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Workplace Well-being in DND – Starting at the Top

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ABSTRACT

The Department of National Defence has shown a concern for the well-being of its people. The leadership of DND is especially vulnerable and needs attention. There are warning signs of ill-health for the leadership, and so for DND as a whole.

There is a strong relationship between the health of an organization and the health of its leadership. The health of DND and its leadership are examined using the analogy of the organization as a living breathing being. In particular the state of mind of DND is examined by using the rich metaphor of psychoanalysis.

There are many possible ways to treat the ill-health of DND and its leadership, both individually and organizationally, and some of these are examined. The paper shows the importance of adopting an organizational culture of well-being.

Workplace Well-Being in DND - Starting at the Top

Introduction

The Department of National Defence has taken very seriously the need to pay attention to its people. “Putting people first” is the top priority for DND; the Deputy Minister and Chief of the Defence Staff believe “that People really are at the heart of this Department” (DND 2002a,b). Over the last few years Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Chiefs of the Defence Staff have all remained committed to the people of DND and to action to improve their quality of life. In doing so, they seek to maintain or improve the health of the organization.

The need for DND to look after its people is not just a matter of being kind and caring. It is not just a matter of getting more effective work out of people. “More and more managers are waking up to the benefits of workplace well-being. Not just because it makes people feel better and be more productive, but because it’s simply the right thing to do” (Stoyko 8).

Quality of life, work-life balance, workplace balance, or whatever you want to call this concern for the well-being of the individuals, is not a program. “Work-life balance is an ethical issue.”¹ It is also a reflection of the concern for the well-being of the organization as a whole. It is, or should be, an integral part of the thinking and culture of work at DND.

¹ Quoted, with permission, from Assistant Deputy Minister (Material) Allan Williams’ presentation to the NSSC5 course 3 June 2003.

With all of this attention on people, what is DND doing about the workplace well-being of its senior leadership – its senior military officers and civilian public servants at the executive level? There are no apparent quality of life programs focused on this group, but there are good reasons, for the health of the organization, that this group is properly cared for.

The Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) makes this very insightful observation:

Leaders play an essential role in determining health and productivity in today's organizations. A healthy executive can enhance the health of all those with whom he/she works – and thus the health of the organization as a whole. The converse is equally true. Unhealthy leaders can do real damage, putting their own long-term health prospects at risk, but also having a toxic effect on those whose lives impinge on theirs. (APEX ES 4)

There is a close relationship between the health of an organization and the health of its leadership. The workplace balance or well-being is a reflection of the balance or well-being of its leadership, and vice versa. When well-being is a part of the culture of the organization, then balance and perspective will be a part of the attitude of its leaders.

This paper argues that something needs to be done for the well-being of both the senior leadership and DND as an organization. After years of cost cutting, downsizing, restructuring and undiminished expectations, DND remains in a state of some distress. This paper further argues that treatment is necessary which brings a better perspective. This treatment must include adopting workplace well-being as a vital part of the culture.

One Perspective

An organization can be thought of as a living, breathing being. The “head” of the organization is its leadership, also sometimes referred to as its “brains”. When one thinks of the leadership as a part of the organizational body in this way, it opens up the possibility of powerful analogies for understanding the health of an organization.

There are both physical and psychological aspects of illness, with a strong interplay between these two aspects. The state of mind may cause physical symptoms in the body and the physical condition of the body may affect the state of mind. The health of the “head”, then, can be looked at from both the physical perspective and the psychological perspective. This paper relates the physical aspect to the well-being of the individuals within DND’s senior leadership, as one might consider the health of the tissue or the cells within the brain, say. This paper relates the psychological aspect to the leadership as the “head” of the organization, so that studying the health of the leadership is like studying the “state of mind” of DND.

Psychoanalysis² is a method for investigating the workings of the mind. It is a way to uncover the forces and motives underlying a patient’s symptoms. This way of thinking has been applied to organizations (Morgan; Kets de Vries and Miller), and many of the terms, concepts and ideas from psychoanalysis are highly suggestive when applied to organizations. There are always limits to any analogy or metaphor and it should not be

² This paper relies on short papers under “Psychoanalysis” in Vol. 13 of *The Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* for an understanding of the main concepts of the subject.

pushed too hard. However, as with psychoanalysis itself, the object is to gain insight by taking a fresh perspective.

