



## **SPIRITUAL WARRIOR: EMBRACING SPIRITUALITY IN TRANSFORMING MILITARY CULTURE**

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**JCSP 50**

**Service Paper**

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# **SPIRITUAL WARRIOR: EMBRACING SPIRITUALITY IN TRANSFORMING MILITARY CULTURE**

## **AIM**

1. Addressing the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) recruitment, retention, and culture issues is critical for CAF operational effectiveness. Recognizing that individuals are the CAF's most vital asset, this paper advocates for the integration of spirituality as a key strategy to transform military culture positively by enriching the lives of the people who contribute to its capability. Spirituality in the workplace can mitigate stress, enhance resilience, and improve cohesion.<sup>1</sup> The CAF ethos publication *Trusted to Serve* characterizes spiritual health as essential, underscoring its significance in fostering good character and professional competence. The aim of this paper is to examine spirituality in the context of CAF culture and thus improve its operational effectiveness by focusing on the people who serve.

## **INTRODUCTION**

2. The 2022 Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence (DND) and the CAF (Arbour Report) addresses significant issues within the CAF, focusing on sexual violence, gender, ethnicity, and the need for cultural and institutional transformation. The findings are an imperative for the CAF to adapt to societal evolution concerning gender and cultural diversity.<sup>2</sup> Culture issues aggravate recruitment and retention difficulties and of trained personnel, medical issues and low morale further reduce the effective strength.<sup>3</sup> The CAF must rethink its culture to fulfill its operational mandates; it must embody the democratic values it seeks to defend.<sup>4</sup> Fostering a CAF environment that attracts individuals to join, encourages them to stay, nurtures them, and motivates them to excel is necessary. Management theories suggest emphasizing people-centered values can improve productivity, reduce absenteeism, and increase job satisfaction and commitment.<sup>5</sup>

3. *Trusted to Serve* aims to renew and articulate the CAF ethos and create a healthier climate. It emphasizes embracing diversity, challenging unacceptable behavior, and making decisions that support cultural change. This document serves as the capstone for instilling values that enhance the CAF's morale and effectiveness. It alludes to "prioritizing the team's physical, mental and spiritual well-being in their performance of

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<sup>1</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

<sup>2</sup> Maya Eichler, Tammy George, and Nancy Taber. "The Arbour report and beyond." *Canadian Military Journal* 23, no. 2 (2023): 35-44.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada. *Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy* (2022).

<sup>4</sup> Christian Leuprecht. "The demographics of force generation: Recruitment, attrition and retention of citizen soldiers." *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice* (2020): 179-200.

<sup>5</sup> Jehanzeb Khawaja. "Does perceived organizational support and employee development influence organizational citizenship behavior? Person-organization fit as moderator." *European Journal of Training and Development* 44, no. 6/7 (2020): 637-657.

duty.”<sup>6</sup> Organizational culture theory posits that this emphasis on a strongly positive culture fosters productivity, innovation, and cohesion, while a negative culture can impede success.<sup>7</sup> A supportive culture aligns with the organizational goals contained within *Trusted to Serve* and incorporating spirituality into the workplace contributes to this by promoting virtuous behavior, creating a caring environment, and improving problem-solving.<sup>8</sup>

4. **Transforming Military Culture.** Cultural transformation in the DND and CAF is spearheaded by the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC). CPCC conducted consultations with participation from over 9,000 members between October 2021 and February 2022 and identified four key recurring cultural pillars; the themes are: service before self, the warrior identity, leadership, and teamwork.<sup>9</sup> These pillars were seen as strengths but were also associated with limiting mindsets that challenge the CAF's ethos; specifically, the ideas of self-sacrifice in service and ignoring self-care; a narrow view of the warrior that is defined by toxic and aggressive behaviours; directive and unsupportive leadership; and exclusion in teams that leads to isolating members. CPCC sees culture evolution as requiring openness and shifting the four pillars from self-sacrifice to enabling the best self in service; redefining the warrior identity to include emotional resilience; blending decisiveness and emotional intelligence in leadership; and fostering trust and authenticity in teams. A strategy for cultural transformation should thus focus on fostering positive interactions among members and cultivating self-awareness. This is in line with the benefits of spirituality in the workplace which positively influence the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions within groups.<sup>10</sup>

