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## The CAF's Human Resources Management Framework: A Strategic Capability Missing in Action

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# THE CAF'S HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK: A STRATEGIC CAPABILITY MISSING IN ACTION

## AIM

1. To investigate CAF's current human resources management (HRM) framework and evaluate its past and current performance trends to provide recommendations on areas of improvement in the goal of assisting the CAF in meeting its long-term strategic HRM (SHRM) objectives.

## INTRODUCTION

2. There are many diverse definitions of HRM in both the military and civilian context. Kaehler Boris provides a few different ones in a book called *HR Governance: A Theoretical Introduction* including one from DeNisi and Griffin defining HRM as “the comprehensive set of managerial activities and tasks concerned with developing and maintaining a qualified workforce—human resources—in ways that contribute to organizational effectiveness”.<sup>1</sup> Dessler provides a more process-driven definition which describes HR as “the process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees, and of attending to their labour relations, health and safety, and fairness concerns”.<sup>2</sup> Proper HRM is essential in any organization, regardless of its size or mandate. Organizations are comprised of people, and without the right qualified staff or staffing levels, organizations are unable to function optimally thus crippling their capabilities and performance.

3. “The department of national defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) makes up the largest federal government department.”<sup>3</sup> DND and CAF, is currently established for over 100,000 personnel comprised of 68,000 regular force (Reg F) members, 27,000 reserve force (Res F) members and 24,000 civilian employees for a total of 95,000 military members.<sup>4</sup> DND and CAF have plans to grow to over 125,000 personnel with a breakdown of 71,500 Reg F members, 30,000 Res F members and 25,000 civilian employees for an increased total of 101,500 military members.<sup>5</sup> Due to its sheer size and essential national mandate, “the protection of Canada and Canadians and

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Kaehler and Jens Grundei, *HR Governance: A Theoretical Introduction* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada, “Mandate of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces,” last modified 24 September 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/mandate.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada, “Department of National Defence - FAQ,” last modified 24 September 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/contact-us/frequently-asked-questions.html#w1513701667064>.

<sup>5</sup> “Mandate of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces,”.

to maintain international peace and stability.”<sup>6</sup>, having a robust HRM framework is essential for the CAF to maintain its defence capability.

4. Unfortunately, HRM has been a systemic problem for the CAF for the last three decades as identified by the Office of the Auditor General Office (OAG) audits reports dated 2002<sup>7</sup>, 2006<sup>8</sup> and 2016<sup>9</sup>. Despite CAF’s efforts and numerous initiatives, HRM remains a significant problem today. This past year, CAF experienced a sharp reduction in military personnel resulting in an overall staff shortage representing approximately 10 percent of its total strength.<sup>10</sup> Namely, as of October 2021, CAF was short 7,500 military personnel<sup>11</sup> and by December 2021 the revised staff shortage reached 10,000.<sup>12</sup> Although a turn of events greatly impacted by the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic hindering recruiting and training, it was also due to the uncovering of CAF’s systemic misconduct problem. This paper will examine CAF’s current HRM framework with a review of OAG reports’ past findings to identify trends and gaps that hinder CAF’s ability to improve its HRM capability.

## DISCUSSION

### CAF HRM Structure

5. CAF’s HRM structure is comprised of HRM entities, in the form of Directorates and Groups, mainly centralized within the Chief Military Personnel (CMP), a Level One (L1) organization. CMP holds the majority of CAF’s HRM capability with a mandate to “To recruit, train, educate, prepare, support, honour and recognize military personnel and their families for service to Canada.”<sup>13</sup> CMP also has the role to address CAF’s systemic cultural problem of harmful and inappropriate behaviour. The entity responsible for recruiting is the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) through the development and implementation of attraction strategies to solicit Canadians’ interest in joining the CAF

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<sup>6</sup> “Mandate of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces,” accessed 22 January 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the Auditor General, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, 2002. Chapter 5, : National Defense - Recruitment and Retention of Military Personnel* (Canada: [2002]).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5 - Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention - National Defence* (Canada: Speaker of the House of Commons,[2017]).

<sup>10</sup> 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>.

<sup>11</sup> Brewster, “Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military,”.

<sup>12</sup> 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/261568251?parentSessionId=T%2FZHDVIK9UVzbLXixKXSSHXEUuRHsutRZ2LkBqDMpFY%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>

<sup>13</sup> 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>.

and via the recruitment process itself.<sup>14</sup> Directors that play an important role in CAF's retention efforts are the Director General Military Careers (DGMC) who manages military personnel's careers and the Director General Compensation and Benefits (DGCB) as the head of CAF's compensation and benefits framework. These Directors develop and implement strategies, policies, and programs to make CAF an employer of choice.

