹³

“It became clear to me that at the age of 58, I would have to learn new tricks that were not taught in the military manuals or on the military battlefield. In this position I am a political soldier and will have to put my training in rapping out orders and making snap decisions on the back burner and have to learn the arts of persuasion and guile. I must become expert in a whole new set of skills.”¹⁴

General George Marshall
Chief of Staff United States Army

¹² Chilcoat, Major-General R.A., *Strategic Art: The New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College: Carlisle Barracks, PA. October 1995. p iv

¹³ Catano, V.M. *Competencies: A Review of the Literature and Bibliography*. CHRA Report, Halifax. 1998. For the purposes of this paper, the definition of ‘competency’ will be that developed by Catano as the “... knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes (KSOAs) that underlie effective job performance”. p. 58

¹⁴ Cited by Cadotte, Col P. *Human Factor at the Strategic Level*, National Security Studies Course 1 Paper, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, May 1999, p. 1

The challenge to adapt confronting General Marshall, remains equally valid in today's strategic military leadership arena. Indeed, it may even be greater, given the added complexity inherent in today's environment. To meet those challenges and to perform effectively, today's generals and admirals must be equipped with a large and growing complement of personal and professional competencies. In recent years, and in recognition of the critical importance of these competencies to organizational success, a significant body of writing has been generated on the subject of competencies. In the early 1980s such writings focused on the private sector and, specifically, the business world. However, beginning in the late 1980s, the militaries of both Canada and the United States began to devote research to this important subject.

Not surprisingly, the increasing body of literature has produced list after list of the competencies deemed prerequisite for successful strategic level leadership. For the purposes of this paper, the competency model developed at the US Army War College was reviewed used to examine a representative sample of key competencies required for effective strategic leadership. This seminal work was selected for two reasons: First, it obviously deals with leadership in a military context, thus avoiding the potential pitfalls inherent in adopting competencies identified in a purely business corporate context – a context which does not address the unlimited liability underpinning of the profession of arms.¹⁵ Second, it builds on extensive research conducted for the first edition, published in 1997, as well as additional research conducted by a team of academics and students at the College that led to the second edition in 2003. In this second edition, the team was

¹⁵ See Caravaggio, Lieutenant-Colonel A. N. *Command and the Military Leader Competency Model* Unpublished Work Canadian Forces College, Toronto, 2004, p.1 for a more complete discussion of this issue.

successful in distilling the extensive list of competencies identified by numerous writers and researchers, which required that strategic leaders “...be, know and do” just about everything (44 competencies in all) into a much more manageable and understandable grouping of three categories: ***Conceptual Competencies; Technical Competencies; and Interpersonal Competencies.***¹⁶ Importantly, this modified grouping correlates very closely with CF writings in this area, including a similar study on strategic leadership competencies conducted for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI)¹⁷. Finally, and very usefully for the section of this paper which will address the development of future strategic leaders, the researchers were able to provide “...aiming points for an integrated leader development system”.¹⁸ These three categories of competencies - conceptual, technical and interpersonal - will now be examined.

CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCIES

One of the key challenges facing strategic leaders is that of extraordinary complexity. The problems confronting them are often ill defined and highly complex; as a result, the solutions to such problems can be ambiguous and involve considerable risk. Additionally at the strategic level decisions will likely have significant and long lasting impacts and therefore, the adverse consequences of errors can be great. In order to deal with these kinds of issues, strategic leaders must be capable of conceptual thought, the ability to synthesize complex issues, “...to develop an idea or object that makes some

¹⁶ Wong, L., Gerras, S., Kidd, W., Pricone, R., Swengros, R., *Strategic Leadership Competencies USAWC Report*, Carlisle PA. P. 3 The “Be, Know, Do” typology listed 44 competencies

¹⁷ Paquet, S., Hambley, L., Kline, T. *Strategic Leadership Competencies in the Canadian Forces*, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Kingston, 2003

¹⁸ Wong, L et al p.iii

other idea more comprehensible.”¹⁹ They must also be able to conduct strategic analysis, a process which requires innovation, intuition, mental agility, lateral thinking, judgement and vision.²⁰ This also requires them to be able to think holistically, factoring in the potential second and third order consequences of the decision on the organization.

