



**THE PRIVILEGE TO SERVE IS NOT ENOUGH:
THE CAF AS AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE**

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JCSP 49

Exercise Solo Flight

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“I am very, very worried about our numbers...”¹ This is a quote from the current Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Eyre, given during an update to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU). As noted by the CDS, this concern is not the only hot topic surrounding the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Concerns relating to the CAF on sexual misconduct, recruitment, retention, and leadership are front and centre within media, the public, and CAF members. Most recently, reports from the Honourable Louise Arbour² and the House of Commons³ highlight the concerns noted and provide recommendations on ways forward. In particular, recommendations for recruitment and retention are vitally important to maintaining the integrity of our defence system and CAF abilities. Historically, the CAF has relied on the recruitment and, likely, retention policy of people joining and staying within the military sphere through a desire to serve their country, a duty to serve. While there is still some truth to this concept, changes in demographic and generational thinking and desires are shifting away from this form of employment. As will be discussed in this paper, the newest generations of workers, primarily Millennials and Generation Z, want more from their jobs and careers. The Canadian Armed Forces need to shift their cold-war era way of job attraction to a more modern and diverse model to become an Employer of Choice.

Concerns

The Canadian Armed Forces is in crisis mode. Significant concerns surrounding allegations of sexual misconduct, lack of trust in leadership, and alarms regarding recruitment and retention have placed a heavy burden on the Chief of Defence Staff (General Wayne Eyre). While initiatives have been put in place to address these concerns, the crisis of member shortage is the emphasis of this paper. Depending on the source and timeliness of data, the member shortage crisis varies in terms of numbers. Citing the most current media article, “...the Canadian Armed Forces is facing a shortage of 16,000 members”.⁴ This was confirmed within the article by the Commander of the Military Personnel Generation Group, Brigadier-General Krista Brodie. This is not new information regarding shortage, but the most recent acknowledgment of the actual shortage numbers. In fact, the recruitment and retention issues stem back years, even decades, without resolution or improvement. In the Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons (Chapter 5) regarding National Defence – Recruitment

¹ “Minutes - SECU (44-1) - No. 37 - House of Commons of Canada,” accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/SECU/meeting-37/minutes>.

² Honourable Louise Arbour, Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 2020.

³ House of Commons NDDN Committee Report, Modernizing Recruitment and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces, last modified June 2022, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/NDDN/report-2/>.

⁴ Dylan Dyson, CTV News Ottawa Multi-Skilled Journalist, and Follow | Contact, “Canadian Armed Forces Facing Member Shortage ‘Crisis,’” Ottawa, April 5, 2023, <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/canadian-armed-forces-facing-member-shortage-crisis-1.6344761>.

and Retention of Military Personnel, it is noted within the first paragraph of the report, “Over 3,000 positions are vacant, many of them in key occupations...”⁵ Some 20 years ago, shortages within the CAF were noted. In 2016, the Auditor General completed another report, Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence.⁶ This report cites the 2002 report and a status report completed in 2006. Of particular note, the 2016 report notes that mechanisms were set in place to address recruitment needs but were not well managed. This is important as the CAF was recruiting members but not necessarily in the most needed occupations, or in some cases, more in occupations that were not in need and could not absorb.⁷ Key messaging within the report that echoes the 2002 shortages is that even with the recruitment plans that were implemented from the 2002 report and 2006 status update, the issues around shortages were not being addressed. “Overall, we found that the total number of Regular Force members had decreased...”⁸ Further, it mentions, “In our opinion, it is unlikely that the Regular Force will be able to reach the desired number of members by the 2018-19 fiscal year as planned.”⁹ This mention is empirically confirmed by the results of the Minister of National Defence report released in 2022 “Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces 2021-22 Departmental Results Report”¹⁰, the report confirmed the ‘unlikely’ aspiration of reaching staffing numbers.

