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INDIVIDUAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION MODERNIZATION: CAF AND THE RCLS

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to highlight the need to move forward with Individual Training and Education (IT&E) modernization within the context of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Royal Canadian Logistics Service (RCLS). This will be accomplished with a view to address recruiting and retention issues wholistically. This service paper will provide the necessary information to engage in further dialogue, while suggesting additional areas of opportunity and potential courses of action open to the service at this time. Addressing recruitment and retention through a modern, rapid, and sustainable training system is essential for ensuring that the CAF becomes an employer of choice for all Canadians.

INTRODUCTION

2. This service paper has been written to inform future projects and future discussion on individual training and education modernization with an aim to increase retention through leveraging modern systems for IT&E. The RCLS must work quickly to address a variety of issues associated with retention – issues such as those issues associated with reducing the time between trade specific courses, allowing members to reach their Occupational Function Point (OFP) earlier and finding the right balance for leveraging civilian equivalencies in order to become an employer of choice. It is important to note that all of the above items have been identified as major dissatisfiers for new recruits.¹

3. This service paper will further look to examine several issues related to retention, while examining ways in which IT&E modernization may facilitate remedies to these problems, indeed provide readily available solutions. This discussion will be followed by several recommendations and areas for potential further research and development. It is important to understand that the Military Personnel Generation Group (MPGG) is responsible for the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) and the Military Personnel Generation Training Group (MPGTG) and is therefore responsible for CAF IT and CAF IT&E modernization.² “MPGG is the CAF authority for modernized individual training and education. (Where) Training and learning opportunities are augmented by cutting-edge technologies and initiatives.”³

DISCUSSION

4. **IT&E Modernization.** Before delving further into the associated issues, one must understand what IT&E modernization consists of, as this will provide the lens through which modernization efforts must be viewed. As early as 2005, Chief Review Services (CRS) identified IT&E modernization as involving course delivery and methodology, leveraging Prior Learning

¹ LCol Shawn, Courty, Email “IT&E Modernization Initiatives - Presented by MPGG Modernization Team - with additional CFLTC feedback,” 31 Jan 23.

² “Military Personnel Generation Group,” Canada, Department of National Defence, accessed 25 Feb 23, Military Personnel Generation Group - Canada.ca.

³ Ibid.

Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) processes and the modernization of training establishments.⁴ All of which are essential items related to not just training, but also retention. These will be discussed below in an effort to more wholesomely address the recruitment and retention issues that are currently present within the CAF and RCLS within the framework of IT&E.

5. **Voluntary Releases.** Related to course delivery, there are a few specific issues regarding retention that have become quite apparent over the past few years. It is widely known that most of the Voluntary Releases (VR) occur during the first week of Basic Military Qualification (BMQ). It is at this stage where soldiers, sailors and airmen and airwomen often express their displeasure with the lack of knowledge, or foresight, as to where their first posting will be, or what their first unit will be. A pervasive theme throughout BMQ serials is that a member feels that their commitment to the organization is not being reciprocated when the organization can not even tell them where they will be posted immediately following training. It is important to note that this is not generally a challenge that is encountered in the civilian world. Civilian industry does not hire individuals for the greater good of their institution, but rather they hire personnel for a specific position within the organization. It is clear that the CAF has this process backwards, however it is a problem that can be rectified with additional research.

6. **Wait Times.** The next tranche of releases generally occur during the often-lengthy wait time in between BMQ and the requisite trade-specific Development Phase (DP) courses.⁵ At the Canadian Forces Logistics Training Center (CFLTC) it is currently understood that the wait time between BMQ and a soldier's DP training can stretch up to 3 months. In many instances, Personnel Awaiting Training (PAT) have reported a substantial lack of meaningful work, and an absence of direction and there is a general acknowledgement that "this has a significant impact on morale which could contribute to the loss of highly motivated candidates through voluntary release."⁶ These wait times also result in considerable "skill fade" and can result in members being unprepared for their next course and can even result in failures in training, again creating institutional strains and training delays where none should exist. This is a problem that can be remedied, and such a recommendation will be provided below.

7. **Leveraging Technology.** In 2010 it was identified that the CAF struggles as a learning institution. Even more so it struggles with its ability to deliver course content in a modern and adaptable fashion. The top 2 strategic gaps were identified as "inadequate exploitation of modern learning methodologies and technologies" and inadequate infrastructure to support the leveraging of these technologies.⁷ As a result the CAF Campus Operational Framework was developed to address these issues, unfortunately as of 2019 it is widely accepted that there is still little in the way of "actual implementation plans"⁸ and in an environment rife with new information

⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, "Evaluation of Military Individual Training and Education," Government of Canada, 2005, p. iv.

⁵ LCol Shawn, Courty, Email "IT&E Modernization Initiatives - Presented by MPGG Modernization Team - with additional CFLTC feedback," 31 Jan 23.