5. Furthermore, integrating spirituality in the workplace supports employees in finding purpose and meaning in their tasks and the organization.<sup>11</sup> In the context of military service, sacrifice should naturally extend outside oneself to encompass broader, meaningful contributions. Unlimited liability is the ultimate commitment that military personnel make. A spiritual CAF complements military service; it puts more effort towards acknowledging members' quest for meaning, desire for connection, and contribution towards the organization's goals. Spirituality supports the CAF to not only meet its demands to the highest calibre but also enriches the lives of its members. This

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<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trust to Serve*, (2022).

<sup>7</sup> Steven Kuhl, Anna E. Kosloski, Stephanie Bontrager Ryon, and Astrid Monar. "Masculinity, organizational culture, media framing and sexual violence in the military." *Social sciences* 7, no. 5 (2018): 80.

<sup>8</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada, *Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture Consultation Summary*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/conduct-and-culture/join-the-discussion-defence-team-conduct-and-culture-consultation/defence-team-conduct-and-culture-consultation-summary-report.html> (2022), retrieved on February 14, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Stephanie A. Bosco-Ruggiero. "The relationship between Americans' spiritual/religious beliefs and behaviors and mental health: New evidence from the 2016 General Social Survey." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 22, no. 1 (2020): 30-48.

<sup>11</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

increases CAF's appeal as an employer because it fosters a work environment that not only values but actively cultivates well-being and a sense of belonging, thereby boosting retention rates and making the CAF a more attractive option for prospective recruits seeking meaningful careers.

## DISCUSSION

6. **Defining Spirituality in the CAF.** The CAF states that spiritual resilience is essential to overall well-being and that spirituality is foundational to a member's identity, motivations, and commitment to serve. Spiritual resilience enables one to withstand and grow from adversities through inner strength and/or connection with a higher power. It incorporates elements like belonging, hope, and gratitude, and supports recovery and health which is especially useful in the demanding context of military life.<sup>12</sup> The Royal Canadian Chaplain Service (RCChS) supports spirituality in the CAF. They care for the moral and spiritual well-being of personnel and their families. The following RCChS tool, Figure 1, is provided as a self-assessment tool for spiritual health and well-being. Members can identify on a spiritual spectrum ranging from flourishing to struggling or in crisis; it provides a framework to support members on their spiritual journey.



Figure 1. Spiritual Fitness Continuum (Government of Canada, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Canada, *Spiritual Resilience in the CAF*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/spiritual-resilience-caf.html> (2023), retrieved on February 14, 2024.

7. **Wider Spirituality.** Spirituality encompasses a broad spectrum of personal beliefs and practices that explore one's values, principles, and the sense of peace and well-being derived from various aspects of human experience. The RCChS Spiritual Fitness Continuum suggests that the CAF recognizes the importance of wider spirituality for enhancing resilience and the holistic well-being of its members. At Figure 1., optimal spiritual health is described by this sentiment: "I have enriched positive relationships and an established sense of belonging." While activities like mindfulness, prayer or meditation, and participation in spiritual or faith groups are available to CAF members, this paper is a call for developing a comprehensive CAF program to help people achieve optimal spiritual health. The following section suggests that committing to wider spirituality in the CAF can transform the CPCC consultations' cultural pillars (ie., service before self, warrior identity, leadership, and teamwork) positively.

