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INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP: LEVERAGING FAILURE INTO OPPORTUNITY

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INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP: LEVERAGING FAILURE INTO OPPORTUNITY

"Values are real to the degree that we are prepared to risk something in order to make them prevail. Values are virtual when they remain rhetorical, when the commitments we make are not followed with action."

- Michael Ignatieff: *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond*¹

The military is an eloquent brute. It creates effects through violence yet demands civility amongst its members. Nevertheless, when it comes to sexual misconduct, we often see a relatively slim divide between its primary modus operandi and the execrated actions of some of its members. Senior military officers differ to the extent and calibre to which they lead, yet one thing remains constant – effective leadership in any organization is underpinned by morality, confidence, and trust. This is a fundamental concept that hinges on the relationship between leaders and the led and is fundamental to the Canadian Armed Force's (CAF) shared value system – where one party accepts and believes that another party has their best interest in mind or shares a set of common interests, values, or ethics.

As senior officers (and to a lesser degree Non-Commissioned Members²) grow in rank, they move away from a direct style of leadership at the tactical or operational levels and move instead toward a more indirect style of leadership that is focused on ensuring the effective self-regulation of the institution which better earns the trust and confidence of both internal and

¹ Canada, Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-004, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005. Pg 26

² While the author recognizes that many senior appointments are held by Non-Commissioned Members including Command Chief Warrant/Petty Officers, and that they fill a critically important role in the CAF, for the purposes of this paper any reference to senior institutional leadership specifically refers to officers unless otherwise identified. Although the institutional leadership of the CAF consists of many senior officers, the reverence paid toward the appointments of the CDS and other General/Flag Officers suggest that the cause and effect of their actions disproportionately affects the force. Therefore, their actions alone will be examined as evidence in determining the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of institutional leadership within the CAF.

external audiences of the CAF.³ The move away from tactical or operational leadership positions to ones of strategic importance signals a turning point for most senior leaders. They begin to take on positions heavily focused on driving change and ensuring the CAF, as an institution, subscribes to the same standards of ethical and judicial behaviour as Canadian society. Truly influential institutional leaders go further. They are visionaries who look to the future of what the CAF can become and lead by exemplifying the behaviour they want to see in others while simultaneously promoting their visions for the future force.

Recently, allegations of sexual misconduct leveled against Canada's top General, amongst others, have shaken the moral bedrock upon which the CAF is built. If the CAF is to remain an operationally effective force aligned with Canadian values and ethics, the recent actions of senior leaders and any subsequent impact to trust should be considered when gauging the effectiveness of institutional leadership. This paper will demonstrate that senior officers failed to lead the institution effectively while impacting and diluting trust amongst CAF members.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP, SELECTION, AND COMPETENCIES

Within the CAF, senior institutional leaders are charged with effectively shaping the organization for the better by embracing and exemplifying the same values, ethics, and norms as defined within fundamental leadership doctrine.⁴ These officers must resolve difficult interpersonal situations using approaches and resources consistent with the values of integrity, loyalty, moral courage, honesty, fairness, and responsibility.⁵ They are obliged to act in the

³ Canada, Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-004, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations...*, 41,42

⁴ Ibid., 124

⁵ Ibid., 22

interest of the Canadian public and obey lawful authority. Arguably, the CAF has a large cadre of well-intended and qualified officers to lead the institution and influence change. In fact, institutional leadership is of such importance that the CAF invests a significant amount of time and money into training its senior officers on leadership theories and models in order to promote effective leadership traits. Numerous courses and professional development opportunities exist in which senior leaders can hone their leadership skills and abilities. These leaders must consider the importance of values and value-based leadership and the impact that those values play within the organization.

Building on this, we can extrapolate that the most senior and trusted leadership positions in the CAF go to experienced officers who are proven exceptional leaders with years of service at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels and have demonstrated outstanding performance and potential. Such leaders are developed over time and measured against the strategic changes they affect. At no time is the concept of effective leadership more critical than when leaders must drive culture change to improve individual and group performance and capabilities.

