

Revision of the Canadian Forces Attrition Information Questionnaire

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Introduction

The Canadian Forces Attrition Information Questionnaire (CFAIQ) was developed in 1992 to determine why CF personnel were leaving the military. It was used to assess the necessity of modifying, revising or developing human resources policies to reduce attrition. The instrument and methodology are being revised. The purpose of this paper is to outline the revision process. It will be done by briefly describing the instrument and examining the rationale for changing it. This will be followed by a discussion of the revision process and conclude with future plans for the instrument.

Canadian Forces Attrition Information Questionnaire (CFAIQ)

The survey consisted of six sections, the first of which asked personnel to identify the importance 46 statements in their decisions to leave the military. The reasons included such things as: "My hours of work are too long," "I am spending too much time away from home," and "I am under too much stress." The second section asked participated to compare the CF with civilian life on 30 work related factors of such things as time spent at home, desired work challenge, and job security. The third section asked people indicate their satisfaction with 20 work factors such as hours of work, postings, and pay. The fourth section asked questions that determined how much preparation had been done to start a civilian career. This was followed by a demographic section. The last section offered the participants the opportunity write additional comments about other reasons why they left as well as provide recommendations about what could have been done to prevent people from leaving. The survey was offered to members as they were leaving the Canadian Forces.

Data was gathered using this survey between 1992 and 2001. In 2001, an interim instrument was put in place until a proper revision could take place. In the 1992-2001 time period, sampling problems and relevancy issues have arisen that require a rethinking of the method and theoretical foundations of the instrument.

There was a large downsizing of the CF and a large number of those people who left filled out the questionnaire. While they were leaving voluntarily, they were being offered incentives to leave. This would have influenced the reasons they stated. This group also represented the largest percentage of personnel who filled out the questionnaire between 1992 and 1996. After the downsizing occurred, the number of people who filled out the questionnaire decreased dramatically, and remained low each subsequent year until 2000. This is illustrated in Table 1. These reasons indicate that the information gathered is not representative of the typical CF member who left in the ten-year period in which data collected. While it describes why the large group left, it cannot accurately describe why people left who did not receive incentives.

The relevancy issues arose from the numerous changes that occurred in the CF since the introduction of the survey in 1992. Besides the reduction of the strength of the military, there was an increase in the number of operations in which the Canadian military participated. Thus, military personnel participated in more operations during the later part of the 1990s and individuals were rotated more often. In addition, there was abundant evidence that the demographics of the target applicant population had changed sufficiently (Adams, 1998) that a reanalysis was required. In other words, these changes in the organizational tempo and in the general public made it very difficult to demonstrate that the reasons people might list now would be the same as those people listed 10 years ago.

Table 1
Canadian Forces Attrition Information Questionnaire (CFAIQ)
Respondent Participation from 1992-1999

Year	Total Releases*	Voluntary Releases** (including vol FRP)	CFAIQ Respondents *** (% of voluntary releases)
1992	6140	3923	1,270 (32.4)
1993	5636	3593	1,733 (48.2)
1994	5744	3953	1,817 (46.0)
1995	7342	5570	1,916 (34.4)
1996	7631	6017	1,505 (25.0)
1997	5078	4036	809 (20.0)
1998	5253	2991	497 (16.6)
1999	4173	3020	419 (13.9)
2000	3972	2641	721 (27.3)
2001	3890	2411	707 (29.3)

* DHRIM Database, 2001

** DHRIM & DSHRC Databases (2001)

*** CFAIQ Database: N = 9966, missing data = 528

The previous model used to develop the questionnaire was based partly on Steers and Mowday (1987). However, a psychometric analysis conducted by Catano and Kelloway (2001) determined that the instrument had a very poor factor structure and described the item composition as a “Christmas tree” approach. The poor factor structure was reinforced in another analysis conducted by Lucas (2002). Neither analysis could account for more than 40 % of the variance in the items, indicating that the instrument was not effective in identifying many of the reasons for leaving. The factors that were identified did not fall out under the Steers and Mowday. Moreover, the previous methodology supposed that the reasons listed as people are leaving the military are the real reasons they are leaving. A review of the literature was needed to determine if these theoretical models and processes were valid.

