



## Beyond Strategy and Culture: Refocusing Leadership on Structure

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### JCSP 49 DL

#### Exercise Solo Flight

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## **BEYOND STRATEGY AND CULTURE: REFOCUSING LEADERSHIP ON STRUCTURE**

Despite the release of the Chief of Defence Staff's (CDS) and Deputy Minister's (DM) Directive for Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reconstitution in October 2022,<sup>1</sup> the CAF's personnel shortage problem has persisted. Attrition has continued to outpace recruitment, resulting in the internally projected deficit of 15,000 members by the end of March 2024.<sup>2</sup> Considering the CAF's current authorized force size is 101,500<sup>3</sup> according to the Department of National Defence's (DND) 2024 Strategy: *Our North, Strong and Free* and this number is what is required to "lay the foundations for future growth,"<sup>4</sup> this personnel shortage problem threatens both the current relevance and future sustainability of the CAF.

At the heart of this problem is the fundamental importance of having suitable members in the CAF throughout the DND's structure. As the cornerstone of operational effectiveness, recruiting and retaining the right people at the right time with the necessary competencies is critical. While organizational strategy and culture have rightfully attracted the attention of DND leadership at all levels as key factors in CAF recruitment and retention, it will be argued that organizational structure warrants comparable focus. Structure supports and shapes strategy and culture and sets the foundational conditions for recruitment and retention to occur and thrive.

This paper will explore the interconnected organizational constructs of strategy, culture, and structure, emphasizing the importance of structure. It will examine the DND's Organization and Establishment (O&E) directive, highlighting its role in CAF recruitment and retention. Examples of current and future O&E challenges will underscore the need for greater DND leadership engagement. Finally, practical recommendations will be offered to enhance leadership involvement in O&E, increasing the CAF's capacity to recruit and retain the required personnel with the needed skills at the opportune moment for executing DND's strategy now and as the future security environment evolves.

### **Strategy, Culture, and Structure**

In contemporary organizational theory, strategy, culture, and structure form a meaningful but delicate bond. Although individually significant in what they contribute to an organization's operational model, it is only through organizational leadership's understanding, appreciation, and exploitation of their interconnectedness that their true power is unleashed. They shape and are shaped by one another. If organizational

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, "CDS/DM Directive For CAF Reconstitution." DM/CDS Directives, last modified October 6, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/dm-cds-directives/cds-dm-directive-caf-reconstitution.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Burke, "Vast Majority of Permanent Residents Applying to Join Military Not Accepted in 1st Year of Eligibility: Data," *CBC News*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/permanent-resident-military-applications-enrolment-1.7116469>.

<sup>3</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence* (Ottawa, ON: Department of National Defence, 2024), 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

leadership aptly harnesses the interconnectedness between strategy, culture, and structure, the potential for an organization to realize the effective execution of its strategy is boundless. Should it not be, and one or more within the relationship is neglected, negative consequences—up to and including organizational failure—will result.

Strategy enables an organization to function and navigate within its ever-changing surroundings.<sup>5</sup> The synchronization of organizational activities is encouraged through its presence, reducing ambiguity and disorder.<sup>6</sup> It enables organizational leadership to use the finite resources of its organization purposefully. An effective strategy offers members a conceptual way to perceive their organization's essence and understand its actions.

Culture involves the many shared values and norms that characterize an organization.<sup>7</sup> How the members of the organization interact personally with each other and with external stakeholders is inspired through culture.<sup>8</sup> It acts as a moral compass that aids rational decision-making and prioritization by organizational leadership. It fosters cohesion, constructive interactions, and collective commitment to an organization among its members. An effective culture enhances member engagement, productivity, loyalty, and morale by providing a sense of belonging.

Structure is comprised of an organization's sub-organizations, positions, and processes. It delineates the formal arrangement of roles, responsibilities, and relationships, and establishes how tasks are divided, coordinated, and controlled.<sup>9</sup> How an organization is designed by its leadership shapes member behaviour as well as its other structural components. A sound structure increases clarity, accountability, and communication among an organization's members, creating the foundation for a harmonious workplace and fostering member satisfaction.