General Hillier, Chief of the Defence Staff of the CF, summarized these many elements of highly developed cognitive thought in his challenge to the CF PME system to produce officers capable of “intellectual agility and creative thinking.”²¹

It is through application of these intellectual competencies, and based on accumulated experience and knowledge, that the senior leader is able to develop a personal strategic frame of reference, a ‘situational awareness’ of the relevant factors in the environment in which he/she is leading and which will impact on the decision to be made. Development of this framework is a necessary prerequisite to enable the leader to formulate and articulate a vision for his/her organization. This creative process, widely acknowledged as the key role of the strategic leader, lays out the leader’s intent and objectives and, in so doing, defines the envisaged future - what the organization “...ought to be”.²² The vision also serves as to provide the organization and its people with a unifying sense of purpose and direction and, as a result, serves as a source of individual and collective motivation. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this process and the conceptual and cognitive skills the leader must apply in its development.

¹⁹ Guillot, Colonel M.S., *Critical Thinking For the Military Professional*, Air and Space Power Chronicles, June 2004. p.1 <http://www.airpower.au.mil/airchronicles/cc/guillot.html>. Accessed 2/23/2006

²⁰ McCann, C., and Pigeau, R., *The Human in Command*, New York. 1998

²¹ Remarks to CSC Course 32

²² USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer, p. 20

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

“While the technical skills used at the lower levels are important elements of the strategic leader’s frame of reference, they usually are not relevant to the specific tasks at the higher level.”²³

The technical skills developed at the tactical and operational levels, while not used directly by the strategic leader remain important. It is the knowledge of his/her craft which contributes to the credibility of the strategic leaders, particularly in command roles. That being said, and as noted, at the strategic level, technical competencies relate more to understanding of organizational systems and relationships, both internal and external to the organization. The leader must know the processes and the organizational dynamic (including the internal ‘politics’) of the organization. Additionally, they must understand the place of the organization in the larger domestic bureaucracy. Finally, the leader must be ‘small p’ politically aware and astute, in order to be able to effectively operate in the larger arena of government.

Through development of this base of knowledge, the strategic leader can be a strong and credible voice in the policy formulation process and an effective advocate for advancement of the interests of the organization.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES

“Leaders must become *cosmopolitans* who are comfortable operating across boundaries and who can forge links between organizations. They must take their ability to craft visions, inspire action and empower others and use it to encourage people from diverse functions, disciplines and organizations to find common cause in goals that improve the entire organization.”²⁴

The competencies to be discussed in this section are those that are essential to enable the strategic leader to implement – to give effect to - the vision he/she has articulated for the organization. This ability represents the all-important and, indeed, critical second half of the strategic leadership equation – execution. As asserted by Larry Bossidy “Without the ability to execute, all other attributes of leadership become hollow.”²⁵

²³ USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer, p. 40

²⁴ Kanter, R.M., *The Leader of the Future*, San Francisco, 1996, p. 90

²⁵ Bossidy, L. and Chara, R., *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, New York, NY. 2002, p.34

The competencies requisite for success in execution are primarily about the ‘people dimension’ of the leadership challenge. That success requires the leader to be able to effectively communicate the vision to a wide variety of target audiences and stakeholders. These audiences will be both internal and, increasingly, external. The strategic leader must also be able to achieve consensus, both internally and externally. This is particularly challenging given the lateral relationships that are a constant at the strategic level. Predictably and understandably, given the resistance to change that characterizes most organizations (including the military and the larger bureaucracy), not all will share the leader’s vision. As a consequence, the he/she must also possess well-honed negotiation skills including the ability to formulate an acceptable position, to listen effectively, to communicate respect for the position of others, to discern unspoken agendas and to detach oneself personally from the negotiation process.²⁶

To demonstrate the application of these competencies, a case study - specifically strategic leadership role played by General Hillier following the promulgation in February 2005 of his vision for the Canadian Forces - is instructive. Having first secured the personal support of the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence for his vision, he began by conducting an unprecedented series of ‘town hall’ meetings within the Department for both military and civilian audiences to obtain their critically important buy-in. He then took his message to the senior leadership of the broader federal bureaucracy. Finally he communicated with Canadians, both directly in further ‘town hall’ meetings, presentations to service clubs, universities and schools and, indirectly, through the media. Using a sports metaphor, he put on a ‘full

²⁶ USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer, p. 42

court press'. His interaction with the media is particularly noteworthy, reflecting a great deal of 'media savvy', another important competency for the strategic leader.

