



Canadian Forces Human Resources Management

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JCSP 48

Exercise Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: A STUBBORN FRAMEWORK LEADING MILITARY MEMBERS OUT THE DOOR

INTRODUCTION

The loss of any part of a workforce in any industry or organization is inevitable.¹ This loss, irrespective of the reason, is called attrition. Attrition can be a good thing as it strikes a balance between new and experienced personnel. It has the benefit of bringing in new knowledge and technologies, introducing new ideas, lessening the negative impact of groupism, reducing any surplus of staff, has the potential to bring in creativity and innovation as well as creating a healthy dose of competition within an organization.² In a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) context, attrition can create growth and career progression opportunities by having “the right person, with the right qualifications, in the right place at the right time (R4)”³ in taking on new challenging roles and responsibilities, one of the key tasks of CAF Career Managers. Attrition also has its downfalls and can even be detrimental to an organization’s performance and/or “raison d’être” if attrition levels are too high and/or employees leave at the wrong time.⁴ Some of the negative effects of attrition include the loss of productivity and quality, increase in cost (i.e. recruiting, training, administrative proceedings (i.e. issued identification cards, access passes, uniforms), signing bonuses), loss of customer and stakeholder support, decrease in brand loyalty, loss of goodwill, loss of secrecy of employees leaving the organization, loss of

¹ Gayatri Negi, “Employee Attrition: Inevitable Yet Manageable,” *Abhinav - International Monthly Refereed Journal of Research In Management & Technology*, Volume Two (July 2013): 50.

² Negi, “Employee Attrition...”, 54-55.

³ Canadian Forces, B-GL-005-100/FP-100, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 1.0 Military Personnel Management Doctrine* (Ottawa: CF Canada, 2008), 5-2.

⁴ Amanda Huddleston, “Canadian Armed Forces Retention: A Wicked Problem?” (master’s thesis, University of Manitoba, 2020), 74.

key personnel and lack of competitiveness.⁵ As a Millennial who has seen my cohort peers of experienced people leaving CAF over the past few years, something that has accelerated in the past year at a time when CAF needs them the most, this is an important issue that concerns me.

The Department of National Defence (DND) and CAF is the largest federal government department⁶ established for over 100,000 personnel comprised of 68,000 Regular Force, 27,000 Reserve Force, and 24,000 civilian employee positions for a total of 95,000 military positions.⁷ In CAF's organizational context, attrition can be more difficult to correct than in other organizations due to its bottom-up recruiting and career progression models. Although common in military organizations⁸, these models make it difficult to quickly fill personnel gaps caused by attrition. "Gaps in higher ranks are difficult to correct if not enough people are moving through the system to be promoted to those ranks."⁹ Although CAF does not adopt the practice of "recruiting experienced people into its higher ranks"¹⁰, it has, on a case by case basis, accepted suitable applicants from Commonwealth countries. To fill its higher ranks, CAF members must generally have the necessary training, experience, and skillsets to be appointed or promoted to fill them. CAF training comes at a high cost¹¹ to the Canadian public and is a lengthy process

⁵ Negi, "Employee Attrition...", 53-54.

⁶ Government of Canada, "Mandate of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces," last modified 24 September 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/mandate.html>.

⁷ Government of Canada, "Department of National Defence – FAQ," last modified 24 September 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/contact-us/frequently-asked-questions.html#w1513701667064>.

⁸ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, 2002. Chapter 5: National Defense - Recruitment and Retention of Military Personnel* (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2002), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5, Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence, of the Fall 2016 reports of the Auditor General of Canada* (Ottawa: House of Commons, 2017), 12.

that “can take from two to seven years depending on the occupation”¹² to reach Trained Effective Strength (TES) status. This means that preparing military members to fill personnel shortages caused by attrition not only comes at a high cost from a public funds perspective but also takes multiple years.

CAF attrition rates have been significantly increasing over the past three decades. In addition, CAF has experienced exponential attrition in 2021 resulting in CAF being short about 10 percent of its total TES (Regular and Reserve Force combined) by December 2021. According to CAF’s Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), General Wayne Eyre, this sharp reduction was due to the uncovering of CAF’s systemic misconduct problem compounded by the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic 2019 (COVID-19) which constrained CAF recruiting and training.¹³ The CDS also said that this unexpected turn of events was “forcing many in uniforms to pick up the slack. In addition, about 1,000 mid-level officers are either in positions where their skills don’t match up – “or just don’t exist.” ”¹⁴ This trend is concerning “because the military’s operational capability depends on [CAF’s] ability to retain highly specialized, trained, and experienced military personnel on a long-term basis.”¹⁵ “The Canadian population expects that they will be protected by the CAF [...]. For CAF to be able to do this effectively, the [armed] force[s] needs to have a sufficient number of well-trained personnel.”¹⁶ CAF’s high levels of

¹² Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada, Chapter 2: National Defense - Recruitment and Retention* (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2006), 52.

¹³ Murray Brewster, “Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military,” *CBC News*, last modified 26 October 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/wayne-eyre-armed-forces-sexual-misconduct-pandemic-1.6224791>.

¹⁴ Lee Berthiaume, “‘Cracks’ appearing as Canadian military faces confluence of challenges: defence chief,” *The Canadian Press*, 3 June 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2537161935?parentSessionId=JvMVaWdukrdGFQl5tarny6fuluaj2DnSXqcP1ND0v0U%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>.

¹⁵ Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5...*, 12.