Results achieved

Departmental results	Performance indicators	Target	Date to achieve target	2019–20 Actual results	2020–21 Actual results	2021–22 Actual results
3.1 Canadian Armed Forces is growing toward its end state of 101,500 personnel*	% of Regular Force positions that are filled	95 – 100%	31 March 2026	96.5%	93%	91.6%**
	% of Reserve Force positions that are filled	At least 95%	31 March 2026	81.47%	79.78%	76%
	% of occupations with critical shortfalls	5% or less	31 March 2022	17.9%	50.5%	61.7%***

Figure 1.1 Departmental Result 3.1 – Canadian Armed Forces is growing toward its end state of 101,500 personnel

⁵ Government of Canada, “Report of the Auditor General of Canada. Chapter 7, : Federal Search and Rescue Activities : FA1-2013/1-7E-PDF - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.Ca,” July 1, 2002, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.576288/publication.html>.

⁶ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, “Report 5—Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence,” November 29, 2016, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

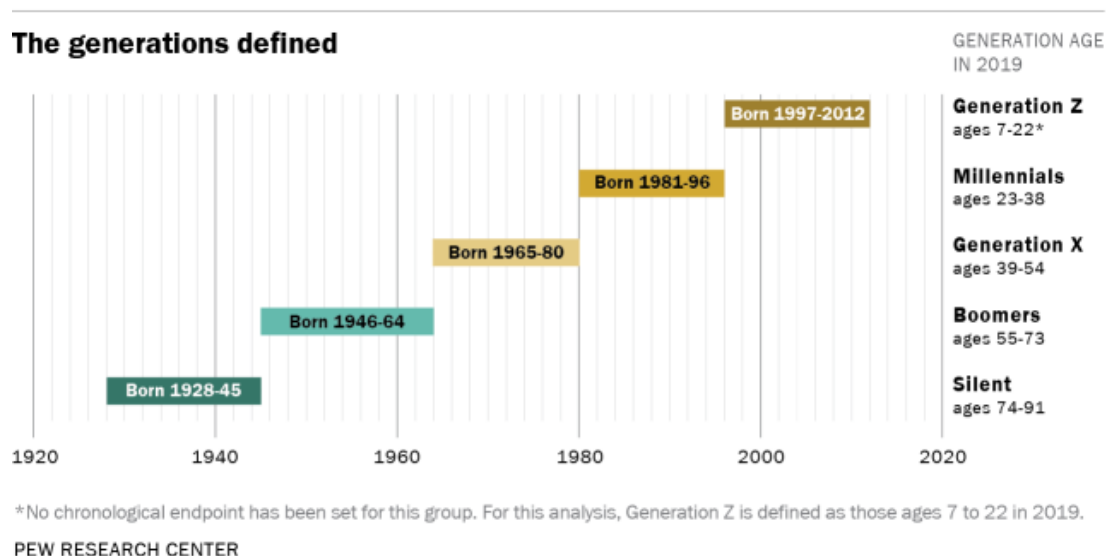
¹⁰ Department of National Defence, “Departmental Results Report 2021-2022,” navigation page, December 2, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-results-report/2021-22-index.html>.

As can be seen in Figure 1.1, not only were the concerns noted in 2016 about the unlikely ability to meet staffing numbers, but the trend continues to move downward with each subsequent year worse than the previous. The report notes, “...reduced CAF strength and readiness will take upwards of 5-10 years to remedy...challenging the CAF’s ability to fulfill the Government of Canada’s policy...”¹¹ This is concerning. The staffing concerns or ‘crisis’ has been mentioned for decades, and each report suggests a need to address the concerns, yet little to nothing has changed this. Negative recruitment and retention trends are factually tracked and shown with an outlook that does not allow for a quick fix.

Generational Demographics

To understand the staffing problem, it is essential to understand the demographic(s) being considered. While there is no one perfect or absolute Generational definition, for the purposes of this paper, the Pew Research Center figure¹² below will be used.