In 2014, in response to a number of reports of sexual misconduct within the CAF, Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps undertook an independent review to analyze workplace policies, culture, and leadership engagements.⁶ The final result consisted of a scathing report on the systemic sexualized culture of the CAF and included ten recommendations on how to combat the problem.⁷ In August 2016, the CDS responded by issuing an order to initiate Operation

⁶ Canada, Department of National Defence. *The Operation Honour Manual – Archived*. Ch 1.4

⁷ Ibid., Ch 1.4

HONOUR to eliminate harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour in the CAF.⁸ Operation HONOUR continued for nearly six years and officially ended on March 24th, 2021, after allegations of sexual misconduct and inappropriate relations surfaced against the General who initiated the campaign.⁹ The Deschamps report shed light on the highly sexualized culture within the CAF and specified the subsequent harm caused to women and marginalized groups.¹⁰ Although the CAF had training and education already in place, which focused on preventing sexual harassment and misconduct, these programs were insufficient and required strengthening and reform if they were going to result in any meaningful cultural change.¹¹ Consequently, several additional workshops and training sessions were developed and instituted as a result of this report, including Bystander Training and Gender-Based Analysis.¹²

Although many critics deemed Operation HONOUR a failure (the CAF reported an increase of 1038 complaints between 2015 and 2018), some positive changes have resulted from its implementation.¹³ Perhaps most important is the recognition and acceptance that this type of behaviour was a pronounced problem rooted deep within the predominantly masculine culture of the military.

Evaluation

⁸ Ibid., Ch 1.5

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/operation-honour-closed-down-1.5962978>

¹⁰ Deschamps, Marie. *External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2015. V.

¹¹ Ibid., VII

¹² Canada, Department of National Defence. *Operation Honour Training and Educational Material* Ottawa: DND Canada, 2015.

¹³ Canada, Department of National Defence. *2019 Sexual Misconduct Incident Tracking Report*. Ottawa: August 2019: 6.

According to CAF personnel evaluation schematics, senior officers at the General rank would have had to demonstrate excellent leadership qualities and consistent performance over the course of their careers.¹⁴ The assessment of their leadership is measured against such metrics as visioning, organizational awareness, ethics and values, and behavioural flexibility, to name but a few.¹⁵ Senior leaders get to where they are because they showed signs of desirable leadership traits, and although potential often correlates with performance, the two are not necessarily commensurate with each other. Past performance can a valuable indicator of potential, leaving one to posit that the incumbent holding the position of CDS has mastered 'Leadership' and holds the highest potential amongst current serving General and Flag Officers. Although politically appointed, the Chief of Defence Staff is drawn from a pool of qualified and proven General Officers who range in experience and potential. It stands to reason that anyone appointed to the role of CDS has gained the trust and confidence of the Government of Canada based on competency assessments of their leadership capabilities and congruent values systems.

As PERs are considered the universal measurement against which promotions and subsequent succession planning are based, the institutional leadership will be measured against three metrics drawn from the leadership assessment in Section 4 of the senior officer's PER: Interpersonal Relations, Ethics and Values, and Organizational Awareness. Unfortunately, recent allegations of sexual misconduct and inappropriate personal relationships made public against two former CDSs, and other high-ranking CAF officers call in to question the appropriateness of their appointments and threaten to undermine any progressive cultural changes to date.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence. *Canadian Forces Personnel Appraisal System, Chapter 7- CAF Senior Officers, Leadership Assessment*. Ottawa: DND Canada.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ All allegations of misconduct of any kind against former, or currently serving officers of the CAF have not been tested in court. The information presented is open source and pulled from a variety of reporting agencies and

very nature of these allegations and their historical prevalence confirms that the current promotion and appointment methodology for the CDS needs to be reviewed and reformed. In simple terms, these senior officers failed to master any of the three metrics listed above, displaying unacceptable behaviour that needs marked improvement.

TRUST IN LEADERSHIP

As a military imperative, trust is essential for a leader to exercise influence in combat.¹⁷ It is a requisite for successful military operations, and it is a critical concept interwoven throughout discussions, theories, and concepts related to leadership within the CAF. Trust is necessary to navigate the often-uncertain randomness of military operations and warfare generally. The nature of which is always complex and necessitates trust amongst one another at a significant order of magnitude above what civilians are used to. After all, military members serve in operations that risk life or death, trusting that not only their peers but the institution can be relied upon when needed. Misguided, misaligned, or broken trust can and does have consequences that can be deleterious, or at worst, deadly to personnel.