Much of psychoanalysis is concerned with unhealthy responses to stimuli. So for example social, cultural and economic conditions can contribute to neurotic illness in some, while in others they lead to favourable conflict with beneficial results. Familial circumstances especially may hold the balance in whether this response is healthy or not. Anxiety is a traumatic state that develops when the influx of stimuli exceeds the mental capacity to deal appropriately with the stimuli. Defence mechanisms can be developed to cope with stimuli (especially the unpleasant ones) and such mechanisms include repression, isolation, regression, projection, identification, reaction formation and denial. These defence mechanisms may lead to resistance in any treatment.

The subconscious might find its parallel in the culture of the organization. Culture is that often unspoken way of thinking that underlies much of an organization's behaviour. A defence mechanism, that is a way of coping organizationally with stimuli and stress, can be a deeply ingrained part of the culture of the organization.

This paper, then, examines the health of DND, in large part by focusing on the health of its leadership. The paper discusses both the individual and organizational, aspects of the leadership's health. A look at the environment for DND through the lens of psychoanalysis suggests the impact on health of root influences in the environment. The paper then examines the nature of DND and its leadership. It looks at the vital signs and the symptoms of illness to aid in the diagnosis of DND and its leadership, as a patient. Some of the many possible treatments, both individual and organizational, are discussed. Finally, the paper hazards a prognosis for the patient.

The Environment

The environment has a significant impact on shaping the health of DND. There are many external stimuli that are extremely challenging and, perhaps, overwhelming for DND. This section provides a quick sketch of some of the environmental factors for DND and then uses the psychoanalytic metaphor to examine DND's response to these stimuli.

In the world broadly, the end of the Cold War and the threat of terrorism has meant a different nature of threat for DND to contend with. Canada has no particularly obvious threat, militarily. The terrorist threat is only in part the concern of DND; there are other government Departments more directly concerned with security. Canada's best friend and ally, the United States, is a powerful and dominant player in the world in many ways, not just military. Canadian society most of the time seems somewhat ambivalent to its Defence Forces; it recognizes and honours them in times of need but ignores them most of the rest of the time. Defence is a lesser priority than many other key societal concerns, including health care. The government has trimmed DND and its leadership, at the same time expecting a continued level of service.

The psychoanalytic metaphor can be very rich in studying the impact of this environment on DND. Some examples are given here, which suggest the impact of the environment on the "mental health" of DND. These examples are necessarily somewhat speculative, as there is no research by experts into the psychoanalysis of DND. Nevertheless these examples point to the potential value for others to explore this perspective further.

The lack of any threat to Canada and the changed world environment, may simply cause DND to deny the possibility that it has no significant role to play in Canada.

Alternatively, with the possibility of being reduced to largely domestic or peacekeeping roles, DND may respond with a reaction formation defence mechanism whereby it takes this negative possibility and replaces it by reasserting its primary role as “the manager of violence” or the “force of last resort” for Canada.

If the government of Canada is its father and Canadian society its mother, this might explain frustrations within DND. The father is too distant, aloof and impersonal, and the mother does not provide that feeling of being needed. Like any child, DND - and the CF especially - want to be “loved” or at least understood and appreciated. These feelings can be repressed and subconsciously – that is, through organizational culture - may affect behaviour. Children try hard to impress and catch the attention of their parents, and are frustrated when they do not. DND, feeling it is a largely ignored child, may work even harder.

The relationship between Canada and the U.S. has all the makings for a classic inferiority complex. DND, and the CF in particular, may be envious of the size, might, strength and “toys” of the U.S. military. DND may struggle to rationalize its efforts with what it has, while repressing feelings of inadequacy. (Freud would have a field day with this.) At the same time, DND may identify with the U.S. military, trying to adopt its values and attitudes.

In its relationship with central government DND may exhibit a classic projection defence mechanism. DND looks to others in government – the PCO, Treasury Board, the Finance Department – to blame for the reasons for its shortcomings. The government has

severely cut back on the number of people in leadership, while at the same time demanding DND do more with less. Under such severe stress DND may in many ways regress to old, comfortable ways of doing business rather than risking bold new approaches. This leads to overwork in the old way of business and frustration at making so little progress.