Figure 2.1 Pew Research Center – Generations Defined



Using the definition of dates and generational naming, a composition of CAF members is also needed to correlate the current workforce. Data from Statistics Canada¹³ from a 2021 census showed that there were 97,625 serving members, which included

¹¹ Department of National Defence, “Departmental Results Report 2021-2022,” navigation page, December 2, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-results-report/2021-22-index.html>.

¹² “The Generations Defined,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/st_18-02-27_generations_defined/.

¹³ Statistics Canada, “*On Guard for Thee: Serving in the Canadian Armed Forces*”, last modified 13 July 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220713/dq220713c-eng.htm>.

both Regular Force and Reserve Force members. This data composition is broken down into the following age categories:

- 33% are aged 17-29;
- 32% are aged 30-39;
- 21% are aged 40-49; and
- 14% are aged 50+

In addition, the numbers can be extrapolated to show that:

- Average age of serving members was 36.2 years old; and
- More than 50% of the CAF were less than 35 years old

Using the data and percentages above and then relating to the Pew Research Center definitions for generations, it can be established that:

- 33% are Millennial/Generation Z (born 1992-2004);
- 32% are Millennial (born 1982-1991);
- 21% are Generation X (born 1972-1981); and
- 14% are Generation X/Boomers (born >1971).

This also further defines that:

- Average age of serving members were born around 1985 and are a Millennial; and
- More than 50% of the CAF were less than 35 years old, and therefore the majority of the working members in the CAF are Millennials or Generation Z.

Millennials make up the bulk of currently serving members, with Generation Z eventually replacing the dataset as the majority. This can be anticipated to happen within the next 8-10 years and should be the focus of future recruitment campaigns.

What does this all mean? Millennials, also called Generation Y, are “considered to be the first generation that grew up exposed to technology.” They are “diverse, social, seek achievement, and acceptance among cohorts.”¹⁴ While Generation Z “have never known life without means of instant communication” and are immersed in technology.¹⁵

Acknowledging that Generation Z is the future members and leaders of the CAF organization, it is just as important to consider the large percentage of remaining Millennial and Generation X members that form the substance of the senior leaders and subject matter experts. This consideration must be accounted for within retention

¹⁴ Stout, Donna, “*Qualitative Case Study on Leadership Communication with Generation Z*”, (Phoenix: University of Phoenix), 2020, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

strategies and policies so as not to remove the knowledge base and expertise needed for operational effectiveness and success. This challenge must account for a balance of leadership and communication that will bridge the gap between generational members. "...the presence of multiple generations of employees within an organization presents opportunities and challenges."¹⁶ Concerning Millennials in the CAF, these members are now entering a window of taking on leadership roles or have already done so. With the majority of serving members being Millennials, and assuming they joined between the age of 16-25, they are now entering 10+ years of service. This means they are likely to enter follow-on postings and increases in rank that will place them in leadership and mentoring roles. While this will not apply to all members (millennials), it is fundamental as these members will fill the roles within the "missing middle" as noted in the Arbor Report.¹⁷ This middle target area is crucial for retention and the future of the CAF leadership and expertise.

Employer of Choice

Having formulated that Millennials and Generation Z will likely be the focal points of retention and recruitment for the next decade, determining how to do that becomes a priority. As mentioned in the introduction, the CAF recruitment model based on a desire to serve or duty to serve is outdated and unlikely a characteristic of the current and future generations; that is not to say it is not still relevant, as people are still signing up to be CAF members. But the data presented indicates that it is not as effective as it once might have been and requires a shift. This shift or evolution of recruitment and retention policies is necessary in the same way as the evolution of the generations has occurred. If the CAF fails to adapt to the generational changes and the needs of those generations, it will fail to attract and retain members and exacerbate the current staffing concerns. Strategies to address these concerns are ongoing, and the CAF has released plans for such.¹⁸ In order to improve success, consideration should be given to the Employer of Choice (EOC) concept versus the present-day Employer of Last Resort. "The concept of EOC implies that employees consciously choose to work for an EOC instead of other organizations."¹⁹ While this concept is primarily centred around the business sector and involves 'branding' it also applies within the government sector. "Individuals prefer those organizations as EOCs which match their own interests and values, or organization wherein they can fit in."²⁰ These matched interests pertain to the generational changes and evolution needed for a shift to EOC.

