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**A FUTURE WITHOUT MANOEUVRE WARFARE:
HOW ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE LOSS IS ERODING THE CA'S ABILITY TO FIGHT**

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A Future Without Manoeuvre Warfare: How Organizational Experience Loss Is Eroding the CA's Ability to Fight

AIM

1. This paper will explore a second-order effect of the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) retention crisis, with emphasis on the Canadian Army (CA). This second-order effect is organizational experience loss due to high attrition across all ranks. This experience loss will continue to degrade the CA's ability to wage manoeuvre warfare unless it improves career management.

INTRODUCTION

2. The retention crisis faced by the CAF did not happen overnight. Retention has been a severe problem for the CA for the last decade; to treat the symptoms of a high attrition rate, trades within the army have applied different solutions.¹ One of these solutions has been to give both officers and senior non-commissioned officers (Snr NCOs) minimal time in their baseline job in their current rank, which has been informally accepted as six months to one year.² What experience or tasks the officer or Snr NCO is exposed to during that year is not standardized nor relevant. It is accepted that the individual has the requisite experience after that year to continue with their career progression. This trend was barely sustainable prior to COVID because of the collective experience of the organization and the informal mentorship given by superiors or peers. The pandemic exacerbated this problem as retention is no longer a problem but a crisis, and it affected the type and quality of members' experiences between 2020 and 2022 due to the force protection health measures and lockdowns. As the CA came out of lockdowns, it was forced to resume business as usual while trying to find creative solutions to train soldiers across all ranks. This split focus created the perfect storm, where even less attention was paid to what experience members were receiving in their current roles and had no bearing on their career progression.

3. The loss of experience across all trades and ranks creates an organizational experience delta that will impact the CA's ability to conduct its core task: warfighting. As the global security landscape becomes less stable, these effects may have dire consequences in the future. This experience loss will negatively impact the CA's ability to conduct warfare in line with its doctrine, employing manoeuvre warfare. The ability of the CA to conduct manoeuvre warfare is paramount to be interoperable with its allies, both within NATO and the Five Eyes community. Understanding how the CAF, NATO and its key ally define manoeuvre warfare will provide the context to see how organizational experience loss will impact the CA's ability to fight. This will be demonstrated by analyzing the percentage of releases by rank in the CA and the associated experience lost with those releases. Understanding this delta and how both the CAF and NATO define manoeuvre warfare, makes clear what the CA needs from its soldiers and leaders to effectively employ this type of warfare.

¹ Kerckhoff and Canadian Forces College, *Square Pegs and Round Holes: Early Attrition in the Canadian Forces*, JCSP/PCEMI 42-24:19.

² The author's experience of serving within the CA for 20 years.

DISCUSSION

MANOEUVRE WARFARE

4. The CAF has adopted the same definition for manoeuvre warfare as NATO, increasing interoperability. It is defined as an approach to warfare in which friendly forces seek to destroy their adversary by shaping their understanding, attacking and undermining their will to fight and shattering their cohesion.³ For clarity, the CAF uses the manoeuvrist approach and manoeuvre warfare interchangeably. Further, the CAF views manoeuvre warfare to be simultaneously waged on the adversary's physical and psychological plane. This approach is believed to be more advantageous than attrition warfare.⁴ The CAF not only understands how to employ manoeuvre warfare but understands which type of adversary this type of warfare is best suited for. The manoeuvrist approach is most effective against a conventional adversary, whereas it loses effectiveness against an asymmetrical threat, fighting an insurgency, for instance.⁵ Given the current global security landscape, manoeuvre warfare is of the utmost importance.

