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DIVERSITY: A FORCE ENABLER IN THE RCAF

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DIVERSITY: A FORCE ENABLER IN THE RCAF

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to demonstrate how inclusivity, through the promotion of diversity, can be a force multiplier within the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Diversity can be seen as a Government of Canada (GoC) initiative, but inclusivity needs to be valued and embraced for its ability to increase productivity, foster teamwork, and generate unique solution sets to a multitude of challenges faced by the RCAF both today and into the future. Additionally, by leveraging the cultural and linguistic diversity, the RCAF can broaden and bolster its ability to operate in multi-national operations.

INTRODUCTION

2. The 2021/2022 JCSP Research Topic List contained a question from the RCAF related to diversity as a force multiplier.¹ The research question was to identify how diversity can act as a force multiplier within the military context, and be the potential implications for the RCAF might be if it is unable to retain/recruit diverse members from Canadian society. Given that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is an estimated 7,500 personnel short and Statistics Canada estimates one out of two Canadians will either be an immigrant or a child of an immigrant by 2036, these are certainly important questions both the RCAF, and the CAF as a whole, must consider.² However, before considering diversity and its potential implications as a force multiplier, several terms must first be defined and understood.

3. The first term which needs to be understood and defined is diversity. For most organizations, diversity entails demographics which includes race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and/or disability.³ Thus, from an organizational perspective, what is defined as diversity is more broadly categorized as demographic diversity. However, there is another aspect, or type, of diversity that is often neglected or poorly understood. As Dr Okros notes:

“Thus, diversity is more about elements such as world views, belief system, ethical frameworks, role obligations and other personal perspectives that reveal how individuals see themselves and perceive others and, more importantly, how they exercise independent reasoning and judgement.”⁴

¹Canada, Department of National Defence, *JCSP Research Topic List 2021/2022*, (Toronto: Canadian Forces College 2021), 1. This service note is intended to address the RCAF question under Theme 1: Deliver Air and Space Power. A4. Diversity as a Force Multiplier.

²Murray Brewster, “Eyre Blames Sexual Misconduct Crisis, Pandemic for Shrinking Military,” *CBC News*, October 26, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/wayne-eyre-armed-forces-sexual-misconduct-pandemic-1.6224791>; Canada, Statistics Canada, *The Daily – Study: A Look at Immigration, Ethnocultural Diversity and Languages in Canada up to 2036, 2011 to 2036*, January 25, 2017. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170125/dq170125b-eng.htm>; Canada, Statistics Canada, *Canada Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036*, January 25, 2017.

³Alistair D Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, Bessma Momani, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019). OverDrive Ch1.

⁴Alan Okros, “Rethinking Diversity and Security,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2009): 348.

Okros makes the distinction between demographic diversity and individual diversity. Thus, the term diversity, as utilized in this service paper, encompasses both demographic diversity and individual diversity.

4. The second term that needs to be understood is inclusivity. Inclusivity, in the context of diversity, should be seen as second order diversity or maturity in an organization that is diverse. Promoting a policy of diversity normally means promoting a policy of accepting those who are different; while inclusion means welcoming the contributions of diverse personnel to the operations and activities of an organization.⁵ This is a nuance that needs to be well understood. Diversity then, by itself, should not be the goal or objective of an organization seeking to be diverse. Rather, the organization benefits from diversity only when the organization displays inclusivity. If the organization is purely targeting diversity from an image perspective, then it is really a *woke* organization.

5. Finally, diversity for the RCAF needs to be understood in the greater context of how diversity is defined within the CAF. In the CAF context, inclusivity is reasoned to be part of diversity. The CAF definition is identified in the “Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy” as, “respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, language, gender, age, national origin, disabilities, sexual orientation, education, and religion.”⁶ This portion highlights the importance of demographic diversity. The CAF definition continues by stating: “It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing, celebrating, and integrating the rich dimensions of diversity with each individual.”⁷ This later portion identifies the individual aspect of diversity as well as the necessity of integrating the diversity, that is inclusivity. Thus, the CAF definition of diversity encompasses both demographic and individual diversity as well as inferring that inclusivity is imbedded within diversity.

