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EARLY INVESTMENT IN THE RCCS OFFICER CORPS

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EARLY INVESTMENT IN THE RCCS OFFICER CORPS

Integration goes beyond bringing the parts together, to combine those parts into a greater whole. It is the invisible bond within the complex personnel management system of systems that brings the pillars, their activities, the research and plans to bear to create the career management filter essential for producing the desired effect of having the right person, with the right qualifications, in the right place at the right time.

- CFJP 1.0, Military Personnel Management Doctrine

AIM

1. ‘You are your own best career manager.’ It is a phrase often heard and one that resonates with the Officers within the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (RCCS). How the RCCS manages careers, particularly those at the junior officer and Major ranks, has been a loosely defined concept and notoriously under communicated to officers in the lower echelons. However imprecisely career management is applied, a significant amount of importance lies within the domain of professional development (PD). Outside of justifiably infrequent interaction with the career manager (CM), junior officers¹ PD is highly dependent on attention from supervisors. Lacking this, they must rely on their own initiative, wanting for guidance and direction from the Corps². The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of PD and career management on the junior officers of the RCCS and provide recommendations to mitigate and improve areas that may be deficient.

INTRODUCTION

2. Military Personnel Command (Mil Pers Comd) is responsible to the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) for the oversight of military personnel management and the production of the overarching policy and doctrine for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)

¹ For the purposes of this service paper, the term ‘junior officer’ shall refer to RCCS Officers holding the rank of Major and below.

² For the purposes of this service paper, the terms ‘RCCS’ and ‘the Corps’ are interchangeable.

on PD. A collection of strategic and service level documents provides leadership foundations, theories, and guidance that underscore the foundation of CAF PD.³ The CAF PD system (CFPDS) is the method of implementing this direction into the education and training provided to service members by the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA), the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), and the Canadian Army (CA).⁴ Through the Defense Orders and Directives (DAODs), the Commander Canadian Army (CCA) has been tasked the responsibility to conduct the PD of Army Officers in accordance with the CFPDS.⁵

3. The CFPDS is the source of the CA PD Framework, and Army officer development follows the four components of training, education, employment experience, and self-development.⁶ The philosophy behind this framework is that all of these components integrate to help ensure that members of the CA adhere to the ethos of the profession of arms, satisfy the necessary criteria for employment within the CA, their occupations and specialties, and demonstrate learning and growth throughout all stages of their careers. Through Canadian Army Order (CAO) 11-79, the Director RCCS (DRCCS) is required to issue a succession planning (SP) directive to ‘implement a transparent process’, without being given a prescriptive methodology.⁷ This paper will approach the

³ This collection includes the *Leadership in the Canadian Forces* series, CAF Joint Doctrine, CA Doctrine, Defence Administrative Orders and Directives, and Canadian Army Orders, listed in the bibliography.

⁴ Public Service and the Military. *Canadian Armed Forces professional development framework*. Accessed 16 October 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/education-training/professional-development/framework.html>

⁵ Department of National Defence. DAOD 5031-0. *Learning and Professional Development* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 31 January 2003); Department of National Defence. 5031-8. *Canadian Forces Professional Development*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 14 June 2012).

⁶ Department of National Defence. B-GL-300-008/FP-001. *Training for Land Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, June 2014), 3-1-1.

⁷ Department of National Defence. *CAO 11-79 Army Succession Planning*. (Ottawa: DND, 2012)

PD of junior officers including discussion on career management, self-development, and SP, and demonstrate that success in each is dependent on the strength of relationships between junior and senior RCCS Officers.

DISCUSSION

Career Management

4. There is a shortage of information available on the process of career management. CAF and CA policy, doctrine and directives on PD and SP allude to career management⁸, but there is no specific direction in any of these documents on how to execute it. Outside of this, there seems to be no distinct formal body of knowledge on career management within the CAF doctrine, CA doctrine and orders, or the RCCS directives and instructions. How career management is practiced appears to be left to the discretion of the occupation's senior advisor (DRCCS) and is connected to Director General Military Careers (DGMC). The current process is difficult to navigate, is under communicated to the junior officers, and members often finds themselves lacking a voice in how their career is managed.

5. Organisationally, the position of career manager (CM) falls under DGMC and is filled by a RCCS Officer at the rank of Major. In theory, the CM is responsible for the career management of junior officers with respect to postings, course nominations and loading, and promotions. Information on these topics can be found on a SharePoint site that is hosted by the Director Land Command and Information (DLCI), not DGMC. This

⁸ Department of National Defence. B-GL-005-100/FP-001. *CFJP 1.0, Military Personnel Management Directive* (Ottawa: DND Canada, June 2008); Department of National Defence. *CAO 11-79 Army Succession Planning*. (Ottawa: DND, 2012); Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-006. *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 138.

suggests that the authority over career management practically rests not with DGMC, but within the RCCS occupation. The site is provisionally a baseline of information for the career management process. However, a lack of formalised direction or policy requiring maintenance of the site means the content may be inaccurate and outdated, and there is no single point of contact with whom to confirm. With little direct contact to the CM and no confident access to information, policies, and directives that drive the career management process, it can be very difficult for junior officers to navigate the system.