5. The United States Department of Defense (DoD) also subscribes to manoeuvre warfare. Every branch within the US DoD slightly varies in how they define manoeuvre warfare; however, only the United States Marine Corps (USMC) definition will be explored. The USMC understands, first and foremost, that warfare is the clash of human wills and that warfare will have friction, uncertainty, and disorder, and it will be complex.⁶ Given these conditions, success forces leaders to understand the situation faster than their adversary and adapt to it faster. Understanding and adapting to the environment quickly allow the USMC to attack their adversary both on the psychological and physical plane with an emphasis on speed. With the speed of decision and action, the USMC believes it can create the conditions to shatter the will to fight of their adversary.⁷

6. Key similarities across the definitions suggest that should a military want to wage war using manoeuvre warfare, it requires more than just professionalism but key experiences, knowledge, and trust throughout the chain of command. However, while the USMC's focus on speed is explicit, it is not found explicitly in CAF or NATO definitions but can be interpreted from them. With that in mind, the focus will be on the similarities between the three doctrines and why they are important. Experience is critical in any conflict but is paramount when waging manoeuvre warfare because of war's uncertainty and reliance on intent-based orders. Without the proper experience, is too much information to interpret, formulate and enact a plan in line with the commander's intent to do so without something to cue from. Lastly, trust in all levels of the chain of command is required because of the reliance on intent-based orders. Commanders at all levels are trusted to make timely decisions within their authorities to accomplish the mission in accordance with their superior commander's intent. Not only is this expected, but so is finding

³ Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-300-001/FP-001, Land Operations. (Ottawa, DND Canada, 2008). 5-64.

⁴ Ibid, 5-64.

⁵ Ibid, 5-67.

⁶ United States. Department of Defense. MCDP 1-0, Marine Corps Operations. Washington, DoD US, 2017. 1-3.

⁷ Ibid, 1-4.

gaps to exploit, to shatter the enemy's cohesion further or will to fight without over-extending your force. This trust between commanders must be built through shared experiences, without it, the trust is blind and borderline ignorant.

RETENTION CRISIS

7. The CAF's retention crisis affects all of the services, and the CA is not spared. While this issue has been discussed openly across all levels of the chain of command, empirical evidence would suggest that retention is not the only crisis. A combination of attrition, recruiting and a high percentage of soldiers being on Medical Employment Limitations (MELs) that preclude them from performing their primary duties are being misrepresented as a retention crisis.⁸ This is illustrated by an analytical analysis of the Trained Effective Strength (TES) within the CA. The data shows that the CA is staffed between the ranks of Pte and LCol at 87%, as can be seen in Figure 1.⁹ However, when the same analysis is conducted using a filter of MELs that precludes soldiers from completing their baseline job, the percentage of people available drops from 87% to 72.3%, as seen in Figure 2. Therefore, it is not just retention but a blend of retention, recruitment and MELs creating this organizational experience loss that undermines the CA's ability to provide its soldiers and leaders what is required to execute a manoeuvrist approach. Research from other organizations suggests that effectiveness is degraded when more than ten percent of its employees leave.¹⁰ There is no reason why this does not apply to the CA, and it can explain the friction this organization is having completing standard complicated tasks.

Trained Effective Strength (TES) by Corps									
Title	LCol	Maj	Capt/Lt	MWO	WO	Sgt	MCpl	Cpl/Pte	Total
CA	98.2%	89.7%	94.6%	94.6%	83.8%	84.8%	74.1%	90.4%	87.0%
RCA	89.7%	81.3%	80.9%	95.3%	82.4%	77.6%	79.6%	91.9%	86.3%
RCAC	93.5%	100.0%	94.6%	97.4%	75.3%	76.1%	78.7%	89.2%	86.9%
RCCS	93.3%	85.7%	109.5%	81.8%	72.2%	70.1%	65.0%	63.6%	69.7%
RCE	129.4%	89.4%	85.3%	93.3%	88.5%	97.7%	68.8%	99.4%	92.1%
RCEME	100.0%	89.4%	108.2%	95.8%	76.4%	81.6%	79.6%	93.6%	88.7%
RCIC	96.7%	91.3%	97.3%	99.1%	92.1%	91.1%	74.9%	94.4%	91.1%
Total	98.2%	89.7%	94.6%	94.6%	83.8%	84.8%	74.1%	90.4%	87.0%

Figure 1 – CA TES, “CA G1 Pers Gen Update”

⁸ Corey, Aaron, CA G1 Pers Gen Update, 2.

⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰ Subramony, M. and Holtom B., “The Long-Term Influence of Service Employee Attrition on Customer Outcomes and Profits,” 463.

Trained Effective Strength (TES) by Corps									
Title	LCol	Maj	Capt/Lt	MWO	WO	Sgt	MCpl	Cpl/Pte	Total
CA	90.2%	79.1%	85.4%	70.1%	60.9%	63.8%	59.4%	77.6%	72.3%
RCA	89.7%	71.9%	72.1%	72.1%	58.8%	62.4%	66.5%	81.5%	73.9%
RCAC	80.6%	90.0%	86.0%	74.4%	55.8%	58.0%	68.9%	78.7%	75.1%
RCCS	93.3%	67.9%	97.3%	58.2%	45.2%	46.4%	45.5%	54.4%	54.5%
RCE	105.9%	80.3%	76.9%	62.2%	63.1%	73.9%	54.5%	86.7%	76.7%
RCEME	90.9%	72.3%	97.5%	67.4%	55.7%	59.5%	61.5%	77.2%	70.9%
RCIC	90.2%	83.1%	88.6%	79.3%	69.3%	69.5%	63.9%	80.2%	76.6%
Total	90.2%	79.1%	85.4%	70.1%	60.9%	63.8%	59.4%	77.6%	72.3%

Figure 2 – CA TES with O4/G4MEL filter applied “CA G1 Pers Gen Update”

8. The same analysis also demonstrates that while releases in the CAF are indeed high, they are not outside of historical norms.¹¹ This is an important distinction because this data suggests that the organizational experience loss is temporary due to the additional factors mentioned above. If the experience loss were due solely to unhealthy attrition, the experience loss would be permanent, meaning more drastic measures would be required to save the CA’s ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare. This is, fortunately, not the case because the experience required still exists within the CA, it either resides at the wrong rank or with someone that is injured. In either of these cases, someone being promoted, posted or injured will likely prevent or limit their ability to conduct a meaningful handover at a minimum or mentorship to the person taking their position. With this perspective, it is clear why the pandemic seemed to exacerbate this problem not only were there limited new personnel entering the CA, but CA members did not receive the traditional experience expected during this timeframe. The lack of exposure, previous experiences, and mentoring before, during the pandemic and immediately afterwards created a less capable force than it was ten years prior.

9. Why the CA is less capable of conducting manoeuvre warfare than it was ten years ago can be attributed to three reasons mentioned throughout, attrition, recruitment and MELs. As mentioned, the manoeuvrist approach requires experience, knowledge, and trust to succeed, all of which are at odds with the CA because of the delta in personnel. The loss of experienced personnel, regardless of rank, harms an organization’s performance and effectiveness, most evident in decision-making.¹² A degradation of decision-making and mission execution directly erodes trust in the chain of command, both from a subordinate’s perspective looking up and from a superior commander looking inward. Without trust that an organization can complete the mission or make a sound, timely decision, manoeuvre warfare is impossible. Manoeuvre warfare demands that leaders be adaptive and innovative while operating in complex situations, and the only way to do this is to train properly. This is why knowledge is also critical for this type of warfare, knowledge not just in the sense of knowing how to complete the task but also how to train for future tasks or the unknown. Again, with the loss of experienced personnel, regardless

¹¹ Corey, Aaron, “CA G1 Pers Gen Update”, 2.

¹² Durst and Wilhelm, “Knowledge Management and Succession Planning in SMEs,” 639.

of the mechanism, the institution loses personnel with the required knowledge to complete tasks but, more importantly, develop training to ensure future generations understand manoeuvre warfare. Most critical to the manoeuvrist approach is experience, for without it, a commander cannot conduct the full range of military operations.¹³ Not only are they not capable, but their lack of experience prevents them from making sound, timely decisions and reduces their ability to provide meaningful mentorship and training.

