



WALKING THE WALK ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: HOW THE RCAF CAN DO WHAT IT SAYS IT SHOULD DO

Major Cole D. McGregor

JCSP 50

Service Paper

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2024.

PCEMI n° 50

Étude militaire

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté le Roi du chef du Canada, représenté par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2024.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 50 - PCEMI n° 50
2023 - 2024

Service Paper – Étude militaire

**WALKING THE WALK ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE:
HOW THE RCAF CAN DO WHAT IT SAYS IT SHOULD DO**

Major Cole D. McGregor

“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

« La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale. »

WALKING THE WALK ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: HOW THE RCAF CAN DO WHAT IT SAYS IT SHOULD DO

AIM

1. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Strategy, released in February 2023, highlights a need within the RCAF to “prioritize a healthy balance between lifestyle, family, and service” as one of its 26 strategic actions.¹ The purpose of this service paper is to recommend tangible means by which this can be accomplished, informed by academic research, and permitted by existing policies.

INTRODUCTION

2. Achieving a healthy balance between lifestyle, family, and service is generally referred to by Human Resource (HR) practitioners and academics as “Work-Life Balance” (WLB), and while several definitions for it exist, two are particularly relevant to the discussion which follows. The first of these highlights the need for ‘proportionality of engagement’ among different life domains: “*Work-life balance is engagement in multiple roles with an approximate[ly] equal level of attention, time, involvement or commitment.*”² The second definition highlights the importance of achieving separation between those domains by reducing ‘Role Conflict’ (RC): “*Work-life balance involves the interaction not only of high levels of role engagement in work and nonwork domains but also minimal conflict between work-related roles and other social roles in nonwork life.*”³ These definitions focus on two important antecedents for work-life balance; one concerns how much of one’s time/attention/involvement/commitment is allocated to different life domains, and the other focuses on ensuring that time allocated to one domain is not degraded by demands from another. To improve work-life balance, therefore, the RCAF must increase and diversify role engagement in underserved domains while minimizing RC between them. The discussion which follows will first consider which institutional actions are recommended by academic research to promote work-life balance, followed by a brief analysis of the state of existing HR policy and culture with the CAF and RCAF relative to those recommendations, and finally recommendations for means by which the RCAF can achieve its aim of improving work-life balance within the force.

DISCUSSION

ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

3. Research indicates that the way an individual worker achieves high levels of engagement in both work and nonwork roles is a complex relationship subject to a multitude of individual and organizational factors.⁴ The individual factors include personal and cultural attributes which

¹ Canada, “Royal Canadian Air Force Strategy,” February 8, 2023, 15, <https://www.canada.ca/en/air-force/corporate/reports-publications/royal-canadian-air-force-strategy.html>.

² M. Joseph Sirgy and Dong-Jin Lee, “Work-Life Balance: An Integrative Review,” *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 13, no. 1 (March 2018): 230, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-017-9509-8>.

³ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 233.

⁴ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 238.

predispose an individual towards or against engagement in certain roles as a result of their experience, personality traits, gender, and culture, among many others.⁵ These traits are generally consistent over time, and as such, an in-depth discussion thereof is unnecessary except to state that despite this proclivity, WLB can be improved through the manipulation of organizational factors while personal factors remain more-or-less constant. Work-life balance itself “increases job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career development and success” while reducing “job malfunction, job burnout and alienation, absenteeism, and turnover intention.”⁶ These organizational outcomes are highly desirable, and it is, therefore, logical for the RCAF to make all reasonable attempts to improve WLB in pursuit of their realization, particularly through the use of organizational levers.

4. It is logical for the RCAF to prioritize WLB and encourage RCAF members to engage proportionally and distinctly in multiple life domains, but to meaningfully engage in multiple life domains RCAF members must first be able to allocate their time to each domain distinctly and proportionally. That is, time allocated to the nonwork domain must be distinct from time allocated to work, and each must be roughly proportional.⁷ If a member’s work role regularly requires a disproportionate quantity of their time, their ability to engage in the nonwork domain will diminish consequently, and WLB will degrade. Similarly, if the demands of a work role create stress or tasks which carry into the nonwork domain, competition for any remaining time and mental energy therein will create role conflict and WLB will also degrade.⁸ Therefore, to improve WLB, the RCAF must ensure it consumes no more than half of the total productive time available to members in a day/week/month, either directly by scheduling members to work more than a proportional quantity of hours, or indirectly by imposing work expectations during non-working hours, both of which must be avoided.

