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ENHANCING RESILIENCE OF CAF MEMBERS TO BOLSTER INSTITUTIONAL RETENTION

AIM

1. This service paper seeks to determine to what extent the level of resilience of military members and military institutions within the CAF can enhance retention. By enhancing individual and group resilience in the CAF, members are more likely to develop a positive relationship with their peers and the chain of command hence becoming more successful in their roles, contributing to the overall CAF retention issue.

INTRODUCTION

2. Resilience can help CAF retention by helping members cope with the stress of military life. High levels of resilience can help members to better manage difficult situations and remain focused on their roles and responsibilities. It can also help members to develop better social skills, build stronger relationships, and cope with traumatic experiences. All of these characteristics can help members stay in the CAF and remain resilient in the face of adversity.

3. To enhance resilience, CAF leaders should aim toward achievable goals regarding training and education for their members. Promoting PT, Practice gratitude, building healthy relationships, self-care to recharge, be present in the moment are all effective and simple actions that can create a virtuous circle of resilience. By iterations and enforcing those habits, retention can be positively influenced.

4. Retention is a critical issue for the CAF, as it ensures the longevity of the organization and its ability to carry out its mission. Retention is especially important for the CAF because it requires a highly trained and dedicated workforce to effectively carry out its operations. The CAF must ensure that its personnel remains in the service for extended periods of time in order to maintain its operational effectiveness. Without a strong retention program, the CAF would not be able to sustain itself.

5. Knowing how to manage stress is a fundamental skill for military personnel that can have an impact on job performance, as well as on emotional and physical health which ultimately will sustain and support the essential resource of the CAF, its military members.¹

DISCUSSION

The virtuous circle of resilience in the military.

6. One of the primary reasons why building resilience through healthy relationships is efficient is because it positively spread into all facets of our lives. Building resilience can create a virtuous circle because it can help CAF members to cope with difficult situations and build their capacity to tackle them. Resilience, when worked upon by military members, becomes a renewable health resource for military organizations. Resilience gives us the strength to face

¹ Pallavicini et al., 'Virtual Reality Applications for Stress Management Training in the Military'.

challenges, the courage to take risks, and the confidence to learn from our mistakes.² It also encourages us to seek out new experiences and develop our social, emotional, and physical well-being. This helps us to become more connected with our environment and the people around us, allowing us to build relationships that can help us to tackle difficult situations and overcome obstacles. This in turn creates an environment of mutual support and understanding, which reinforces our resilience and helps us to stay positive and motivated. You then become a person that people want to be surrounded with because of your coping force. This virtuous circle of resilience, connection, and growth can help us to become stronger, more capable, and more successful in our military careers.

7. Moreover, it can be said that you are the average of the people you are surrounded by. CAF members should surround themselves with great minds and positive transformational leaders. Surrounding yourself with great people helps resilience because it gives you the support and encouragement needed to stay resilient in the face of challenging times. Having people around who are positive and have a “can do” attitude during military exercises can help inspire and motivate you to keep going when you feel like giving up. Additionally, having an uplifting support system can help to provide a sense of security and reassurance, which can further increase your resilience.³ In addition to providing support, being around great people can also give you the opportunity to learn from their successes and failures. By observing the way they respond to life’s challenges, you can gain insight into how to handle similar situations in the future. Seeing how they cope and persist in the face of adversity can be a great source of inspiration and can give you the confidence to face your own challenges.⁴ Surrounding yourself with great people can also help to expand your perspective. It can be easy to become isolated and stuck in your own perspective when faced with a difficult situation. Having people in your life who have different experiences and perspectives can provide a much-needed breath of fresh air. They can help you to see things from a different angle and can provide valuable insight into how to move forward. When life gets overwhelming, having someone to talk to can be invaluable. Friends can provide practical help and advice, as well as a listening ear. This can be especially helpful when you are dealing with a traumatic experience or a difficult situation during an overseas military deployment.

Diversity to boost resilience in the CAF.

8. The CAF should continue to promote diversity and inclusivity of women at all levels of the chain of command because they possess physical and psychological skills that are essential to fulfill CAF’s retention strategies. As stated by Nindl et al: “Specific to the demands of combat, women are better at making logical decisions under stressful conditions without the negative interactions caused by testosterone which increases the activity of brain areas associated with impulse control and distractibility”.⁵ We connect available actions to resilience by claiming that an actors are more resilient if they have a greater diversity of actions available or, equivalently, a

² Britt, Sinclair, and McFadden, ‘Introduction: The Meaning and Importance of Military Resilience’.

³ Britt, Sinclair, and McFadden.

⁴ Britt, Sinclair, and McFadden.