DISCUSSION

6. With diversity now understood in its broader or mature concept, consideration needs to be given to understanding why military organizations, generally quasi-homogeneous, are driven to become diverse. Often the addition of diverse groups to a quasi-homogenous organization has been driven by a legal obligation or necessity.⁸ Possible reasons for these changes are external direction that overcomes or overrides military conservatism, internal direction from a visionary leader, or an institutional reaction to an external shock.⁹ Historical changes in the CAF, and the RCAF, can be attributed to each of these reasons however, that is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather the point to take away is that, if diversity is being driven by an outside force and not wholly accepted or embraced by the organization, it will in fact not likely be a positive change. The greatest benefit for the organization in becoming diverse is when visionary leaders

⁵Edgar *et al.*, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces . . .*, OverDrive Ch1.

⁶Department of National Defence, “Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy” (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016), 1.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸J.P. Clark, “Organizational Change and Adaptation in the US Army.” *Parameters (Carlisle, Pa.)* 46, no. 3 (2016): 24. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/organizational-change-adaptation-us-army/docview/1861027329/se-2?accountid=9867>.

⁹*Ibid.* 25.

understand what benefit the diversity and, in particular, the inclusion can bring to the organization. If the visionary leader is able to show, demonstrate, and/or convince the organization of the benefit, then real positive change can occur.

7. *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion* makes a case based on five points as to why the CAF should embrace diversity. The five points raised are: identity politics, public legitimacy, shifting of demographics, cultural competency, and participating or leading international coalitions or multinational operations.¹⁰ As noted by the editors, though each may be a valid reason to promote or encourage diversity, they fundamentally miss the force multiplying aspect of why diversity can, in fact, be a force multiplier or enabler. Diversity alone does not create an effective or holistic organization. It is only through understanding and embracing inclusion that diversity becomes an enabler. In essence, diversity has been seen as a necessity as opposed to being embraced for the potential benefits it provides to the organization.

8. To illustrate how diversity can be a force enabler, consider the example from the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in Afghanistan. In the documentary, “Desert Lions: Canadian Forces Mentors in Kandahar,” Mike Vernon shows how cultural diversity can play a significant factor in operations.¹¹ He notes that several members of the OMLT struggled with cultural and linguistic differences in interacting with their Afghanistan National Army (ANA) partners. In contrast, a member of that same OMLT, who had been born in Pakistan and spoke Urdu and Punjabi, was more frequently approached by their ANA partners. The OMLT’s willingness to embrace diversity and support inclusion enabled the team to be more effective. The cultural and linguistic ability that the Pakistani born member brought to the team was an operational enabler and facilitated better coordination with their allied partner. The leader promoting diversity would have accepted the Pakistani born member, while the visionary leader would have additionally sought to harness the unique insights the member could provide from both a cultural and linguistic perspective.

9. Afghanistan is one of many countries in which the RCAF has operated in the past decade. In the recent past, the RCAF has also deployed to the Philippines, Haiti, Mali, Ukraine, Iraq, Kuwait, and Romania to name but a few. Each of these countries has unique culture and linguistic traditions. In each situation, the RCAF has had to adapt to communicate and understand the cultural norms. This same trend is likely to continue going forward. As one author notes, in today’s multi-cultural business world “Cultural dexterity is essential.”¹² Leaders need to have the ability to adapt their approach across a myriad of cultures and tailor their problem solving and communication skills to the socially accepted norm in that culture.¹³ Recent operational experiences have highlighted the requirement for military leaders to be able to adapt

¹⁰Edgar *et al.*, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces* . . . , OverDrive Ch1.

¹¹Mike Vernon, “Desert Lions: Canadian Forces Mentors in Kandahar,” YouTube video, 1:00:45. Posted by Michael Vernon, June 25, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGvLzG9YcYo>.

¹²Adrienne Selko, “The Business Case for DIVERSITY,” *Industry Week* 257, no. 9 (2008): 50, <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/business-case-diversity/docview/219739004/se-2?accountid=9867>.