Unlike other models or theories that have measurable metrics to determine success or failure, the idea of trust is abstract in the sense that it is a personal decision that can change from one instant to the other. Trust is different from one person to the next. However, the nexus that connects the rank and file to the senior leadership of the CAF is the same – interpersonal relations. Senior officers are expected and entrusted with the responsibility of effectively

referenced as applicable. Any deduction or implication regarding the accuracy of these claims, guilt, or innocence of the accused, or recommended action/inaction is the sole opinion of the author and in no way represents the opinion of the Canadian Forces College, CAF, DND, GOC, or any other individual besides the author of this paper.

¹⁷ Bergh, Johan., Boe, Ole. “*Samhandling and Trust in Military Leadership Structures*” In ‘*Samhandling*’ *Under Risk. A Step Ahead of the Unforeseen*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk. (2018): 321

interacting with individuals from the private sector and the public sector, including superiors, peers, and subordinates, whether they be civilian or military¹⁸. Their interactions must be based on respect, and of course, trust. For CAF Senior Officers, interpersonal skills are not simply social graces; they are means of achieving important objectives for DND and the Canadian Forces.

To some, these same leaders, whom many had come to trust, were now seen to be part of the same problem they promised to fix when so many had hoped they would be the driving force behind change. Many felt, and no doubt continue to feel, that any trust between the institution its members had been irrevocably damaged. This was reinforced when a statement was released by the Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, specifically denoting that "trust has been broken" in the Canadian military following these accusations.¹⁹ As they witnessed any semblance of progress washed away, there can be little doubt that some in uniform felt a sense of anger and helplessness with the leadership of the forces.

Instances of sexual misconduct are especially insidious within the military as this behaviour undermines the trust between the institution, its members, and the public. Consequently, CAF members' perception of organizational leadership was only moderately positive and could be improved according to the 2021 CAF retention Survey.²⁰ Additionally, personnel experienced moderately high levels of organizational cynicism.²¹

¹⁸ Canada, Department of National Defence. *Canadian Forces Personnel Appraisal System, Chapter 7- CAF Senior Officers, Leadership Assessment*.

¹⁹ Reynolds, Christopher. *Trust is 'Broken' After Misconduct Allegations Against Military Leaders: Sajjan*. National Observer. 12 March 2021.

²⁰ Canada, Department of National Defence. *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey-Descriptive Analysis*. Defence Research and Development Canada. Ottawa: January 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

While it is likely that no one contributing factor can be specifically blamed for the CAF's recent struggle with recruitment and retention of women in the CAF²², it is clear that senior officers at the institutional level have discounted the ethics and values doctrinally enshrined in numerous publications. Prospective recruits may be off-put by these actions and instead choose an alternate employer whose ethics and values more aptly match their own. As a result, one particular strategic goal of Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE) – Canada's Defence Policy – to increase the proportion of women in the CAF to 25 percent representation by 2026 will be challenging to achieve.²³ In fact, as of 2021, women only represented 15.8 of Regular Force members.²⁴ While not out of reach, this goal has likely been jeopardized by the investigations into the misconduct of the CDS and other high-ranking officers. If women can not feel safe at work, how can the CAF realistically expect to be their employer of choice?

Recently, LCol (Ret'd) Eleanor Taylor, a prominent female within the combat occupations, submitted her release from the CAF, citing "disgust by ongoing reports of sexual misconduct in the Armed Forces and dismayed that it has taken this long for the problem to come to the fore."²⁵ In the same article, Taylor describes a cycle of silence where she, and others, felt they have stood silent for too long.²⁶ She goes on to state, "I have spent the past decade speaking publicly and passionately about the gains women have made in the CAF... ...While I remain fiercely proud of parts of our organization, on the issue of addressing harmful sexual

²² Directorate of Human Rights and Discrimination. *Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Statistics*. Department of National Defence, January 2021. Designated Group membership by rank.

²³ Canada, Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017: 12.

²⁴ Directorate of Human Rights and Discrimination. *Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Statistics...* Designated Group membership by rank.