The indication of the values and interests is a driving force in the move towards EOC. The difficulty is that it cannot be centred on one generation or subset of a particular

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁷ Honourable Louise Arbour, Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 2020, 208.

¹⁸ Department of National Defence, "The CAF Retention Strategy," October 6, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/caf-retention-strategy.html>.

¹⁹ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, "Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media," *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 800.

group or demographic. It needs to be a more holistic approach that will benefit the currently serving members to address retention concerns while simultaneously attracting new members within a recruitment strategy. By not focusing on just one group or generation, it is vital to consider the Canadian population's diverse nature and the desire for the CAF to resemble that.²¹ According to the 2021 Canadian census, the population consists of: 50.3% female, 26.5% visible minorities, 23% immigrants, and 5% indigenous.²² While this does not compose the entirety of the population (of course), it is an essential statistic to validate when looking at the composition of the CAF. Contrasting these population statistics, the CAF comprises only 14.9% females, 6.7% visible minorities, and 2.6% indigenous. Of note, the statistics do not have any data on immigrants as the CAF has recently opened recruitment to Permanent Residents under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.²³ As can be seen from these contrasting statistics, the Canadian Armed Forces does not reflect Canadian society from a demographical view. While an argument can be made that the military is not for everyone (personal interest or lack of) and that a perfect match of society's construct will ever be likely, the large disparity in the statistics is alarming.

An EOC intends to attract the best employees they can. This is accomplished once the attraction increases and the pool of applicants rises. At the same time, the satisfaction of highly skilled members increases retention and satisfies knowledge and skills gaps. Within the business construct and most research on EOC, the “brand” is a crucial aspect of becoming an EOC. “Companies have long recognized the importance of a brand as an important asset to attract talented workers.”²⁴ To do this, an organization must create an atmosphere or environment that applicants are eager to work for. Further research indicates that to become an EOC, emphasis must be placed on “job attributes, which include salary, advancement opportunities, location and work content.”²⁵ Interestingly, in researching the topic, a quick visit to the CAF recruitment website led to a document, “The CAF Offer – Our Value Proposition”²⁶ which addresses the job attributes mentioned above and attempts to ‘sell’ the CAF as a career of the best choice.

²¹ Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy,” policies, September 22, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-defence-policy.html>.

²² Statistics Canada, “Census of Population,” January 15, 2001, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>.

²³ Department of National Defence, “Minister of National Defence Announces That Permanent Residents Are Welcome to Apply Now to Join the Canadian Armed Forces,” news releases, December 5, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/12/minister-of-national-defence-announces-that-permanent-residents-are-welcome-to-apply-now-to-join-the-canadian-armed-forces.html>.

²⁴ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, “Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media,” *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

²⁵ Linn Viktoria Rampl, “How to Become an Employer of Choice: Transforming Employer Brand Associations into Employer First-Choice Brands,” *Journal of Marketing Management* 30, no. 13–14 (October 1, 2014): 1486–1504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.934903>.

²⁶ Department of National Defence, “The CAF Offer,” February 1, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/the-caf-offer.html>.

Forbes²⁷ lists the following topics that businesses should consider when looking to become an EOC:

- Flexible and Remote Work;
- Competitive Compensation;
- Flexible Paid Time Off;
- Diverse and Inclusive Teams; and
- Company Visibility.