8. **Self-Improvement for Service.** The mantra, 'service before self,' often entails dedication to the organization over personal well-being. Cultivating spiritual warriors promotes the holistic well-being of members and enables individuals to contribute their utmost in service. In an article examining spirituality and self-actualization, spiritual practices were shown to significantly boost resilience and aid in personal development<sup>13</sup> Through practices like mindfulness and meditation, people gain the ability to be fully present and discerning, which in turn helps in handling life's challenges more effectively. These practices contribute to personal growth, a sense of purpose, better decision-making, and the ability to navigate adversity. In a review of spirituality in health care, there was robust evidence supporting the integration of spirituality into the care of patients with serious illness. The study suggests the benefits in incorporating spiritual care into therapy and treatment, educating healthcare teams about spirituality, and acknowledging spirituality's protective health associations.<sup>14</sup> These findings suggest that the military can enhance the physical and overall well-being of its members by integrating spiritual care into its healthcare services, educating members, and recognizing the protective health benefits of spirituality.

9. **Warrior Identity.** Traditionally, the warrior identity has been associated with a problematic culture that glorifies aggression, toughness, and emotional disconnection.<sup>15</sup> This connotation can lead to poor mental health outcomes and a lack of empathy. A spiritual person adopts values such as emotional intelligence, resilience, and the courage to show vulnerability.<sup>16</sup> Traditional warrior virtues like bravery, discipline, and skill in combat can still be honoured but spirituality also acknowledges the importance of mental

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<sup>13</sup> Gold, Joshua M. "Spirituality and Self-Actualization: Considerations for 21st-Century Counselors." *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 52, no. 2 (2013): 223-235.

<sup>14</sup> Tracy Balboni, Tyler J. VanderWeele, Stephanie D. Doan-Soares, Katelyn NG Long, Betty R. Ferrell, George Fitchett, Harold G. Koenig et al. "Spirituality in serious illness and health." *Jama* 328, no. 2 (2022): 184-197.

<sup>15</sup> Maya Eichler, Tammy George, and Nancy Taber. "The Arbour report and beyond." *Canadian Military Journal* 23, no. 2 (2023): 35-44.

<sup>16</sup> Gold, Joshua M. "Spirituality and Self-Actualization: Considerations for 21st-Century Counselors." *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 52, no. 2 (2013): 223-235.

health, compassion, teamwork, and ethical behavior. By promoting a more holistic view of the psychological and moral dimensions of military members, the CAF can create a culture that enriches individuals. This approach aligns with the essence of spirituality in the workplace, where an individual's connection to their role transcends mere tasks. In a study of workplace identity and spirituality it was found that individuals who positively integrate their work into their personal identity possess deep spiritual convictions and a forward-looking perspective.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this redefinition of the warrior identity allows individuals to align with their most virtuous selves and see themselves as integral to the collective strength of the CAF.

10. **Spiritual Leadership.** Leaders not only guide operations but also shape the moral and ethical framework within which those operations occur. A spiritual organization, by promoting wisdom, reflection, inspiration, creativity, and compassion, can lead individuals towards more ethical decision-making in their activities.<sup>18</sup> As a leadership style, it leads to decision-making that is ethically sound and cultivates trust among members.<sup>19</sup> Decisions in a military context often carry significant consequences for operations and its members. Leaders seen as more authentic and approachable are invaluable in the high-stress, high-stakes environment of military operations. Integrating spirituality into leadership development in the CAF can improve empathetic leadership and ethical decision-making, and foster supportive, motivated, and inclusive teams. Such leadership makes members feel valued and motivated to be part of the organization, driven by a shared commitment to its mission.

11. **Spiritual Teams.** Teams characterized by spirituality foster mutual understanding and unity of purpose. They enhance empathy among members and enable better understanding and connection with each member's experiences and perspectives.<sup>20</sup> In military activities, trust and mutual support are especially beneficial within teams. By creating a supportive culture, members can explore their intuition and creativity, which are essential qualities for problem-solving and innovation in the face of complex challenges. Moreover, spirituality aligns individual and collective identities with the organization's values and mission.<sup>21</sup> These teams share a profound sense of community, underpinned by a supportive network where members feel genuinely connected to one another and to a common purpose. The unique demands of military service require teams that are not only technically proficient but also ethically grounded and spiritually resilient. As military operations often have serious and strategic implications, spiritual teams are better equipped to navigate challenges. This strong sense of community and shared purpose within spiritual teams not only encourages individuals to remain with an

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<sup>17</sup> M M, Sulphery. "Can Spirituality and Long-Term Orientation Relate to Workplace Identity? an Examination using SEM." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 41, no. 9/10 (2021): 1038-1057.