¹⁶ Huddleston, “Canadian Armed Forces Retention...”, 4.

attrition are causing a lack of corporate knowledge, momentum, and continuity within the institution. This can lead CAF to be a lower-performing and quality force, potentially placing Defence Team members in vulnerable positions and in the worst case, dangerous situations. Additionally, this causes CAF to be in a constant reactive state resulting in the implementation of ad hoc solutions which, have been unsuccessful over time. Overall, CAF's high levels of attrition can have detrimental impacts on its operational effectiveness, credibility, and relevance on the national and international stage and become a matter of national security.¹⁷

Although attrition is inevitable, it is manageable. There are different kinds of attrition including voluntary, involuntary, compulsory, and natural.¹⁸ This paper will focus on the voluntary attrition of CAF's Regular Force members with a lens on society's changing demographics explaining generational differences including workplace motivators. These motivators will then be compared with CAF's Human Resources Management (HRM) framework which, despite CAF's continuous efforts, has a strong disconnect between current generations and its HRM policies and practices meant to retain them. It will also demonstrate how CAF's HRM framework, although robust, lacks synchronicity and is missing a key strategic capability resulting in CAF's HRM policies and practices missing the mark and leading military members to voluntarily leave CAF early. The paper will also offer short and long-term solutions, with potential pitfalls, to enhance its' HRM framework suggesting changes to its organizational structure as well as key policies and practices benefiting both CAF's recruiting and retention efforts.

¹⁷ Brewster, "Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military...".

¹⁸ Negi, "Employee Attrition...", 51.

Although recruiting is an essential piece of an HRM framework, retention will be the primary focus of this paper.

CAF'S ATTRITION PROBLEM

CAF's Intensifying Attrition Rate

CAF has experienced personnel shortages and attrition problems for the past three decades. This trend stems from the "actions taken when [the Department of] National Defence downsized in the mid-1990s."¹⁹ For at least the past two decades, CAF has tried to increase its effective strength to meet its occupational demands using a variety of recruiting and retention strategies. Despite its efforts, CAF's overall effective strength has been trending downwards owing in part due to the lack of synchronicity between recruiting and retention efforts.

CAF's personnel shortages problem was so significant that it was subject to audits from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of Canada in 2002, 2006, and 2016. The 2002 report identified that over 3,000 positions were vacant and anticipated that "many members [Baby Boomers] will soon have enough years of service to be eligible to leave".²⁰ Progress was made by 2005 as the decline in TES personnel had stopped and the number of vacant positions was now 2,400.²¹ By 2012, the gap seemed to have stabilized with a gap of 2,300 positions, however, in 2016, the gap increased to 4,200.²² Since 2016, no formal OAG external reports have been produced to capture CAF's recruiting and retention situation, however, became a matter studied by Defence Research and

¹⁹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 2002...*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 2006...*, 47.

²² Parliament, *Report 5...*, 3.

Development Canada (DRDC). In 2021, CAF experienced a sharp reduction in military personnel triggered by the uncovering of CAF's systemic misconduct problem as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDS announced that CAF was short 7,500 military personnel²³ in October 2021 and by December that same year, the revised shortage reached a staggering 10,000, representing 10 percent of its effective strength.²⁴ CAF's personnel shortages are worsening as time goes on.

Not only has CAF's personnel gap increased over the years but so have CAF's attrition levels as a consequence. Historically, CAF's Regular Force attrition rate "has averaged six percent since 2000"²⁵ however, has experienced an overall increase over the past 20 years. The 2002 and 2006 OAG report both anticipated this trend, forecasting increased future attrition over several years.²⁶ This would be due to natural attrition where the Baby Boomers generation would become eligible for retirement²⁷ however, also due to the discovery of a new voluntary attrition trend whereby "attrition rates are also higher than average in the early years when members are getting initial training and adjusting to military life."²⁸ By 2008, the attrition rate rose to 9.1 percent, decreased to 7.6 percent in 2010²⁹, rose slightly in fiscal years (FY) 17/18 to 19/20 to 7.8 percent, and decrease to 6.4 percent in FY 20/21.³⁰ The particularly lower attrition rate in FY 20/21, in comparison to

²³ Brewster, "Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military..."

²⁴ Lee Berthiaume, "Canadian Navy Needs to Recruit 1,000 Sailors to Crew New Warships: Vice-Admiral," *The Canadian Press*, last modified 30 December 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2615682517?parentSessionId=T%2FZHDVIK9UVzbLXixKXSSHXEUuRHsutRZ2LkBqDMpFY%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>.

²⁵ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Chapter 5 2002...*, 4; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 2006...*, 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁹ Manchun Fang and Paul Bender, "Analyzing Changes in Attrition of the Canadian Forces," *ACTA Press*, accessed 18 March 2022, <https://www.actapress.com/PaperInfo.aspx?PaperID=452225&reason=500>.

³⁰ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Attrition by occupation, designated group, and years of service group* (Ottawa: Editorial Office of Defence Research and Development Canada, 2021), 3.

more recent years, is “as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; most notably as a result of the reduced intake and cessation of training.”³¹ and should be seen as an aberration due to uncertainty in the world. Specifically, in terms of voluntary attrition, a *2016 CAF Retention Survey*³² identified that 18.6 percent of Regular Force members intended to leave CAF within three years while a 2019 survey revealed an increase at 23.5 percent.³³ As for CAF members’ desire to stay with CAF until the compulsory retirement age (CRA) set at 60 years old, the 2016 survey indicated that 44.7 percent intended to stay until CRA while the 2019 survey indicated a decrease at 40.5 percent.³⁴ So far, this data is in line with the 2002 and 2006 OAG’s increased attrition projections.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDS commented that the majority of members leaving “are the heart of our command structure, the 'missing middle' – master corporals, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, majors, master sailors, petty officers, lieutenant commanders”.³⁵ He also admitted that “he’s particularly alarmed at the number of experienced leaders – officers and noncommissioned officers – who are putting in their release notices and quitting the service”³⁶, indicative that voluntary attrition is no longer a significant problem but a critical one.