By virtue of being interconnected organizational constructs, strategy and culture can impact one another. Today's dynamic operating environment presents numerous opportunities and threats that can induce both reactionary and deliberate modifications to an organization's strategy. These evolutions can challenge an organization's flexibility, unity, and adaptability, prompting adjustments to its organizational change culture. On the other hand, culture can influence strategy based on what is deeply cherished by an organization. To exemplify, if an organization values innovation, its leadership's strategy will be motivated towards the development of creative business methods, resulting in the investment of its organization's resources in novel capabilities, such as digitalization.

Culture and structure can also exert influence over one another. An organization that values transparency and openness can enrich communication across all levels. This type of cultural development can stimulate a more organic and unified structure.

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel, "And Over Here, Ladies and Gentlemen: The Strategic Management Beast," In *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Gareth R. Jones, *Organization Theory, Design and Culture* (New York: Pearson Education Inc, 2013), 31.

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

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

Conversely, structure can be leveraged by an organization's leadership as a mechanism to support and reinforce a desired culture. For instance, if an organization's leadership wants to cultivate a culture of collaboration and empowerment to improve member engagement, flattening the structure or altering specific sub-organizations, positions, and processes can aid it in achieving such an aim.

There is similarly a reciprocal connection between structure and strategy. Since structure represents the totality of an organization's physical constitution, its degree of rigidity and number of communication layers can leave an impression on strategy. Inflexible structures and inconsistent information flows can cause difficulties in strategic initiative development and reduce an organization's ability to change when the operating environment dictates. In contrast, strategy can motivate transformations in an organization's structure. Different strategies require different organizational capabilities to realize success, and structure provides the tangible framework for organizing and deploying these capabilities to achieve maximum effect.

The complex, interconnected relationship between strategy, culture, and structure forms the basis of the effective execution of strategy (see Figure 1). While each construct's individual contribution helps shape an organization's operations, the interconnectedness of these constructs can make or break the organization's success. A well-aligned strategy, culture, and structure enables clarity, solidarity, and adaptability within an organization, generating a conducive environment for achieving strategic objectives. Discounting any aspect of this relationship by an organization's leadership can lead to inefficiencies, disarray, and the prospect of organizational failure. It is crucial that organizational leadership focuses on each of these elements equally to ensure their organization remains relevant in today's dynamic operational landscape and sustainable in the future.



Figure 1 – Strategy, Structure and Culture

Source: COREinternational, “Strategy Structure Culture,” YouTube, January 5, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6n7IR8q0f4k>.

### The DND’s O&E Directive

Transitioning from organizational theory to practical application, within the DND, structure consists of the physical arrangement of the organization and its positions, and a plethora of process instruments. O&E is one of many structural process instruments in the DND, and it sets the foundational conditions for the other process instruments in the organization to function and flourish. Any change in the DND’s O&E will have an impact on one or more structural processes, such as those associated with recruitment and retention.

The DND’s O&E process is managed through a directive released under the authority of the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, who has been made the functional authority for O&E by the CDS and DM in accordance with Defence Administrative Order and Directive 1000-10, Policy Framework for Corporate Administration.<sup>10</sup> This directive outlines the principles and protocols governing the O&E practices of the DND, National Defence Headquarters, and CAF, and guides its implementation.<sup>11</sup> According to the directive, organization embodies structure and order, achieved through the methodical

<sup>10</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, Vice Chief of Defence Staff, *Organization and Establishment Directive* (Ottawa, ON: Vice Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of Programme, Director Defence Force Planning, 2023), 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

aligning of tasks and roles within a hierarchy of authority and accountability to promote seamless vertical and horizontal coordination across the DND,<sup>12</sup> and establishment represents the physical structure of the DND, which consists of units and detachments that are further broken down into departments composed of positions.<sup>13</sup> The difference between these positions and the members available to occupy these positions generally denotes the CAF's recruiting needs. While this difference has been recently reported to be a deficit of 15,000 members, is this actually accurate and reflective of the CAF's current and future positional needs? Is the CAF recruiting the right personnel at the right time with the right competencies? Are the remaining 86,500 being effectively employed? More broadly, is the DND's O&E, as captured within its system of record, effectively enabling CAF recruitment and retention?