6. The breakdown of influence over career management for junior officers in order of power is distributed as follows: the DRCCS, Commanding Officers (CO), Regional Senior Signals Officers (RSSO), Officers Commanding (OC), the CM, and the junior officer. Junior officers posted to Communications and Electronics (C&E or Branch) organisations have Chains of Command (CoC) that are in a position to advocate on their behalf. RSSO's may represent junior officers who are not within one of these organisations, but this appointment is a secondary duty.⁹ The span of responsibility of the CM is to cover all officers from the rank of Major and below; obviously, it is impossible for them to devote sufficient time to each individual. Other factors such as parental leave, postings outside of Canada (OUTCAN), deployments, education and simple oversight can create gaps where junior officers are left without any connection to the Corps and without representation in the career management system. In situations like these, the member can miss critical communications from the Corps and opportunities to further their career. With the CAF espousing the message of *people first*, this labyrinth of

⁹ *RSSO Terms of Reference* (Ottawa: Director Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, Oct 2013).

direction, players, and oversight of members can compound into long-term problems within an occupation struggling with attrition.

Self-Development

7. Of the four components of the CFPDS, training, education, and employment experience are relatively quantifiable and are determined by and formalised across the CAF. The fourth component, self-development, is inherently focused on the individual's initiative. According to the CAF directives, there are two people ultimately responsible for the self-development of RCCS officers: the CO and the individual. While the individual is responsible to initiate self-development, it is to be managed in conjunction with the CO.¹⁰ This balance of power is weighted against the individual; for while the CO is responsible, it is the individual who will be held accountable at the promotion boards or during consideration for SP, regardless of whether the CO worked with the junior officer or not. In order to engage in self-development that will benefit both the individual and the Corps, junior officers need to understand the priorities of the corps, have exposure to RCCS challenges, and have a means to develop and communicate their ideas.

8. Ideally, all junior officers would find themselves in a position where they receive trade specific mentorship and exposure to Corps priorities. As mentioned, many do not have RCCS members as direct supervisors to provide them with updates about current and future Corps priorities, changes, and challenges. Junior officers also typically receive limited exposure to activities (such as briefings, working groups (WGs), conferences,

¹⁰ Department of National Defence. 5031-8. *Canadian Forces Professional Development*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 14 June 2012), para 8; Department of National Defence. B-GL-300-008/FP-001. *Training for Land Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, June 2014), 3-6-2.

etc.) where discussion and development of RCCS initiatives and priorities occur. This compels junior officers to determine on their own how they should diversify their knowledge on new technologies, whether or not to upgrade their education and in what field, and in what relevant activities they should participate. If this information were made common knowledge and readily available regardless of rank, it would allow junior officer to focus their time, effort, and learning to mutual benefit. This shortfall of information could be mitigated through good communication. The RCCS attempts to communicate its messaging and priorities to the Corps in a variety of ways. Past and current methods have seen the CM conducting briefings and interviews on bases, invitations issued to key members of the Corps to brief during in-house courses, through C&E week activities, and through 'Letter's from the DRCCS'. All have limitations: the CM no longer visits bases, attendance at briefings given by key Corps members during in-house courses is limited to students on course, C&E Week activities are invitation-only or dependent on member's proximity to Kingston, and formal letters come infrequently. This results in the partial dissemination, of some information, to a fraction of the Corps. The likelihood of an RCCS officer being exposed to the information decreases proportionally with rank and status, leaving junior officers in the dark. It becomes increasingly unlikely that a member will internalize the culture of continued self-development if they are not mentored and exposed to such learning opportunities as junior officers.

9. All organisations have challenges, and the RCCS is no different. Various methods are employed to develop and discuss potential solutions: tiger teams, working groups, and delegation of tasks to specific units, positions, or individuals. While all methods have

value, they typically involve senior officers within the Corps. The RCCS would benefit from the development of a collaborative forum where input could be solicited from the entire officer corps. Without this, the Corps is missing an opportunity to involve and employ the brainpower and ingenuity of the vast proportion of officers that make up its membership to its collective challenges. A collaborative environment also creates opportunities for personal investment and guidance from senior to junior officers; this includes working together to share information and ideas, a method of reviewing and refining writing techniques and styles, and creating bonds of trust in leadership. If implemented, this would provide junior officers with excellent PD opportunities and create results that will serve the needs of the Corps: investment from junior officers in their future careers, an outlet for self-development, and increased visibility of officers across all ranks.