Causes of Attrition in CAF

Although attrition is a systemic and known problem in CAF, it seems that CAF either does not seem to be aware of the source of this problem or does not know how to

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² Nicholas Bremner and Glen Budgell, *The 2016 CAF Retention Survey: Descriptive Analysis* (Ottawa: Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, 2017), 3.

³³ “This percentage excludes those who will reach CRA within the next three years.” Defence Research and Development Canada, *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Descriptive Analysis* (Ottawa: Editorial Office of Defence Research and Development Canada, 2019), 105.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Brewster, “Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military...”.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

entice members to stay in CAF. “For several years, the Department did not track [capture] reasons for leaving, and now it does not have complete or reliable data that would help it to focus on retention efforts.”³⁷ Over the years, CAF’s recruiting and retention have been analyzed by various entities (i.e. OAG, DRDC, CAF) who uses different research methods, analyze different data sets and produce different types of reports to present their findings, and suggest ad hoc solutions. Although rich sources of information, these reports are inconsistent with one another and are conducted sporadically which reveals a deficiency and lack of synchronicity in CAF’s strategic HRM (SHRM) framework.

Despite this deficiency, the Defence Team has put an active effort into trying to understand attrition and attempting to decrease its personnel gap using various recruiting and retention initiatives. For instance, its Defence strategies³⁸ and CAF Doctrine³⁹ all contain a section pertaining to HRM. From an organizational structure standpoint, CAF has centralized its major HRM organizations, in the form of Directorates and Groups, under the Chief Military Personnel (CMP), a Level 1 (L1) organization. CAF even created new organizations to improve its support to members and their families. For instance, in 2018 it stood up the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group (CAF TG) to better support ill and injured military members, veterans, and their families.⁴⁰ Most recently in April 2021, a new L1 organization called Chief of Professional Conduct and

³⁷ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Chapter 5 2002...*, 13.

³⁸ Department of National Defence, *Military HR Strategy 2020 : Facing the People Challenges of the Future* (Ottawa: National Defence, 2002), <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/385809/publication.html>; Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa: National Defence, 2008), 16, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.693410/publication.html>; Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy* (Ottawa: National Defence, 2017), <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.838545/publication.html>.

³⁹ Canadian Forces, B-GL-005-100/FP-100, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication...*

⁴⁰ National Defence, “Stand up of the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group: a commitment to look after members, veterans, and their families,” last modified 10 December 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2018/12/stand-up-of-the-canadian-armed-forces-transition-group-a-commitment-to-look-after-members-veterans-and-their-families.html>.

Culture (CPCC)⁴¹ was created to address CAF's systemic misconduct problem and promote culture change. These various commands are responsible for developing programs and services, creating policies, and instilling practices to ensure the proper support of its military members and their families from their time of enrollment, throughout their military career, and upon departure from CAF with programs and services available to CAF veterans. Although CAF seems to have a robust HRM organizational structure, it appears that the L1s and Level Two (L2) work in so-called silos manifested by the apparent lack of synchronicity at various levels in its HRM framework and lack of overall positive progress. Despite CAF's efforts, its personnel gap has been increasing with a current unprecedented personnel gap of 10 percent, a trend that has become of serious concern to the CDS.

Generational Workplace Motivators

Although CAF attrition is a perpetual problem, it is not the only Defence Force experiencing this issue. The United States (U.S.) based military defense corporation is also experiencing increased levels of attrition from early-career employees. A recent study conducted by Martin A. Jacoby was done on the topic by analyzing different generations' values, attitudes, and beliefs and their impacts on hiring and attrition rates in U.S.-based military defense corporations.⁴² Since Canada and the U.S. have similarities in terms of society and have geographical proximity to one another, it would be beneficial for CAF to leverage finding from this study to better understand potential reasons

⁴¹ Canadian Armed Forces, "Chief Professional Conduct and Culture Command," last modified 10 August 2021, <http://www.rcf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/article-template-magazine.page?doc=chief-professional-conduct-and-culture-command/koejbk59>.

⁴² Martin A. Jacoby, "Millennial and Generation Z Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs About the Military and Their Effect on Job Attraction and Attrition in the Military Defense Industry" (Dissertation, Keiser University, 2021), Abstract.

surrounding CAF's attrition problem. Generations change in different ways and understanding generational differences and motivators are important when analyzing attrition to develop synchronized recruiting and retention strategies. After all, it is people from those generations who make up voluntary Defence Forces such as CAF. "[...] there is abundantly valid confirmation and continuing research to show that a generational method to understanding society and groups of people is technically acceptable and justifiable for conducting quality social science research."⁴³

Generational categorization can be an effective baseline used to understand people's attitudes, values, and beliefs useful when developing viable HRM strategies such as retention. Generation's societal and cultural beliefs and makeup differ from one another and are shaped by "similar events [experienced] in their youth during a distinct period."⁴⁴ These events result in generations developing "a distinctive character and a shared set of attitudes and behaviors."⁴⁵ For instance, the Baby Boomer generation was born between the end of World War II in 1946 and the early 1960s and is reaching retirement age. This generation is significant in size and is "thought to be competitive and loyal workaholics who value individual freedom and dedication to task."⁴⁶ Then came Generation X, a smaller generation, born in the early 1960s to late 1970s. Unlike the Baby Boomers, Generation X "are self-reliant, optimistic; value education, independence,

