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CAF'S RECRUITING AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES POSED BY THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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Solo Flight

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THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

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CAF'S RECRUITING AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES POSED BY THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

INTRODUCTION

The premise of generational theory is that those of a similar age share experiences that can produce important commonalities in personal traits, conversely there will be meaningful differences in groups of different ages.¹ This paper will examine the millennial generation, also known as Gen Y, with a focus on the recruiting and integration challenges posed by this generation for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and will also touch on CAF diversity targets and women for this generation. It is generally accepted that millennials are born in the early 1980s until the year 2000.² Therefore, this generation will be between 20 and 40 years of age in the year 2020, and be prime candidates for CAF recruiting. The CAF also needs to retain those it recruits. Unlike civilian employers, the CAF cannot recruit senior officers or senior non-commissioned members it must develop them from within. With this in mind, the recruiting and retention of the millennial generation becomes a strategic issue for the CAF.

This paper will demonstrate that, although this is the largest generation in the workforce in both the United States and Canada, the CAF will have significant challenges in both recruiting and retaining this generation. In order to support this assertion, this paper will discuss the characteristics of the millennial generation, strategies to market to millennials, and the perception of the CAF's recruiting efforts in main stream media. Furthermore, this paper will examine the priorities of Military Personnel Command (MILPERSCOM) who is responsible for recruiting and training. Recruiting counter arguments will be presented in the form of *The Journey* initiative and diversity initiatives to attract millennials. Finally, challenges related to integration

¹ Okros A. Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials. In: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials in the Future Workplace. Management for Professionals. Springer, Cham, 2020. P. 34

² Ibid, P.42

focusing on the culture in the military and ethnocentrism will be presented in order to further highlight how difficult retaining the millennial generation will become.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS

Author Okros discusses Generational Theory in *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials* and suggests that members of the same generation will develop common characteristics as a result of the socioeconomic conditions and societal evolutions that they encounter throughout their lives.³ Generally speaking, the Millennial Generation tends to be confident because they have been raised to follow their dreams, and were told they were special. This confidence can sometimes manifest as entitlement and narcissism.⁴ Unrealistic expectations is another result of millennial optimism as they enter into adulthood. Many early millennials went through post-secondary education and found employment in unrelated fields or underemployed and job hopping more frequently than previous generations.⁵ A prominent characteristic of millennials is that workplace satisfaction tends to matter more than monetary compensation, and work-life balance is often considered essential.⁶ For this generation, unpleasant work environments will not be tolerated and grievances with employers will be broadcast using social networking to highlight their concerns.⁷ Conversely, satisfied millennials are often employee advocates for the organization, providing honest, free and convincing public relations.⁸ Millennials are very skeptical about marketing, and generally don't believe promotional material of any kind. This characteristic makes both conventional marketing and

³ Okros A. *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials*. In: *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials in the Future Workplace*. Management for Professionals. Springer, Cham, 2020. P. 35

⁴ Rouse, Margaret and Haughn, Matthew. "Millennial Generation." WhatIs.com, 21 February 2020.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

employee recruitment practices often ineffective for millennials.⁹ Finally, millennials are concerned about social justice, in that, generally they will not support institutions that they see as in conflict with social and economic equality.¹⁰

The implications of these characteristics are quite self-evident. The CAF needs to market itself as providing a good work life balance, be seen as an institution that promotes social and economic equality, provide a pleasant work environment, communicate through social media, and have internal advocates that are willing to aide in recruiting.

LARGEST GENERATION IN THE WORKFORCE

More than one-in-three American labor force participants are millennials, making them the largest generation in the U.S. labor force, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from 2018.¹¹ In the United States, 56 million millennials were working, more than the 53 million Generation Xers, and well ahead of the 41 million Baby Boomers.¹² In Canada, the Millennial Generation makes up 8 million in the workforce.¹³

MARKETING TO MILLENIALS

As mentioned, millennials are smart and understand when they're being sold a bill of goods, and therefore recruiting this generation must take a different approach.¹⁴ Millennials are

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Fry, Richard. "Millennials are the largest generation in the US labor force." PewResearch.org, 11 April 2018.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Okros A. Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials. In: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials in the Future Workplace. Management for Professionals. Springer, Cham, 2020. P.42

¹⁴ McDowell, Wes. "Five Winning Strategies for Millennial Marketing." DuctTapeMarketing.com, 21 February 2020.