<sup>18</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

organization but also inspires them to consistently give their best, knowing their contributions and well-being are important to the organization.<sup>22</sup>

12. **Spiritual Mindset Strategy.** The CAF should deliberately adopt spirituality into its battle rhythm, its development phases, its leadership programs, and the organizational ethos. Implementing structured programs focused on spirituality can provide members with the tools and understanding necessary to navigate the challenges of military life. This could include workshops or training modules on mindfulness, meditation, and reflection, tailored to the unique stresses and experiences of service. Such programs can be designed to help members find deeper meaning in their work and enhance their ability to cope with adversity. Encouraging people to engage in reflective practices, such as journaling or participating in discussion groups, can help them explore their values, beliefs, and experiences on a deeper level.<sup>23</sup> Reflection can be a powerful tool for personal growth, helping individuals to process their experiences, set meaningful goals, and align their actions at work with their core values.

## CONCLUSION

13. This paper sees an approach to enhancing the CAF's operational effectiveness is by embracing spirituality. It provides the CAF's means for evaluating members' spiritual fitness and highlights how a holistic view of service can improve morale, cohesion, and physical and emotional well-being. The discussion addresses the findings from the Arbour Report, which calls for cultural transformation. In line with organizational culture theory, integrating spirituality can enrich the CAF's culture and thus improve the organization and contribute to its operational effectiveness. By prioritizing the spiritual dimension alongside physical and mental aspects of service, the CAF not only responds to the Arbour Report's call for transformation but creates an engaging environment that attracts prospective recruits, develops healthier people, and fosters a sense of belonging among current members.

14. Spirituality promotes self-awareness and positive engagement; these themes are crucial for transforming the four cultural pillars identified by the CPCC. By integrating spirituality, the CAF might shift from a focus on self-sacrifice to enabling personal growth in service, redefine the warrior identity to include spiritual resilience, develop virtuous leaders, and create strong inclusive teams. This paper presents spirituality in the CAF as a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices that support personal growth, connection, and well-being, essential for facing the demands of military life. By promoting spiritual practices that value self-awareness and ethical behavior, this paper suggests that the CAF can create a more supportive, effective, and cohesive military culture that aligns with *Trusted to Serve*, the CAF ethos.

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<sup>22</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



## RECOMMENDATION

15. The RCChS, as the CAF's spiritual resource, should partner with CPCC to incorporate spiritual health initiatives in the strategic plan for CAF culture evolution. This represents an opportunity to provide all CAF members with a view of service that appreciates not only their physical and tactical skills but also their psychological, moral, and spiritual well-being, as outlined in *Trusted to Serve*. The CAF should adopt spiritual initiatives that have been successful in the civilian workplace including deep discussions and reflections, allocating resources for spirituality, and spiritual leadership development.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, spiritual practices that the CAF might prioritize can include mindfulness, meditation, appreciation for nature, art, and human relationships. Implementing these initiatives across the CAF will foster a more holistic approach to a member's development and enhance their ability to cope with the unique challenges of military life.

16. The CAF should create an environment that facilitates the discussion of spirituality in the context of the CPCC cultural pillars: service, identity, leadership, and teams. It should allocate resources towards spiritual development including designated areas for spiritual practice, such as meditation rooms and quiet spaces; it should provide time for personal development; and it should invest in programs and people to support members' spiritual wellness including increasing the number of counselors and spiritual practitioners in the CAF. Finally, leaders serve as the backbone of the military, embodying its soul in their leadership. Leaders are pivotal in shaping a cohesive, effective, and morally grounded force and they should be encouraged to support and exemplify spirituality. The CAF should adopt these spiritual measures so that it can achieve cultural transformation and enhance operational effectiveness by improving the overall well-being of its personnel.

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<sup>24</sup> R. Indradevi. "Workplace spirituality: Successful mantra for modern organization." *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2020): 437-440.

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