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STAFF OFFICER TRAINING IN THE CANADIAN ARMY

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STAFF OFFICER TRAINING IN THE CANADIAN ARMY

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STAFF OFFICER TRAINING IN THE CANADIAN ARMY

AIM

1. The purpose of this paper is to examine the learning methodology and learning outcomes for the second developmental period (DP2) for Canadian Army (CA) officers in order to produce employable staff officer. The intent is to discuss the methodology and identify areas of concerns but also discuss additional learning outcomes often cited as lacking for the officer corps entering their third developmental period (DP3). A few of these gaps include; writing skills, administrative and management skills, and institutional knowledge. The discussion will offer a few recommendations for further examination and future implementation.

INTRODUCTION

2. The knowledge and skills required of our members operating outside their fields of expertise, in positions such as staff officers, instructors and advisors, is growing as they navigate through their career progression. The Canadian Forces Professional Development System (CFPDS)¹ sets the framework for our member's career long learning experience to meet the needs of the service, which in theory includes the above-mentioned employment. Each developmental periods aim to develop five meta-competencies to improve our members leadership potential, these include, expertise, cognitive capacities, social capacities, change capacities and professional identity as part of the Leader Development Framework (LDF).² Through DP2, members are intended to operate at the junior level within these competencies and DP3 officers at the intermediate level. At this time, do we develop these competencies enough to prepare members for their DP2 and DP3 employment as staff officers, through which mechanisms?

3. DP2 aims to develop those competencies in the unit and brigade context. However, as members progress to their next position, they are often ill equipped to handle some of the institutional and organisational aspects they confront in their new capacities once employed outside the brigade. If the staff forms the intellectual core of any military organization³, they must be formed, trained and educated as such. Shortfalls such as writing skills, institutional knowledge, planning processes, management knowledge and administrative processes and knowledge often create inefficiencies for the members and the new organisation. This issue is not only present in the CA, it is present in the wider CAF, documented in 2003 with the review of the professional development program conducted by Canadian Defence Academy (CDA).⁴ It is also present within civilian industry as career movement is at an all time high amongst young professional. How do successful organizations manage formal and informal management training to ensure maximum effectiveness and output through personnel movement? Can these shortfalls be address within DP2 and DP3?

DISCUSSION

4. DP2 starts when a member arrives at his first unit fully qualified in their trade. For officers the next requirement for the period is to complete the Canadian Armed Forces Junior Officer Development (CAFJOD) program, which intends to provide the member with the baseline professional body of

¹ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. "Canadian Armed Forces Professional Development", accessed 4 February 2021 <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/training-prof-dev/index.page>

² Ibid.

³ Jeffrey M. Stouffer and Bernd Horn, Canada. Canadian Armed Forces. Wing, 17, and Canadian Defence Academy. Educating the Leader and Leading the Educated: The Defence Learning, Education and Training Handbook. Kingston, Ont: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013. p.29

⁴ Ibid., p.37

knowledge (PBK) related to the military profession and critical thinking skills.^{5 6} In the CA members must also complete the AJSO qualification, which focuses on establishing a training plan at the sub-unit level, which is accomplished with an on-the-job-training (OJT) type of task. Officers must then attend the Army Tactical Operation Course, the Army Operations Course and any other trade specific to complete the training period. Upon promotion to Major, members enter their third development period (DP3) and will complete trade specific training such as the combat team commander's course or others and attend the Joint Command and Staff Program.