⁶ "Preliminary Assessment – Personnel Awaiting Training," Canada, Department of National Defence, accessed 21 Feb 23, Preliminary Assessment – Personnel Awaiting Training (PAT) - Canada.ca

⁷ Canada, Department of National Defence, "Evaluation of the Canadian Defence Academy," Government of Canada, 2015, p.19.

⁸ Ibid. p. 18.

technology aimed at serving a remote, or work from home, workforce this is unacceptable. In many respects the global COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for leveraging technology and understanding how to adapt to a digital workplace. Much as war often results in rapid innovation, the COVID-19 pandemic has done the same. The recommendations for how to further apply this to the current CAF and RCLS training throughput will be discussed below.

8. **PLAR.** The PLAR process is utilized to streamline, or bypass altogether, certain aspects of a candidates training. It is meant to avoid redundancy in training and to expedite qualifications. If a member has completed similar training, or has worked in a similar environment, or has equivalent civilian qualifications, they may not be required to complete certain elements of CAF training. This is hard to accomplish when looking at some of the more unique military occupations, such as those that reside within the combat arms. However, the process should be much easier for those trades that have direct civilian counterparts – many of whom reside within the RCLS (clerks, mobile support equipment operators, materiel management technicians, postal clerks, accountants, cooks etc.). Unfortunately, the CAF currently has an antiquated process for determining who is eligible to have elements of training deemed to be equivalent – especially when granting civilian equivalencies. The process is cumbersome and ultimately burdensome on all involved. Until recently, the CAF and RCLS still required Red Seal Endorsement (RSE) Chefs to undergo military Cook training, an example of just how laborious a process a PLAR can become. For knowledge, RSE “is a highly valuable professional designation that allows you to practice your trade anywhere in Canada. The Red Seal Program creates common standards and examinations for provinces and territories and covers 54 trades in Canada.”⁹ With the challenges present to training throughput such an approach does not make logistical sense.

9. **Training Infrastructure.** Many of the current training establishments, indeed infrastructure at large, within the CAF have been allowed to become outdated. Nowhere is this more evident than at the CFLTC. Other MPGTG establishments at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Borden have been modernized in recent years, including the Health Services Training Center and the Royal Canadian Electrical Mechanical Engineering School, in projects totalling over \$120M.¹⁰ More recently a new study and accommodations building has been announced – creating a potential for greater collaborative synergies within the modern learning environment. Defence Construction Canada (DCC) Coordinator Jennifer Drumm noted that CFB Borden has quite a substantial amount of ageing infrastructure – of which CFLTC counts itself.¹¹ “It’s no secret that military recruitment and retention require modern infrastructure that matches the world-class training we provide our members.”¹² Currently, CFLTC training labs do not meet the

⁹ “Discover the Skilled Trades,” Government of Canada, accessed 26 Feb 23, Follow your passion. Find your skilled trade. - Canada.ca

¹⁰ “New Infrastructure at Canadian Forces Base Borden,” Government of Canada, accessed 20 Feb 23, New Infrastructure at Canadian Forces Base Borden - Canada.ca

¹¹ “A Home away from home: Building Borden’s newest accommodations,” Canada, Defence Construction Canada, accessed 25 Feb 23, A home away from home: Building Borden’s newest accommodations - Defence Construction Canada (dcc-cdc.gc.ca)

¹² “National Defence Breaks Ground on New Accommodations Facility at CFB Borden,” Government of Canada, accessed 20 Feb 23, National Defence Breaks Ground on New Accommodations Facility at CFB Borden - Canada.ca

standard of Canadian civilian counterparts and the only solution currently being presented has CFLTC being one user within a greater collaborative learning environment construction.¹³

RECOMMENDATION

10. **Voluntary Releases.** It is essential that CFRG, Occupational Advisors (OA) and Career Managers (CM) are closely integrated. CMs are consistently, constantly, and acutely aware of the “real-time” gaps that exist within specific trades – down to the specific units that have current vacancies. This information should be pushed to CFRG in a methodical and regulated manner, understanding the need to build in positional occupation data. It would then become incumbent upon CFRG to recruit a new member directly into a specific position, in a specific location. This provides benefits for both the member and the institution. The institution is able to fill specific gaps – understanding that some locales and units are of higher priority – and the member is able to begin planning for life beyond initial enrollment and training. Repeated quality of life surveys of CAF members have shown that family and social life, along with neighbourhood and general living environment rank high on CAF member’s priorities lists.¹⁴ Having the ability to pre-position a member’s family to an already known location prior to the completion of DP training could move the needle for improving family stability and for increasing retention even before a member is qualified. This approach is not without its own risk, there will be training failures which result in positions being left vacant, but the ability to provide member’s with stability is likely to outweigh this risk.