hard-wired to their smartphones, therefore a good marketing strategy complements this behavior, by ensuring web pages are optimized for mobile users.¹⁵ While millennials have tuned out traditional advertising, they still value any information they deem to be authentic, therefore an effort should be made to form partnerships with online influencers that millennials already trust.¹⁶ Providing millennials with content they can learn from, or be entertained should be part of recruitment.¹⁷ By offering authentic experiences, and engaging content, and by listening to what they're asking for, there is an opportunity for recruiting millennials into the CAF.¹⁸

MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN THE MEDIA

As discussed, millennials will not support institutions that they see as in conflict with social and economic equality¹⁹ and are savvy to public perception of institutions. Therefore the issues of women in the forces and diversity will resonate with millennials. Unfortunately, CAF recruitment in the media over the past decade has not been positively portrayed. In 2013, author Matt Gurney published an article entitled *You can't set diversity targets for patriotism* in which he advocates that the military shouldn't have to adhere to a bureaucrat's vision of social progress but rather judge applicants to the CAF according to merit not gender or background.²⁰ He highlights that the 4,000 recruits a year that are needed to maintain our current Regular Forces strength of 68,000 comes from the same demographic pool it always has, namely white men.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rouse, Margaret and Haughn, Matthew. "Millennial Generation." WhatIs.com, 21 February 2020.

²⁰ Gurney, Matt. "You can't set diversity targets for Patriotism." National Post, 19 August 2013.

²¹ Ibid.

Author Julia Oliver in 2014 wrote an article entitled *Military retreating on diversity targets after failing to meet recruiting goals for minorities, women*. This article explains that at the heart of the diversity issue is a legal requirement in the Employment Equity Act that the CAF must work to increase the diversity of its workforce.²² The targets are that females should make up 25.1% of full-time military personnel and reservists, visible minorities should be 11.7%, and aboriginals should be 3.3%.²³ The CAF has never actually met its targets with women representing 15% of personnel in uniform in 2014, and visible minorities represent 4.2%, and aboriginals 1.9%.²⁴ The conclusion was that the CAF wasn't doing enough to recruit women, visible minorities and aboriginals.²⁵

Recently, author Barbara McKay wrote an article entitled *The Canadian Forces Failed Recruitment Policy* where she highlighted that in 2020 women presently comprise 15.9% of Canadian Forces members, the great majority of whom are serving in support roles.²⁶ The military apparently has been ignoring their own recruitment analysts, who informed them that women feel “discomfort with a profession that involves combat,” because it has the “potential of killing people (especially innocent people).”²⁷ She concludes that if the military’s main “systemic barrier” to recruiting women is their inherent distaste for the profession’s purpose, that systematic barrier cannot be overcome.²⁸

²² Oliver, Julie. “Military retreating on diversity targets after failing to meet recruiting goals for minorities, women.” National Post, 19 May 2014.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kay, Barbara. “The Canadian Forces Failed Recruitment Policy.” National Post, 18 February 2020.

²⁷ Kay, Barbara. “The Canadian Forces Failed Recruitment Policy.” National Post, 18 February 2020.

²⁸ Ibid.

Finally, in February 2020 author Suzanne Raby wrote a response piece entitled *Recruitment Report Based on Research* where she advocates that in order to move the yardstick forward, to achieve the government's targets for women in the CAF, everything must be explored and that somewhere there is a key that will open the door for women to view the CAF as a viable career option.²⁹ No matter your opinion on the subject of women in the CAF, and having this institution reflect Canadian society, it is clearly evident that the CAF is not a diverse place of employment and millennials are attuned to this reality. Furthermore, recruiters are still searching for that elusive "key" in order to meet employment equity and diversity goals.

WOMEN IN THE CAF

A more recent article in *The Maple Leaf*, published 25 February 2020, highlighted some facts about women in the CAF. Currently, 15.9% of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members are women with the NATO average for women in the military at 11%. The CAF is now preparing new strategies and initiatives to increase women's representation to 25.1 percent by 2026.³⁰

RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECRUITING

Military Personnel Command (MILPERSCOM) is responsible for the overall personnel management of the Canadian Armed Forces. This includes recruitment, training, education, pay, benefits, health services, honours, history, casualty support, career transition services and a host of other corporate and personnel support services.³¹ MILPERSCOM's priorities in accordance with the Defence Policy's Strong, Secure and Engaged (SSE) are four fold.³² First, recruitment

²⁹ Raby, Suzanne. "Recruitment report based on research." *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 February 2020.

³⁰ Canada. Canadian Armed Forces. "Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: the facts speak for themselves." *The Maple Leaf*, 25 February 2020.