6. Another CMP priority includes military personnel transition, a mandate spearheaded by the Canadian Forces Transition Group (CAF TG). CAF TG stood up recently in 2018 as the renewed Joint Personnel Support Unit and Casualty Support Management.<sup>15</sup> This Group supports CAF's ill and injured members including veterans and extends their support to their families ensuring members' successful transition to civilian life.<sup>16</sup>

7. As for CAF's health and safety programs, CMP is comprised of the Canadian Forces Health Services Group (CF H Svcs Grp) responsible to provides health services, such as medical and dental, to military personnel. CAF also has an external partner, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS), who not only supports military personnel's health and wellbeing but is another organization that extends its programs and services to families. CFMWS' purpose is to build self-reliance, resilience, and readiness by enhancing mental health, social, physical and financial wellbeing.<sup>17</sup> This social enterprise works on behalf of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and falls under the authority of the Deputy Minister (DM).

8. In terms of safety program, CAF has a General Safety Program "aimed at preventing accidents in operations, training and support activities".<sup>18</sup> This program falls under the authority of the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS). Another HRM entity that falls under the VCDS is the Director General Canadian Forces Grievance Authority

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<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada, "Advisory of the Military Recruitment Process," last modified November 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/audit-evaluation/advisory-military-recruitment-process.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Canada, "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>.

<sup>16</sup> "Chief of Military Personnel," last modified 11 March, accessed 21 January, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> CFMWS, "About CFMWS," last modified 8 October 2021, <https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/CFPFSS/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>18</sup> Government of Canada, "DAOD 2007-1, General Safety Program," last modified 19 April 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2007/2007-1-general-safety-program.html>.

(DGCFGA) to address fairness concerns.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, a new L1 command was recently stood up in April 2021 called Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) “responsible for all aspects of addressing systemic misconduct and the promotion of cultural change.”<sup>20</sup> The CPCC reports directly to the CDS.

9. Overall, CAF’s HRM structure is composed of various entities with respective HR mandates fulfilling all major HRM organizational functions in support of military personnel, their families, and veterans. Most of these entities are centralized under the same command (CMP) with a few falling under the VCDS’ authority, an external partner that falls under the DM’s authority (CFMWS) along with a new command (CPCC) that reports directly to the CDS. The centralization of HRM capabilities under the same command (CMP) is very beneficial in an HRM framework as it establishes an HRM expert within the organization, fosters close coordination and share of knowledge within the HRM capability, and creates an economy of effort.

### **CAF HR Occupations**

10. Equally as important as an organization’s HRM structure are the individuals who perform HR functions and fill HR positions. CAF has a few HR-specific occupations within its Military Occupational Structure (MOS) such as the Personnel Section Officer (PSO), Trade Development Officers (TDO), Logistics Human Resources (Log HR O), and Human Resources Administrators (HRA). The PSO’s role is to promote military members’ retention by providing advice on recruiting, selection, leadership, performance appraisals and other HR matters.<sup>21</sup> As for the TDO, this occupation specializes in military training and education providing guidance and advice pertaining to CAF’s Individual Training and education system.<sup>22</sup> The Log HR O, although only existent within the Logistics Air occupation as a sub-specialty, provides HR advice and guidance in support of military activities. Lastly, HRA provides general administrative and HR support to CAF and military members.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Government of Canada, “DAOD 2017-1, Military Grievance Process,” last modified 19 April 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2017/2017-1-military-grievance-process.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Government of Canada, “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>.

<sup>21</sup> Government of Canada, “Personnel Selection Officer,” accessed 12 January 2022, <https://forces.ca/en/career/personnel-selection-officer/>.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Canada, “Training Development Officer,” accessed 12 January 2022, <https://forces.ca/en/career/training-development-officer/>.

<sup>23</sup> Government of Canada, “Human Resources Administrator,” accessed 12 January 2022, <https://forces.ca/en/career/human-resources-administrator/>.