It is important to note that General Hillier's communications strategy was not a 'one-shot' effort; rather it remains both persistent in its application and consistent in its message. In this regard, it is also important to note that another key to his success is his ability to convey his message in clear and unambiguous 'down to earth' and easily understood language, carefully avoiding the propensity of the military to speak in jargon and acronym-filled language.

His personal involvement and charismatic personality have resonated within the military and with Canadians at large. As a consequence, his role as a champion of military values, his praise of military personnel and their families, and expressions of pride in their accomplishments, have also served to enhance pride in the organization and to inspire and motivate the 'troops'. Through these people-focused efforts, General Hillier was very visible and clearly identified as the face and champion of change – another key competency required for successful strategic organizational change.

This example also illustrates another reality of the life of a strategic leader; specifically that he/she will be required to spend a great deal of time outside the organization, dealing with leaders of the government, the bureaucracy, leaders of other militaries and opinion leaders in the country.

In summary, this review of only a sample of conceptual, technical and interpersonal competencies serves to demonstrate the challenges inherent in the discharge of the strategic leadership role. When the array of personal attributes (credibility, trust, courage, integrity) are added to the list of requirements, it is easy to see why truly

outstanding and successful strategic are among the ‘rare few’. How then does the CF produce such leaders ?

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT – THE CURRENT SYSTEM

“... there exists no education or training other than experiential to prepare senior officers for the highest levels of leadership within the Canadian Forces. An arrogance, based on the notion that “the system worked alright for me and I’ve done alright” remains a firewall to intellectual development and reform in this regard.”²⁷

While this critical assessment of the professional development system by Lieutenant-Colonel Horn may have been valid in 2000, considerable improvement has been made in the intervening years. Responding to the criticisms arising from the Somalia Inquiry²⁸, a study on leadership in the Canadian Forces was commissioned by the then Minister of National Defence, The Honourable Doug Young. The resultant report produced several recommendations on the career management and education of both the officer and non-commissioned member corps.²⁹ These included

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The CF aggressively implemented most of the recommendations. By way of evidence, the Senior Leaders Project was set up in 1999 by the then CDS, General Henault, to address the professional development needs of General and Flag Officers (GOFOs). A major study was conducted and a report was produced to guide development of the officer corps³⁰ and the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute was stood up in 2002 to serve as a centre of excellence for the study of leadership. Additionally, and very

²⁷ Horn, Lieutenant-Colonel B., *Contemporary Issues in Officership : A Canadian Perspective*, Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, Toronto, 2000 p. 129

²⁸ [Somalia Report](#)

²⁹ *Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces*

³⁰ *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century*, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Kingston. 2001

importantly, the Advanced Military Studies Course (AMSC) and the National Security Studies Course (NSSC) were established at the Canadian Forces College in 1999 to redress the significant post-Command and Staff Course gap which had developed in officer professional development for senior and general and flag officers following the close of the National Defence College in 1994. In particular, the NSSC was designed to focus its learning at the strategic level, reflecting its aim to: “Prepare generals, flag officers, selected colonels, naval captains and civilian equivalents for strategic leadership responsibilities in the development, direction and management of national defence and security policy.”³¹

CURRENT SYSTEM OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

However, and notwithstanding these many adaptations and improvements, the current professional development system is still not optimized to inculcate the future strategic level cohort of the CF with the competencies identified earlier in this paper. The system is based on three pillars: experience, education and self-study and a commitment to life-long learning. Indeed this latter commitment is embedded in the Mission Statement of the Canadian Defence Academy: “To champion life-long learning and CF professional development in support of the Defence Mission.”³²

The current career management system consists of providing officers with a variety of line and staff appointments, as well as opportunities to enhance their knowledge through PME courses and second language training. Selection for promotion is based on evaluation of performance and a subjective assessment of the officer’s potential for higher rank and responsibility. Indeed, the officer evaluation is more heavily weighted to

³¹ Canadian Forces College, *National Securities Studies Course Curriculum*, Toronto 2006, p. 7

³² Leadership in The Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution, p. 178

this assessment of potential than that of performance. Selection for promotion is made by merit boards, comprised of officers of higher rank. The system is fair and has served the CF reasonably well during the past.