11. **Wait Times.** Currently, CFLTC is leveraging a pilot project to attempt to engage their PAT members in meaningful work. Some of the ideas below are drawn from this project. The first objective would obviously be to decrease any, and all, wait times for PAT, however the current institutional framework for IT&E, and the poor staffing of training establishments, does not currently lend itself to a larger throughput of members. Any PAT members that are required to wait in excess of a month for training should be employed in meaningful on the job employment (OJE). Ideally, this would occur in a location – and even more beneficial a position – with which the member will be posted immediately following the completion of their DP training. While there will be costs associated with the requirement to attach post members to their future positions while awaiting training, the argument is that this cost is actually quite minimal when placed in the context of the cost of losing a member to a VR prior to their OFP. Thus, if the actual throughput of courses and members can not be increased this pilot project, taken in conjunction with the above-mentioned recommendation to recruit a member directly into a position, could prove incredibly effective.

12. **Leveraging Technology.** Following on the heels of the global COVID-19 pandemic the CAF and the RCLS is better positioned now, more than ever, to fully leverage information technology. CFLTC should look to courses that do not require significant “hands-on” learning processes, such as materiel management technicians, postal clerks, Human Resources

¹³ LCol Shawn, Courty, Email “IT&E Modernization Initiatives - Presented by MPGG Modernization Team - with additional CFLTC feedback,” 31 Jan 23.

¹⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, “Review of Quality of Life Project Management,” Government of Canada, 2004, p. i/ii

Administrators (HRA) or Financial Support Administrators (FSA) to leverage more virtual training processes. For these trades, flexible virtual learning with virtual courses should become the norm – thereby increasing the potential for greater throughput. The resources, and staff, required to run such a course in person far outweigh the resource strains of a virtual learning environment. It is known that some technical trades such as, mobile support equipment operators or cooks, will require more in person experience, but there should still be an effort to made to leverage modern learning methods when and where appropriate.

13. **PLAR.** As mentioned previously, the institution is hard pressed to address training throughput concerns. An in-depth analysis of civilian equivalencies, including RSE should be made in order to streamline this process. A line by line examination and study of civilian equivalencies as related to military occupations should be conducted immediately. For example, CFLTC has done an examination of their FSA and HRA courses and have noted that 10/21 FSA candidates had previous business/administrative experience while 5/26 HRA students had previous human resources experience.¹⁵ In 2 courses 15 candidates could have potentially be granted equivalencies and therefore have resulted in additional training opportunities. A more robust PLAR process will carry with it many benefits, including “reducing the amount of time for military training and education...reducing the cost necessary to obtain CAF qualification.”¹⁶ Not only should a comprehensive analysis be conducted immediately, but the granting of equivalencies should be rapidly and dramatically advertised accordingly and communicated directly with CFRG in order to expedite and exploit potential recruiting opportunities.

14. **Training Infrastructure.** There is a clear need to modernize training establishments, especially CFLTC, which is not only spread out across CFB Borden, but is done so throughout various ageing buildings. Defence Construction Canada and the Real Property nexus may be a topic for a much larger service paper in and of itself. Ultimately, CFLTC needs to have world class facilities in order to make it attractive to new recruits, simply meeting the standards of civilian educational facilities should not be enough. CFLTC may be able to leverage current IT&E projects to lobby for greater speed of infrastructure build – but this is a slow process.

CONCLUSION

15. In conclusion, the current recruiting and retentions issues affecting the CAF and the RCLS must be addressed in rapid succession. The ability to force generate combat capable, and technically proficient soldiers is a cornerstone to CAF credibility. Credibility is indeed the Centre of Gravity for an Armed Forces organization within a democratically elected country. Serving Canada first in not an option, it is job number one.¹⁷ Without modernizing the IT&E framework the CAF, as a whole, runs the risk of becoming irrelevant and risks failing to meet its primary mandate.

¹⁵ LCol Shawn, Courty, Email “IT&E Modernization Initiatives - Presented by MPGG Modernization Team - with additional CFLTC feedback,” 31 Jan 23.

¹⁶ “DAOD 5031-1, Canadian Forces Military Equivalencies Program” Canada, Department of National Defence, accessed 19 Feb 23, DAOD 5031-1, Canadian Forces Military Equivalencies Program - Canada.ca

¹⁷ Canada, Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy*. Government of Canada. 2017, p. 11.

16. The CAF and the RCLS need to address early era VRs through the collective approach to ensuring that CAF personnel know where they will be posted and that they are hired to a specific position, not just an institution. CAF members must be provided with meaningful and purposeful work experiences while waiting to complete their initial training, pairing this effort with that of hiring directly to a position would be incredibly beneficial for all involved. Leveraging modern learning methods and technology through virtual training and virtual courses, when and where applicable, can increase the overall throughput of logistics personnel training. Granting civilian equivalencies to military recruits will serve to reduce the amount of time a recruit remains in the training system before they are able to begin being productive and can create additional training capacity. Finally, in order to remain a world class organization and an employer of choice, the CAF and RCLS must commit to modernizing its training infrastructure. If these issues can be tackled and addressed in the vein of IT&E modernization the RCLS will be able to manage its task burden and provide soldiers who are ready and able to serve Canada.

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