5. The first issue that arises from this career progression is the method used to deliver AJSO. The OJT model can be used in a multitude of environments for learning, however research as shown that it more often than not poorly implemented.⁷ Researchers propose that experiential learning is comprised of a ratio of 70:20:10, broken down with 70% accounting for OJT learning, 20% occurring with feedback and coaching, and 10% with formal learning.⁸ The most common experiential learning model is proposed by Kolb, which stipulates a learning cycle defined by concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.⁹ These are significant ideas; in this model, the institution is responsible for only about 10% of the learning with 90% being in the hands of the supervisor and learner, if the OJT and the feedback portions are not supported and executed well, the member loses a significant opportunity for critical learning. The OJT methodology used by the CA differs from what our learning models would propose. When examining the required outcomes for the qualification¹⁰ we can extrapolate that the aim is task focused, almost like a basic training task but more complicated and longer in duration. The length of the task does not lend itself to Kolb's learning model or the OJT model for learning reflection and experimentation. Compared to the theoretical models discussed above, this provides only a small learning value.

6. The results of Matsuo's research¹¹ concluded that OJT supervisors are required to possess the ability to stretch objectives, monitor objectives, promote reflection, provide feedback and promote the learning cycle. Although supervisors in the CA are competent enough, the assessment mechanism is focused on completion of the task and not the learning cycle, which again diminishes the learning value of the task. The training we are discussing falls within what the literature calls managerial training. Learning strategies must also be adapted to this reality, literature suggest that inductive learning strategies are more successful¹² in this area of learning, meaning the learner needs to drive the process and find the answers while assisted by the training facilitator. OJT tasks described in the AJSO checklist tend revolve around training activities that are directed and short in duration, meaning the individual will be coached for a short period of time for a specific task and the learning environment will be terminated.

7. One of the issues with this learning framework rests on the availability of supervisors and their capacity to support this learning process. The lack of manpower for training is a theme that resonates

⁵ Ibid., p.291

⁶ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. "CANFORGEN 007/19" accessed 29 January 2021, vcds.dmil.ca/apps/canforgen/007-19/CANFORGEN_007/19

⁷ M. Matsuo. (2014), Instructional skills for OJT and learning. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 18: 225-240. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/ijtd.12035>p.237

⁸ Ibid., p.225

⁹ Ibid., p.229

¹⁰ Canadian Army Command Staff and College. "Army Junior Staff Officer OJT Package" accessed 29 January 2021, <https://acims.mil.ca/trg/CACSC/Working Documents/1.1E Annex B Appendix 1 OJT INSTRUCTIONS AND CHECKLIST.docx>

¹¹ M. Matsuo. (2014), Instructional skills for OJT and learning. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 18: 225-240. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/ijtd.12035>p.235

¹² Shirine L. Mafi. "Planned On-the-Job Managerial Training." *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 3, no. 4 (November 2001): 488-95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15234220122238418>.p.494

across most industries¹³ but is amplified in the CA with the yearly rotations of our members during the yearly posting season, but also in the tempo of operations and the ratio of supervisors and trainees. Another issue is uniformity, as the process is executed at the unit level, its application across locations and trades is difficult to support for attaining a clear standard.

8. OJT is a valuable tool for learning skills. However, in the environment our junior officers operate and work in, the use of a basic short period task does not provide value to the member or the institution in terms of learning opportunity. Young officers would benefit more from a prolonged engagement in the form of mentorship. Establishing a strong mentorship network and increased engagement opportunities for junior officers would provide more opportunities for learning and development within DP2, creating a stronger learning and resilient organization. This would support institutional goals laid out in the Officership 2020¹⁴, which discusses mentoring as a supporting tool to officer development. Dr. Bill Bentley, author in *Educating the Leader*, describes it best:

“To that specific point, the second part of the leadership definition speaks to the requirement for senior leaders especially, to create and sustain the culture of a learning organization. Such a culture is, in fact, a critical capability that energizes all of the other important capabilities that leads to successful institutions and militaries.”¹⁵

A mentoring program could support the development of such a culture. This would also align with the additional training requirements mentioned in the following sections, demonstrating development is a continuous endeavor, a key tenet in the CFPDS and why it is expected of officers.¹⁶ It would also support socialization of the CA values that require a steady engagement once a member completes DP1.