³¹ Canada. Military Personnel Command. "Our Priorities." cmp-cpm.mil.ca, last accessed 28 February 2020.

³² *Ibid.*

through Operation GENERATION, to recruit the quantity and quality of personnel necessary to meet SSE and diversity goals. Second, to establish a Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group, which will take on the release portfolio for all transitioning CAF members. Third, as part of the project *The Journey*, to build the workforce of the future and to support the Canadian Armed Forces with a more compassionate, dependable, safe and healthy workplace. This includes to undertake a comprehensive review of the conditions of service and career paths to allow personalized career choices and flexibility in career paths.³³ Fourth, to establish a new administrative response center.

Both the above priorities of Op GENERATION and *The Journey* have been designed to address the needs of the CAF for recruitment and retention of military members and are directed at millennials (Gen Y) but also aging Gen Xers and potentially the next generation of post-millennials (also known as Gen Z).

To execute these priorities, MILPERSCOM has a number of formations, one of which is Military Personnel Generation (MPG). MPG has a mandate that spans the personnel generation activities of the Canadian Armed Forces, from military personnel generation requirements and recruiting, through to basic training and common support trade schools.³⁴ The MPG is headquartered in Ottawa and is composed of a recruiting group known as the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG), and a training group known as the MPG Training Group.³⁵ The Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) which was established on 3 June 2015, has a mandate of military personnel generation requirements including recruiting.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Canada. Military Personnel Generation. "Professional Development." Canada.ca, last accessed 28 February 2020.

³⁵ Canada. Military Personnel Generation. "Professional Development." Canada.ca, last accessed 28 February 2020.

THE JOURNEY

The strongest counter-argument to the CAF not doing enough to address recruitment and retention of the millennial generation rests with *The Journey* initiative. The CAF is competing for human resource talent in today's highly competitive job market. To meet this challenge, it must continuously attract and recruit qualified new applicants for full-time and part-time military service.³⁶ As mentioned, SSE provides clear direction on recruitment and requires the CAF to modernize and improve its recruiting methods and experience. *The Journey* was designed to fundamentally change the way members of the armed forces experience a career in uniform. This includes improved recruiting processes, enhanced services and support for military families, enhanced support for ill and injured members, and the establishment of a new CAF Transition Group.³⁷ By addressing conditions of service and allowing more personalized career choices and flexibility in career paths³⁸ this initiative may address some of the more pressing concerns of millennials with regards to workplace satisfaction and work life balance. This type of flexibility may also reduce job hopping and increase retention in the CAF. Unfortunately, it is too early to determine how this will be implemented and what the effects on the recruitment and retention of the millennials generation will be for the CAF.

Furthermore, it is unclear if and how *The Journey* initiative will tackle issues such as pursuing further education, building a sound financial base, and postings and geographical moves. Dr. Eustace highlighted, in an e-mail to this author, that being a CAF member creates financial challenges of building significant home equity, causes disruptions with a partner's career and children's education, and generally cut off members from normal Canadian society.

³⁶ Canada. Military Personnel Command. "The Journey." cmp-cpm.mil.ca, last accessed 28 February 2020.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

So, while the CAF does market itself as providing the sorts of life style that millennials would find attractive, once in, it becomes very difficult to retain.

Another counter-argument is MILPERSCOM's leveraging diversity initiatives. That is, developing the CAF Diversity Strategy and Action Plan released as CANFORGEN 24/17 and appointing Defense and Diversity Champions released as CANFORGEN 74/18. This meets SSE objectives and promotes diversity and inclusion as a core institutional value, and ensures individual and institutional behaviors, attitudes and beliefs are aligned with the ethical principles and values codified in the Statement of Defense Ethics.³⁹ This demonstrates to millennials that the CAF as an institution is aligned with social equality.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the CAF has never actually met its targets with women or diversity within its forces to date.

INTEGRATION AND RETENTION

Author Okros in *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials*, brings forward a number of suggestions to increase integration and retention of millennials and post-millennials in the workplace. Some key takeaways for the CAF come from the areas of adaptability and control, investing in human capital, and leading people. The author suggests that developing the capacity of middle managers and front-line supervisors to engage in the creative challenge function, to ensure that the bright ideas are valuable and attainable, and to determine how technology and social media might facilitate this for the CAF will yield increased workplace satisfaction.⁴¹ Furthermore, flexibility in work arrangements including office, telework, and

³⁹ Canada. Military Personnel Command. "Leverage Diversity & Promote a Culture of Leadership, Respect and Honour." cmp-cpm.mil.ca, last accessed 28 February 2020.