The DND's O&E system of record is a software application referred to as the Human Resources Management System (HRMS).<sup>14</sup> It stores the DND's sub-organizational data, including command, formation, and unit names, roles, locations, affiliations, and language designations.<sup>15</sup> It also houses the DND's positional data, such as position title, rank, component, geographic location, security classification, occupation, unique qualifications/courses, and language requirements.<sup>16</sup> The O&E system of record does not encompass the organizational charts made in OrgPlus® or Microsoft Office 365™, nor the information contained in Military Command Software Personnel (Monitor MASS). Though these software applications are used to visually depict and gain some understanding of their organization's structure, they are easily manipulatable by members across the DND and often misaligned with what is contained in the HRMS—some examples of which will be explored later. The result is that any gap between the DND's current and future structural realities and HRMS O&E data can hinder CAF recruitment and retention.

Using a recruitment lens, HRMS O&E data is used to inform DND leadership decision-making on CAF recruitment targets. Referring to Figure 2, data from various sources—including HRMS O&E data—is transposed into various tools and deliberated during each occupation's annual military occupation review (AMOR). Decisions made by each AMOR chairperson drive the CAF's strategic intake plan (SIP). Notwithstanding this annual structural process to generate the SIP, it is important to note that Director Personnel Generation Requirements within the Chief of Military Personnel is in the process of transitioning to a long-range planning model (LRPM) to inform changes to the SIP through the AMOR chairperson on a more fluid basis than annually.<sup>17</sup> However, like the tools previously leveraged at the AMOR, the LRPM tool is also reliant on HRMS O&E data.<sup>18</sup> Effectually, accurate HRMS O&E data enables the CAF's occupational authorities to make better data-driven decisions, allowing recruiters to align with the DND's strategic objectives, advertise job openings, and develop targeted recruitment

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, Annex C, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 40-43.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Director Personnel Generation Requirements personnel, April 18, 2024.

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

strategies tailored to specific trades with the highest demand. In addition, it helps potential recruits understand the trades they are applying for and what their future career path in the CAF may look like.

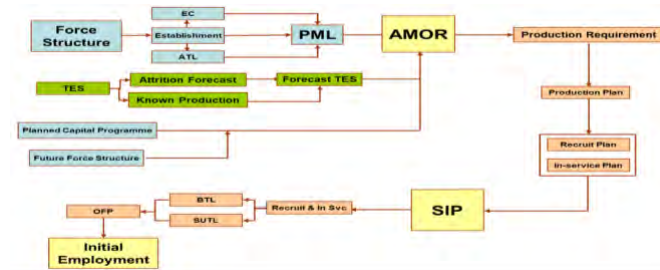


Figure 2 – The “SIP” Within the CAF Pers Generation Process

Source: Canada, Department of National Defence, Chief of Military Personnel, “Military Personnel Generation AMOR/SIP Presentation,” Ottawa, ON: Chief of Military Personnel, Director General Military Personnel Strategic, Director Personnel Generation Requirements, 2017.

Regarding retention, HRMS O&E data bolsters other structural process instruments that can directly affect member well-being and job satisfaction within the DND. With accurate HRMS O&E data, better succession planning can be facilitated, allowing for the strategic development of talent within the organization. It can permit more equitable member allocation across a well-defined structure, especially in times of personnel shortages, preventing member burnout and supporting their welfare. Likewise, accurate HRMS O&E data can enable proper systemic recognition of members' positional contributions to the organization during promotion boards and provide members with improved visibility into potential future career pathways, encouraging goal-setting and renewed dedication to continued service in the CAF. It also can strengthen the connection between members and the organization as the accountabilities, responsibilities, and authorities can be clearly attributed to both a sub-organization and a position, which minimizes confusion, duplication of effort, and frustration. Finally, accurate HRMS O&E data can promote effective communication and collaboration through a truer understanding of others' roles in the DND, creating a positive work environment geared towards achieving shared goals of which members will want to be a part.