However, the application of this process in the selection of officers for promotion to flag rank staff has two significant shortcomings: The first is “The implicit and somewhat tenuous assumption of this selection process that those who are successful in the direct level of leadership³³ will acquire, as they rise to higher echelons of command, the requisite skills and experiences for strategic leadership”³⁴. Secondly the performance evaluation reports are written by officers whom likely will have no experience at the strategic level and, as or more importantly, little knowledge of the competencies required. Absent this knowledge and experience, how can they then be reasonably expected to assess potential for successful performance at that level?

Most officers selected for promotion to flag rank will have had little exposure to strategic level, except for the few who may be assigned to positions working directly with general and flag officers at the strategic level National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ). General DeChastelain, a former CDS provides an excellent example “My initial assignment to National Defence Headquarters did not happen until I was a Brigadier-General and then only after two postings in that rank elsewhere. That NDHQ assignment lasted only one year before I was sent back ‘to the field’. Thus I was faced with a

³³ Essentially, this is leadership at the tactical and operational levels and involves of leading people vice leading the institution

³⁴ Flowers, Colonel M., *Improving Strategic Leadership*, Military Review, Fort Leavenworth, March-April 2004. p. 42

learning curve that meant that I was not able to work at an optimum level during my first year in Ottawa, nor in subsequent appointments there.”³⁵

With respect to the education pillar and, as noted, considerable improvement has been made, principally through enhancements to the curriculum of the Command and Staff Course and the introduction of the AMSC and NSSC programs at the Canadian Forces College. These programs equip selected officers with the opportunity to acquire, on a phased basis, knowledge of each of the tactical, operational and strategic levels. However, in this system, study of the strategic level first occurs during NSSC, when most of the attendees are at or around the 25-year point of their career. Given the complexities of and the challenges inherent in exercising leadership at the strategic level, there is an emergent school of thought that development of strategic leaders must begin much earlier in the careers of officers. Colonel Flowers asserts simply, but forcefully, that “...developing strategic leaders at the War College level comes too late.”³⁶ Colonel Ferron makes a similar case, asserting that “The training of a strategic leader can no longer be isolated to senior officers, dependent on the traditional and cultural tenets of command and leadership. The process must be continual, striving to develop and reinforce strategic leadership skills for the outset of a military career.”³⁷ Allan English supports this education imperative by arguing that “... greater effort is required to impress upon the leadership of the future that the nurturing of strategic skills requires a long-term and sustainable education programme.”³⁸

³⁵ Leadership in the Canadian Forces, p. 101

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 43

³⁷ Ferron, Colonel J. *Developing Strategic Leaders – An Evolutionary Process*, NSSC 7 Paper, Canadian Forces College, Toronto. May 2005, p. 6

³⁸ English, A. *Comments on DP2 QS/TP Board Documents*, Development Period Three Study 2001 – Volume Four, cited by Col Ferron p. 18

In summary, from the point of view of the experience pillar, the legacy model of career management and selection is not optimized to produce strategic leaders with the competencies requisite for success at that level. With respect to the education pillar, recent changes to the PME system of the CF, particularly the introduction of the NSSC, are helping to better prepare selected officers to function at the strategic level. That said, absent clear articulation (and acceptance!) of the concept of competencies by the senior leadership and a focusing of both career management and education on developing those competencies, the professional development system is performing sub-optimally.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC LEADERS

“If becoming a strategic leader is the ‘ends’, then leadership is the ‘ways’ and development is the ‘means’³⁹

As noted in the initial section of this paper, a great deal has been written about the importance of the development of competencies for those who will be called upon to exercise leadership at the strategic level. Considerable research has been conducted in both within the private sector and by several militaries.⁴⁰ The need to develop such competencies within the CF officer corps for those who would accede to senior levels has been clearly identified in the research and in the CF’s own vision for the officer corps – Canadian Officership in the 21st Century. Indeed, two of the eight listed strategic objectives in that document relate to the creation of a learning organization staffed by leaders who are able to conceptualize and to formulate innovative responses to

³⁹ Guillot, p. 6

⁴⁰ Although reference has been made only to the research conducted for the US militaries, similar research on strategic level competencies has been conducted in other militaries (United Kingdom, Australia and Singapore).

unorthodox situations through intellectual acuity and objective analysis.”⁴¹ Yet little has been done to translate that research into changes in the education system and career management processes.