As these examples are intended to suggest, factors in the environment may have led to the development of strong psychoanalytical defensive mechanisms within DND in order to cope. The behaviour of DND, particularly the drives that lead to overwork and frustration, may be deeply rooted in such environmental factors. The defence mechanisms and the factors in the environment contributing to them need to be recognized and understood before they may be overcome in treatment.

This paper does not intend to put DND on the couch and psychoanalyze it. The examples just described are simply meant to provide some insight, to make the reader look a little deeper at the reasons behind ill health that may be observed in DND and why DND might be worse than other Departments. As the character of the patient, the symptoms of illness and the possible treatment are examined further, the psychoanalytic metaphor can give some insight into why DND works extra hard, why it gets frustrated more easily, or why it behaves rigidly and compulsively.

The Patient

DND is a somewhat unique patient. It exists to field forces in operations, although at any given time most of it is engaged in preparation – planning, exercising or otherwise generating the capability for its forces. DND faces constant uncertainty, as it can never be sure where its next operation might be or what it might be facing.

DND has a dual nature – military and civilian. Its two parts work together as a team, although they have different cultures and conditions of service. There are some differences between the military and civilian components of DND leadership. They do, however, have to work together and, certainly at the senior levels, they work in the same general milieu. Operations can help to provide clarity of purpose and mission for leadership so engaged – whether military or civilian. At other times this schizoid nature of DND can create problems.

The leaders of DND have traits common to most executives. They are confident and driven. They are often competitive and workaholic. They are dedicated, committed and sometimes single-minded. They can usually cope with stress well and can manage several, complex areas at one time. The military leadership are strong-minded and compulsive, trained to decide and act quickly, often in the absence of complete information. The military especially have a culture where physical fitness is important, although it may be difficult for general officers to sustain this.

The individual traits just described are not all inclusive nor are they necessarily generally valid for all DND's leaders. These traits do however give a caricature of these

individuals. Most of DND's leaders are usually highly stimulated and energized by challenging work.

As APEX notes, "for any organization to be successful, it needs leaders who are dynamic, energetic, creative and innovative." However, as APEX goes on to say, "high levels of fatigue do not encourage these characteristics to flourish" (ES4). Nor do high levels of fatigue set the conditions for a strong learning organization.

Many executives, with the typical traits of an A-type personality, have a tendency to overwork and burnout. A continuous, fast, unrelenting pace, combined with a high degree of stress and uncertainty, can take its toll. People do get sick, literally and figuratively, of work. A good lifestyle, which reduces the factors for ill-health, cannot always keep at bay the deleterious effects of overwork. "Place a healthy person in an unhealthy environment, and eventually they will become ill." (APEX ES 2)

Organizations have a life and personality all their own. They can tire and become sick. Their behaviour can become rigidly neurotic and dysfunctional. By analogy to human psychiatry, Manfred Kets de Vries and Danny Miller describe five neurotic styles for organizations: paranoid, compulsive, dramatic, depressive and schizoid. Each style has its organizational characteristics, its ways of thinking underlying its behaviour (called "fantasies") and its dangers. They opine that organizational behaviour can be predicted based on its neurotic styles.

As with humans it is normal to have a mix of neurotic styles reflected in an organization. There is usually one dominant neurotic style. It is in the extreme, when this dominant style leads to rigid, inflexible and inappropriate behaviour, that the organization is likely to fare poorly; it is the extremes leading to ill health that are a

concern. According to Kets de Vries and Miller, an organization's dysfunction mirrors the neurotic styles of its top executives. They state that "our experience with top executives and their organizations revealed parallels between individual pathology – excessive use of one neurotic style – and organizational pathology, the latter resulting in poorer functioning organizations" (Kets de Vries and Miller 17).

DND appears to have a dominant compulsive neurotic style, although there are also strong hints of paranoid and depressive neurotic styles as well. It is wed to ritual. There is an emphasis on formal controls (bureaucracy), standardized operations (tactics) and formal policies (doctrine). It is exceedingly hierarchical.