DND leadership—at all levels—is responsible for following the O&E directive and the organization's structure. While institutional leaders are specifically expected through CAF leadership doctrine to develop and sustain a framework that facilitates continuous modifications to structure within the DND to ensure the perpetuation of the organization's capabilities,<sup>19</sup> they lack the required visibility and understanding to make sub-organization and position changes down to the tactical level. Failures to make timely adjustments to the O&E at every level and ensure that current and future structural

<sup>19</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, Chief of Military Personnel, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2006), 23.

realities are correctly reflected in HRMS can detrimentally impact the CAF's ability to recruit and retain the members it needs to execute strategy effectively. With that said, how accurate is DND's O&E in HRMS?

### **Current and Future O&E Challenges**

Several current and future O&E challenges within the DND exist today due to a myriad of factors, such as lack of awareness, time constraints, conflicting priorities, and inadequate O&E directive enforcement. By identifying only a select few of these as examples, the intent is to corroborate the prevalence of the issue within the DND and reinforce the necessity for its leadership's heightened attention to structure. This is not to criticize those who have been or are currently involved with the decision-making behind them—some or all of these may already be well on the path to structural resolution.

Among the DND's current O&E challenges are undocumented organizations, for instance, Mission Support Squadrons (MSS) and Operational Support Squadrons (OSS) within the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the Military Personnel Generation Group within the Chief Military Personnel Command. Both very much exist in practice to address the strategic needs of the DND but are notably absent in the HRMS. Focusing specifically on MSS' and OSS', although the master implementation plan approved in 2018 targeted their formal establishment by “[active posting season] 2019 or 2020,”<sup>20</sup> they remain unrecognized sub-organizations in HRMS today. Moreover, inconsistencies exist in established positions across the DND's O&E, where members posted into them find themselves performing tasks vastly different from what the position was originally established to do. As one of many examples, there are positions related to the Modernization and Integration of Sustainment and Logistics project that have been borrowed from other sub-organizations, like the Canadian Materiel Support Group in the Canadian Joint Operations Command, since 2018. Although O&E directive mechanisms such as loans exist to address short-term organizational requirements, they are often underutilized or ignored altogether. Furthermore, should adjustments to the structure like this become permanent in nature, given the length of time and evolutions to the DND's strategy, the implementation of the O&E change process frequently lags behind leadership's structural decisions—a lack of decision still constitutes a decision, resulting in HRMS O&E data inaccuracies that lead to the generation of false recruitment and retention requirements.

Exploring the DND's potential O&E challenges, the CAF will soon be onboarding many new capabilities as outlined in *Our North, Strong and Free*. As positions are reallocated and created to support them, it can put a strain on the DND's capabilities already in service. Unless the new positions created are privates or officer cadets, or they are established with sufficient time to recruit and train members to the level and skill set required, the members needed to ensure that the new capability is operationally functional will have to come from elsewhere within the organization. This is because the CAF builds its members from the ground up—unlike civilian organizations

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<sup>20</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, Royal Canadian Air Force, *1 Canadian Air Division Wing Restructure Master Implementation Plan*, (Winnipeg, MB: Royal Canadian Air Force, 1 Canadian Air Division, 2018), 4-3.

that bring talent in at every level. Though numerous recruitment initiatives have been undertaken by the CAF to entice previous members to put the uniform back on to address this issue, over the last 20 years, it has only been able to re-enroll 10% per year on average (see Figure 3). Thus, ensuring that the DND’s future requirements for personnel are timely and accurately captured in the HRMS to shape CAF recruitment is essential to develop the personnel needed to support both the DND’s current and future capabilities, as it cannot rely on the re-enrollment of past members to fill its needs quickly.