⁴³ Jacoby, "Millennial and Generation Z Attitudes...", 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁶ Jane W. Gibson, Regina A. Greenwood and Edward F. Murphy Jr., "View of Generational Differences In The Workplace: Personal Values, Behaviors, And Popular Beliefs," *Journal of Diversity Management*, Volume 4, no. 3 (Third Quarter 2009): 1, <https://www.clutejournals.com/index.php/JDM/article/view/4959/5051>.

and parenting above work”.⁴⁷ The Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are the offspring of the Baby Boomers and thus, also significant in size, were born in the early 1980s to the end of 1990s. This generation is “characterized as socially sensitive, optimistic, ambitious, curious, technologically adept, and easily bored.”⁴⁸ Then came Generation Z born from the late 1990s to 2012. Technology forms part of Generation Z’s identity who, tend to be instant-minded, individualistic, self-directed, environmentally and socially conscious, trustworthy, and less motivated by money than Millennials.⁴⁹

Each generation has different workplace motivators which translate to various attitudes, values, and beliefs related to military service. For the Baby Boomers “[Baby] Boomers entered the workforce seeking fulfillment through their jobs rather than through their personal lives. They define job security as a lifelong commitment to a corporation”.⁵⁰ A deduction that can be made from this generation is that they would be more prone to dedicate their lives to military service and likely to serve during the entirety of their contract (i.e. 20 to 25 years) or serve until CRA. Unlike the Baby Boomers, Generation X “does not have a strong loyalty to an employer [...] [and] [...] seek balance in their lives as they raise their families.”⁵¹ It can be inferred that, unlike the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X individuals serving in the military may not be as

⁴⁷ Christina V. Ware, “Generation X and Generation Y in the workplace: a study comparing work values of Generation X and Generation Y” (Dissertation, Capella University, 2013), 35, <https://www.proquest.com/pagepdf/1317633201?accountid=9867>.

⁴⁸ Gibson, Greenwood and Murphy Jr., “View of Generational Differences In The Workplace...”, 1.

⁴⁹ Dr. A.P. Singh and Jianguanglung Dangmei, “UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z THE FUTURE WORKFORCE,” *South-Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Volume Three, Issue 3 (Spring 2016): 3, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jianguanglung-Dangmei/publication/305280948_UNDERSTANDING_THE_GENERATION_Z_THE_FUTURE_WORKFORCE/links/5786a11008aef321de2c6f21/UNDERSTANDING-THE-GENERATION-Z-THE-FUTURE-WORKFORCE.pdf.

⁵⁰ Andrew G. Wilcox, “Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs,” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2001), 27. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA391042.pdf>.

⁵¹ Nancy Sutton Bell and Marvin Narz, “Meeting the Challenges of Age Diversity in the Workplace,” *The CPA Journal* (February 2007), <http://archives.cpajournal.com/printversions/cpaj/2007/207/p56.htm>.

likely to serve until the end of their contract or CRA. The “Millennials’ attitudes and behaviors represent a sharp break [contrast] from Generation X, and are running exactly counter to trends launched by the Boomers.”⁵² The three highest workplace features this generation seeks are “schooling and constant learning prospects, flexible work hours and schedules, and quality of life issues.”⁵³ This generation’s interest to serve in the military is motivated by self-centered reasons vice for “patriotic duty or service to the nation.”⁵⁴ Although the military can fulfill some of the Millennials’ workplace needs, “flexibility and quality of life will never be one of the selling points for a military career.”⁵⁵ negatively impacting this generation’s recruiting and retention. Generation Z exhibited even less loyalty than the Millennials, “with 61% saying they would leave within 2 years if given the opportunity”.⁵⁶ Generation Z seeks flexible hours, personal freedom, “independence to prove themselves and earn immediate recognition”⁵⁷, “desire the managers to listen to their ideas and value their opinion”⁵⁸, and “prefer to work for a leader with honesty and integrity”.⁵⁹ See below for additional generational descriptors comparing Baby Boomers, Generations X, and Y (Millennials).

Table 1: Generational Descriptors

Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Sandwich generation	Latch-key kids	Netters
Company loyalty	Lack of loyalty	“Contract” mentality
Idealistic	Reactive	Civic-minded
Self-absorbed	Self-reliant	Self-centered
Workaholic	Work/life balance	Multi-taskers

⁵² Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 7.

⁵³ Jacoby, “Millennial and Generation Z Attitudes...”, 20.

⁵³ Gibson, Greenwood and Murphy Jr., “View of Generational Differences In The Workplace...”, 23-24.

⁵⁴ Jacoby, “Millennial and Generation Z Attitudes...”, 26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁷ Dr. Singh and Dangmei, “UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z...”, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Tech conservatives	Computer savvy	Tech experts
Entitled	Cynical/skeptical	Easily bored
Traditional family	Divorced family	Many family forms
Wary of authority	Independent	Crave feedback
Competitive	Entrepreneurial	Serial Entrepreneurs
Materialistic	Fun-loving	Volunteers
Training	Life-long learning	Distance learning
Comfortable with change	Creative	Crave challenge
Optimistic	Want fulfilling work	High maintenance
Security oriented	Career options	Collaborative

Source: Gibson, Greenwood, and Murphy Jr., “Generational Differences In The Workplace: Personal Values, Behaviors, And Popular Beliefs”, 3.