One of the dangers of a compulsive organization is an inward orientation, and DND is introverted. This may seem an odd statement when so many of the military leadership are individually highly extrovert and the military are often in the news. But consider that if its leadership are spending all their waking hours consumed with the problems of running the organization, how can they have time to lift their heads and look around? If the organization is so consumed with its internal problems, how can it interact effectively with its counterparts? The rest of Government knows little about DND. The Canadian public knows little about the military. The military community does a great job of supporting its own, but it really is introverted.

Kets de Vries and Miller describe other dangers for the compulsive organizational style. In addition to the aforementioned inward orientation (introversion), the dangers for this style include: indecisiveness and postponement; avoidance due to the fear of making mistakes; inability to deviate from planned activities; excessive reliance on rules and

regulations; and difficulties in seeing “the big picture”. Elements of all of these dangers are in evidence in DND.

An organization’s neurotic style is closely identified with, and reflects, the character and state of health of its leadership. Because of this, Kets de Vries and Miller suggest this “framework also implies that executives must be on the lookout for the five pathological styles” (Kets de Vries and Miller 44). The leadership must be able to view the organization with some detachment and objectivity to make a fair assessment of its “state of mind”.

Karlene Kerfoot uses another human analogy to raise a point about organizations. She talks about organizational intelligence and organizational stupidity. She notes this as the leader’s challenge. The leadership may individually be very bright, perceptive, intelligent and even caring people. But they can still lead and work in a stupid organization! An organization can be especially stupid in times of stress.

Everyone has his or her favourite examples of organizational stupidity in DND. Very often they occur in times of stress or because DND was unable to respond appropriately. Consider, for example, the case of offering a bonus in hiring in an occupational area one year and not many years later offering the same occupation a bonus to leave! Then there’s the case of making a generous open offer to entice people to leave during downsizing, only to realize years later that all the experience and needed expertise in stressed trades has gone! As a more controversial, and debatable example, the early stages of the acquisition of a new maritime helicopter may be seen as a case of organizational naivety, if not stupidity. And, more to the point of this paper, consider all

the well-intentioned additional urgent initiatives the organization has taken on – creating more work and stress - in order to improve the quality of life!

These examples are not meant to embarrass anyone involved; they are after all organizational gaffs. Those involved undoubtedly acted in good faith with their best judgement. But some such decisions lacked perspective - a longer term or broader perspective. The organization was under stress and in a hurry to do something, and so was more likely to do something stupid.

Kerfoot cites the work of Albrecht that introduces the ideas of organizational entropy and syntropy. Organizational entropy is the loss of available energy caused by dysfunction or stupidity. “When there is dysfunction, most of the organization’s energy is focused on the internal strife and the goals of the ... organization ... cannot be kept in focus.” (Kerfoot 92) By contrast, organizational syntropy is the gain of energy with intelligent integration of all an organization’s resources. A good example of this is a well honed, elite military unit.

Kerfoot believes that “[l]eaders must accept the challenge to build the infrastructure that leads to excellence in organizational IQ” (93). This infrastructure is not just programs and process. It is an aspect of the organizational culture that allows time for its leadership to reflect on the health of the organization and to get above or outside the organization to see it from a different perspective. To avoid working in a stupid organization leadership needs a view and perspective beyond the individual perspectives of its leadership.

The conditions for the patient’s recent health history have not been good. The patient has had liposuction to remove the fat (downsizing). It has been starved of

resources in order to clean out the system (wage freezes and cost controls). It has been forced to adapt to new ways of doing business and to use new technology to make its work “easier”. It has been asked to do more with less.

It should be no surprise that such a patient can become sick.

The Diagnosis

The vital signs for the health of the organization and its leadership are not all that good; the evidence suggests they are not particularly healthy.

There have been numerous studies taking the pulse and examining the condition of the patient. Evans cites and summarizes seven studies from the last few years that survey the state of mind of DND, the CF or its civilians. Some of these studies include the much broader population of the public service as a whole. It is not possible here to do justice to the detail contained in all these studies. A side-bar highlights a very few of the more telling statistics. The studies referenced in Evans give a clear picture of the state of health.

There are some positive aspects to these studies; the patient is not wholly or gravely ill. The public service has pride and satisfaction in its work. The vast majority feel their work is important and they like their jobs. But half of the public service said “there was too much of a good thing... In all parts of the public service and at all levels, workload is a problem” (Stoyko 8).

