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Public Affairs Officer Occupational Relevancy: Condition Setting for the Next Generation

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Service Paper - Étude militaire

**Public Affairs Officer Occupational Relevancy:
Condition-Setting for the Next Generation**

Major Anonymous

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

AIM

1. This aim of this paper is to address an issue raised by the Public Affairs (PA) Branch pertaining to the training Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Public Affairs Officers (PAO) receive and the CAF's expectations regarding their training and employment as both advisors and staff officers within the context of the current and future Information Environment (IE). This paper will compare the Canadian PAO training and career paths with that of two Allies that have professional military PAO occupations—the United States and Australia. Finally, this paper will offer recommendations to help inform PA Branch leadership decisions about the future of CAF PAO training.

INTRODUCTION

2. The PA Branch is currently conducting an occupational analysis of the PAO trade. A 2020 Problem Definition Paper identified several challenge areas within the occupation.¹ The paper is helping to inform the current occupational analysis. Two identified challenge areas are salient to this discussion. The first challenge pertains to the current PAO training model. This challenge highlights that the current training model has not e

DISCUSSION

3. Bob Pritchard et al. describe the current IE and the speed at which it is evolving a

¹ Lieutenant-Colonel Doug Allison, 'Problem Definition Paper - Public Affairs Officer Occupation', Paper (Ottawa: National Defence, 27 November 2020).

² Allison, 3, 5–6.

³ Allison, 3.

⁴ Bob Pritchard et al., *Public Relations in the Military: The Scope, Dynamic, and Future of Military Communications* (New York, UNITED STATES: Business Expert Press, 2022), 27–35, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cfvlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=29447507>.

to develop and deliver information programs, and to manage issues. This means PAOs must develop the competencies and skills to be able to deal with the breadth and depth of the IE's complexities and the associated challenges of manoeuvring within it, whilst ensuring the provision of timely and accurate information to various audiences per Government of Canada and Department of National Defence policies. Pritchard et al. describe the communications environment as a contested space that calls into question reason and common sense.⁵ This tension affects the way Commanders and their PAOs deliver internal and external information programs, manage their media relations, and conduct community relations and outreach.⁶ At the high operational and strategic levels, there is a requirement for PAOs to operate with a degree of sophistication that cannot be cultivated solely through experience.

4. In reviewing Government of Canada and Department of National Defence communications and public affairs policies as well as CAF PA doctrine, the range of public affairs activities PAOs must deliver upon is significant.⁷ The expectation placed upon PAOs to deliver on these activities is also significant. Prior to the digital era and the onset of gray zone activity with respect to military operations, the PAO occupation's training model typically afforded them some advantage of being an expert in their trade.⁸ But, changes to the IE in the last 15-20 years coupled with the way Government communicates and publics react has had an undeniable effect on the ways in which PAOs gain their experience and expertise. What was once adequate is no longer.

Occupation Training

5. The Basic Public Affairs Officer Course (BPAOC) is the only mandatory PA course a CAF PAO is required to complete for promotion through to Brigadier-General/Commodore. Notwithstanding mandatory second language requirements, there are several recommended professional development and PA-related courses PAOs should take at various stages between promotion to assist in rounding out skills. These courses include, but are not limited to Information Operations, Intermediate Law of Armed Conflict, Joint Staff Officer Programme, Joint Targeting Familiarization Seminar, Joint Targeting Staff Officer as well as NATO PA courses. These courses are considered necessary for a PAO's development; however, as they are not mandatory, the opportunities are subject to PAOs' individual chains of command allowing their PAOs to take time away from their positions to complete the training.⁹ In most cases, PAOs are the only PAO at their formation or base, which makes finding space to participate in this

⁵ Pritchard et al., 29, 35.

⁶ Pritchard et al., 35.

⁷ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 'Policy on Communications and Federal Identity', 8 March 2016, <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng>; National Defence, 'DAOD 2008', policies, 13 November 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2008.html>; National Defence, 'B-GJ-005-361/FP-000, Joint Public Affairs' (Canada, 23 May 2007).

⁸ Based on the author's experience and training as a PAO for the past 17 years in both the Reserve and Regular Forces.

⁹ Allison, 'Problem Definition Paper - Public Affairs Officer Occupation'.

training difficult.¹⁰ Course loading prioritizes those members who have a direct requirement over those who do not thus presenting another challenge for PAOs attempting to receive these recommended courses. The PA Branch's Problem Definition Paper also highlights these two additional challenge areas. Though these additional challenges are beyond the scope of this paper to address, they are relevant to the issue at hand and thus worth noting.