While the scope of this paper does not permit a comprehensive description of a professional development system which would address the challenge of producing a strategic leadership cohort with the competencies presented earlier, some proposals for action will be offered. These suggestions will address the career management and the education pillars of professional military development.

The necessary pre-condition for change is the educating of and resultant acceptance by the current generation of the senior leadership of the validity – and the potential – of the use of competencies as the underpinning for professional development. The case should be made for the development of two arrays of competencies: *generic* – those conceptual, technical and interpersonal competencies required by **all** strategic leaders; and *tailored* – those competencies linked to specific level one positions. Implementation of a competency based model further requires top down direction to the career management and professional military education systems to adapt their respective systems to effect implementation to ‘make it happen’.

Career Management

To be effective, the envisaged career development process should not be controlled and directed, as it is at present, by the military human resources (HR) organization; their role should be to provide specialist advice. “In truth, the HR function cannot run the talent development function. It requires the commitment and engagement of senior line

⁴¹ Officership 2020, p. 5,7

management.”⁴² Therefore, acceptance of competency based development has to translate into ‘ownership’ of the succession planning process by the senior leadership, logically the CDS and the members of his Armed Forces Council. It cannot be a ‘launch and leave’ approach if it is to be successfully implemented. “The CEO and his senior team ensure that talent retention and development are seen as one of the corporation’s highest priorities.”⁴³

It is acknowledged that this ownership and the requirement for top down direction bring a considerable demand on the time of senior leaders. This time should be viewed as an important investment in the future of the CF and part of the stewardship responsibilities of the senior leadership. Although, and as already noted, not a direct parallel, it is worth noting that CEOs of world class and successful corporations are seized of this imperative. For example, Larry Bossidy and Jack Welch, two of the most successful CEOs in the US “... arguably masters of people decisions at the top would invest up to half their time in such activities.”⁴⁴ devote over fifty per cent of their time to the development and succession planning of their executive talent.

A key part of this of this process of succession planning would have to be developed to facilitate the early identification of ‘high flyers’⁴⁵, notionally at the rank of lieutenant-colonel/commander.⁴⁶ The careers of these officers would then be carefully

⁴² Gandz, J. *Remove Clogs in Your Talent Pipeline*. Globe and Mail, Toronto, March 10, 2006. p. C9

⁴³ Fulmer, Robert M and Conger, Jay, A., *Growing Your Company's Leaders*, American Management Association, New York. 2004,p. 42

⁴⁴ Fernandez-Aroaz, C., *Getting the Right People at the Top*, MIT Sloan Management Review, Summer 2005, Cambridge. 2005

⁴⁵ McCall, Morgan W. *High Flyers – Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business School 1998. The author provides an excellent description of the process being adopted by world class corporations in the development of their senior executives. Many of the initiatives have direct applicability in a military context.

⁴⁶ It is important to inject a caveat to this process of early identification. While the career management system is capable of adapting to the circumstance in which one of the identified ‘high flyers’ subsequently

managed to ensure they receive the proper developmental career assignments and other development opportunities necessary to ensure they arrive at the strategic level with the required competencies. This recommendation would respond to the increasing body of thought which indicates that the development of strategic leaders must be an evolutionary process, which begins much earlier in an officer's career. To reiterate the assertion of Colonel Flowers, an assertion supported in several of the writings researched for this paper "... developing strategic leaders at the War College level comes too late."⁴⁷

Those officers identified as possessing the 'potential', not only for increased rank but also and very importantly, having the more specific potential to develop - to achieve the identified and accepted competencies - would receive early assignment to development positions identified as key to competency development. Examples of these development positions would include assignments to the personal staff of a strategic leader as an Executive Assistant or Special Advisor. Outreach appointments in other departments or the central agencies such as the Privy Council Office, Treasury Board and Foreign Affairs Canada would also be included. These appointments would provide first-hand exposure to the strategic level environment, as well as to the leadership style and competencies of their generals, flag officers or senior level bureaucrats. The importance of these developmental positions has been identified in CF Leadership documentation:

"While strategic leadership is expected of officers who occupy the most appointments in the CF, it must be emphasized that the staffs who work for and support them must shape their understanding and world views if they are to be fully effective."⁴⁸

demonstrates a lack of ability to rise to flag rank, it must also be capable of identifying the 'late bloomer' and adapting career management patterns to enable those officers to enter the advanced development stream. Care must also be taken not to create any impression of 'elites'.