The single most significant problem is workload, and a host of distressing symptoms flow from this. People have so much work they cannot usually get it all done in normal working hours; they must work overtime and/or take work home. People have so much to do that they do not have the time to do properly all the work they feel they have to do. People have this overload of work routinely; there are no peaks and valleys. There is a constant and continual stress of overwork. There is an organizational culture

***Warning Signs
for
The Canadian Public Service***

Almost half of all public servants considered their workload not reasonable most of the time.

40% of public servants could not complete their assigned workload during regular working hours most of the time.

Half of all public servants feel that their work often or always suffers because they are asked to do more with fewer resources.

29% of public servants feel that their work often or always suffers because of unreasonable deadlines.

Employees reporting high levels of depression more than doubled, from 15% in 1991 to 33% in 2001.

In 2001, 33% of workers were reporting high levels of job stress and 58% suffered high levels of role overload.

Source: Stoyko's "A Fine Balance"

of hours. If you aren't working long hours you must be slacking off. To get ahead you must put in long hours.

“Blame the information revolution, the ‘new economy’ or just the prevailing attitude that the customer – in this case, the Canadian people – is king; whatever culprit is chosen, it’s easy to adopt the approach that the job has to get done no matter what.”

(Stoyko 9) Given the nature of DND and its leadership described in the last section, it is clear that the dominant compulsive neurotic style demands that the job must be done. The pathology results when the job must be done no matter what and no matter how overburdened the organization may already be.

***Warning Signs
for
Canadian Government Executives***

They work, on average, almost 5 hours each weekend.

More than a quarter of them work 6 or more hours each weekend.

63% of those retiring consider balancing work and personal life a very important factor in their decision to leave.

For 51% of them, problems with work/life balance were a very important reason for not seeking promotion.

One in five of them have recently been diagnosed with some form of cardiovascular disease.

95% report sleep disturbances and an average of only 6.6 hours of sleep per night.

They say they have no more latitude to make decisions now than they did five years ago.

They are travelling more now than five years ago and workload has not diminished.

Duplication of processes and severe reduction of decision-making authority cut risk but hamper effective operations and add to frustration.

Sources: APEX 2002 Study and Stoyko's "A Fine Balance"

The workload problem is most acute for senior leadership. The symptoms of ill health for the executives in the Canadian Public Service are sobering. The APEX report on the health of its executive membership is a sad indictment of a public service that seems unable to do anything about the problem. Since the ill health of the public service leadership was identified in a 1997 APEX survey, there has been no improvement – in fact, the situation is generally worse. A few of the warning signs for executives are

highlighted in another side-bar. The APEX report is a well-written and insightful report that deserves closer reading and attention by all executives and military leaders.

The general ranks of the CF were not included in this APEX survey. Those who have studied the issue suspect the statistics will be no better, and perhaps worse. The military culture of physical well-being may have a positive affect on health of senior officers. However, to reinforce a point made earlier, “improved health is not solely a result of improved lifestyle – even individuals who take personal responsibility cannot sustain good health in an environment that is unhealthy” (APEX ES 4).

Citing the Work-Life Balance Study, Evans notes that there are “high workloads within DND, particularly for CF members and officers and civilian managers”. In fact, the “total demands assumed by managers and officers at DND are more intense than those borne by managers in other sectors” (Evans 10). One has to wonder why this is the case. Is there really more work to do at DND? Is it a reflection of the strong culture of hours? Is it a reflection of the compulsive nature of the leadership? Some suggestions are rooted in the psychoanalysis of environmental impacts described earlier.

A major factor in affecting the health of executives is a lack of control, a lack of decision-making authority. If the leadership feels a lack of control, the organization is bound to have problems. Aside from the frustration with bureaucratic controls and lack of flexibility, in DND there is concern for the span of control of some of its leaders. Many DND leaders have a truly amazing ability to manage a wide span of control, but they will admit that they cannot give all parts due attention. In some respects this can give leaders a broad intuitive view of the organization, if they take the right perspective.

However, even the sharpest minds can have difficulty in seeing to the heart of things, to clearly see the essentials, when their thoughts are stretched in so many ways.