6. Once an officer achieves their basic officer qualification and minimum second-language profile, the career path for PAOs begins with the BPAOC. However, once a PAO reaches their occupational functional point upon completing BPAOC, career progression follows no specified developmental path. This lack of standardization leads to an imbalance in competencies, experience and skill sets gained at each rank level across the occupation.¹¹ For example, one PAO may not be the sole PA advisor to a Commander until they reach the rank of Major/Lieutenant-Commander, meaning they have only worked for senior PAOs until that point in their career. In other cases, PAOs may have only worked for Commanders and may not have worked as staff where they must support a senior PAO. Some PAOs receive multiple domestic and expeditionary deployment opportunities, while others do not. Some PAOs are in positions that permit them time to obtain some of the recommended courses, while others are in positions that cannot afford them the time to take courses. The current state of the CAF having a 10 000-member deficit will only exacerbate this issue.¹²

7. The PA Branch has long recognized the requirement for more advanced PA training. In the last decade, foundational work to develop an advanced PAO course exists by way of an approved Qualification Standard (QS).¹³ That said, the PAO occupation does not have an occupation competency model that identifies the competencies, skill sets, and job expectations required at each rank level. As such, it is difficult to appreciate whether that which has been identified in the approved QS for advanced PAO training will meet the occupation's needs now and in the future.

The United States Military Model

8. The United States military PAO occupation uses a different occupational model than that of the Canadian military. In the US, all PAOs—Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard—obtain the basic PA qualification through the Department of Defense's Defense Information School (DINFOS). Upon completion of the basic PA qualification, each service is responsible for the training and career progression of their service's PAOs.¹⁴ DINFOS offers a host of additional communications courses, including

¹⁰ Allison.

¹¹ Allison, 'Problem Definition Paper - Public Affairs Officer Occupation'.

¹² The Canadian Press, 'Military Dealing with More than 10,000 Unfilled Positions amid Growing Pressures', *National Post*, 18 January 2022, <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/military-dealing-with-more-than-10000-unfilled-positions-amid-growing-pressures>.

¹³ Military Personnel Generation Training Group, 'Approval - Qualification Standard (QS) - Advanced Public Affairs Officer (AJDC)', 23 June 2016.

¹⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Patterson, US Department of Defense Information School, Telephone, 25 January 2023.

intermediate/advanced qualifications; however, their requirement is dependent on the respective service's requirements for its PAOs.¹⁵

9. The most advanced course for US military PAOs is the Joint Intermediate Public Affairs Course (JIPAC).¹⁶ This course focuses on research, planning, and analysis; strategic thinking; and globally integrated operations.¹⁷ Further, the course expands PAOs' knowledge of issues and crisis management in global operations and aims to enhance their strategic thinking and planning capabilities.¹⁸ Depending on the service, the advanced course may be a requirement for a PAO prior to assuming a particular PA position. For example, the US Army would request an advanced course prior to a PAO assuming a division PAO billet.¹⁹ However, other than the basic PA qualification, the services manage their PAO training and development. The US model does prioritize graduate level studies as a pre-requisite for promotion to O5 with the services selecting the preferred study field. For example, the US Army does not require its PAOs to select a Communications or Public Relations related graduate degree, while the US Navy does.²⁰ Additionally, PAOs within the various services must complete professional military education specific to that service's officers at each rank level.²¹

10. While the US model does not have a unified PAO training and development path across all its services, each service seems to favour a relatively robust training map for its PAOs that addresses three training and development pillars: academic, professional military education and key gateway jobs or professional experiences prior to advancement at each officer rank. The US Department of Defense Public Affairs Training and Education Council developed a competency framework called the Military Communicator Competency Model. This document is service-agnostic and identifies the "competencies, sub-competencies, knowledge skills, and abilities" required for its communicators and imagery specialists throughout their careers.²²

The Australian Defence Force Model

11. The Australian PAO occupation model is both different than and like that of the US. The Australian model is similar in that all PAOs across all services must complete the Military Public Affairs Officer Basic Course (MPAOBC). The course teaches students to understand the role of military PA, develop PA plans, manage incidents/issues, conduct media relations, lead teams of imagery specialists and deliver PA training.²³ After completing the basic PA qualification, the individual services

¹⁵ Patterson.

¹⁶ Patterson.

¹⁷ United States Government, 'Defense Information School (DINFOS)', accessed 19 February 2023, <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/>.

¹⁸ United States Government.

¹⁹ Patterson, US Department of Defense Information School.

²⁰ Patterson.

²¹ Patterson.

²² 'Military Communicator Competency Model', accessed 22 February 2023, <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Academics/Military-Communicator-Competency-Model/>.

²³ Major Tom Maclean, 'Query from Canada - Public Affairs Training', 5 February 2023.

manage their respective PAOs' career paths. The Australian Army has the more developed of the services' PAO career management systems.²⁴

12. A graduate degree is not required for promotion; however, Australian Defence Force (ADF) PAOs can apply for ADF funding to complete a Master of Strategic Communication at a civilian university.²⁵ In terms of advanced PAO training, the ADF is aiming to run for the first time an advanced PAO course in Fall 2023.²⁶ The course aims to develop PAO leadership skills and strategic level competencies to enable senior PAOs to work in operational and strategic level headquarters.²⁷ The course is for senior O3/junior O4 levels. ADF PAOs will learn to lead a Joint Information Bureau on major exercises and operations as well as large teams of PAOs and Imagery Specialists. The course will also focus on developing PAO competencies in providing senior commanders with strategic advice and integrating PA planning with other government agencies and partners.²⁸ Whether or not this advanced course becomes a requirement in the PAO career specification is to be determined.²⁹

The Canadian Armed Forces Model

13. The Canadian PAO occupation for Regular Force officers is the same as both the US and Australian models. PAOs across all services must complete their basic military PA qualification offered at the Defence Public Affairs Learning Centre. The BPAOC is six-months long. Upon completion, graduates are able to support PA activities at a bases, formations and on deployed operations.³⁰ The course teaches candidates how to provide PA advice to commanders, develop communications products, conduct media relations, develop PA plans, support internal communications, coordinate a media event, support community relations activities and public affairs operations, and manage audio-visual production.³¹ Where the Canadian model differs from the US and Australian model is in the career management piece. The PA Branch manages all Regular Force PAO careers regardless of their parent service.