11. Even though CAF has HR occupations, it adopts a common practice of having non-HR occupations with no HR training or experience performing HR functions and filling HR positions. Non-HR trained personnel are expected to become familiar with HR policies and regulations and apply them to the best of their ability during their two to three-year postings.<sup>24</sup> The rationale behind this practice is to encourage non-HR trained personnel's professional development (PD) and optimize career progression. Experience performing HR functions and filling an HR position increases non-HR trained personnel's breadth and depth of experience in preparation for the next rank and is thus used as a stepping stone for promotion. A study conducted in 2010 by a JCSP 36 student, J.L. Glaude, found that at that time, the Air Force filled 65% of its HR positions with HR trained personnel while the remaining 35% of positions were filled by non-HR trained personnel for PD purposes. Conversely, the Navy and Army filled up to 70% and 80% of its HR positions with non-HR trained personnel.<sup>25</sup> Although an enriching experience for non-HR-trained personnel and beneficial to CAFs succession planning efforts, this practice does not optimize an HRM framework. The lack of skilled HR personnel performing HR functions hinders an HRM framework's effectiveness, progress, and growth thus diminishing the HRM's capability.

### **CAF HRM Strategic Initiatives**

12. Through the years, CAF generated various SHRM initiatives to improve CAF's HRM performance. One of them was the *Military HR Strategy 2020: Facing the People Challenges of the Future*, promulgated in 2002.<sup>26</sup> This strategy introduced the concept of the "integration of HR into the departmental strategic planning process"<sup>27</sup>, a significant step forward in CAF's SHRM. This document presented four plausible HR scenarios based on social, technological, economic, environmental, and political trends and factors that would significantly impact the CAF and military personnel in the 10 to 30 years horizon. One of its' proposed strategies included 'HR Systems' which stated that "In order to maintain an effective HR management system, members must be trained and developed in the HR field, such that they can both understand and implement human resources theories and practices."<sup>28</sup> To meet this objective, the proposed action plan suggested that "Human Resources training and certification programs must be available to all personnel employed in a HR role."<sup>29</sup> The strategy concluded with a short-term and long-term action plan supported with a mid-term CF HR investment strategy using a

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<sup>24</sup> J. L. Glaude, "Canadian Forces Requirement for Military Human Resources Professionals" (Canadian Forces College), 40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Government of Canada, *Military HR Strategy 2020 : Facing the People Challenges of the Future*, last modified 3 April 2013, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/385809/publication.html>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Long Term Capability Plan – Human Resources (HR) to achieve its objectives throughout the next decade.

13. In 2008, a *Canada First Defence Strategy*<sup>30</sup> was produced which made a brief mention of “Investing in People”. Also in 2008, a *Military Personnel Management Doctrine* was included in the *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 1.0*.<sup>31</sup> The doctrine highlights the importance of personnel generation and sustainment as well as introduced the concept of supporting military personnel from ‘cradle to grave’ to illustrate CAF’s commitment starting from the time of enrollment until their time out of uniform. In 2017, a new defence policy called *Strong Secure Engaged*<sup>32</sup> was published providing direction on Canadian Defence priorities over a 20-year horizon which “placed an unprecedented focus on ensuring our people [military members] and their families are well-supported, diverse and resilient”.<sup>33</sup>

### **OAG Findings and Recommendations**

14. Despite CAF’s positive strategic initiatives above, HRM has been a systemic problem as identified in OAG reports dated 2002<sup>34</sup>, 2006<sup>35</sup> and 2016<sup>36</sup>. According to the 2002 OAG, HR was the Department’s top priority in 2001 and 2002.<sup>37</sup> It also noted concerns regarding the limited amount of personnel assigned to HRM with previous experience or training in HR policies and practices with a recommendation to have a knowledgeable group in the field to manage HR effectively over the long term.<sup>38</sup> This report even makes reference to a previous OAG report dated back in 1990 which also “commented the need for a long-term focus in managing military personnel.”<sup>39</sup> The report noted issues with recruiting such as difficulty in meeting its recruiting targets. It also identified a systemic attrition problem with a projection that starting in 2004 “a large group of skilled and experienced member could start leaving the Canadian Forces”<sup>40</sup> due to the Canadian economic situation at the time and the imminent retirement of baby boomers.

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<sup>30</sup> National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Canada: National Defence and the Canadian Forces, 2008), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, *Military Personnel Management Doctrine* (Ottawa: Issued on authority of the Chief of the Defence Staff,[2008]).

<sup>32</sup> *Strong Secure Engaged* (Canada: National Defence, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Office of the Auditor General, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, 2002. Chapter 5, : National Defense - Recruitment and Retention of Military Personnel*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5 - Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention - National Defence*.