In the results of studies of quality of life and well-being cited here, and elsewhere, there lies a scathing criticism of the mantra of the last decade “to do more with less”.

The blindingly obvious conclusion is that too few people are trying to do too much.

The vital signs are a concern. The symptoms are clear. Recognizing a serious concern for the health of DND and its leaders, how can the patient be treated?

The Treatment

The health of people at work has been studied extensively, especially over the last twenty or so years, and there are many prescriptions – both individual and organizational. Virtually any book or article on well-being talks about the importance of an organization’s leadership in providing treatment. Leadership plays a vital role in having a healthy organization and employee well-being.

It is ironic, then, - and disturbing - that leadership in the public service seems to have the worst record for maintaining balance and health.

In psychoanalysis, the defence mechanisms by which people or organizations may seek to cope with stimuli can mean great resistance to treatment. Treatment often means first overcoming denial that the problem exists. As individual and organizational treatment for the leadership are discussed in the following, keep in mind some of the defence mechanisms described earlier in the psychoanalytic metaphor.

There is a plethora of articles and books with variously folksy and well-considered advice on how individuals can maintain balance within the workplace. The publication “A Fine Balance”, from The Canadian Centre for Management Development, is a reply to the recognized problem within the public service (Stoyko). It has some good, very simple advice. It reminds readers, for example, that the five well-known dimensions of individual well-being - physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social - all need attention for balance.

Four basic strategies for individual work-life balance have been culled from experienced coaches, counsellors and consultants for executives by Barbara Reinhold.

These are (somewhat adapted):

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Get physical | Pay attention to your body through regular exercise, nutrition, physical touch and deep breathing. |
| Keep connected | Resilience on the job comes mostly from having strong supportive relationships outside of work. |
| Go inside | Spend time in mindful activities, like meditation or prayer.
Hurry sickness is deadly for both careers and people. |
| Look at the big picture | See things in perspective and make informed judgements about what is really important. |

This advice is very similar to, but more concrete than, the concern for balance in the five dimensions mentioned above. This folksy wisdom is repeated in various ways in numerous articles in business magazines.

Everyone has different ability to cope individually and each will find their own effective strategies – if they recognize there is a problem and make the effort. The harder problem is to know how the organization as a whole should respond. This is in part a matter of the state of mind, or the culture, of the organization.

The five dimensions of individual well-being - physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social can be applied to the organization as a whole. Consider the following two examples.

Does DND have the physical capacity (people and resources) to do all the work demanded and maintain well-being? It is important for leadership to understand the

capacity of DND to do work. With the flatter organizational structure and matrix project structures (in a joint headquarters especially) a few key people can become overtaxed as they must contribute to a multitude of projects – if only to attend meetings and provide balanced input. Hierarchies still exist in organizations for a number of good reasons (Leavitt), one of which is the clarity and limits it puts on any one individual's workload.

Does DND have a balanced social life, working closely with other departments, where possible, and seeing the bigger picture of Canadian life? As suggested earlier, DND is introverted. The leadership is internally focussed. The Canadian public knows little about the military; the leadership often feels the need to educate the public. But how can the community, outside the military family community and industrial partners, really come to know DND? How many of DND's leadership take on community leadership, sit on hospital boards, lead or even participate in the arts community, participate in church life, and so on? These things not only are good for individual well-being, but they can be good for the social dimension of the life of DND. Executives in business do this, and are recognized for it. This is not to suggest leaders should add this to their overloaded days. It is to suggest they might want to drop something else and deliberately put some time and effort into living and leading in the community. This can provide balance for our leaders individually and a valuable perspective from which our leadership can look back into DND. This can provide the community, perhaps in a small but very real way, with a glimpse into DND.

This last example is deliberately intended to stretch the thinking about well-being – individually and organizationally. But the message is that leaders can take care of their own well-being at the same time as they are contributing to the well-being of the

organization – and vice versa. It only takes a little creative and intentional thought, an attitude, a culture of balanced commitments.

The APEX study uses a model that has developed out of a growing body of research about organizational work and health. In this model “there are five principal forces which interact in the workplace and determine health status. The demand/control relationship (often referred to as decision latitude) and the balance between effort and rewards form the major axis of interaction” (APEX 1). “The pivot point in the model is support in the work place”, that is “social support” (APEX 2). This model provides another framework in which to discuss the key factors in treatment of DND leadership.