9. Another key issue cited by staff is our officers’ ability to write, once promoted to Major, there is an expectation that members will have an above average ability to produce quality written products. This, for the majority of members is not the case. A university level education does not necessarily equate to members possessing the expected level of writing skills expected at DP3. Many degrees only require basic writing skills completed at the first year of undergraduate level of programs, which is the starting point for most officers in DP2. An article written in 2011 for the Military Review Journal discusses the state of writing in the United States and its impact on the U.S. Army officer corps, in the essay the author describes the impact social media has had on our soldiers and officer’s ability to write well, going so far as to call it a crisis.¹⁷ The assumption is that the general Canadian population and CA officer corps are most likely in a similar situation.

10. “Writing is a form of thinking. As the writing skills of Army officers atrophy, our thinking skills may be wasting away as well.”¹⁸ The ability to write supports learning objectives and the ability to understand and formulate abstract models; these are skills and aptitudes that support the most basic

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020) : Strategic Guidance for the Canadian Forces Officer Corps and the Officer Professional Development System, Ottawa, 2001.

¹⁵ Jeffrey M. Stouffer and Bernd Horn, Canada. Canadian Armed Forces. Wing, 17, and Canadian Defence Academy. *Educating the Leader and Leading the Educated: The Defence Learning, Education and Training Handbook*. Kingston, Ont: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013. p.26

¹⁶ Ibid., p.121

¹⁷ Trent J. Lythgoe. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS. *Flight Simulation for the Brain: Why Army Officers must Write*, 2011.

¹⁸ Ibid.

concepts of the CFPDS. This skill is at the center of the LDF and the PBK frameworks therefore critical to the development of our officers at all levels.

11. The development of writing skills is a must in DP2 in order to prepare officers for DP3, where the expectation of these skills is extremely high. The CA should establish a required outcome for its members and provide courseware and testing mechanisms to ensure standards are met. This would ensure our officer corps achieves the necessary level of proficiency to function at the intermediate and senior level.

12. The third area for improvement is in the areas of management knowledge. Although this area of knowledge is quite large, there are many subjects that are greatly relevant to the CAF and the CA as organisations. As members progress through their career and many different types of employment, this type of knowledge becomes crucial to lead the institution with its delivery of programs. Junior officers in DP2 need to be initiated to subjects such as change management, project management, human resources, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, etc. As the link between the tactical and strategic levels continues to get smaller, staff officers operating in this space need the tools to navigate complex issues of possible strategic relevance.

13. These topics, categorized as supporting knowledge as part of the CAF professional body of knowledge (PBK)¹⁹, would provide a solid base of knowledge for officer entering DP3 as well as junior officers working in higher-level headquarters. This would also support a better understanding of interactions with other governmental departments and the public service. This type of knowledge can be delivered through distance learning and be approached as incremental in complexity for delivery or as stand-alone courses required for promotion to Major.

14. The last area of improvement to discuss is the institutional knowledge piece. At the conclusion of DP2 officers should have a good understanding of the institutional process that govern the CAF and the CA. Having a general understanding of the business planning process, procurement process, component capabilities, Defence Team Establishment Plan, Financial Administration Act training, etc. Other subjects to explore further could include leadership doctrine and the LDF to provide a better understanding of the meta-competencies and their impact on professional development. This knowledge would better prepare officers entering DP3 for sub-unit command and employment within higher-level headquarters.

15. Again, these areas of study are referred to as supporting knowledge, part of the PBK, and its delivery could be done online and through the same models as management knowledge as described in para 13. These could be combined or stand alone, but should be done as a requirement for promotion to Major. As the demographics for the officer corps continue to change, the approach to determine the required outcomes and the content delivery need to be addressed through the learning centered approach.²⁰ This enables the learner to drive his own learning experience and progress at his own rate.