⁵ Nindl et al., ‘Perspectives on Resilience for Military Readiness and Preparedness: Report of an International Military Physiology Roundtable’.

larger ‘option space’.⁶ Diversity is an intuitive surrogate for resilience: the more different things a system has, the better its capacity to respond to disturbances or change.⁷

9. Women are often found to be more resilient in military roles due to their ability to multitask, their emotional intelligence, and their attention to detail. Women also tend to have a stronger sense of loyalty to their team and country, as well as heightened communication skills. As shown by Nindl et al: “Additionally, research has shown that women have a higher pain tolerance and better physical endurance than men, which can be beneficial in a military environment. Research demonstrates that women in combat roles would result in far fewer accidents, assaults, and cases of fratricide”.⁸

10. Women also tend to be more emotionally expressive than men, which can help them to better manage their feelings. “Expressing emotions can be a helpful way to process difficult experiences and to make sense of them. It can also help women to build emotional resilience, as it allows them to understand their feelings and to develop coping strategies to handle them.”⁹ In terms of mental resilience, after controlling for reports of prior life stressors and sexual harassment during deployment, Vogt et al. reported “no gender differences in the association between several types of deployment stressors including combat exposure and PTSD. In fact, men are 5 times more likely to use alcohol as a coping mechanism, and become alcohol dependent or diagnosed with an antisocial personality disorder.”¹⁰ This emotional expression is something that many men struggle with, which can leave them feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with difficult experiences. While the capability of a soldier’s performance is ultimately grounded at the cellular level, performance will be suboptimal if the soldier is unable to develop coping mechanisms to handle a changing operational environment.¹¹ Women also have a greater capacity for compassion and empathy than men. This can help them to better understand the experiences of others and to be more understanding in difficult situations. This can help women to stay strong when faced with adversity, as they can recognize and appreciate the struggles of others. Compassion and empathy can also help them to build strong relationships, which is an important factor in developing resilience.

Practicing gratitude.

11. Gratitude is a powerful tool that CAF leaders and members should embody and promote because it increases resilience and improves overall well-being. Practicing gratitude means taking the time to appreciate and acknowledge the good things in your life and in the life of others. Research has shown that people who practice gratitude often experience greater emotional well-being, improved physical health, and a more positive outlook on life. The benefits of practicing gratitude extend beyond simply feeling good. Studies have found that

⁶ Bousquet et al., ‘Resilience and Development: Mobilizing for Transformation’.

⁷ Lade, Walker, and Haider, ‘Resilience as Pathway Diversity: Linking Systems, Individual, and Temporal Perspectives on Resilience’.

⁸ Nindl et al., ‘Perspectives on Resilience for Military Readiness and Preparedness: Report of an International Military Physiology Roundtable’.

⁹ Jordan, ‘Women and Empathy: Implications for Psychological Development and Psychotherapy’.

¹⁰ Nindl et al., ‘Perspectives on Resilience for Military Readiness and Preparedness: Report of an International Military Physiology Roundtable’.

¹¹ Nindl et al.

practicing gratitude can help increase resilience, which is the ability to cope with life's challenges and bounce back after difficult times.¹²

12. One way that practicing gratitude helps increase the resilience of CAF members is by helping people stay connected to their values and purpose. When life is difficult, it can be easy to become overwhelmed and lose sight of what is important to an individual. Practicing gratitude can help us reconnect with our core values, which can give us the motivation and strength to continue. Gratitude also helps people stay connected to the CAF support systems. It can help us remember the people in our CoC who have offered us unconditional love and support. This can remind us that we are not alone and that we have people in our lives who are there for us when we need them. Finally, practicing gratitude can help us appreciate the small wins in life. "Cultivating a culture of gratitude might be the best way to help a workplace prepare for stresses that come with change, conflict and failure. Making gratitude a policy and a practice builds up a sort of psychological immune system that can cushion us when we fail".¹³ Even when life is difficult, there are still moments of joy and success to be found. Practicing gratitude can help us focus on the positive moments, which can help us stay motivated and hopeful. Having this positive outlook can help us build resilience and cope with difficult times. Not only does it help us stay connected to our values and purpose, but it also helps us remember the people in our lives who are there to support us. For these reasons, practicing gratitude is an important tool in increasing resilience which benefits the overall retention.

Resilience via innovative training for the CAF.