While this is not an exhaustive list and only one view on what it takes to become an EOC, it is a good starting point. Second, the Forbes list and accompanying information about each topic are geared towards businesses with different goals (profit) and stakeholders (shareholders) than that of the CAF. However, the topics are relatable and can be adapted to highlight the need to focus for the CAF to move towards being an EOC.

Flexible and Remote Work

In 2021 32% of Canadian employees (age 15-69) “worked most of their hours from home,” compared to just 4% of employees in 2016.²⁸ The pandemic quickly shifted the opportunity (and need) to work remotely and normalize the activity. This was no different for the CAF, except that the CAF still had essential in-person activities that could not be done remotely. What is of particular interest is that a significant amount of work within the CAF can still be completed remotely. As indicated in the shift from 4% to 32% of Canadians working remotely, for the CAF to, as previously shown, represent the population, a focus on flexible and remote work opportunities must be prioritized. The benefits of remote work are still being researched in more depth, but initial indications are that significant health benefits come with it. Remote work is not a perfect solution and comes with its own challenges. In the case of the CAF, the need to be in person is generally known. In addition to in-person requirements is the need to deploy domestically and internationally. “The benefits of remote work remain controversial.”²⁹ In their study on remote work, the authors noted, “...empirical study provides evidence that remote work decreases psychological and physical stress...”; however, the authors note that “...full-remote work was found to have a negative effect on presenteeism.”³⁰ Suppose the population is slowly adapting and becoming accustomed to working

²⁷ “How Companies Can Adapt To Become Employers Of Choice During The Great Turnover Tsunami,” accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karadennison/2021/06/10/how-companies-can-adapt-to-become-employers-of-choice-during-the-great-turnover-tsunami/?sh=73cbb5a47f63>.

²⁸ Statistics Canada, “Working from Home after the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Estimate of Worker Preferences,” May 26, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021005/article/00001-eng.htm>.

²⁹ Akiyoshi Shimura et al., “Remote Work Decreases Psychological and Physical Stress Responses, but Full-Remote Work Increases Presenteeism,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.730969>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

remotely and realizing the benefits that are attached to it. In that case, it can then be posited that they will look for future employment with this as an option. While the CAF uses remote work opportunities, the attached stigma is still prevalent and not yet part of the culture. The CDS has tried to promote remote work, albeit primarily to deal with the ongoing pandemic. However, this is slowly becoming part of the norm. Increased efforts to promote and support remote work will increase employee satisfaction and attraction to the CAF. Aside from the health benefits indicated within the study noted, the gender and social benefits that are attached to remote work also improve the satisfaction and interest of potential employees and currently serving members.

Competitive Compensation

“Salary is an important job attribute.”³¹ Typically speaking, people are not joining the military because of the overwhelming pay or to become rich. However, as noted in the topic title, the compensation is meant to be competitive. Regarding the CAF, the pay scales associated with work are intended to be competitive within the public sector and government employment. The CAF is open and transparent about the compensation benefits attached to CAF careers and outlines this within the documentation.³² This is not to say it is perfect or meets the pay that a skilled employee could get outside the CAF. Still, by being open with the compensation to be expected, the future employee has a better understanding of what they anticipate. Part of compensation is also the benefits and compensation outside of pay. Anecdotally, friends and family unfamiliar with the military often ask this author, “Do you pay taxes? Do you get free housing? Do you get free food?” These are just a few examples but very common questions often asked. Where the questions or assumptions of them stem from is unknown, but interesting nonetheless. Unfortunately, the questions noted and the accompanying answers are usually no. This does not imply there are no benefits. Medical, dental, Family Services, pension, and job security. These are just some of the benefits of a CAF career. But do they meet the needs of future or potential employees? “Gen Z cares more about work-life balance and personal well-being.” In addition, “...they look for benefits such as paid time off, mental health days, or activities that create a sense of community.”³³ If these are the priorities of the next generation of CAF members or those that the CAF would like to recruit, it is then critical that the CAF focus on how to promote these wants. The medical, dental, pension, etc., are not selling features; they should become part of the expected. It harkens back to the essay introduction of the Cold War era mentality of what a career is and provides. Those days are over, and prospective employees want different.