FY of intake	Reg F intake, excluding CTs from the P Res				P Res intake, excluding CTs from the Reg F			
	No previous release	Previous Release from Reg F	Previous Release from P Res	Total	No previous release	Previous Release from Reg F	Previous Release from P Res	Total
03/04	3167	271	24	3462	3515	349	128	3992
04/05	3258	239	56	3553	4059	342	127	4528
05/06	4507	274	91	4872	5067	376	157	5600
06/07	5006	326	111	5443	5335	352	141	5828
07/08	5298	404	121	5823	4583	393	157	5133
08/09	5745	552	125	6422	4272	560	168	5000
09/10	5820	479	133	6432	4223	656	196	5075
10/11	3445	256	92	3793	3567	335	132	4034
11/12	2493	208	81	2782	3139	249	155	3543
12/13	3246	172	97	3515	2851	215	167	3233
13/14	3295	176	111	3582	2889	243	162	3294
14/15	3613	191	119	3923	2843	243	149	3235
15/16	3928	231	161	4320	3118	318	184	3620
16/17	4140	269	133	4542	3581	355	200	4136
17/18	4660	239	140	5039	3777	316	192	4285
18/19	4778	237	123	5138	5288	333	211	5832
19/20	4847	215	118	5180	4626	292	164	5082
20/21	1796	178	37	2011	1875	247	127	2249
21/22	4505	179	98	4782	2873	262	153	3288
22/23	3652	198	75	3925	2784	299	165	3248

Figure 3 – Re-enrollees in the CAF  
Source: Etienne Rollin, email message to author, April 2, 2024.<sup>21</sup>

The inability to accurately reflect current structures and job roles in the HRMS hinders CAF recruitment and retention efforts. Additionally, any failures in identifying and translating evolving operational needs into the HRMS in a measured and timely fashion could result in the CAF having to support several new capabilities with the members it has, increasing the potential for the current personnel shortage to worsen in the future. DND leadership at all levels must increase their engagement in its organization’s structure—particularly in O&E—to prevent this from being realized. However, how can this be practically accomplished?

<sup>21</sup> “A member with multiple enrolments could be counted several times over the multi-year period. However, in each case, the enrolment is categorized according to the release immediately preceding the enrolment (if applicable).”

## **Practical Recommendations for Greater DND Leadership Engagement in O&E**

Effective CAF recruitment and retention necessitates proactive engagement from DND leadership at all levels in its O&E. To uphold the timeliness and accuracy of HRMS O&E data, several practical approaches are recommended. Firstly, O&E should be established as an essential business function and staffed appropriately at the Formation, Division, Command, or Group Principal levels—at a minimum—to create consistency, build key relationships, and demonstrate a clear cultural commitment to O&E. Secondly, the review of HRMS O&E data should be mandated alongside annual business planning activities to facilitate structural alignment with current and future priorities and strategies. Thirdly, co-locating O&E and business planning functions will streamline operations and promote constructive interaction, enhancing structural responsiveness to strategic and cultural changes. Fourthly, involving O&E personnel in discussions regarding strategy, culture, or structural changes will better inform leadership decision-making and enable prompt translation of decisions into the HRMS. Fifthly, digitalizing and standardizing O&E change processes and outputs from the HRMS will increase process efficiency and allow for continuous systemic structural understanding. Finally, holding subordinate DND leadership accountable for the accuracy of their HRMS O&E data and incentivizing correctness will improve the integrity and effectiveness of the DND's overall structure.

### **Conclusion**

The significance of structure in the DND cannot be overstated. Structure is just as important to an organization as strategy and culture. It helps support and shape both through its intertwined relationships and provides the foundation for CAF recruitment and retention. The DND's O&E, as a structural process instrument, plays a crucial role in this regard, as it sets the conditions for better recruitment decision-making and increases retention through improving processes linked to member well-being and job satisfaction.

Addressing existing and potential O&E challenges within the DND is essential. Inconsistencies in the HRMS data underline the need for more precise and timely updates to reflect the DND's current and future structural realities. By not doing so, these discrepancies can prompt further recruitment shortfalls and retention issues, impacting the CAF's ability to sustain and project its capabilities. As the CAF prepares to integrate several new capabilities as outlined in *Our North, Strong and Free*, ensuring that organizational changes are promptly reflected in the HRMS is vital for maintaining an effective and prepared force.

To mitigate these challenges, increased engagement by DND leadership at all levels in structure and O&E processes is crucial. By treating O&E as an essential business function, integrating it into strategic and cultural discussions, implementing digital tools for greater efficiency, and holding subordinate DND leadership accountable for it, the DND can become highly responsive to changes in its operating environment. A renewed commitment to structure and focus on its overall integrity by DND leadership at all levels will help support CAF recruitment and retention efforts and strengthen the CAF's potential to effectively execute the DND's strategy now and into the future.

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