10. The CA's ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare cannot only be maintained but improved if the CA's focus shifts from retention to preventing organizational experience loss. By focusing on this, the perspective of the CA will also change, meaning more emphasis will be placed on mentorship, professional development and retaining key individuals for continuity. By creating a culture of knowledge sharing, mentorship becomes the norm and individuals at all ranks will develop a professional curiosity not only to know more but to be cross-functional. With proper mentorship and understanding the roles of peers, subordinates, and immediate supervisors, the next generation of soldiers can start rebuilding the knowledge gap that exists today. This knowledge will enable them to complete complex tasks while being adaptive and innovative on the battlefield, a part of the recipe for success in manoeuvre warfare.¹⁴ Nearly 22 percent of available MCpls through Majors are on MELs precluding them from being operational,¹⁵ their experiences and knowledge are valuable to the future generation. This knowledge must be leveraged through formalized mentorship, in turn, this will help reduce the loss of organizational experience. This will also build trust. With this shared knowledge, proper training plans can be developed to effectively train the new generations with the tenants of manoeuvre warfare in mind. This training will create the conditions for trust to be built through shared trials and tribulations throughout the whole chain of command. However, the most critical aspect that underpins the other tenets of manoeuvre warfare is experience, and unfortunately, the only way to gain experience is with time. If members of the CA working inside organizations that are operationally focused or focused on force generation could keep members in their current positions for two years, the institution's collective experience would significantly increase. The collective increase in experience and a culture of mentorship would enable the CA to conduct manoeuvre warfare and excel at it.

CONCLUSION

11. To appropriately understand a problem, it is useful to define key terms to ensure a common baseline as well as understanding, at a minimum, the second-order effects of what the problem creates. In this case, it is important to understand that manoeuvre warfare can be generally defined as an approach to destroy an adversary by shaping their understanding, attacking and undermining their will to fight and shattering their cohesion.¹⁶ However, to be successful the force needs to be experienced, knowledgeable and trustworthy. The retention crisis that is plaguing the CA is threatening its ability to force generate enough leaders and

¹³ United States. Department of Defense. FM 3.0, Operations. Washington, DoD US, 2022, 1-3

¹⁴ Ibid, 1-3.

¹⁵ CA G1 Pers Gen Update, 2.

¹⁶ Canada, Land Operations 5-64.

soldiers capable of applying a manoeuvrist approach. The CA's force generation issues are being caused by three factors attrition, low recruitment and nearly 20 percent of its force between MCpl and Maj are on MELs that, preclude them from doing their core task. While the CA's force generation is causing an organizational loss of experience, it can be rectified through a series of immediate actions.

RECOMMENDATION

12. In order to reduce the impact of organizational experience loss on the erosion of the CA's ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare, immediate actions need to be applied. Two recommendations directly treat the deltas in the critical components identified for the manoeuvrist approach, experience and knowledge and indirectly trust. The recommendations below will require the CA to be flexible in how it views career progression and employability of its soldiers in the short term for long-term gain. In order of precedent, the recommendations are listed below.

13. In order to rebuild the experience loss the CA has experienced, it must separate the personnel required for institutional support and those required for operations to include schoolhouses. Both tasks require different experiences and traits. To regain the experience required for manoeuvre warfare, the CA must freeze postings in all of their operational units, headquarters and schoolhouses for two to three years. At the end of the posting freeze, personnel will be experts in their current job and would have experienced the entirety of the managed readiness plan. With this new collective experience going forward, personnel can provide meaningful mentorship to their subordinates and peers. Exempt from this posting freeze are CA members in support of the institution. Promotions can still occur, but the CA would have to accept that personnel will be over-ranked in some positions.

14. Knowledge is critical to the manoeuvrist approach, and the CA needs to expand the culture of knowledge sharing. There are significant members of the CA on MELs that preclude them from working in operational units, but they have incredible knowledge. To tap into their knowledge, the CA must create a formal mentorship program with members on MELs as a mechanism to formally share their knowledge that they can no longer put into practice.

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