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## Developmental Training for Aircrew Junior Officers

Major Kristopher Sutton

**JCSP 48**

### Service Paper

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## **Developmental Training for Aircrew Junior Officers**

### **AIM**

1. The aim of this service paper is to examine the current Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Officer Developmental Period two (DP2) for Pilots and Air Combat Systems Officers (ACSO) in order to determine areas for improvement. This paper will provide observations on the Air Force Officer's Development (AFOD) program and advocate additional leadership training and the inclusion of baseline project management (PM) training.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is entering a period of reconstitution. Long-standing training back-logs have resulted in a substantial vacancy of middle managers (known as the "missing middle"), affecting key leadership positions at the Captain (Capt) and Major (Maj) rank levels; an issue affecting the CAF for at least the next five to seven years.<sup>1</sup> The Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) has issued guidance noting that we need to review best practices and identify opportunities for growth while streamlining training and addressing culture change.<sup>2</sup> Aircrew are selected for the majority of command positions within the RCAF and the training they receive during DP2 is vital to their development as officers and leaders. DP2 must continually evolve to meet the future needs of the RCAF and give our leaders the best foundation possible.

3. In order to analyze the effectiveness of the DP2, recent observations, experiences and feedback obtained from both senior and junior officers at the RCAF Wing level are leveraged and form the basis for the critical analysis in this paper. While the majority of the observations noted within originated in the Maritime Helicopter (MH) community, they are applicable to other communities employing aircrew officers as they are similarly structured. The following areas will be the focus of this paper:

- a. AFOD program;
- b. leadership training; and
- c. project management training.

### **DISCUSSION**

4. Professional Development (PD) in the CAF is governed by the Canadian Forces Professional Development System (CFPDS) and consists of four pillars, which are Education, Training, Employment experience and Self-development.<sup>3</sup> Under this framework, DP2 is designed to facilitate the development junior officers to the rank of Maj, and primarily consists of the Canadian Armed Forces Junior Officer Development (CAFJOD) and AFOD program,

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<sup>1</sup>Canadian Armed Forces, "CDS Planning Directive for Canadian Armed Forces Reconstitution" Ottawa: DND Canada. 9 July 21. Page 5.

<sup>2</sup>*IBID*, Page 11.

<sup>3</sup>Department of National Defence, DAOD-5031-8, Canadian Forces Professional Development, Ottawa: DND Canada, 2012. Section 4.

executed concurrently while undergoing their respective trade training. In recent years, the completion of the Air and Space Power Operations Course (ASPOC) has also become a prerequisite to the completion of the DP2 and promotion to the rank of Major. ASPOC is designed to “foster an air and space power mindset, hone staff skills and teach all phases of integrated air operations”.<sup>4</sup> Observations indicate that this course is well executed and relevant. As such, it will not be addressed further in this paper.

## **AFOD Program**

5. The AFOD program has evolved since inception and currently consists of five separate blocks. The first four of these blocks are taken via the Distance Learning Network (DLN) and represent an approximate 155 hours of work, while the final block is an in-house two-week session, focused primarily on the Operational Planning Process (OPP).

6. The material presented in the AFOD program overall is deemed to be relevant, and gives a good theoretical knowledge base of the organizations for employment in air staff roles at organizations such as the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC), Canadian Joint Operations Centre, the RCAF Air Warfare Centre (RAWC), or employed as part of an Air Task Force (ATF). While the program touches on some of the strategic level RCAF organizations, it pays little focus to the majority of other Level 1 (L1) organizations. These are areas in which members could possibly be employed as future staff officers. While an in depth focus on these organizations is not expected, an introductory level understanding would be beneficial to enable an overall knowledge base of the CAF strategic level organization, aid in career path planning and equip members to be able to better mentor subordinates as they move into senior positions.

7. The material presented during the AFOD program is designed to be augmented by mentorship at the unit level. Currently, there is minimal guidance to supervisors of candidates attending the program. It only recommends that they be aware of their member’s journey, and provide opportunities for them to apply, enhance, and reinforce the material and knowledge obtained.<sup>5</sup> Backing up theoretical knowledge with practical application is a very effective means of learning, one that the RCAF has endorsed during aircrew flight training and enables a deep understanding. As it stands right now, there is no handbook or mentorship program available to supervisors to facilitate and track the areas of the program requiring practical reinforcement. This represents a training documentation deficiency that requires increased communication between the training and operational units to rectify.