⁴⁰ Rouse, Margaret and Haughn, Matthew. "Millennial Generation." WhatIs.com, 21 February 2020.

⁴¹ Okros A. *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials*. In: *Harnessing the Potential of Digital Post-Millennials in the Future Workplace*. Management for Professionals. Springer, Cham, 2020. P.160

allowing individuals to combine work travel with leisure and or vacation pursuits will yield increased work life balance.⁴² Finally, millennials expectations are that they will be able to move up quickly in the organization, and be given increased responsibilities relatively soon after joining.⁴³ The most critical task will be the supervisory responsibilities to optimize the contribution of each person and develop them to achieve their full potential. This I would argue, is the strength of the CAF, basic leadership skills and knowing your people.⁴⁴

Counter-arguments for integration and retention of the millennial generation focusses on ethnocentrism and being stewards of the profession of arms. Ethnocentrism is the tendency for individuals to place their own group (ethnic, racial, or cultural) at the center of their observations of others and the world.⁴⁵ People tend to give priority and value to their own beliefs, attitudes, and values, over and above those of other groups.⁴⁶ Ethnocentrism can be a major obstacle to effective leadership because it prevents people from fully understanding or respecting the viewpoints of others.⁴⁷ Author Northouse further explains in *Culture and Leadership* that skilled leaders are able to negotiate the fine line between trying to overcome ethnocentrism and knowing when to remain grounded in their own cultural values.⁴⁸ This leadership challenge will determine how effective the CAF is at retaining the limited diversity it has within its ranks.

⁴² Ibid, P.163

⁴³ Ibid, P.164

⁴⁴ Ibid, P.166

⁴⁵ Northouse, Peter G. "Culture and Leadership." In *Leadership: Theory and Practice, 6th ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

⁴⁶ Northouse, Peter G. "Culture and Leadership." In *Leadership: Theory and Practice, 6th ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Northouse, Peter G. "Culture and Leadership." In *Leadership: Theory and Practice, 6th ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

Stewardship of the profession of arms means staying attuned to major cultural and social shifts in Canada.⁴⁹ These shifts may not always be beneficial to the military but, should not be allowed to isolate the military from its parent society.⁵⁰ Stewardship must anticipate, recognize and respond to changing social and cultural conditions while ensuring that fundamental values, both military and Canadian, are preserved.⁵¹ Meeting diversity and employment equity goals falls under the stewardship of the profession of arms. Expanding the demographic pool to include all millennials and tracking societal shifts that affect social justice and economic equality will be another challenge for CAF leadership.

⁴⁹ Canada. Department of National Defence. *A-PA-005-000/AP-006, Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution*. Kingston, ON: CDA - Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2007. Chap. 1. P.16

⁵⁰ Ibid, Chap. 1. P.16

⁵¹ Canada. Department of National Defence. *A-PA-005-000/AP-001, Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*. Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2009. Chap. 3

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the millennial generation's characteristics and focused on the recruiting and integration challenges posed by this generation for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). As the CAF cannot recruit senior officers or senior non-commissioned members it must develop them from within, and therefore the recruiting and retention of the millennial generation remains a strategic issue for the CAF.

This paper demonstrated that, although this is the largest generation in the workforce in both the United States and Canada, the CAF has and will face significant challenges in both recruiting and retaining this generation. This paper discussed the characteristics of the millennial generation highlighted by the CAF needing to market itself as providing a good work life balance, be seen as an institution that promotes social and economic equality, provide a pleasant work environment, communicates through social media, and use internal advocates to aide in recruiting in order to attract this generation. This paper discussed strategies to market to millennials through offering authentic experiences, and engaging content, and by listening to millennials wants and needs. This paper further examined the negative perception of the CAF's recruiting efforts in main stream media, with articles focuses on the CAF's inability to meet diversity and employment equity goals set forth in the Employment Equity Act and the Defense Policy's Strong Secure and Engaged (SSE).

Military Personnel Command (MILPERSCOM) was discussed as they are responsible for recruiting and training. *The Journey* initiative was examined, as this initiative may address some of the more pressing concerns of millennials with regards to workplace satisfaction and work life balance. Also, MILPERSCOM's leveraging diversity initiatives were discussed in order to demonstrate to millennials that the CAF as an institution is aligned with social equality.

Finally, integration and retention of the millennial generations was discussed. Author Okros, provided some key takeaways for the CAF in the areas of adaptability and control, investing in human capital, and leading people. Challenges related to integration focused on the culture in the military and ethnocentrism in order to further highlight how difficult retaining the millennial generation will become.

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