

AN OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

By

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Abstract

A wide variety of reforms have been implemented or are under consideration by senior leadership in the Canadian Forces (CF) in response to internal and external challenges. These challenges include social factors, changing demographics in the Canadian population, the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and unusually high attrition levels within the CF. As a result, the CF Human Resources Group has undertaken a number of strategic initiatives to prepare for the alternate futures that it faces. This paper presents an overview of activities in support of some of these initiatives.

Introduction

Canada's defence mission is to defend Canada and Canadian interests and values while contributing to internal peace and security. The CF vision for 2020 is that of a defence team to generate, employ and sustain high quality, combat-capable, interoperable and rapidly deployable task-tailored forces. This is to be implemented following a decade characterised by review and reform, and resulting in a torrent of initiatives regarding human resource (HR) planning. In light of the inherent danger of maintaining an outmoded HR system, the CF Human Resources Group is in the midst of charting a new course of action in order to both meet current challenges and to exploit the potential of the future HR environment.

Defence Strategy 2020

A major obligation of the CF HR system is to support the Defence mission by creating the conditions to generate and sustain a competent, committed and professional military force. The CF Defence strategy for 2020 establishes eight core objectives that must be met in order for the CF to accomplish its mandated mission in the future environment. Although all have a relationship to the human resource system, two have a particular salience to the HR realm: "Decisive Leaders" and "Employer of Choice".

The need to develop decisive leaders is founded on the need to deal effectively with the future context inherent in the Revolutions in Business and Military Affairs. Specifically in the HR realm, this is dependent upon developing a climate that encourages initiative, intelligent risk-taking, decisiveness and trust. There is a large professional development and training component under development in order to meet this objective. There is, however, an equally important effort required in the development of the CF HR system that will permit leaders to put theory into practice. This can only occur by reforming the HR system in a manner that moves away from a highly centralised system dependent upon deferral to the centre for decisions.

Weathering the Storm

There has been a multitude of significant events in the recent past of the CF, but none with as much impact upon the CF and the Canadian public as the Somalia Inquiry. The Somalia Inquiry not only tarnished the image of the CF nationally and internationally, but also spawned a myriad of reviews including the Minister's reports on Leadership and Management of the CF. The Senate Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs resulted in many new initiatives that focused on the Quality of Life of CF members and their families. As well, reviews of the CF medical services have led to a major realignment of the CF Health Care system and practices. Aggravating this situation, the CF has experienced a force reduction but has coincidentally increased operational deployments, leading to a growing concern over Operational and Personnel Tempo.

Challenges on the Horizon

Some of the factors to be considered in discussing military recruitment and retention are the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), the Revolution in Business Affairs (RBA), changes in Canadian demographics, changes within the Canadian society and the Canadian economy, and the current state of the CF.

The term, RBA, refers to a shift from a society wherein manufacturing and service industries are the major part of the economy to a society employed in the knowledge industry or information technology.

The term, RMA, implies a major change in battlefield management and the conduct of military operations, principally resulting from innovations in technology and military doctrine, and the changing nature of international operations. Regarding HR matters, the RMA points to three fundamental concerns: how to recruit and retain the right people in the organisation; how to train and employ them; and how to develop the decisive leadership climate and abilities needed to support RMA.

Traditionally, the CF has recruited from (or has targetted for recruitment) the majority (white) population, mostly male, from small towns and rural areas. It has been predicted that, with low Canadian birth rates and changing immigration patterns, the CF will have to target current minority groups (who often live in larger cities) in its

recruiting campaign. The Canadian population, on the whole, is attaining higher levels of education than in the past, whereas the rate of illiteracy is increasing, leading to a declining population in the educational zones from which recruits have traditionally come. As well, Canada's employment rate is currently high and expected to remain high in the next decade, leaving fewer people within the recruitable population to consider the military for employment.

Current State of the CF

One of the most important factors in determining the future state of the CF is the current state of the CF. Some occupations are currently undermanned as the result of the Forces Reduction Plan (1992-1996) and limited or no recruitment over the past few years. Many of these occupations have had few promotions, if any, over the last decade, and consequently, few engagement conversions. These factors have resulted in a large proportion of the population reaching the end of either their intermediate engagement or their continuing engagement, at which point, many will voluntarily retire if they are not retired through contract expiry. In order to maintain Preferred Manning Levels (PMLs), these occupations must greatly increase their training capacity, with the corresponding budget, personnel and physical space.

Other occupations may be on target or even overmanned, but their populations are expected to decline well below PMLs within the next five years. The reasons for attrition may be the same as those described in the previous paragraph. However, the need for increased recruiting may not be seen to be as great in overmanned occupations.

The CF Recruitment Challenge

Immediate recruiting, and for some occupations, drastically increased recruiting, could bring occupations up to their PMLs within a few years. However, it may not be possible to find as many recruits as are needed, nor may it even be desirable to recruit so drastically. A recent study has shown that promotion prospects are highly dependent upon timing of entry into the military system. If extreme attrition requires that unusually large numbers be recruited over several years, promotion prospects may be good for the earlier recruits, who may be promoted quickly to fill vacancies. However, those who are recruited toward the end of the recruitment "bulge" may find that their career paths are consistently blocked by those with slightly more years of service, which could lead to dissatisfaction and higher attrition.

Emergence of a Human Resources Strategy

In September 2000, the CF Human Resources Group conducted a strategic planning session to consolidate its mid-term HR strategy. Force reduction, including the reduction of HR staff and reorganisation, and the massive number of initiatives resulting from intensive review and assessment, have led to a situation where the strategic direction of HR was masked by a large number of disjointed projects and initiatives. The outcome of the planning session was the establishment of a common HR Group vision

and mission fully supportive of the Defence Strategy and taken in consideration of the environmental assessment. More than 130 projects and initiatives were re-evaluated categorised and prioritised. Critically, the results of the session have been published in “People in Defence: Beyond 2000” which has been widely distributed within the department.

From Planning to Execution

In 2001 a Long Term Capability Plan for HR (LTCP-HR) became the mechanism for improving the role of HR within the Defence Planning process. LTCP-HR is a rigorously developed proposal for the funding of HR initiatives and programs that resulted directly from the September 2000 strategic planning session. The LTCP-HR has played a major role in ensuring that programs which value people as more than “human resources” will be supported through to fruition.

What Next?

The development of “People in Defence: Beyond 2000” has provided a mid-term HR strategy for the CF. With the development and implementation of the LTCP-HR, the mechanism for gaining HR’s seat at the planning table has been established. The next step will be the development of a HR strategy for 2020.

The Directorate of Strategic Human Resources Coordination (DSHRC) continually monitors the HR environment, nationally and internationally, to identify trends and potential impacts for the Defence Team on a range of different factors. This information is used to determine implications for HR management in the Department of National Defence (DND) and will also be used to prepare HR strategy to guide the development of HR management doctrine, policy and process out to the year 2020 (HR2020). Once HR 2020 has been completed the direction charted in Beyond 2000 will be reviewed and changes will be incorporated to ensure strategic alignment between the mid- and long-term.