5. Defining working conditions and working hour limits is an essential first step and is captured in recommendations #1 and #2 below, but it will not create widespread WLB in the RCAF without an accompanying culture which also encourages members to actually stick to the defined limitations.⁹ Lamane-Harim et al (2023) studied the effects of a supportive culture surrounding WLB practices and found such a culture to be “the principal determinant of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and reduce[d] work-family conflict.”¹⁰ In fact, a culture supportive of WLB practices was determined to be more impactful on employee outcomes than the availability of WLB practices themselves, with the greatest contributor to that culture being managerial support for WLB practices.¹¹ To meaningfully improve WLB within the RCAF, then, it must promulgate clear WLB policies and demonstrate clear support for the use of those policies at all levels of leadership, which forms the essence of recommendation #3 below.

⁵ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 239.

⁶ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 235–36.

⁷ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 230.

⁸ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 234–35.

⁹ Jamila Lamane-Harim, David Cegarra-Leiva, and Ma Eugenia Sánchez-Vidal, “Work–Life Balance Supportive Culture: A Way to Retain Employees in Spanish SMEs,” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 34, no. 10 (May 31, 2023): 2075, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1878255>.

¹⁰ Lamane-Harim, Cegarra-Leiva, and Sánchez-Vidal, “Work–Life Balance Supportive Culture,” 2074.

¹¹ Lamane-Harim, Cegarra-Leiva, and Sánchez-Vidal, “Work–Life Balance Supportive Culture,” 2075–76.

RCAF POLICY AND CULTURE ON WORK AND NON-WORK DOMAINS

6. RCAF members' working time is generally governed by the Canadian Forces Leave Policy Manual (CFLPM), which is a foundational policy applicable to all CAF members, not just those in the RCAF. It indirectly dictates when and how much RCAF members work by detailing how leaders are to administer the time off to which their members are entitled. It implies that all Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members are normally entitled to weekends and other holidays but does not define daily working hour limits or expectations. Section 2.8 on shift work states that Commanding Officers (COs) are "responsible for specifically identifying both the working and non-working days so as to ensure that the amount of time off [for shift workers] is equivalent to the weekends and statutory holidays provided to CF members working a Monday to Friday work-week."¹² This direction implies that regular workers in the CAF are normally entitled to weekends and statutory holidays and that shift workers are entitled to the same number of non-working days but with a varied schedule thereof, as determined by their CO. The CFLPM defines a working day as "a day of paid service on which an officer or non-commissioned member is regularly scheduled to perform duty"¹³ but does not define a non-working day. The CFLPM, therefore, defines the conditions required for a member to have a day off, but does not describe in any detail expectations for members during working days, nor does it indicate working hour/day limits.

7. The CFLPM does, however, contain links to policy mechanisms to compensate members financially when operational conditions require them to work enough that they cannot use their full allocation of annual leave. Section 2.8 on 'Shift Work' together with Section 4.1 on 'Accumulated Leave' and Section 3.5 on 'Payment in Lieu of Annual Leave' form the necessary policy basis to compensate members for unused annual leave (up to 25 days) as a result of an 'Imperative Operational Requirement' (IOR). An IOR is defined as "a situation or circumstance that precludes a CF member from taking leave" and includes "participating in an operational deployment or major military exercise; participating in an un-forecasted tasking; attending a career course" among others.¹⁴ Authority to accumulate annual leave rests at the CO and Formation Commander levels (depending on the quantity of leave to be accumulated) and authority to pay a member 'in lieu of annual leave' rests with Formation Commanders. As such, the requisite policy exists to compensate members for instances where operational conditions require them to work additional days, but only when that extra work prevents them from taking annual leave by the end of the fiscal year. Since working hours/days/weeks/months limitations are not defined in the CFLPM or any other directive, these 'overtime' compensation policies are rarely utilized and when operational requirements arise and conflict with annual leave plans, those annual leave plans are simply rescheduled for later in the fiscal year, and no compensation is typically applied. Additionally, while the CFLPM directs that members be compensated for unused annual leave days (either by accumulation or payment in lieu thereof), that same directive does not apply to unused weekends or statutory holidays, which can be lost to IORs without the requirement for compensation. The policy mechanisms to permit accumulation or payment in lieu of annual leave could be meaningfully deployed as a tangible mechanism to encourage WLB

¹² Canada, "Canadian Forces Leave Policy Manual," n.d., 23–24, accessed February 7, 2024.