⁴⁷ Flowers, *Strategic Leadership Primer*, p. 43

⁴⁸ *Leadership in the Canadian Forces*, p. 75

Professional Military Education

As noted earlier, post-Somalia improvements to the professional military education in the CF have been both significant and noteworthy. The current system is based on development periods linked to ranks (e.g. Development Period (DP) 3 is aimed at Majors/Lieutenant-Colonels and naval equivalents; Development Period (DP) 4 is aimed at Lieutenant-Colonels/Colonels and naval equivalents). The curricula are further linked to the tactical, operational and strategic levels and, thus, are fairly compartmentalized. In recent years, considerable ‘compression’ between these levels has been identified, particularly in operations. The implication for the officer corps is that, increasingly, junior officers must develop an awareness of the strategic level and the potential implications of their actions and/or decisions at that level. The resultant implication for the education system, as it is for the career management system, is the requirement for exposure to the strategic level in the curricula of the DP3 and DP 4 level programs. A review of the existing curricula indicates that only fine tuning would be required. This fine tuning, which should include lectures and discussions on strategic leadership roles and required competencies, along with exposure to strategic leaders who would address strategic level issues in their presentations to CFC and AMSC students, should serve to meet this need. The NSSC curriculum which, as noted, focuses on the strategic level, provides a solid introduction to the challenges of leadership at the strategic level, both in the curriculum material and, practically, through an array of exercises.

However, beyond NSSC, there is little opportunity for continuing learning. The single opportunity is the week long Executive Leaders Symposium for newly promoted

general and flag officers. It is suggested that this single opportunity need to be reinforced with other learning opportunities.

In this regard, the Senior Leaders Project identified this shortcoming and offered the following recommendations which merit consideration:

- Institutionally supported self-development among senior leaders on a self-starting, self-regulating basis, with opportunities internal and external to the CF. Examples include professional development plan development with academic mentors, other senior leaders and subject matter experts; several day (one week) exchanges with other government departments; brief executive seminars at universities; focused reading lists on specified subject matter; short term battlefield tours, multi-rater 360 degree assessment and feedback; and
- Targeted CDA-sponsored seminars (short, sharp, exclusive (privileged platform), convenient (on-site), half day, responsive to senior leader identified needs) and facilitated for open exchanges and general discussions.

In summary, it is recommended that the current systems of both career management and military education require change if they are to provide the future generation of strategic level CF leaders with the personal and professional competencies they will need.

CONCLUSION

The decade of the 1990s found the strategic level leadership of the CF wanting in their ability to effect the strategic change required to adapt to the rapidly changing geopolitical and economic environment. Through no fault of their own, the professional development system had simply not equipped them with the personal and professional competencies they would have required to meet this challenge.

Experience to date in the new millennium clearly demonstrates that the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment will be a constant in the lives of these leaders. As a consequence, their primary role of *leading the institution* will continue to be

a demanding one. This paper has asserted that, in order to successfully meet these challenges, these leaders will require a full complement of conceptual, technical and interpersonal competencies.

In order to do so, it is further asserted that changes to the current legacy system of career management will have to be effected. These changes must include acceptance of the concept of competencies by the current senior leadership, as well as their 'ownership' of the career management system (with the HR organization providing specialist support). Early and frequent exposure to the strategic level, through selection of those identified as 'high flyers' to selected developmental assignments, will be required. These assignments should also include outreach opportunities with other departments to broaden their horizons and to build relationships.

Changes will also be required in the professional military education system, to complement this early experiential introduction to the strategic level. These changes should include fine tuning of the CSC and AMSC curricula and include greater exposure to strategic level leaders. For general and flag officers, post-NSSC education opportunities must be provided, particularly in those cases where development of specific 'tailored' competencies is required for a future assignment to a level one position.

The experiential and educational development of the next cohort of strategic level CF requires a new focus on the providing them with the competencies they require – the visioning, the strategic conceptual thinking, the communications and the relationship building competencies – if they are to successfully continue the transformation journey upon which General Hillier has embarked the Canadian Forces.

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