¹³*Ibid.*

to new cultural settings in order to effectively operate in multicultural environments of allies and/or belligerents.¹⁴

10. The multicultural environment that confronts the RCAF on operation is a similar microcosm that already exists within the Canadian populous. If one was to survey the Canadian population, there would most certainly be immigrants from each of these countries in Canada. Thus, the RCAF has the ability to recruit from a diverse and multi-cultural populous. What better way is there to adapt in the multicultural environment than by embracing and building a multi-cultural environment within the RCAF itself? Adapting to, and embracing, a multi-cultural RCAF will certainly pay dividends as it will foster a force that is well suited to operate throughout the world. The challenge for the RCAF today is convincing the multi-cultural Canadian populous that there is a place for them in the RCAF.

11. The RCAF is faced with the great challenge today of demonstrating how it not only desires to be diverse, but, more importantly inclusive. “While recruiting new demographic groups to CAF can be driven by law or circumstances, inclusion cannot. Inclusion can be built only over time through education, interaction, and dialogue.”¹⁵ Thus, for the organization to transition from diversity to diversity and inclusion, the approach must be command driven. Furthermore, having a diverse workforce is a competitive advantage and not simply a human resource initiative.¹⁶ Diversity, therefore, needs to be approached through the lens of a strategic objective.¹⁷

12. Thinking of diversity as a strategic objective is a monumental shift. If diversity with inclusion is seen as a strategic objective, then the desire for diversity becomes a change embraced by the organization. It can be leveraged as a benefit for the organization and not a change being forced externally upon the organization. Considering diversity from a business perspective, one author stated: “By bringing together people with diverse backgrounds, who have a variety of experiences, there are more actionable ideas. We find new ways to approach markets, our processes and our business model.”¹⁸ Likewise, in the RCAF, diversity needs to be seen as bringing more opportunity to grow, challenge the status quo, and adapt to the future operating environment.

13. In a similar vein, this is how operational design is conducted. In operational design, one needs to allow divergence of thought before converging to the solution. Without a divergent or inclusive environment, possible solutions are not even explored or considered. When discussing the benefits of a Diversity and Inclusion Council, one member stated: “Our goal is to provide a place where everyone feels their voices can be heard. The results of inclusion are increased production and innovation.”¹⁹ True innovation and change is limited when the full potential of a

¹⁴Karen D. Davis, “Sex, Gender and Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces.” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2009): 431. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/14662040903375091>

¹⁵Edgar *et al.*, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces . . .*, OverDrive Ch1.

¹⁶Selko, “The Business Case for DIVERSITY. . .”, 46.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 48.

team is not utilized. Without inclusion, the RCAF will fail to fully grasp the spectrum of solutions for any given problem set. If the RCAF does not embrace inclusion in its desire for diversity, then it will fail to bring its best assets to bear. The quasi-homogenous organization will be stuck in an individual diversity paradox that doesn't harness the strength that demographic diversity, coupled with individual diversity, provides. Thus, diversity with inclusion is not only a benefit in a multi-cultural operational environment, but it also opens the organization to increased production and change/improvements.

14. If the RCAF is unable to recruit/retain diverse members of society, the RCAF and greater CAF will be impacted across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Recruiting will become more difficult as the Canadian Society becomes more diverse. The members of Canadian Society need to see themselves represented in the CAF. The RCAF, and the CAF as a whole, need to determine how to interact and actively recruit its future members. The business world is turning to mentoring and educational programs to attract a diverse workforce while ensuring there is a connection between the company and the populous from which they draw their employees. Companies such as Textron are performing Engineering Boot Camps in an effort to connect engineering students in local universities with recently hired engineers.²⁰ The purpose of the program is to show students how they would fit into the company in a meaningful way. A similar approach could be considered within the RCAF.