³¹ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, “Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media,” *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

³² Department of National Defence, “The CAF Offer,” February 1, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/the-caf-offer.html>.

³³ Hillary Hoffower, “Meet the Typical Gen Z Worker, Who Is Quitting Their Job for a Better One but Probably Regretting It Later,” *Business Insider*, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-gen-z-wants-workplace-expectations-salary-benefits-perks-2022-5>.

Flexible Paid Time Off

The CAF Leave Policy provides the framework for “the physical and mental wellbeing of CF members by providing periodic opportunities for rest and relaxation.”³⁴ The leave provided is quite competitive with industry and other government policies. Where it is challenged is that time outside of the Leave Policy is not as simple. Discretionary time off is subject to Commanding Officer approval and is not standardized. While this can allow flexibility with options, it also opens the door for those to deny time off if and when needed easily. In addition, the inherent military job cannot easily accommodate flexible time off during periods of essential operational requirements. Operations, exercises, deployments, and training have fairly robust schedules that require time dedication. However, during periods outside those operational requirements, flexibility should be made more accessible and accommodating.

Diverse and Inclusive Teams

If there is an area that the CAF is currently investing in making changes or improvements, it is Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Recognizing EDI's importance within the workplace is not new; from a military standpoint, it is a drastic culture shift. So much so that the CAF has created a new overarching high-level command authority called the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture Command (CPCC). The CPCC is “the centre of expertise and single, functional authority for aligning Defence culture to ensure professional conduct meets the standards expected of the profession of arms and the Defence Team.”³⁵ This command authority will review and realign policies related to misconduct, professional conduct, discrimination, harmful behaviour, biases, and barriers.³⁶ This effort is to create a culture where people feel comfortable working. This keystone will provide for a more EDI-centric work environment and the potential to welcome the next and current generations of employees. Whereas with the previous EOC topics, the information could be found relatively easily with simple web searches. The changes in culture, the work toward an improved EDI workplace and the general activities that CPCC conducts are not as easily found. A progress tracker³⁷ for conduct and culture change exists but has little content or tangible evidence of change. Suppose prospective members are looking at the CAF as a possible career path and simple web searches come back with a majority of media reports on sexual misconduct and concerns of staffing shortages. In that case, the member will be

³⁴ Department of National Defence, “Leave Policy,” policies, May 29, 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/leave-policy-manual.html>.

³⁵ Department of National Defence, “Chief Professional Conduct and Culture,” April 29, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/organizational-structure/chief-professional-conduct-culture.html>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Department of National Defence, “Conduct and Culture Change Progress Tracker,” November 15, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/conduct-and-culture/conduct-and-culture-tracker.html>.

quickly discouraged. Very little information could be found on how the military is making changes and improvements and how the CAF is becoming a more EDI-aware organization. It is here that the CAF should focus on advertisement and information push. "...research in the area of employer brand has identified diversity, ethics and CSR and work-life balance as important dimensions of the employer brand."³⁸ Members need to be reassured that the CAF is a safe workplace, not just reassured but shown. The culture must adapt and prove that there is change. Initiatives are in place to address this, but if those responsible are not held accountable, the perception will not change.

Company Visibility

Company visibility circles back to the EOC topic of branding. "...employer brand is measured by understanding the general attitude towards the company prevalent among its stakeholders and the public."³⁹ In the case of the CAF, we can assess the stakeholders as the currently serving members to focus on retention, and the public being those considering a career in the CAF and thus a focus on recruitment. This visibility and branding are not what the CAF is currently doing well. A study commissioned by the Department of National Defence (DND) on the 'Views of the Canadian Armed Forces' was completed in 2022.⁴⁰ The study notes the following as it relates to public perception and, for the purposes of this paper, branding:

- 35% say their impression of those who serve is strongly positive, compared to 43% in 2020 and 57% in 2018;
- About half (56%) agree that the CAF is as good a career choice for women as it is for men, compared to 70% in 2020;
- Just 32% say the CAF is doing a good job addressing hateful, racist or sexist conduct;
- Men and women alike were deterred by the idea of having to leave their families and move around frequently, requiring them to uproot their families; and
- A few participants were also put off from joining the CAF based on what they had heard about allegations of sexual misconduct.