When demands are high and control or decision latitude is low, this can lead to an unhealthy level of psychological strain. If there is not much social support the problem is made even worse. This echoes the advice previously given for individuals, which includes the need for social balance and connectedness. A vital aspect of social support - inside and outside the organization - is collegiality among the senior leadership.

Using this APEX model as a framework, then, firstly consider the demand/control relationship and its impact for the organization. It would seem that if anyone in an organization has decision control it is the senior leadership. It appears that this is not necessarily the case within the public service. But consider this more closely. Demands may come from outside DND, or they may come from within, being either self-generated by leadership or coming from below within the organization. Demands that come from government would appear to be unavoidable, although the true extent of the demands and the reasons behind them often need clarification. There may be a level of control for these demands, then, by clarifying and not accepting blindly “suggestions” or demands

from central government. Unfortunately it would seem that “more and more energy is diverted away from providing service and into bureaucratic activities” (Evans 20). It would seem that at least many of the demands that come from within – perhaps self-generated by the leadership or by those pushing some laudable pet project – should be controllable.

Within limits, DND has flexibility in how it delivers its programs and service. What would stop DND leadership from saying: “This year and for the next few years we will have no change or stretch objectives.” This is so violently against the current culture that it would be dismissed out of hand. (Besides, what would happen to executive bonuses?) But the point is, who but DND leadership determines its workload? Who but DND leadership should have their finger on the pulse and recognize when it is counter-productive to push harder? There are always many things needing change and many fine ideas to improve the organization. But, can DND resist the urge to try to change everything right away? A compulsive leadership, with all the built-in psychoanalytic defence mechanisms for responding to external stimuli, would find this difficult. Perhaps if DND was more accepting of its resource limitations, it could accept that it will take time to achieve the desired progress and so let the organization relax and breathe!

“The perception that it is counterproductive to slow down won’t change until society starts to see stress vulnerabilities in the same light as ailments such as diabetes or a weak heart” (Tillson 84). “APEX made it clear that work/life issues are not about shirking work or dodging around a pressing deadline; it’s a health issue” (Stoyko 10). The perception that it is counterproductive to slow down will not change until DND comes to realize that it needs to pace itself, to rest and pause, just as a human does in

order to maintain peak operational efficiency. An organization, as much as any human, needs a reserve to handle the really rough times.

The organizational pause taken by the CF in its rotation of forces to Afghanistan is a good example of an organization being smart. The impact of operational rotations on the health of the military has become quite evident, and indeed is entirely predictable. The capacity to undertake continuing operations was soberly assessed.

Outside of operations it is perhaps less clear that the organization needs a pause, from time to time. The organization cannot continually push and drive – even if for very laudable end objectives. Like humans, organizations need rest and relaxation. They need capacity to surge. When they have been sick, undergone severe trauma or been ill treated they need time to recover.

Continuing to use the APEX model as a framework, secondly consider the balance between effort and reward and its impact for the organization. The balance between effort and rewards is an interesting one for leadership, because there is a natural tension. An executive tends to be a highly motivated, perhaps even driven individual. Such a leader can have a vision for where the organization can go and they want to take it there. But they do not do the work; they set the conditions. The work to achieve their aims and objectives falls on other people, who do not necessarily have the same capacity to work. “Managers who work punishing hours with excessive workloads usually wind up imposing these burdens on others. Someone has to draw the line somewhere.” (Stoyko 14) The executive must be able to see the demands he places on the organization not just from his or her own perspective, but also from the perspective of the organization that must follow through. It is hard to be recognized as a good leader when you hold

back from doing something because it is too demanding on the organization, but it should be reflected in the overall health of the organization.

The leadership in the public service is now rewarded based on its achievement of its objectives. To a large extent the leadership itself sets those objectives in discussion with their superiors. Leaders are rewarded to the extent they meet or exceed their objectives. It is hard for leaders to have an objective, balanced view of what is good for the organization when it hits the pocket book and perhaps even self esteem when a leader is a little less demanding or a little less successful in meeting some objectives for the good of the organization. The reward system needs to include the degree to which leaders contribute to the health of the organization.

