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REVIEW OF THE ARMY'S MID-LEVEL SUCCESSION PLANNING

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AIM

1. This service paper will focus on how the Canadian Army is assessing the career progression of mid-level Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) leaders. The literature is well established for senior management/leadership in large organizations; however, the recently completed CAF Development Period (DP) 4/5¹ Study identifies significant issues in developing fully effective general/ flag officers (GO/FO). While this study made recommendations for developing senior Colonels and Generals, there is a clear requirement to also consider the effective development of Majors (Maj) and Lieutenant-Colonels (LCol). Therefore, this paper will provide recommendations on how to expand on the DP 4/5 study by examining issues related to mid-level leader career succession.

INTRODUCTION

2. Is the Canadian Army effective and efficient in developing the proper middle level leaders (Maj to LCol) to provide tomorrow's leaders? This service paper will answer this question using two of the career succession planning tools, the appraisal system and the Army Succession Plan (ASP) available to manage the career progression of Majors and the Lieutenant-Colonels. What does succession mean? It refers to "the process within an organization associated with the required movement of personnel to replace the departing personnel."² But why do we need to focus on the officers at the mid-level range? Simple, a large organization like the army must always know and recognize the available leadership talent in its pipeline (5-10 years out) so it can employ the right person in the right place at the right time. Therefore, it must groom the

¹ Director Military Personnel Strategies and Coordination. *Succession management: A Concept Paper*. Director Military Personnel Strategies and Coordination. *Succession management: A Concept Paper*.

² J. J. Gauvin, "Canadian Forces Executive Succession Planning: A Deliberate, Career-Long Process." (Canadian Forces College, June 2000)

majors of today to become the generals of tomorrow. As stated by Denis Carey (a leader in corporate governance), “The common conception of succession planning...has to do with changing leadership at the top, [but] the bottom of the organization is where succession planning actually starts if organization really wishes to develop their own talent.”³ This will not happen until the Army revamps/reinforces its ASP (Land Force Command Orders (LFCO) 11-79). Some improvements could be made to improve the situation; one which will be discussed in further detail is to have the appropriate staff in charge of succession planning at the branch/regimental level. The discussion will also focus on the need to revamp the appraisal system in order to conduct more successful merit boards that are more transparent and fair for the member.

DISCUSSION

3. An extensive literature review conducted on succession planning has been conducted and can be summed up as follows. To be successful, a succession planning model should have the following five stages: 1) recognizing the key importance of succession planning, 2) identifying possible successors, 3) determining who is the best possible successor, 4) mentoring them to be ready, and 5) finally taking over the reins.⁴ This discussion will look at all the stages and how they are conducted in the Canadian Army with a specific focus on succession planning for the Maj rank to determine what improvements could be made.

4. First stage: recognizing that succession planning (SP) is necessary. All branches of the military have their own SP directive, and all of them differ a little bit in their application, but the bases are the same. In the CAF, our succession planning is based on the competency model: “the availability of succession planning information and processes both to the employers and to the

³ Micheal Colarusso (Lt. Col) and Lyle David (Lt. Col). “Talent Management, Six Constraints on Senior Officer Succession Planning.” (*Army*, July 2014): 23-25.

⁴ Carroll Thatcher & Thatcher Meredith. “Passing the Torch- Corporate Succession Planning”. Thatcher Workplace Consulting. www.spaceneedsanalysis.com

employees”⁵ forms the basis of the modern competency-based succession planning system. It contains three main components equally important: people, position and development activities. The Army has an LFCO 11-79 dedicated to the ASP. It utilizes a combination of both the performance evaluation report (PER) and SP to fulfill its ASP; they are linked and need to be considered together in order to develop people within the institution and better prepare them for the responsibility of senior appointment. One way to improve the ASP already in place is to share the responsibility for the SP. The responsibilities for SP are on everyone, not just the organization’s top tier. The platoon commander all the way to the Army commander should be involved and knowledgeable about the process. This of course may require teaching our young officers the process and reality of succession planning. How many of our young officers understand the tiers system currently used by the Army? Some majors on the current Joint Command Staff Program (JCSP) are only vaguely aware of the tiers system and some of them are also unsure of where they fit in the tiers system. By the virtue of being on JCSP most of us assume that we are being looked at for a tier 4 but have never been official told so. The challenge also comes with the difference between all the services; as per example, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) does not use the tiers system for their Officers, they use the Observation list. This creates a problem when, as per example, the Logistic board convenes with different planning guidance. The other area for improvement resides with truly expanding the succession planning for the mid-level positions, i.e. our Majs and LCol. Unfortunately, the CAF, like most civilian companies and organizations, tends to focus on top-level leaders. The General succession plan is well defined, but the pool of candidates to generate high-quality leaders must start at the mid-