Given these generations’ workplace motivators, it is no longer surprising why CAF’s attrition has been on the rise. The hard truth is that today’s young adults and youth are self-centered vices selfless.

Today’s youth see a military with an uncertain future, ill-defined mission, long family separations, unequal living conditions, and general lack of choice compared to a civilian career showing long term growth and promise, with greater rewards in familial and personal fulfillment.⁶⁰

Additionally, young adults do not even view the military as an economic safety net⁶¹, let alone a patriotic duty.

CAF’s HRM policy framework is regrettably not helping the situation due to being outdated, bureaucratic, and inflexible. From an HRM organizational structure perspective, the majority of CAF’s HRM capability, including policy, is centralized within CMP, an L1 organization. CMP has the mandate “To recruit, train, educate, prepare, support, honour and recognize military personnel and military personnel and their families for

⁶⁰ Dr. Singh and Dangmei, “UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z...”, 26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

service to Canada.”⁶² CMP also has the mandate to address CAF’s systemic cultural problem including harmful and inappropriate behaviour. Another L1 with an HRM mandate is the CPCC which recently stood up in April 2021, “responsible for all aspects of addressing systemic misconduct and the promotion of culture change.”⁶³ Additionally, CAF has an external partner, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS), which supports military personnel and their families’ health and wellbeing through various programs and services.

In addition to expanding its HRM organizational structure, CAF has made positive policy changes, namely in “its retention strategy and initiatives to encourage skilled and experienced members to remain in the Canadian Forces.”⁶⁴ Some of these changes include pay increases as well as changes to CAF’s terms of service timeline and structure to include shorter-term contracts and pension eligibility from 20 years to 25 years. Another positive change was the promulgation of an administrative order by National Defence “directing that a member cannot be asked to leave home for at least 60 days after returning from a deployment and will not be deployed again for another 12 months”⁶⁵, to reduce time spent away from families. A most recent and notable policy change which curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic is CAF entertaining alternate working arrangements including working from home (WFH) employment as well as increased use

⁶² Government of Canada, “Chief of Military Personnel,” last modified 11 March 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/transition-materials/defence-101/2020/03/defence-101/cmp.html>.

⁶³ Canadian Armed Forces, “Chief Professional Conduct...,”

⁶⁴ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Chapter 5 2002...*, 13.

⁶⁵ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Chapter 5 2002...*, 7.

of virtual training and education vice in-person.⁶⁶ This shift enabled CAF members' continued training, education, and employment while abiding by public health measures. Though CAF's positive initiatives and changes to its HRM framework, their timing was too late as they were implemented in a reactive fashion and took effect after the organization had already suffered the negative consequences associated with attrition. CAF's approach to tackling its HRM problems is unproductive as it uses old data to fix current and future problems where instead, it should be taking a more forward-looking approach. This is yet another sign of a lack of synchronicity in CAF's SHRM framework.

CAF Members' Dissatisfiers

One of the ways CAF's SHRM deficiencies manifest themselves is through CAF personnel shortages stemming from its recruiting and retention challenges. In regard to retention, DRDC conducted a thorough analysis of Regular Force attrition and retention with the most recent retention survey conducted in 2019. According to this survey, the seven most significant dissatisfiers amongst the 892 survey respondents were identified (illustrated in Figure 1 below) including the level to which they could influence military members in leaving CAF (illustrated in Figure 2 below).

⁶⁶ Wayne D. Eyre and Bill Matthews, *CDS/DM Directive on DND/CAF Operating and Reconstituting in a Persistent COVID-19 Environment*, last modified 25 February 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/dm-cds-directives/cds-dm-directive-dnd-caf-operating-reconstituting-persistent-covid-19-environment.html>.