The results listed are not the only ones; they are just some critical highlights the study pointed out. Generally speaking, many other items of concern show the CAF in a negative light. As can be seen, many of this study's results, compared to previous studies, show a negative trend in the CAF brand. Respondents within the study noted that they

³⁸ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, "Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media," *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

³⁹ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, "Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media," *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

⁴⁰ Department of National Defence, "Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2021-2022 Tracking Study Final Report," March 2022, https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tps-gc/por-ef/national_defence/2022/084-20-e/POR084-20-Report-EN.pdf.

were aware that discrimination and harassment exist within society and were not surprised that these issues existed in the CAF.⁴¹ What is of concern is that respondents were less convinced that the CAF culture would change and were skeptical that the CAF would “address the allegations and misconduct.”⁴² Issues surrounding misconduct and harassment, as well as the impacts on women and other diverse or minority groups, have been and are currently being researched and written on by many different authors and academics and are not the centre of this paper. These issues could be and likely are the whole of essays and research papers. The concerns raised are meant to acknowledge the need to increase awareness of these impacts on the recruitment and retention of members. If part of branding toward becoming an EOC is company visibility, the negative visibility currently faced by the CAF is a significant hurdle that needs to be overcome. As well as increasing the visibility is the methods for doing so, “Organisations hoping to obtain EOC status will profit from increased attention given to social media.”⁴³

What Else

While the Forbes list of what it takes to become an EOC is helpful, it is not definitive. Various variations and suggestions for topics on EOC can be found, but a few different topics surrounding the CAF as an EOC will be explored briefly.

Use of Technology

Previously noted information about Millennials and Gen Z is the lifelong use and understanding of technology and the immediacy of information. These generations are used to having the most sophisticated and quickest technology at the touch of a finger and near-instant speed. However, the CAF is not known for using the latest and greatest technology. This slow adaptation can be a source of frustration when used to such ease. Having to print out forms or handing paper copies of work is a backwards model of the employee experience that the newest generations are looking for. Quicker means of administration, messaging media, and self-serve systems are technologies that have become the norm in business and parts of society that the CAF is only just beginning to implement. While policy is being put in place⁴⁴, this, once again, is not a selling feature of the CAF. If programs were better managed and advertised, the CAF could be sold as a leading user of digitization and become a selling feature, a reason to want to pursue a career in the military.

⁴¹ Department of National Defence, “Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2021-2022 Tracking Study Final Report,” March 2022, https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsdc/poref/national_defence/2022/084-20-e/POR084-20-Report-EN.pdf.

⁴² *Ibid.* 8.

⁴³ Karnica Tanwar and Amresh Kumar, “Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Social Media,” *Personnel Review* 48, no. 3 (2019): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>.

⁴⁴ Department of National Defence, “Release of the CAF Digital Campaign Plan,” January 20, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2022/06/release-caf-digital-campaign-plan.html>.