⁵ Ren Nardoni. “Competency-Based Succession Planning.” *Information Systems Management.*(Fall 1997, Vol 14 issu2 4): 60-64.

level. So there is a need to carefully manage and evaluate those individuals who are the future of the organization.

5. As stated earlier, there is an inconsistency between the ASP and its real life application that should be reviewed. Due to the scope of this paper, the following list is not exclusive and provides only a few points for review and further investigation. The ASP talks about the annual succession board (the board itself will be discussed later) and the need for a transparent result, but at the Maj level, most members only find out about the board result if they are in a regimental unit; if not, the member will find the ranking on the career manager (CM) website a few weeks later. The long term succession plan (LTSP) and short term succession plan (STSP) are a great concept, but a significant amount of Majors on the current JCSP have never received such information. The ASP states that the information should be passed by the Regiment/Branch Director, but unfortunately those positions are only secondary duties and therefore those Cols are often busy with their day jobs and the ASP is not a priority. There is a need to have a dedicated full time officer for the Majs and LCols.

6. Second stage: identifying possible successors. Most armies around the world operate under a stratification system; because of the constant promotion rate and release rate, there is always a need to have “cut-off” line among each rank. So the question now becomes what is the best way to stratify individuals. In the corporate world the equivalent system is called stack ranking. The system asks the manager to rank a certain percentage of their staff as good and another percentage with a bad ranking. So our current Canadian Forces Personal Appraisal System (CFPAS), the PER, is being used as a stack ranking method with the exception that there is no quota for poor performance. Studies have demonstrated that the methodology of ranking creates an artificial and sometimes unproductive competition between members with the direct

consequence of rendering collaboration more difficult between pairs.⁶ Is the current personal appraisal system a fair and just system and what would be the best way to evaluate performance at that rank level? The annual performance review should be the first major change that needs to be looked at. Our PER system was created to be a performance appraisal system, and the intent was to evaluate and measure our soldiers' achievements and behaviors and to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in order for the member to improve and become a better soldier/officer. But unfortunately the PER system has not been used as it was intended. First, very few Majors in a headquarters receive a quarterly personal development report (PDR); in a high level headquarters, the PDRs are most often overlooked and the only feedback received is the PER. It is important to understand that both the performance evaluation and the selection/merit board are dovetailed and will greatly impact the succession planning/management outcome. So notwithstanding the fact that the PER was indeed a great tool for retroaction and performance review, it is not being used in that manner and it's not transparent in terms of identifying the best possible successor. Prior to writing a PER, every unit and headquarters conducts a merit board and identifies the ranking of each member. As per the example in Canadian Joint Operation Command (CJOC), all majors will be ranked against each other, and depending on the ranking, a PER score will be attributed, therefore making the PER no longer a retroaction tool but a promotion tool. The problem with this approach is that the members are not receiving the right evaluation, which could be inflated or worse, reduced. As per the example, if a unit happens to have five Majors, if all five of them deserved an "MOI" (Mastered, Outstanding and immediate), right justified (all bullets either Master or Outstanding), more than likely not all of them will be

⁶ Matthew Gjertsen, "The Military Needs To Overhaul Its Personnel Management Practices", Task and Purpose blog, 23 February 2015. www.taskandpurpose.com/military-needs-overhaul-personnel-management-practices

right justified. So in order to be more transparent, the ranking system should be done only with regards to the individual performance and potential, and not part of a quota system.