8. Since the AFOD program is designed to be completed over the duration of the DP2, which could span upwards of seven to eight years, a package detailing what is expected of the mentee should be developed to ensure that the supervisors understand the expectations to satisfy the objectives of the AFOD program. A document such as an On the Job Training (OJT) package that can be translated into a unit mentorship program would be beneficial.

## **Leadership Training**

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<sup>4</sup>Canadian Armed Forces. Royal Canadian Air Warfare Centre. ASPOC Course Description. Last accessed on 22 January 2022.

<sup>5</sup>Canadian Armed Forces. Barker College. AFOD Info for Supervisors. Last accessed on 18 Jan 22.

9. The typical career path of an aircrew officer will generally consist of three to four years at an operational unit, focusing on honing their skills as an aviator, followed by an instructional tour of similar length. Depending upon the airframe flown, crews may or may not have Non-Commissioned Members (NCMs) embedded. While they learn to become leaders within the aircraft, the majority of their leadership training and experience originates in the flight environment.

10. Due to the uniqueness of this DP2, aircrew officers are not placed in traditional leadership roles to develop their leadership abilities, as is experienced by other RCAF officer trades or other CAF elements. While they may experience leadership positions during instructional duties at training establishments, this is mostly supervision over peers of the same rank, both fellow instructors and students. Generally speaking, aircrew officers have very few subordinates until they reach the rank of Major. This limits their experiences in the application of some of the principles of leadership as outlined in doctrine, such as monitor morale and ensure subordinate well-being, mentor, educate and develop subordinates, maintain good order and discipline, and developing the leadership potential of your personnel.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they lack early leadership interactions with senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO), an experience that many tout as having a profound impact on their leadership journey, limiting their understanding of the management of NCMs.

11. Although it is common practice to assign secondary duties such as mess representatives, organizers of special events and tours, etc., to junior officers to aid in leadership development, there are usually insufficient meaningful opportunities, and provide only limited benefit in the advancement of their leadership skills.

12. As the RCAF aims to close the ranks of the “missing middle” and preserve tactical level flyers, there will be some junior officers that will be promoted with minimum time in rank. Additionally, as the need to fill higher priority organizations as laid out in the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) priorities, aircrew may find themselves in positions of supervision and leadership sooner than anticipated. Some will take on roles of Flight Commanders, Detachment Commanders (DETCOs), Officers in Charge (OIC) and Deputy Commanding Officer (DCO) roles where they may be in charge of large numbers of personnel with little previous experience.

13. There is a leadership training gap that needs to be addressed during DP2. As it stands right now, there is no in-depth leadership training for aircrew officers until they are promoted to Maj and attend the Joint Command and Staff Programme (JCSP), well into DP3. This, paired with the unique employment with minimal subordinates throughout the DP2, puts them at a disadvantage when taking on future senior roles. While some personnel are natural leaders, others need additional education and mentoring to build necessary skills. Expecting our personnel to become exceptional leaders without adequate training is not a recipe for future success.

14. To address this gap, a formalized leadership course focusing on classic and emerging leadership styles and theory, diversity and inclusive leadership, toxic leadership and emotional

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<sup>6</sup>Canada, Department of National Defence, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces - Conceptual Foundations*, (2005). Page 4

intelligence should be considered. Such a course would provide a solid foundation which aircrew officers can leverage for future senior leader positions. Since many of these concepts are already taught at the Canadian Forces College (CFC), resources from that institution could be leveraged. Such a course could be added to the AFOD syllabus, or taught as a separate course.

15. Flying units often have a large number of maintainer NCMs under the charge of only a few maintenance officers. Consideration could also be given to challenging the current organizational structure of flying units, identifying areas in which amendments could be made to better improve leadership opportunities for aircrew officers. This would require thorough consideration to not impact or hinder existing maintenance functions, inadvertently reducing efficiency.

### **Project Management Training**

16. Strong, Secure and Engaged has indicated that over 64 billion dollars will be invested into the RCAF over the next twenty years to purchase and upgrade new aircraft as well as investing in critical infrastructure and equipment.<sup>7</sup> The acquisition of new equipment and capabilities will see a considerable number of projects at both the strategic and tactical levels. RCAF junior officers will play a pivotal role in implementing such projects. With staffing levels challenged across the RCAF, we need our personnel to be as innovative and efficient as possible.