14. CAF PAOs are not required to complete additional training, obtain graduate level certification and fulfill key positions for career advancement. Like the ADF, CAF PAOs can apply for funding to obtain graduate level certification, but the study area is not limited to a communications, public relations or related field.³² This unstructured career development path is problematic as it creates an imbalance in PAO progression and does not address the growing competency gap required to advise commanders at the strategic

²⁴ Patterson, US Department of Defense Information School.

²⁵ Maclean, 'Query from Canada - Public Affairs Training', 5 February 2023.

²⁶ Maclean.

²⁷ Major Tom Maclean, 'Query from Canada - Public Affairs Training', 13 February 2023.

²⁸ Maclean, 'Query from Canada - Public Affairs Training', 5 February 2023.

²⁹ Maclean, 'Query from Canada - Public Affairs Training', 13 February 2023.

³⁰ Government of Canada, 'Canadian Armed Forces Careers-Public Affairs Officer', Canadian Armed Forces, accessed 20 February 2023, <https://forces.ca/en/careers>.

³¹ Government of Canada.

³² Allison, 'Problem Definition Paper - Public Affairs Officer Occupation', 4.

level and to meet the expectations the institution places upon PAOs to be subject matter experts in all ways military PA must interface within the IE and with other IRCs.³³

15. Based on the aforementioned approved QS, advanced course performance objectives focus on developing strategic communication, leadership and managerial competencies within a strategic and political framework that are required for more senior PAO positions at operational and strategic level headquarters.³⁴ The PA Branch is awaiting the occupational analysis report before it continues further advanced training development and implementation.³⁵

CONCLUSION

16. The military occupational training PAOs receive is insufficient in its current form to enable PAOs to both develop and deliver information services and information effects in support of military operations. Given the complexities of the current and future operating environments and the political capital involved in executing DND/CAF information programs, PAO training does not address the level of sophistication PAOs require at more senior levels.³⁶ The PA Branch recognizes the need to further develop and define the training and career progression of CAF PAOs. Training alone will not solve all challenges presented in the PA Branch Problem Definition Paper; however, there is no question advanced training is required if the PAO occupation is to remain a critical IRC to military commanders. The PA Branch would benefit from developing a PAO occupation competency model before it moves forward with advanced training development. Not doing so risks failing the next generation of PAOs and more significantly the military PA function's relevance to military commanders who require this capability as part of their operational arsenal both at home and abroad.

RECOMMENDATION

17. While the PA Branch awaits the occupational analysis report to support its way forward in addressing the challenges as identified in the Problem Definition Paper, the following recommendations aim to support the PA Branch leadership's future decisions:

- a. Leverage the PA Branch relationship with DINFOS and develop a CAF PAO competency model. Use the developed competency model as a foundation from which to review the approved advanced course QS, revise

³³ George Vrinotis, 'Analysis of the Canadian Armed Forces Development of Its Military Public Affairs Communicators: An Exploration of a Post-Graduate Education Program for Public Affairs Officers in Order to Expand Their Professional Capabilities', Toronto, Ontario, Canadian Forces College, (2015), 16, 118.

³⁴ Vrinotis, 119; Major Evelyne Lemire, 'Research Question - DPALC Courses', 12 February 2023.

³⁵ Lemire, 'Research Question - DPALC Courses', 12 February 2023.

³⁶ Allison, 'Problem Definition Paper - Public Affairs Officer Occupation', 6. Senior levels as defined in this context refers to Major/Lieutenant-Commander and above. PAOs typically operate at more senior levels more quickly than their contemporaries in other occupations due to the way in which PAO billets are structured across the DND/CAF.

the QS to align with the competency model, then develop and implement advanced PA training;

- b. Consider selecting between two and four PAOs from across the services at the O3 and O4 levels to complete both the US JIPAC and the ADF MAPAOC with the goal of providing a detailed comparison of each course to help inform advanced PA training development;
- c. As an interim measure, consider sending CAF PAOs slated for promotion from O3 to O4 to DINFOS to complete the JIPAC until such a time as CAF advanced PA training is developed and implemented and communicate early with commanders about this requirement; and
- d. As an interim measure, consider sending PAOs destined to assume a key O4 PAO position to DINFOS to complete the JIPAC as a pre-requisite to assuming the position until such a time as CAF advanced PA training is developed and implemented and communicate early with commanders about this requirement.

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