13. Delivery of resilience training through innovative virtual reality (VR) has been shown to be effective in enhancing the coping mechanisms of CAF members. The CAF should strive to provide its personnel with the necessary innovative training and education to help them succeed in their roles and feel that they have access to emergent technology. This can include providing training in areas such as leadership and technical skills. Additionally, the CAF should strive to create a culture of encouragement and recognition for its personnel through VR. Virtual reality provides a safe, immersive environment for resilience training. It can simulate real-life situations, allowing people to practice coping with adversity and stress in a controlled setting. VR allows for the use of visualization and experiential learning, which can help people to better understand their thought processes and reactions to difficult situations. Additionally, it can help individuals develop new skills, including problem-solving techniques and emotional regulation strategies. VR resilience training can help people build self-confidence and become more prepared to face adversity in their everyday lives and during military operations. In the military field, the use of VR for SMT is increasingly common. Until a few years ago this technology had been used in a military context almost exclusively for the treatment of disorders associated with exposure to stressful situations and for flight simulation.¹⁴

14. Junior and senior leaders of the CAF need to be enabled to find ways to harden the group to be more resilient based on meaningful transformational leadership training. Leaders who are high in hardiness are likely to have a greater impact on their groups because they possess a

¹² Lasota, Tomaszek, and Bosacki, 'How to Become More Grateful? The Mediating Role of Resilience between Empathy and Gratitude'.

¹³ Adam Smith, *Gratitude Project, How the Science of Thankfulness Can Rewire our Brains for Resilience, Optimism and the Greater Good*.

¹⁴ Pallavicini et al., 'Virtual Reality Applications for Stress Management Training in the Military'.

number of qualities that help them to effectively lead and motivate their followers hence influencing retention. These qualities include confidence, self-belief, and a positive attitude. Hardy leaders are also likely to be better able to handle stress, manage change, and take risks. These qualities give them the ability to inspire and motivate their teams, leading to greater productivity, better relationships, and more successful outcomes. “Hardy persons have a high sense of life and work commitment, a greater feeling of control, and are more open to change and challenges in life. They tend to interpret stressful and painful experiences as a normal aspect of existence, part of life that is overall interesting and worthwhile.”¹⁵

Building positive work environment.

15. One of the most effective way for the CAF to increase retention is to create a positive environment for its personnel. This can be done at the institution level by providing competitive salaries, competitive benefits, and creating a culture of respect and appreciation for its personnel which also contributes to resilience. Additionally, the CAF should strive to create a sense of community among its personnel. This can be done by providing opportunities for social interaction and team building activities. Additionally, the CAF should strive to provide a clear career path for its personnel and ensure that they are given the opportunity to advance within the organization.

16. The CAF should strive to create an atmosphere of loyalty and commitment among its personnel. This can be done by providing additional long-term benefits and additional incentives to its personnel such as additional vacation days and promotions. Additionally, the CAF should strive to create a sense of stability and security among its personnel by enabling posting longevity. Overall, retention is a critical issue for the CAF and the success of its operations depends on the ability of its personnel to stay in the organization for extended periods of time. To ensure the longevity of the CAF members, it is important that the organization take steps to create a positive environment for its personnel and provide them with the necessary training and education to help them succeed in their roles. Additionally, the military should strive to provide its personnel with long-term benefits and incentives to ensure that they remain loyal and committed to the organization. By taking these steps, the CAF can effectively increase its retention rates and ensure its operational success for years to come.

CONCLUSION

17. Resilience is an invaluable asset for the CAF, as it enables members to remain productive and effective in the face of adversity. Resilience helps to ensure that individuals are able to cope with the stressors of military life, allowing them to remain in the service for longer periods of time and ultimately help to increase military retention. The military lifestyle can be highly stressful and challenging. CAF members are often required to be away from their families for extended periods of time and to cope with dangerous and unpredictable situations. Resilience is a key factor in helping members to cope with these stressors and to maintain their productivity in the face of adversity.

18. Resilience is also essential for helping CAF members to maintain their mental and physical health. The physical and psychological demands of the military lifestyle can be difficult

¹⁵ Bartone, ‘Resilience Under Military Operational Stress: Can Leaders Influence Hardiness?’

to manage and can lead to fatigue and burnout if not addressed. Resilience enables members to cope with these demands and to maintain a healthy balance between their physical and mental wellbeing. Additionally, resilience helps members to manage the emotional and psychological stress of the military lifestyle, enabling them to remain in the service for longer periods of time. In a highly unpredictable and dangerous environment, it is essential that members remain alert and focused on their tasks. Resilience helps members to create their virtuous resilient cycle and to remain productive, enabling them to remain in the service for longer periods of time.

RECOMMENDATION

19. As the Canadian defence academy (CDA) is dedicated to providing training and education to members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence civilian personnel, and other security and defence personnel from allied nations, which are key factors of retention, it is recommended that CDA takes responsibility of resilience training and oversight. By taking care of resilience, the CDA can ensure that personnel are enabled to serve in the CAF for a longer period of time.

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