Work-Life Balance

While this was somewhat alluded to in the Flexible and Remote Work topic, an area that did not cover was the hours devoted to work and the better understanding of the family impacts the CAF creates. As the CAF is a salary-based employer, the members are not paid by the hour, so the work hours vary and are not fixed. This is a known acceptance by many, but it is not well understood until after getting into a career path. This also means that the hours vary depending on the level of work required and the attitude of the senior leadership. After-hours, weekends and extended days are standard, and the salary in the CAF is adjusted to reflect this, but little is done to showcase this within the branding of the CAF. Not being upfront on this and setting expectations again creates frustration. Regarding family, as noted within the introduction, the cold war era style of a family is much different now than it was then. With more and more families now having dual incomes, the need for better family services and flexibility in work is increasing. Frequent moves and spousal job relocation challenge current serving members and might be a detractor for future members. Changes in geographical moves will always be a necessary challenge for the CAF and its members. Career advancement, training, and essential vacancies are just a few reasons why members will be required to move. However, better management of these movements and an increased focus on remote work options will alleviate some of this concern.

Sense of Purpose

Finally, the CAF needs to emphasize CAF members' work better, whether domestically or internationally. Providing a sense of purpose allows serving members to feel fulfillment and potential people better understand why they may be interested in joining. Within the study on public views of the CAF, it was noted, "Most groups had some participants who felt they knew little about the CAF, sometimes describing the CAF as not being terribly visible."⁴⁵ The fact that people within the population don't understand the purpose of the CAF, or what lack of its visibility, should be alarming to the government and CAF senior leadership. Emphasis should be placed on showcasing the work and efforts of CAF members and not just relying on the media to toss in a good news story amongst the previously noted concerns around staffing and misconduct. Not only does the public want to know what their tax dollars go to, but proper showcasing of the contributions of the CAF would bring a potential sense of wanting to participate.

Employment Equity (EE)

Complimentary to some suggestions and ways forward noted, the CAF has devoted to the Employment Equity Plan.⁴⁶ This plan focuses on six areas of action: Attraction and Recruitment, Education and Training, Policies, Procedures and

⁴⁵ Department of National Defence, "Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2021-2022 Tracking Study Final Report," March 2022, https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsgc/poref/national_defence/2022/084-20-e/POR084-20-Report-EN.pdf

⁴⁶ Department of National Defence, "CAF Commitment: Employment Equity Plan 2021-2026," November 5, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2021/11/caf-commitment-employment-equity-plan-2021-2026.html>.

Accommodation, Maximizing Self-Identification, Empowering our Defence Advisory Groups (DAGs), and Enabling EE Champions and Promoting Commemorative Events. The intent for these action plans is "...critical to changing the CAF culture to one that values members for being their authentic selves."⁴⁷ This plan is a positive step forward in addressing demographic challenges that were previously identified and part of a bigger plan to address cultural issues within the CAF.

Conclusion

As the CAF struggles to recruit and retain members within its lines, it must also take heavy consideration into what that workforce looks like and will look like. The future generations of the population looking for employment have specific wants and needs, as has been identified. Each generation of workers brings a unique and adapted way of thinking and specific desires for a potential employer. The CAF has relied far too long on outdated recruitment and retention models based on a privilege-to-serve mentality. For the CAF to become an Employer of Choice for these people, it must adapt to an updated way of thinking and lifestyle. The previous beliefs that it was a privilege to serve and provides a sense of duty are not enough to meet the desires of current and future generations. While there will continue to be people that enroll in the CAF with those firm beliefs, as indicated by the statistics on recruitment and retention in the last few years, it is not enough to meet the organization's needs. To move towards becoming an EOC, the CAF must focus on core concepts of: Flexible and Remote Work, Competitive Compensation, Flexible Paid Time Off, Diverse and Inclusive Teams, and Company Visibility. In addition, consideration must also be given to the Use of Technology, Work-Life Balance, and Sense of Purpose. While not all these topics can be wholly integrated into the CAF system, it is a solid foundation for a way forward. The CAF must exit the Cold War era mentality of attraction and focus on branding itself as an employer of first choice. For it to meet a look that is more in line with the makeup of the Canadian population, improved efforts must be made to address the gaps within the Women, Indigenous, and visible minority demographics. The advertising must come in a way that sells the CAF to prospective members while at the same time maintaining a workplace that members want to continue to work in.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

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