16. These proposals have not been resourced for costing or personnel implications. The establishment of a mentoring program would most likely require a few military and civilian positions to run and maintain the program at the national and local levels. The most costly endeavour would most likely be the establishment and implementation of a writing course which would require a number of professors to support the average number of promotions to Major that occur yearly in the CA, these could be sourced from CDA or by contract. Lastly, the development of the management and institutional knowledge

¹⁹ Jeffrey M. Stouffer and Bernd Horn, Canada. Canadian Armed Forces. Wing, 17, and Canadian Defence Academy. Educating the Leader and Leading the Educated: The Defence Learning, Education and Training Handbook. Kingston, Ont: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013. p.287

²⁰ Ibid., p.221

courses costs could be implemented with integral resources currently housed within the Army with minimal cost with the exception of course development.

CONCLUSION

17. The current DP2 framework provides officers a very basic institutional knowledge base with CAFJOD and AJSO, a very limited learning opportunity through AJSO's OJT and a solid tactical and operational planning capability with ATOC and AOC. Multiple gaps in knowledge and skill require attention to better prepare our members for employment as staff officers. The demand of the CA and the CAF will continue to require highly skilled and agile officers to work in staff positions. However, the current approach to their training and education as staff officers does not provide enough knowledge and support to maximize their full potential during DP2 and in DP3. Armed with an increased amount of knowledge, increased writing skills and a strong mentor network our junior officers can thrive in staff positions and be better prepared to lead the institution.

RECOMMENDATION

18. The first recommendation would be to remove the AJSO OJT requirement from the course. In its place, the CA should establish a robust mentorship program designed to support members through DP2 and DP3 employment. The intent would be to support the CA in becoming a learning organisation and provide members with career and psychosocial support as detailed in the CAF mentorship handbook.²¹ The program would enable the same learning objectives as AJSO's OJT module but maintained through the entire developmental period.

19. The second recommendation would mandate the requirement to complete a university level writing course, this would increase our members' ability to communicate in staff positions and provide a better foundation for employment in DP3.

20. Lastly, AJSO needs to incorporate more modules detailing some of the knowledge areas discussed above. These would include a module on management theories practices, and an expanded module on institutional knowledge described in para 12 and 14. Analysis on what DP3 officers are expected to know should drive the content for an outcome-based approach. Content could potentially be delivered incrementally or with targeted delivery periods such as prior and after ATOC, and after AOC. It could also be open throughout the developmental period to be completed at the learner's convenience.

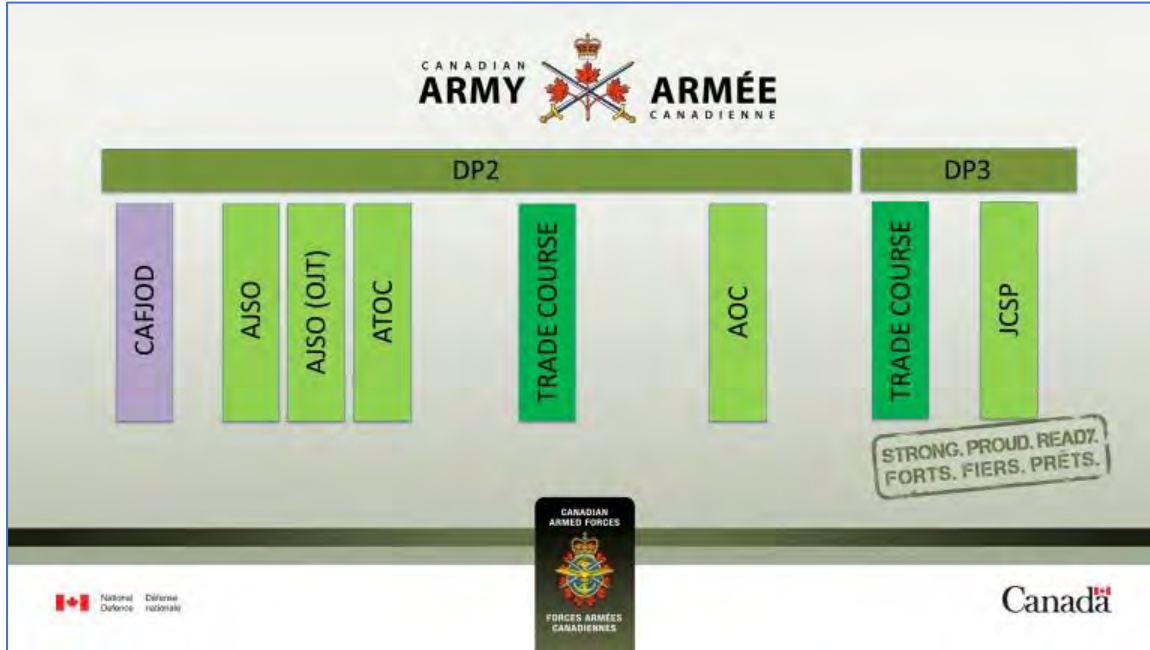
Annex A – DP2 and DP3 Current and Proposed Course Timeline