¹³ Canada, "Leave Policy Manual," 17.

¹⁴ Canada, "Leave Policy Manual," 15.

within the RCAF, but there is significant cultural opposition to their use, a lack of clarity regarding the number of nonworking days members are entitled to each year, and often insufficient financial resources available to commanders to properly manage these policies at the Squadron/Formation level.

8. Many RCAF occupations are also regularly employed as shift workers, including most aircrew positions (pilots, Air Combat Systems Officers, loadmasters, flight engineers, etc.) as well as aircraft maintenance technicians. While COs are directed to provide these members with the equivalent time off as regular workers receive, it is important to ensure that this direction is being interpreted and applied accurately and uniformly across the RCAF. Tracking this metric is recommended by Sirgy, *et al.*, (2018) who indicate that “managers and policy makers should make an effort to regularly measure and monitor the degree of work-life balance on a regular basis.”¹⁵ To do so, the RCAF must first define all of the variables, and in particular what is to be considered a ‘non-working day’ to address the lack of such a definition within the CFLPM. This definition should ensure that non-working days are fully distinct from working days to promote WLB and avoid RC. Once a standard definition of a non-working day is published, COs can begin to collect meaningful data on the number of non-working days their members receive, which in turn will help senior RCAF leaders assess and track the operational tempo across RCAF units and better quantify the impacts of increasing or decreasing that tempo, in dollars paid in lieu of annual leave when desired.

CONCLUSION

9. The RCAF has indicated a need to prioritize WLB within the force and our analysis has revealed that it has the necessary authority within existing policy to do so. The three recommendations which follow address three roadblocks to WLB identified in the discussion above: clear definitions, clear expectations and entitlements, and data collection to establish trends and measure performance.

RECOMMENDATION

10. Recommendation #1: Clear definitions. To clarify the ambiguity that exists in the CFLPM regarding the regular work time/day expectations of RCAF members, we recommend the RCAF publish the following definitions in the RCAF Flying Operations Manual (FOM) or other suitable Level 1 policy document:

Non-working day: any weekend or statutory holiday, or in the case of shift workers any designated non-working day during which the member (1) is not scheduled for or expected to complete any work tasks including standby duties, and (2) is given the opportunity to spend the full 24-hour period in their normal home accommodations, though they may elect not to do so. Time spent away from one’s normal place of residence for work reasons, or at any location while holding standby duties with conditions/limitations shall not be considered as non-working time/days.

¹⁵ Sirgy and Lee, “Work-Life Balance,” 249.

11. Recommendation #2: Clear entitlements. To enable and encourage a positive trend towards a healthy work-life balance across the RCAF, a clear definition of what constitutes a non-working day is required. We recommend the RCAF publish such a definition in the RCAF Flying Operations Manual (FOM) or other appropriate Level 1 policy document:

***Normal working days and hours:** all RCAF members are expected to work five (5) days a week, for eight (8) hours per day on average. COs can authorize modifications to this schedule but should endeavour to ensure a maximum of forty (40) hours of scheduled work per week. Regular workers should normally complete these hours between Monday and Friday, while shift workers will have a modified schedule which should not normally exceed five (5) working days in a week.*

***Non-working day entitlements:** all RCAF members are entitled to a full allotment of annual leave (20-30 days depending on the amount of time in service) IN ADDITION TO 104 weekend days and 12 statutory holidays (116 days in total, see Chapter 2 Annex A of the CF Leave Policy Manual). COs will ensure members utilize all their non-working days by the end of each fiscal year unless Imperative Operational Requirements prevent the full utilization thereof. When all non-working days cannot be utilized before the end of a fiscal year, annual days should be used last and any balance remaining either accumulated or paid in lieu. Non-working days are defined above and will not contain scheduled work tasks or work expectations. Non-working days provided to shift workers as compensation for lost weekends or statutory holidays shall be utilized before annual leave and shall not be discarded.*