<sup>37</sup> Office of the Auditor General, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, 2002. Chapter 5, : National Defense - Recruitment and Retention of Military Personnel*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

15. Like the 2002 OAG report, the 2016 report also expressed concerns with recruiting, namely on the process itself and inability in meeting recruiting targets. Even though CAF's retention problem was raised in 2002, the 2016 OAG indicated that "CAF had neither implemented nor revised its retention strategy for the Regular Force".<sup>41</sup> Unlike the 2002 OAG report, the 2016 OAG report did not recommend the CAF in having HR specialists, rather, it requested CAF to produce and submit detailed reports to the OAG Committee on strategies to address the Committee's recommendations.

### **Performance of CAF's HRM Framework**

16. The OAG reports' findings and recommendations have led CAF in making positive strides in improving its HRM framework. These improvements included the creation of an HR doctrine, promulgation of Defence strategies, new programs and services for military personnel with some extending to families and veterans, and even the stand-up of new organizations with allocated resources. Despite these efforts, CAF's HRM's capability is still not where it needs to be. As of December 2021, CAF experienced a sharp reduction in military personnel resulting in CAF losing approximately 10 percent of its total strength.<sup>42</sup> In October 2021, the CDS expressed that he was "particularly alarmed at the number of experienced leaders – officers and noncommissioned officers- who are putting in their releases notices and quitting the service."<sup>43</sup> This statement is a clear indication that CAF still has a systemic retention problem.

17. For CAF to have the ability to get to the root of its systemic HRM problem, it needs a dedicated SHRM capability within its HRM framework, comprised of knowledgeable and experienced HR trained personnel capable of affecting positive and lasting organizational change. Without a dedicated SHRM, CAF's HRM capability remains ineffective, outdated, and reactive. This compels CAF in addressing its HRM organizational problems when the damage has already been done as manifested by low recruiting and high attrition rates leading to staff shortages. CAF SHRM's would be responsible to identify recruiting limitations and attrition factors using performance measures to develop and kickstart CAF's long-term HRM strategy.

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<sup>41</sup> Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5 - Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention - National Defence*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Berthiaume, "Canadian Navy Needs to Recruit 1,000 Sailors to Crew New Warships: Vice-Admiral,".

<sup>43</sup> Brewster, "Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military,".

## **CONCLUSION**

18. CAF is an organization of a substantial size with an establishment of 95,000 military positions projected to grow to 101,500. It has an HRM framework comprised of various entities responsible to fulfill all major HRM organizational functions. It does not, however, have an SHRM capability to focus on long-term HRM strategies, a significant gap in its HRM framework. CAF also has the practice of employing non-HR trained military personnel into HR positions and performing HR functions. While this may be beneficial to military members PD as well as CAF's succession planning efforts, this practice is overall sub-optimal for CAF's HRM capability. CAF should explore creating an SHRM capability to address its systemic HRM problem and build a group of knowledgeable and experienced HR managers and administrators to perform HR functions in key strategic HR positions. Investing in the development of a robust SHRM capability and positioning HR specialists in key positions will assist CAF in creating the positive and lasting organizational change it has desperately needed for the last 30 years.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **CAF HR Specialists**

19. Given CAF's sheer size, established for 95,000 military members projected to grow to 101,500, it is surprising that CAF does not have more established HR specialists military occupation. As the 2002 OAG report recommends, CAF should build a knowledgeable and experienced group of military HR managers to support a CAF HRM capability.<sup>44</sup> This could be completed via the creation of a new HR officer trade and/or expansion of current HR trades (PSO, TDO, Log HR O, and HRA). Once trained, these members should have continuous employment in HR positions throughout their careers to build a knowledgeable and experienced pool of HR specialists. The practice of filling HR positions with non-HR personnel should be the exception and not the norm for extenuating circumstances and professional development purposes.

### **CAF SHRM Capability**

20. Attrition is crucial for CAF to address as it multiple takes years to make up for the loss of skilled military personnel due to CAF's recruiting and progression model. CAF's point of entry is at the bottom of the organization "bringing in recruits and officer cadets [entry-level positions] and working them up through the military structure".<sup>45</sup> It fills its ranks internally leaving little opportunity to fill the loss of skilled military personnel

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<sup>44</sup> Office of the Auditor General, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, 2002. Chapter 5, : National Defense - Recruitment and Retention of Military Personnel.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

quickly.<sup>46</sup> “Additionally, given the high cost of training, it is therefore more cost-effective if National Defence can retain its trained members.”<sup>47</sup> An SHRM capability comprised of knowledgeable and experienced HR trained personnel should exist within CMP where its members should stay in place for three to five consecutive years minimum to ensure stability throughout the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) phase, build corporate knowledge and expertise. This team should also be comprised of civilian employees, also HR specialists, to ensure continuity.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 5 - Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention - National Defence*, 12.

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