²¹ Daniel Lagacé-Roy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, and Institut de leadership des Forces canadiennes. Mentoring Handbook. Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence, 2007.

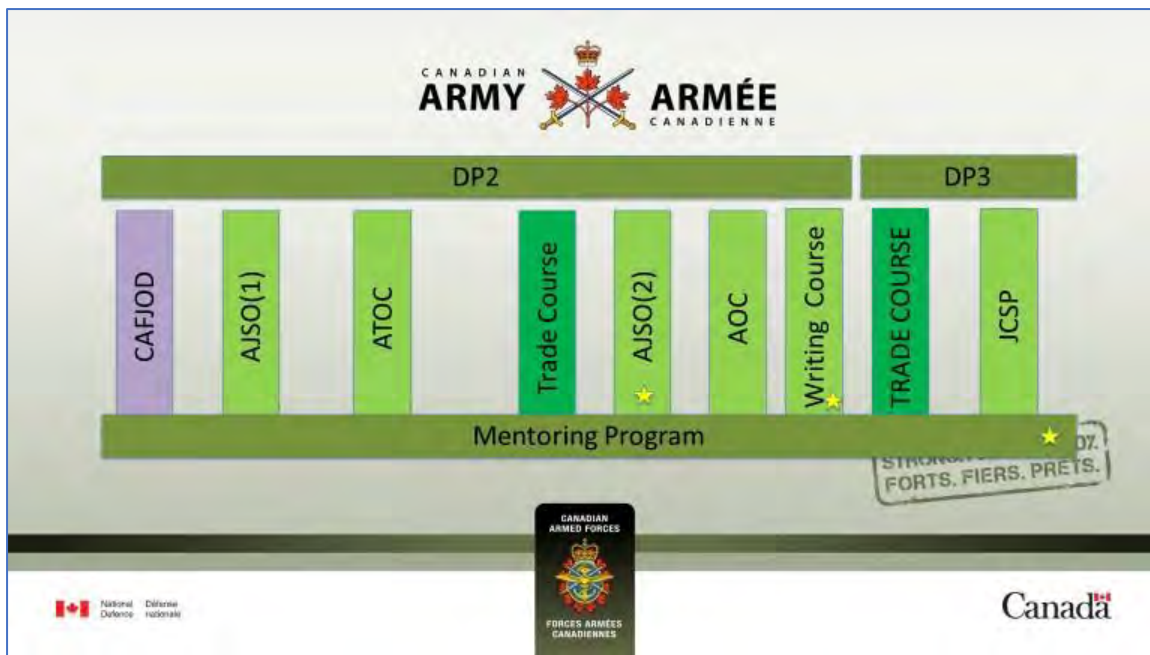
Annex A

D2 and DP3 Current and Proposed Course Timeline

Current course requirements



Proposed course requirement – Targeted approach



Yellow star represent new course and program requirements

Proposed course requirements – Open/incremental approach



Yellow Star represent new course and program requirements

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