²⁵ Brewster, Murray., Everson, Kristen. *Senior Female Officer Quits Canadian Forces, Says She's 'Sickened' by Reports of Sexual Misconduct*. CBC News. 16 March 2021.

²⁶ Ibid.

behaviour, we have lost all credibility"²⁷ Here, Taylor was explicitly referring to the credibility of the senior leadership of the CAF and the degree to which it has failed to protect those harmed by sexual misconduct. However, much more can be drawn from her very public resignation – namely that the CDS and other senior leaders failed to act as role models and neglected to personally exemplify the same values and ethics expected of other members of the force. Consequently, the institutional leadership did not foster a climate of ethical conduct, adherence to organizational values, nor respect for the dignity of others. Although the 2019 CAF Retention Survey was conducted prior to these allegations, it concluded that a majority of personnel were somewhat dissatisfied with the organizational leadership of the CAF while only moderately satisfied with the ability of senior leaders to champion member interests and concerns.²⁸ We can deduce that Taylor and others lost trust in the institution so much that releasing out of protest seemed the only option once these allegations came to light.

While acknowledging that there is a problem is a positive step forward, it is not the same as embracing the problem and working toward a solution. In 2018, the Auditor General of Canada released a report on the status of OPERATION HONOUR and highlighted some of the progress the institutional leadership of the CAF had made in the battle against sexual misconduct. Specifically, a heightened awareness of what constituted inappropriate sexual behaviour resulted in a more than 700 percent increase in complaints lodged between 2015 - 2017.²⁹ Given that, it is easy to extrapolate that the number of complaints correlated to an uptick in the trust between members and their chain of command. Unfortunately, additional information

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Directorate of Human Rights and Discrimination. *Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Statistics...* Designated Group membership by rank.

²⁹ Canada, Office of the Auditor General. Report 5 – *Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour – Canadian Armed Forces...*, 5.18.

gathered by Statistics Canada indicated that there were still many more incidents that went unreported, and in 2018 the CAF acknowledged that sexual misconduct remained a severe problem.³⁰ Given the expectation that many high-caliber senior officers would embrace this moral imperative and exert the necessary pressure to drive change, it is disappointing that more was not done.

CONCLUSION

Influential leaders can directly or indirectly inspire the collective direction of an entire unit, formation, or allied force using various techniques though some conditions are necessary to underpin this leadership. The profession of arms is an occupation and a way of life that, quite literally, depends on the actions and trust of others. Constructive influences will shape one's attitude, positively or negatively, toward the institution and inspire a level of confidence in the senior leadership of the CAF. Ideally, over time, this confidence will grow and correlate with an increase in dedication, loyalty, and *esprit d'accord*. Trusted leaders who have earned the confidence of their subordinates can inspire greatness and sacrifice. Truly effective leaders inspire action from apathy using trust as their tool; it is given cautiously and can be revoked at any time.

Soldiers, sailors, and aviators must have trust in their leaders to always do the right thing, to embrace and act in responsible and ethically pure ways, and to accept responsibility for personal faults and failures if/as they happen. By failing to meet any one of these conditions, the institutional leadership of the CAF maintains minimal influence over the force and instead becomes ineffectual. If the CAF is to be an effective strategic tool for the Government of

³⁰ Ibid., 5.20.

Canada, institutional leaders must exemplify the behaviors they expect to see in others while discouraging behaviors that may harm the collective good. Otherwise, hypocritical behavior is damning to the shared value system of the military, and faith in the institution will be immediately lost. When enough stakeholders lose faith in senior leadership, the institution must reflect and reckon with itself to expose potential vulnerabilities in its culture and find areas for improvement. Three such areas include more in-depth background checks for senior leaders, updated and increased campaigns against harmful and inappropriate sexual misconduct targeting all ranks, and a revision to the personnel evaluation system that better aligns past behaviour with future behaviour.

An operationally effective CAF is a force that aligns its actions with Canadian values and ethics and promotes the welfare and well-being of all of its members. After comparing the recent actions of the institutional leadership against performance measurement metrics from the senior officer PER, it is clear that the actions of those accused have been injurious to the CAF and have led to members questioning their trust in the institution. The actions of these senior officers are not consistent with the standards expected of general officers within the CAF and ultimately resulted in ineffectual institutional leadership.

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