15. The RCAF, and CAF as a whole, need to ensure that they are actively pursuing and communicating diversity and inclusion for the right reason. Diversity and inclusion need to be about making the organization better for the country that it serves. Unfortunately, when there are issues of racism amongst First Nation members of the RCAF, that does not send the right message.²¹ Discrimination causes rifts and further exacerbates the ability to recruit from diverse groups of people. The diversity and inclusion changes need to be seen as real changes and not simply as a change brought about by today's *woke* culture. Unfortunately, as reporter Kennedy Hall and others have stated, the shift towards diversity is only being seen as part of the *woke* culture.²² CAF publicity is equally impeding the cause when no one internally is seen to challenge the Chief of Defense Staff posting a tweet containing a picture of eight white male senior leaders with the caption, "conversations on diversity, inclusion, and culture change are not incompatible with our thirst for operational excellence. . ."²³ Unsurprisingly, there was an uproar on social media. If the media is the gauge for public perception, then this is an indication that the RCAF still has work to do in convincing the Canadian population that the organization believes in diversity and inclusion.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Cree RCAF Member Left Suicidal After Years of Racist Abuse in the Military*, Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016. <https://www.proquest.com/other-sources/cree-rcaf-member-left-suicidal-after-years-racist/docview/1764649784/se-2?accountid=9867>.

²²Kennedy Hall, "Woke Canadian Military Can't Recruit New Members," *Life Site News*, October 8, 2021. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/woke-canadian-military-cant-recruit-new-members/>.

²³David Pugliese, "Military Tweet on Diversity Faces Backlash After it Features Eight White Male Officers," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 12, 2021. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/military-tweet-on-diversity-faces-backlash-after-it-features-eight-white-male-officers>.

CONCLUSION

16. Diversity is a popular topic in government and business circles today. However, the manner in which it is being driven is more about the diversity image as opposed to the diversity benefit. For diversity to be valued and embraced, there needs to be real change and a genuine desire at all levels to embrace it alongside inclusion. Diversity therefore, needs to be embraced for the institutional benefit that a diverse and inclusive multi-cultural organization provides. The RCAF needs to focus on communicating the positive benefits diversity and inclusion have provided and continue to provide. Diversity with inclusion will enable the RCAF to challenge its bias, seek to change, and exploit the full potential of its capabilities. Diversity may be seen as a Government of Canada (GoC) initiative, but inclusion needs to be projected as a force multiplying effort within the organization. It is only through leveraging the cultural and linguistic diversity that the RCAF can broaden or bolster its ability to effectively operate in a global order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. The RCAF needs to leverage the positive changes that diversity and inclusion have brought and will continue to bring about. It needs to be communicated from the highest level, perhaps through *Air Force Vectors*, and then reinforced throughout the Chain of Command by highlighting individuals that have made positive change to the organization by embracing diversity and inclusion. This could include writing stories of RCAF members embracing diversity and inclusion in *RCAF Perspectives*. As opposed to stating that the organization needs to be diverse and inclusive, the organization needs to transition to showing how diversity and inclusion makes the organization better for Canada.

18. The RCAF needs to harness social media mechanisms to show how diverse and inclusive the RCAF has become. As one article in the *Industry Week* identified, “Job seekers are very sophisticated today, . . . and companies should be tapped into Facebook and other social networking sites.”²⁴ Social media needs to be leveraged to show the diverse job opportunities that are available to future RCAF members. Future RCAF members need to be able to envision how they could positively contribute within the RCAF. In essence the RCAF needs to communicate in a manner that enables future recruits to envision themselves in uniform.

19. Finally, the RCAF needs to prioritize messaging on where diversity has been leveraged; for example, highlighting how Arabic speaking individuals have been utilized in a multi-national coalition in the Middle-East. People need to see themselves as having unique talents and advantages based on the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic background. A recent example that could be leveraged is the JTF –Impact post on Facebook about Captain Mena Ghabbour.²⁵ Instead of focusing solely on Captain Ghabbour’s flying duties, he could have provided a comment on cultural diversity or his cultural background and its benefit to the RCAF.

²⁴Selko, “The Business Case for DIVERSITY. . . , 50.

²⁵JTF - IMPACT Facebook post, 16 January 2022, accessed January 22, 2022.
<https://www.facebook.com/OpIMPACT/posts/923829288294412>.

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