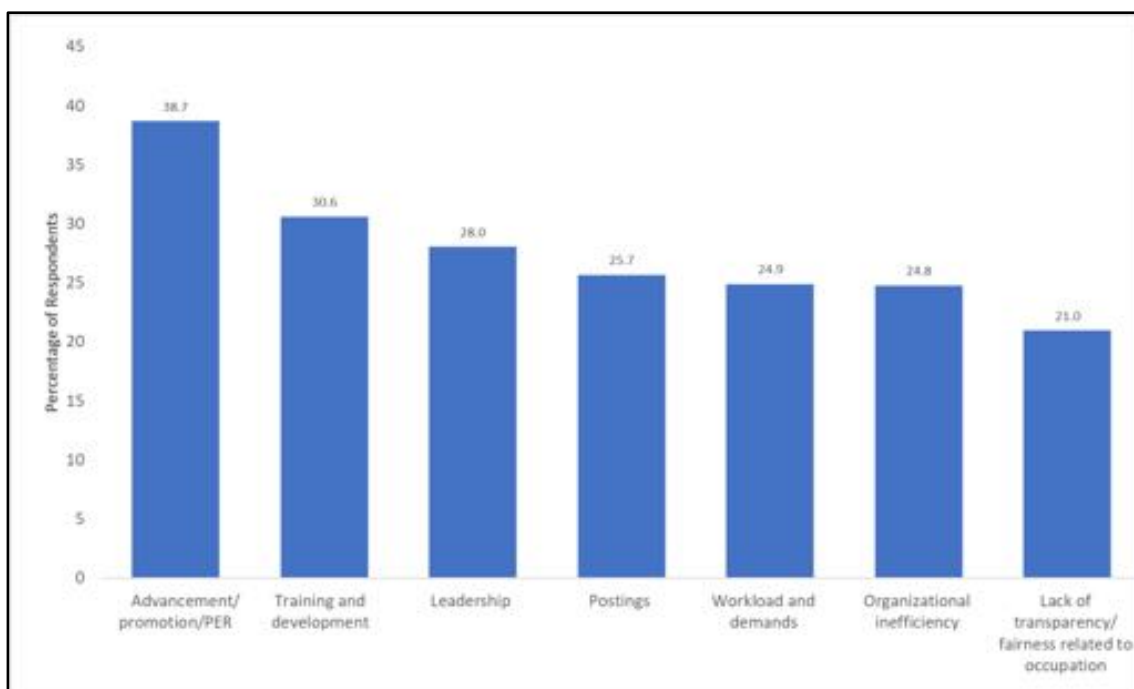


Figure 1 - Seven most commonly cited dissatisfiers regarding CAF occupations.
Source: DRDC, *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis*, 39.

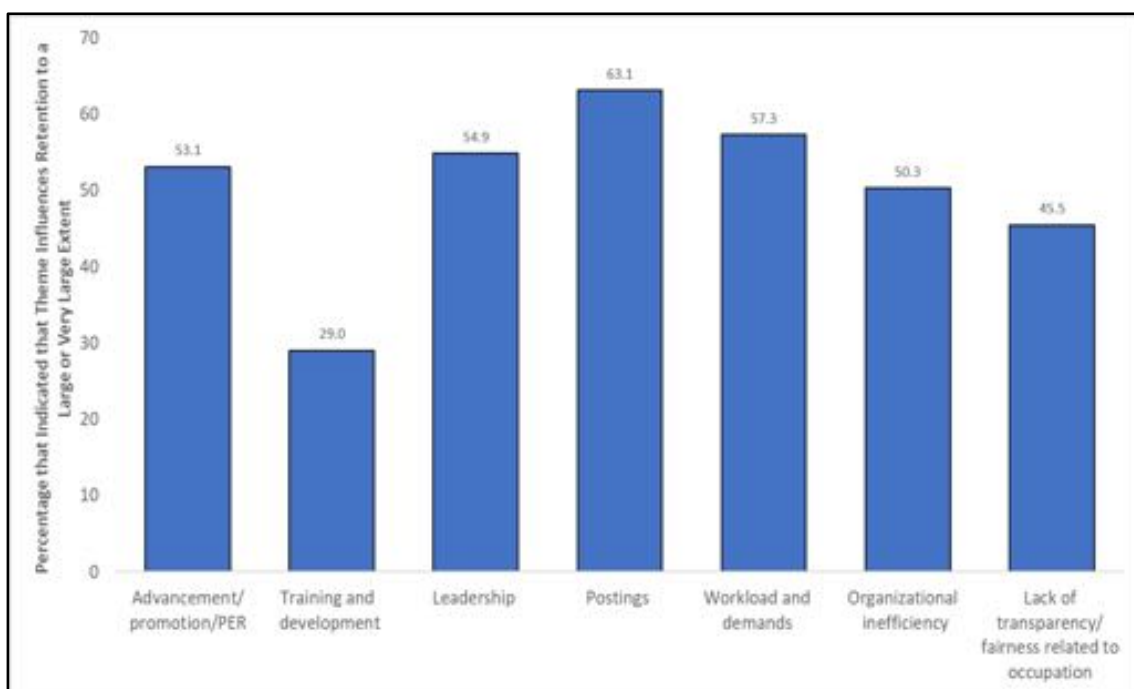


Figure 2 - Percentage of respondents indicating that the seven most cited dissatisfier regarding CAF occupation influenced their decision to stay in the CAF to a large or very large extent.
Source: DRDC, *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis*, 40.

In examining influential dissatisfiers, from the most to the least cited, the most common themes that would influence CAF members' decision in leaving CAF were postings (63.1 percent); workloads and demands (57.3 percent); leadership (54.9 percent); advancement, promotion, and PER (53.1 percent); organizational inefficiency (50.3 percent); and lack of transparency/fairness related to the occupation (45.5 percent); and training and development (29.0 percent). Only the top three internal and external dissatisfiers will be analyzed further.

The top internal dissatisfier is associated with postings, having to geographically relocate a residence and family, received a response rate of 63.1 percent.⁶⁷ Some of the reasons exhibited by this survey included: "Number of postings, postings are often assigned to members without considering personal or family like factors, lack of personal desires when posted in general, posting individuals in locations where they are unhappy."⁶⁸ Over the last three years, CAF affected 10,000 cost moves per year⁶⁹ which represents approximately 15 percent of CAF members. In addition to generational workplace motivators difference, another emerging trend has been CAF changing demographics whereas CAF personnel are much older than before. For instance, the number of Regular Force members under 30 years old in 1988 was 53 percent, in 2007 only 28 percent, and in 2019 even less at 24.5 percent.⁷⁰ Having older military members results in CAF members having more complex family dynamics and potential health issues related to aging requiring an increased level of flexibility when it comes to

⁶⁷ Defence Research and Development Canada, *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* (Ottawa: Editorial Office of Defence Research and Development Canada, 2019), 43.

⁶⁸ Defence Research and Development Canada, *The 2019 CAF... Qualitative Analysis...*, 42-43.

⁶⁹ Government of Canada, Director General Military Careers, "DGMC Historical Cost Moves" Internal Correspondence, Ottawa: ON, 12 January 2020.