17. A Project as defined in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) is “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result.”<sup>8</sup> Essentially, most tasks taken on by officers in the CAF are some variation of a project. Baseline PM courses are readily available throughout educational institutions across the country, offered in both in-person and virtual environments. Typical courses consist of 18 days of in-session learning spread over nine modules and focus on Planning and Controlling, Quality, Assessing and Managing Risk, Leadership, Communication, Stakeholder Engagement, Costing, Negotiation, Integration and Simulation.<sup>9</sup> These courses are taught by civilian industry leaders and represent best practices in the corporate world. Pre-requisites to attend are generally one year of PM experience or the completion of a two to three day introductory PM course, often offered by the same institution offering the baseline course.<sup>10</sup> This training fosters many attributes that would be beneficial for RCAF officers to possess. PM training has a proven track record of increasing efficiency in businesses and organizations. The AFOD block four program does introduce how to manage minor projects; however, the concepts taught are minimal and pale in comparison.<sup>11</sup>

18. Aircrew officers awaiting the Operational Training Units (OTU) often experience substantial delays due to training backlogs and throughput capacity, eroding their obligatory service periods post receiving their initial wings certifications. During these periods, they are

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<sup>7</sup>Canada, Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*, 2017. Page 102.

<sup>8</sup>Project Management Institute. 2017. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Newton Square, PA: Project Management Institute. 5.

<sup>9</sup>Memorial University, “Masters Certificate in Project Management,” last accessed 22 January 2022, <https://www.mun.ca/gardinercentre/certificate-programs/Masters-Certificate-in-Project-Management>

<sup>10</sup>IBID

<sup>11</sup>Canadian Armed Forces. Barker College. *Air Force Officer Development Programme, Block 4 Survival Guide*. Last accessed on 18 Jan 22.

often leveraged to manage important projects that would be challenging with current staffing levels and workloads at the unit level, with little to no training. As an empirical example, two junior officers at 12 Wing Shearwater took on the task of developing the CH148 Cyclone Electronic Warfare Concept of Operations (EW CONOPs) as their OTUs were delayed for numerous years. This project was complex, required liaisons with numerous internal and external stakeholders and was pivotal in the implementation of modern capabilities. A discussion with one of the members indicated that PM training would have greatly benefited their efforts.<sup>12</sup>

19. It has been observed that personnel awaiting training for extended periods are frustrated and morale suffers. PM training during these waiting periods would serve to give them a sense of purpose without delaying any core trade training. It would also provide a solid foundation for future supervisory and leadership roles. For those not experiencing training delays, executing this training anytime throughout DP2 could provide future benefit to the RCAF as their careers progress into more senior and complex roles.

20. Leveraging civilian institutions for PM training would not require any human resource expenditures from the CAF. This is relevant as our current staffing levels are already challenged and will be for the foreseeable future. It would also give junior officers access to industry best practices, enabling them to challenge and evolve military group-think, setting the conditions for future RCAF success. However, there will be a financial consideration as the described training could cost upwards of \$10,000. A cost benefit analysis would be required.

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<sup>12</sup>Major Kristopher J. Sutton, telephone conversation with Captain Cody Hansen. 14 January 2022.

## **CONCLUSION**

21. As the CAF enters into a period of reconstitution and continues to close the gap of the missing middle leadership, we need our officers to be effective and efficient as possible to preserve the future capability and wellbeing of the RCAF. DP2 is critical in the education of junior CAF officers and is the foundational experience that sets the tone for their careers. By addressing deficiencies observed and investing in relevant education, junior officers will be better equipped to manage future challenges.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

22. As the training authority for the RCAF, it is recommended that 2 Canadian Air Division (2 CAD) consider the following;

- a. Liaise with Barker College to augment the AFOD program to include additional information pertaining to L1 organizations. An OJT package detailing what areas of the AFOD program require practical reinforcement should be produced. This will enable flying supervisors to be more cognizant of the requirements and enable them to develop an appropriate mentorship program;
- b. Consider implementing a formalized leadership course at the DP2 level. This could be considered an addition to the AFOD program or a standalone course. Since the recommended subject areas are already taught in detail at the CFC, the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) should be engaged to determine if any existing resources can be leveraged;
- c. Consider implementing baseline PM training during DP2. This will require a cost benefit analysis. Capitalizing on the period while aircrew have extended wait times could serve to make effective use of eroding obligatory service periods and maintain morale while acquiring relevant skills applicable to future RCAF projects and leadership positions;
- d. Since the observations noted above were from an aircrew perspective, socialize this document with other RCAF officer trade training authorities to determine applicability.

23. 1 CAD RCAF flying units should investigate possible amendments to current organization structures to enable better leadership opportunities for aircrew officers. Not hindering ongoing maintenance operations during this venture would be paramount.



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