7. Third stage: determining who is the best possible successor. A balance between the weights accorded by the PER and the Board must be considered in order to achieve a successful succession planning. There is a need to make sure that our future leaders have the desired breadth of experience, background and knowledge in order to be effective leaders in the CAF. The selection board procedures are very black and white and are supposed to be transparent. The problem is that promotion to Maj should take into account more insight into the member's real performance versus what the last PER says. Would a "navy board" approach for promotion to LCol be a good complement to the current appraisal system and selection board? The navy conducts interviews in person for the command board for the lieutenant-commander promotion. The author recommends a similar approach for the promotion to LCol and Col. With today's new technologies, a video conference on the DWAN is easily accessible for all at home or abroad. As stated in the merit board directive, the number of days allocated for each board is based on the expectation that each day the board should be able to score about 50 files, with the exception of the first and last days.⁷ The video implementation will increase the duration of the board, but if each board candidate is given a 15 minute interview, the board will only double in duration. For example this year the Combat Arms board was given a full week to conduct all the selection boards and they were finished after three days.⁸ If they were allocated two weeks, they would have had sufficient time to conduct personal interviews.

8. Fourth stage: Mentoring them to be ready. This is where, in my opinion, the ASP is lacking. It is unclear who is truly responsible to manage the career of the Maj. Is it the Career

⁷ Director General Military Careers. *Selection Board President Terms of Reference*

⁸ Emails exchanged between Engr CM (Maj Lagace) and Maj Tetreault

Manager (CM), the Branch directors, direct supervisors, or through connection? The recommendation would be to have the Branch Director full time in those positions; currently this is a secondary task for them but with the implementation of a more robust, fair and transparent selection board there is a need to have personnel dedicated to these very important tasks. The other possible approach would be to increase the responsibility of the CM to include the LSTP and STSP for the majors. But for transparency, the CM rank should be changed to LCol. This would also provide a twofold advantage, since using a newly promote LCol in the CM position would allow better management at the Maj level and at the same time reduce the workload for the Director to better manage the careers of the LCol and above. Secondly, having the CM position as an entry level position will ensure that the candidate posted in the position has a higher chance to stay in the position for two or even three years, ensuring a better continuity.

9. Once a Maj has been assessed as having potential for a higher tier, that officer should be given a position that would enhance their overall strategic knowledge in order to generate better strategic outcomes as a General. But to succeed at the strategic level, it is necessary that the member has demonstrated high leadership capability at the tactical and operational level. Therefore it is important to ensure that the Maj/LCol get the right exposure at all levels. But unfortunately, being a successful leader at the tactical or operational level will not guarantee success at the strategic level; therefore in planning the career progression for a future general, his or her breadth of experience should include a posting at the strategic level early on in his/her career, prior to being a flag officer. This process should be done via the STSP and LSTP.

10. Fifth Stage: the employment in the executive position. This phase is the culmination of all the succession planning done over someone's career to become a leader at the executive level. If the other four stages are done properly, the fifth stage will result in a transparent and efficient

change of leadership at the top tier. One option that could also be considered is at the major level to enhance the pool of candidates for the top tier by expanded early-promotion opportunities for top performers versus the once a year group promotion.

CONCLUSION

11. The early identification and development of the future leaders of the Canadian Army is essential to ensure the continued success of the institution. Currently there is good succession planning and management at the executive level, but to guarantee the long term success of the institution, the Army needs to develop the “the replacement’s replacement”⁹. With the implementation of stronger succession planning at the Maj level, the Canadian army will deepen the pool of candidates for the future top tier level. The small changes presented could greatly enhance the career progression of Majors and at the same time help with the retention issues of senior/post JCSP qualified Majors. In addition, as a mid-term plan this improves the quality of life for the member and his/her family by greatly reducing the uncertainty that they experience for almost half of every year, from the merit board selection in October to the release of the posting message in March.

RECOMMENDATION

12. In most of the five stages of successful succession planning, recommendations were made. But the two critical ones are to review and adjust the current ASP to reflect the need for better mid-level succession planning and to have a designated person to manage the Maj and LCol career progression. Two options were proposed: creating a full-time position for the Branch Director or delegate with responsibility to the CM (with the understanding that the rank for CM becomes LCol).

⁹ Marc Revere Marc. “Succession Planning vs. Succession Management”. Firefighternation.com, 6 July 2012.

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