Succession Planning

10. Although there are specific directives on succession planning, the selection process is not well communicated to junior officers. The Deputy Commander of the Canadian Army (DCCA) is responsible for the Army Succession Plan (ASP) and is responsible for the Army Succession Board (ASB).¹¹ The RCCS conducts the long term succession board (LTSB) and the short term succession board (STSB)¹² in order to determine the Corps priorities for the ASB. Their purpose is as follows:

¹¹ Department of National Defence. *CAO 11-79 Army Succession Planning*. (Ottawa: DND, 2012)

¹² For the purposes of this paper, LTSB and STSB shall be referred to collectively as the “boards”.

a. LTSL. The LTSL is chaired by Deputy DRCCS (DDRCCS) and has eight voting RCCS LCol. The result of the board is the long term succession list (LTSL) which is ranked list of all RCCS Majors that informs selection for command, advanced training list (ATL) placement, deployments, and Joint Command and Staff Program (JCSP);¹³ and

b. STSB. The DDRCCS and the eight RSSOs comprise the evaluating members of this board. The CM and COs from Signals and C&E units may be invited to attend at the discretion of DRCCS. The board selects individuals for Tier 5 Command positions and JCSP, both of which are informed by the LTSL. Based on the boards' assessment, these selections result in the short term succession plan (STSP) for the DRCCS's endorsement and furtherance to the ASB.¹⁴

11. Intertwined with promotion and positions on the posting plot, the RCCS SP process amounts to the career management apparatus for officers at the rank of Major and LCol.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, little information or discussion on the SP process is provided to the officers below the rank of Major because they are not eligible for the boards. This means the Corps is allowing junior officers to make decisions without understanding the bigger picture of how their choices now can have repercussions on their future careers. This can result in distrust in the leadership, career management, and SP process when

¹³Colonel T.S. Sullivan, *Briefing Note for RCCS Officers, Subject: Succession Planning for RCCS Majors* (Ottawa: Director Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, 01 June 2016).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The exception is that of Captains forecasted for promotion the following year who may also be taken into account during the conduct of the boards.

junior officers realise that though the information was available, it was only available to those privileged to have someone senior in the Corps to mentor them along the way. By the time they have reached a rank and position where they may be considered for SP, they may have lost the motivation to lead the Corps into the future. By investing early, the RCCS would be able to help junior officers make informed decisions, potentially setting the conditions for the right people to have the right qualifications, and be in the right place at the right time.¹⁶ Identifying a formal mentor with whom the junior officer is authorised to contact for information and guidance on the process of SP would be an invaluable resource enabling them to start preparing early in their career for the requirements to succeed at higher ranks. The strength of the RCCS officer occupation comes from its ability to adapt and diversify, and the Corps should play to its strengths when conducting SP.

CONCLUSION

12. Professionally developing and managing the careers of the junior RCCS officers is an intersection between career management, self-development, and succession planning. The scarcity of communication about the process, whether it be from senior RCCS officers or the CM, combined with unreliable information, does a disservice to the junior officers. The limited access to and guidance from key players such as COs, RSSOs, the CM, and senior RCCS officers has a two-fold impact. First, the lack of personal investment directly affects the ability of the Corps to shape the future officers and instill a culture of life-long learning. Second, it misses the opportunity to leverage

¹⁶ Department of National Defence. B-GL-005-100/FP-001. *CFJP 1.0, Military Personnel Management Directive* (Ottawa: DND Canada, June 2014), 5-2.

resourceful, alert, and motivated junior officers to help find the solutions to the challenges facing the Corps. These dissatisfiers can compound into long-term problems such as attrition of members at the time when they would be expected to take on leadership within the Corps. Transparency and early introduction into the processes involved in professional development is necessary to increase junior officer's control over their career choices and the path they want to follow. Though the changes may be small, the net effect can vastly improve the commitment and sense of responsibility of junior officers to both the RCCS and to the CAF.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. It is the author's opinion that the current method for professionally developing the junior officers within the RCCS can be improved through two avenues: incremental improvement and formalised mentorship. Time and people are our greatest resources, and unfortunately, the Corps is short of both. Therefore, two recommendations are put forth that may mutually address these shortages:

- a. Incremental Improvements. What could be described as the 'quick wins', incremental improvements are fast and visible changes to the career management process. This could include updating information on websites, official endorsement of content (such as signing, dating, and disseminating), re-introduction of RCCS 'Communiqué' or 'Dispatch' reports, introduction of 'Esprit de Corps' activities, and prioritisation of PD across the officer corps. The point is to be transparent and to be seen to be taking action. This will not only improve the process, but also increase the confidence in the Corps leadership.

With vision from the DRCCS, the Corps can use these incremental improvements to help build self-development and career management into a formalised process.

b. Formal Mentorship. A plethora of models for talent management, mentorship, and work processes exist both within the CAF and across industry. The RCCS could use one of these as a baseline to develop the career management process within the RCCS. It is also recommended that the RCCS conduct a survey, reaching out to the entire RCCS officer corps and soliciting input on the process, to be presented in the form of briefing notes, proposals, service papers, etc.¹⁷ The process of submitting their ideas creates an excellent opportunity for PD as well as allowing the members to have a say in the design. A formalised mentorship program will increase unity of purpose within the Corps, increase communication across the ranks, provide junior officers with career and self-development guidance and an advocate with personal investment, and distribute some of the disproportionate weight from the COs responsibilities. The institutionalisation of a formal mentorship process can have a compounding effect but in order to make gains for the future of the RCCS, the Corps needs to invest in the now.

¹⁷ In order to ensure a minimum of returns, all C&E/RCCS units and organisations should be tasked to provide feedback.

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