This discussion has been deliberately provocative. There is, of course, nothing wrong with hard work. There is nothing wrong with leaders stretching the organization and urging it to heights of performance. But there must be balance. An organization that is being pushed hard needs to have a release.

An organization needs to laugh and have fun. Laughter and fun can reduce potential for conflict, increase creativity, improve communications, develop cohesion and aid stress management (Newstrom 4). Even when something stupid occasionally happens – and it will! –, it is valuable to have a good laugh, let it out and learn from the event. It may seem totally out of character for DND to have fun. The defence mechanisms DND has developed for coping with its environment, may preclude laughter and fun. However, especially when working long, hard hours, having fun and laughing at work can send one home with a smile and bring one back the next day in anticipation. This will only happen if it is part of the culture of the leadership, as well.

The UK government has taken workplace well-being seriously. It has a draft charter for its executive leadership that calls on them as individual leaders to set personal balance objectives and to have work/life balance high on their departmental agendas. DND would do well to have a similar charter, but more importantly, workplace well-being needs to be firmly and explicitly ingrained in the organizational culture.

The Prognosis

The prognosis is not good in the short term. “There are no quick easy fixes... Long term commitment by all executives to changing their habits, attitudes and behaviours is the only real solution” (APEX ES4). The psychoanalytic approach suggests some of the causes are deeply rooted in the environment and require a long period of “therapy”.

The problems are well recognized, and that is a good start; there is not complete denial that there is a problem. The CF senior leadership spent a session looking at its quality of life at its winter gathering this year, so maybe this part of the leadership is paying attention. But the symptoms have already existed for the public service leadership for at least five years, and no measurable improvement has been made.

There are some positive signs. The recognition of an organizational need for pause in operations is a good sign. The beginning of rejuvenation of the work force and focused growth in DND are good signs. Leaders who talk about the need for workplace well-being and leaders who set an example and actually take their own leave for rest and recreation, are encouraging signs.

It is encouraging that DND can still attract quality people, but it needs to be cautious. “Research has shown that people quit managers, not necessarily employers.” (Styoko 11). DND needs to be able to retain its people, and if it does these people can help to shape an improved culture. Many candidates for higher-level leadership are not interested in accepting extra workload, stress and burnout (APEX 3). Thus a significant proportion of the candidate pool is lost to leadership, and perhaps the very ones that are

needed to change the culture. If leadership really sets the example, takes care of their well-being, shows the fun and reward they receive in their job, then the condition may improve.

Linda Duxbury has described the characteristics of generations in Canada³. The current senior leadership is a part of the “boomer” generation, noted for being workaholic. There may be some hope in that the next generation of leaders may come from the “nexus” generation which values work-life balance.

It is unlikely that the responsibility for the most senior leaders of the Department, and their workload, will diminish. But perhaps with the right perspective they may change what they work on, or how they work on it. They can continue to work on stimulating challenges, and with a little time to think and reflect may provide more lasting direction to DND.

The prognosis then is mixed, and improvement is possible in the long-term. The leadership must show the way if lasting improvements are to happen.

³ “You, Me and Them: Dealing With Generations in the Workforce”, Presentation to the National Security Studies Course, 10 April 2003.

Conclusion

The health and well-being of DND and its leadership is a real concern. The treatment will take time. The treatment requires first and foremost a major change in leadership attitudes and organizational culture before it can lead to long-term solutions. DND needs to pay attention to workplace well-being. A culture of balanced commitments - or even one of fun! - is much more healthy than a culture of hours.

DND leaders need to recognize their essential role for their own health and the health of DND. DND leaders need to be able to lift themselves above the grind and look around. They need to take a detached objective perspective from which to view DND activity in a balanced way. They need to recognize the “organizational neurotic pathology” and to work on improving the “organizational intelligence quotient”; this requires time for pause and reflection. The leadership as a whole needs to control the compulsive urge to do something, and look long and hard at what is done - and what is not done!

Ill-health in DND is a serious problem, both individually and organizationally, but it is not grave. In many ways the patient is strong and many do have a healthy perspective. But ill-health in organization is infectious and it is hard to remain healthy in a sick organization.

In short, DND and its leadership need to attend to workplace well-being – not just for all the clear benefits, but because it is the right thing to do.

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