⁷⁰ Statistics Canada, "Regular and Reserve Forces by age group, Canadian Armed Forces 2019," last modified 4 December 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/191204/cg-c001-eng.htm>.

relocation policies and cycles at a minimum. “On average, personnel spend approximately three to five years in any given location before being moved to a new job.”⁷¹ placing CAF families in a constant state of instability and stress due to posting disturbances. CAF has a vested interest in modernizing its posting policy and practices and in making them more flexible to renew this top dissatisfier.

A close second internal dissatisfier was the amount of workload and demands placed on CAF members with a 57.3 percent response rate. Respondents indicated that they were “sick of doing more with less”⁷², dissatisfied with “a volume of work that is difficult to achieve”⁷³, having to work hours that are often too long as well as irregular hours, “the lack of work-life balance, as well as the low quality of life resulting from their workload and demands.”⁷⁴ Other reasons included disparity between members’ skills and employment resulting in members being employed in positions that were too challenging or not challenging enough as well as the burden of having to complete secondary or administrative duties on top of their regular job. These responses are not surprising given generational workplace motivators. Doing more with less and being assigned an unachievable workload result in members having to work long and irregular hours, a workplace motivator that fits the Baby Boomer generation very well. As described earlier, Baby Boomers have the characteristic of being workaholics seeking fulfillment through their jobs rather than through their personal lives.⁷⁵ However, these work conditions do not fit well with the Millennials who seek flexible hours, work schedules, and quality of

⁷¹ Military Family Services, “A Family Guide to the Military Experience,” 2nd ed., last modified 2016, 17, <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/5d8caf66-d97f-4f59-b444-e0aa98404501/A-Family-Guide-E.aspx?ext=.pdf>.

⁷² Defence Research and Development Canada, *The 2019 CAF... Qualitative Analysis ...*, 43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁵ Wilcox, “Recruiting the Next Generation...”, 27.

life. This is also the case for Generation Z for whom “transparency, self-reliance, flexibility and personal freedom are non-negotiable aspects of Generation Z work ethic and ignoring them could result to frustration among peers, reduced productivity, low morale and lack of employee engagement.”⁷⁶ Based on the Millennials and Generation Z’s workplace motivators, it can be inferred that these generations would be more prone to leave CAF early than the Baby Boomers if the workload and demands stay the same or worsen.

From a CAF HRM policy perspective, there is no control mechanism in place to limit the number of hours or workload fully fit (no Medical Employment Limitations (MELs)) CAF Regular Force members are authorized to work in a set period of time (i.e. day, week, month, or year). All CAF Regular Force members who are fully fit are on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and expected to be available for duty when called upon to fulfill the needs of the service. Additionally, CAF has no mechanism in place to capture the number of hours worked from one job, posting, or supervisor to the next, placing members in the vulnerable position of *what have you done for me lately* when faced with a new supervisor, which often occurs annually. The lack of HRM policy that limits the number of hours worked and workload of fully fit Regular Force members leads members in being overworked for a prolonged period of time (i.e. years), another sign of lack of synchronicity in CAF’s HRM framework. To reduce the number of hours worked and/or workload, CAF members can get assigned MELs, be placed on sick leave, or get posted to the regional Transition Unit (TU) which can negatively impact members’ careers. To put an end to this continuous cycle, some members decide to leave CAF early

⁷⁶ Dr. Singh and Dangmei, “UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z...”, 3.

to get the break or change they seek. Perhaps the option of unionizing Regular Force members while in garrison could be explored to protect CAF members' interests at times when the chain of command and leadership does not seem to be able to manage properly on their own.

Given the second-highest internal dissatisfier was workload and demands, it is no surprise that "The most common external reasons for intending to leave are a lack of energy or motivation and/or needing a break or change"⁷⁷ with a rate of 20.5 percent. When taking into consideration the Millennial's motivators, this response is also not surprising given that Millennials are known to be a curious cohort who are easily bored. Generation Z is no better as they "have acquired deficit disorder with a high dependency on the technology and a low attention span"⁷⁸, which could potentially deter them from completing a long career in CAF. CAF HRM policies currently do not allow much flexibility to accommodate members who need a break or change. CAF members may want a temporary break or change from the Regular Force for various reasons such as exploring different employment, learning new skills, taking a break from CAF's high operational tempo, providing care to dependents (i.e. children, parents, siblings), or any other personal and/or family reasons. They may wish to undergo professional development such as second language training, post-secondary, and graduate-level education given that the 2019 retention survey identified that CAF members were "not happy with the limited ability to access second language training"⁷⁹ as well as the "lack of training and education in my work environment".⁸⁰ CAF has HRM policies and practices

⁷⁷ Defence Research and Development Canada, *2019 Descriptive Analysis...*, 105.

⁷⁸ Dr. Singh and Dangmei, "UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z...", 3.

⁷⁹ Defence Research and Development Canada, *2019 Qualitative Analysis...*, 41.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

in place to support members who wish to have a temporary break or change from CAF. Existing processes could include being placed on leave without pay or sick leave, assigned MELs or compassionate status⁸¹, posted to the regional TU, allocated contingency cost moves for personal reasons or compassionate postings⁸², and undergoing a component transfer to the Reserve Force to name a few. Although options are available to CAF members, they are extremely bureaucratic in nature, slow, and often require high approving authority levels which means that they are not guaranteed. Additionally, they risk having negative career implications, not to mention the negative impact on members' pay and pension.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, people change and these changes are manifested in generational differences. People's workplace motivators differ from one generation to the next, which is important for an organization to be aware of, acknowledge, and consider in its HRM framework to foster recruiting and retention. CAF is no different but one unique factor is the prolonged amount of time it takes for CAF to fill its personnel gap caused by attrition, and the requirement to be operationally effective to fulfill its mandate at home and abroad. For at least the past two decades, CAF has actively been trying to build up its force using various recruiting and retention strategies which, have had some short-term successes but have pushed the problem to later resulting in overall long-term losses.