12. Recommendation #3: Collect data for trend and performance analysis. To establish baseline data and develop a capacity to monitor performance towards a healthy work-life balance, the RCAF must collect and track data on the number of working and non-working days RCAF members receive, and we recommend the following direction be published in the RCAF FOM or equivalent Level 1 policy document:

***Provision and Tracking of Non-Working Days:** Regular workers and shift workers shall utilize the full complement of non-working days to which they are entitled before the end of each fiscal year, and these days should be used at regular intervals to avoid accumulation as much as possible. When 'imperative operational requirements' result in an accumulation of non-working days, these shall be utilized before any other form of leave, including annual leave. A non-working day is defined above and COs and Formation Commanders will forecast and budget for any anticipated accumulations or payments in lieu of annual leave resulting from imperative operational requirements. COs will continuously track the status of non-working days in their units and remit this data to division commanders through formation commanders quarterly for budget and performance review.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Canada. *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve*. Ottawa: National Defence = Défense nationale, 2022.
- . “Canadian Forces Leave Policy Manual,” 2023. Accessed February 7, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/military-benefits/canadian-force-leave-policy-manual/2023/2023-06-30-cflpm.pdf>
- . “Royal Canadian Air Force Flight Operations Manual.” Chief of Staff, 1 Canadian Air Division, December 21, 2023.
- Delecta, P. “Review Article Work Life Balance.” *International Journal of Current Research* 3, no. 4 (April 17, 2011): 186–89. <http://journalcra.com/sites/default/files/issue-pdf/579.pdf>
- Deng, Michelle E., Adelheid A. M. Nicol, and Cindy Suurd Ralph. “Masculine Conformity and Social Dominance’s Relation With Organizational Culture Change.” *Armed Forces & Society*, June 11, 2023, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231178522>.
- Filippi, Silvia, Mara Yerkes, Michèlle Bal, Bryn Hummel, and John De Wit. “(Un)Deserving of Work-Life Balance? A Cross Country Investigation of People’s Attitudes towards Work-Life Balance Arrangements for Parents and Childfree Employees.” *Community, Work & Family* 27, no. 1 (January 2024): 116–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2022.2099247>.
- Fontinha, Rita, Simon Easton, and Darren Van Laar. “Overtime and Quality of Working Life in Academics and Nonacademics: The Role of Perceived Work-Life Balance.” *International Journal of Stress Management* 26, no. 2 (May 2019): 173–83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000067>.
- Fritz, Charlotte, Maya Yankelevich, Anna Zarubin, and Patricia Barger. “Happy, Healthy, and Productive: The Role of Detachment from Work during Nonwork Time.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95, no. 5 (2010): 977–83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019462>.
- Haar, Jarrod, and David Brougham. “Work Antecedents and Consequences of Work-Life Balance: A Two Sample Study within New Zealand.” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 33, no. 4 (February 21, 2022): 784–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1751238>.
- Kim, Kyoung Yong, Robert Eisenberger, and Kibok Baik. “Perceived Organizational Support and Affective Organizational Commitment: Moderating Influence of Perceived Organizational Competence.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 37, no. 4 (May 2016): 558–83. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2081>.
- Lamane-Harim, Jamila, David Cegarra-Leiva, and Ma Eugenia Sánchez-Vidal. “Work–Life Balance Supportive Culture: A Way to Retain Employees in Spanish SMEs.” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 34, no. 10 (May 31, 2023): 2074–2106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1878255>.
- Shirmohammadi, Melika, Wee Chan Au, and Mina Beigi. “Remote Work and Work-Life Balance: Lessons Learned from the Covid-19 Pandemic and Suggestions for HRD Practitioners.” *Human Resource Development International* 25, no. 2 (March 15, 2022): 163–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2022.2047380>.

Sirgy, M. Joseph, and Dong-Jin Lee. "Work-Life Balance: An Integrative Review." *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 13, no. 1 (March 2018): 229–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-017-9509-8>.