⁸¹ Government of Canada, "DAOD 5003-6, Contingency Cost Moves for Personal Reasons, Compassionate Status and Compassionate Posting," last modified 26 June 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/5000-series/5003/5003-6-contingency-cost-moves-for-personal-reasons-compassionate-status-and-compassionate-posting.html#comp>.

⁸² *Ibid.*

A positive first step toward changing the course of this trend is for CAF to establish a full-time SHRM capability within its HRM framework to look forward into the 10 to 20-year horizon. This entity would be responsible to develop effective recruiting and retention strategies, creating policies, and instilling practices that are appealing to current and future generations who, currently have no interest in joining the military. For instance, it would be responsible to examine major CAF dissatisfiers that result in members leaving CAF voluntarily early and in developing retention strategies based on their findings. This SHRM entity should be comprised of Human Resources (HR) Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). As CAF currently does not have HR expertise internally, these SMEs should be either civilian employees or contracted solutions specialized in SHRM. CAF's SHRM entity should also be comprised of CAF members as they hold important corporate knowledge. The combination of SHRM SMEs combined with CAF members would form a robust and diverse team with the necessary expertise and experience to frame CAF's HRM problems and develop viable short and long-term solutions. CAF members within CAF's SHRM should remain in the team throughout the Initial Operating Capability and beginning of the Final Operating Capability phases to build corporate knowledge and ensure stability within the team, maximizing CAF's SHRM success. Another recommendation is for CAF TG to further develop its liaison with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and capture veterans' dissatisfiers with CAF, valuable information CAF could leverage. CAF should also capture CAF members' satisfiers on a regular basis to know what motivators entice members' continued employment in CAF.

Faced with Millennials and Generation Z as potential recruiting pools who seek flexible schedules and quality of life, CAF's posting policies and practices should be revised as it is the top dissatisfier leading CAF members in leaving CAF early. Posting

requirements, frequency, and geographic relocations should be closely revised and reduced. This would provide CAF members the stability they seek to meet their personal and family needs while actively serving CAF. The reduction of geographic relocation may negatively impact CAF members' career progression which, may be an acceptable price to pay for Millennials and Generation Z who value the quality of life over career progression and higher salaries. To facilitate this, flexible work arrangements including WFH and hybrid workplaces should be considered and maximized when possible to allow for flexibility of employment, encourage work-life balance, and potentially avoid a geographic relocation entirely.⁸³ Ironically, CAF has started to entertain WFH arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this is a method of employment many CAF managers are reluctant or opposed to applying. Although a positive initiative, this should have been entertained at least two decades ago as the Millennials entered the workforce about 20 years ago. Leaders may need to come to the realization that hybrid working arrangements may be the way of the future which will require the adaptiveness of CAF leadership.

To fulfill Millennials and Generation Z generations' seeking a change or a break, CAF could offer shorter-term contracts, instill a streamlined process for component transfers, and offer a sabbatical period, all of which would have minimal negative impacts on members' career progression, pay or pension. These initiatives would give members the opportunity to take a pause, gain new experiences, and pursue personal and professional goals with the option to resume their careers in the Regular Force if they wish.

⁸³ Government of Canada, *DOMESTIC RELOCATION PLANNING APS 2022 IN RELATION TO COVID 19*, Canadian Armed Forces, CANFORGEN 036/22 CMP 020/22 251800Z MAR 22, 25 March 2022.

At the time when the drastic drop in military personnel occurred during the pandemic in October 2021, the CDS offered the following response when answering a question about leadership: “We need our mid-level leaders to dig deep and do this for the institution, to put service before self, not to retreat into retirement but to advance forward and face the challenges head-on”.⁸⁴ The CDS’ message is likely to resonate with the Baby Boomers, who are retiring, however, is unlikely to have the same effect with CAF Millennials or Generation Z. Instead, the CDS’ comment has a higher chance of leading CAF Millennials and Generation Z in running out the door vice encouraging them in staying longer. CAF needs to keep in mind that the creators of the message are not the consumers and so proper messaging is essential to obtain the result sought. This disconnect is another demonstration of CAF’s lack of synchronicity and expertise in HRM.

Continuing with status quo solutions, such as extending the CRA or keeping CAF members beyond CRA (up to age 60), are not viable options due to issues associated with an aging military. Society, demographics, and generations change through time and CAF has a vested interest in changing with it to survive as an institution capable to fulfill its mandated roles. CAF’s HRM policies and practices need to be synchronized and more forward-looking to be aware of current and forecasted generations’ needs. Establishing an SHRM capability with proper authority, empowerment and resources is a positive first step toward CAF’s long-term HRM success. If CAF, however, decides to proceed with the status quo, it runs the risk of being ineffective, becoming irrelevant, and further tarnishing its credibility and image at home and on the international stage, putting in

⁸⁴ Brewster, “Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military...”.

jeopardy Canada's national security. Is CAF willing to wait until this happens? It ought not to because our country deserves better.

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