Research Plan

Literature Review

Mowaday and Steers (1987) proposed a model of turnover that involved an indirect relationship between job satisfaction, thinking of quitting, cost of quitting, evaluation of expected utility of search, intention to search for alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, a comparison of the alternatives vs. the present job and a final evaluation of quitting. The CFAIQ used many facets of this model such as asking people to compare their current job with expectations of civilian employment as well as assessing the extent to which they had searched for alternative civilian employment. Many of the models of attrition focus more attention on decision making processes than on organizational processes that can be modified (Azjen and Fishbein, 1980; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand and Meglino, 1979; Lee, Holtom, McDaniel, and Hill, 1999).

Griffeth and Hom (2001) developed a model of turnover that looked at dimensions of job satisfaction such as role stress, job complexity, group cohesion, compensation, leader-member relationships and met expectations. It also looked at measures of organizational commitment such as procedural justice, attraction of internal roles, job security, job investments, extra-organizational conflicts, conditions of job entry, and commitment propensity. These factors combine with labour market conditions and assessing job-seeking costs and benefits to predict who is going to quit. This model was selected because it demonstrated reliability and validity. Moreover, the conditions under job satisfaction and organizational commitment were similar to the factors that had appeared in the in the old version of the CFAIQ.

In addition, this model emphasized a change in the philosophy of which military personnel would be selected to complete the questionnaire. The Hom and Griffeth model specifies that participants should be current serving members of the organization. The survey asks them to identify the likelihood they intend to leave the organization in the next year. It is felt that it is important to talk to personnel at the time they are deciding to leave instead of talking to those who have already decided to leave and have gone through the decision making process. Those who indicate they would leave would be identified as leavers and the others as stayers. Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000) have illustrated that the best predictor of leaving a job is the stated intention to leave a job.

Methodology Selected

The Griffeth and Hom model is the most appropriate theoretical model to describe attrition of CF personnel. Thus, it was selected as the model to use to revise the attrition questionnaire. At the same time, an applied approach that incorporated CF personnel issues regarding attrition had to be implemented so that actual member concerns were identified. In order to update the items on the survey to ensure that relevant reasons could be expressed, a series of focus groups were conducted with a cross section of Canadian Forces personnel. This would enable the development of survey items as well as assess the extent to which the themes in the survey were relevant to reasons personnel were listing today.

Focus Group Methodology

Personnel were invited to participate in the focus groups in a number of different ways. Advertising was established at some bases so that people could phone and sign up for them on a voluntary basis. In other cases, units were tasked to provide certain personnel. A cross-section of people across rank groupings, occupations, genders and linguistic background were asked to participate. Everyone who participated was told at the beginning of the session that participation in the focus group was voluntary. If they did not want to participate, they were free to leave. Of the 514 people who participated, only one person chose to leave before the end of the sessions.

Participants were asked to describe what was causing them to leave if they were thinking of leaving. If they were not actively thinking of leaving, they were asked to imagine that they were thinking of leaving and describe what would cause them to leave. From these questions, probes were given to clarify and elaborate issues. Forty-two sessions were conducted with personnel across Canada with representation from Army, Navy and Air Force elements of the CF. Gender and linguistic background were also well represented. The breakdown of participants is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Description of Focus Group Participants (N = 517)

Demographic Category	Numbers	Percentage
Gender		
Male	365	71
Female	152	29
Linguistic Background		
English	363	70
French	154	30
Rank Groupings		
Officer	154	30
NCMS	363	70
Element		
Air	241	47
Army	171	33
Navy	105	20

Generation/Revision of Items

The revision of survey items involved accepting recommendations from previous research as well as performing item analyses. Lucas (2002) suggested items for deletion from the previous CFAIQ. In addition to her suggestions, a decision was made to reduce the size of the instrument even further. An analysis of the responses to the interim version of the questionnaire was completed. This involved identifying items that were not selected as important reasons for leaving by a majority of the participants. This was done for both practical and theoretical purposes. The Canadian Forces wants to know current reasons people are leaving

and it is important to be able to situate the reasons within a theoretical framework to ensure that the CF is implementing a useful model. Thus, items that were not selected by a minimum of 25% of participants as being important reasons why they were leaving were considered for exclusion. This is a variation of the practice (Anastasi, 1988) that is used primarily for self report tests and cognitive ability tests. Based upon this analysis, items such as: 1) “I was attracted to a civilian job with more fringe benefits”, and 2) “I do not want to work in a mixed gender unit” were removed from the present draft form.

The survey was reduced from 122 items down to 35. This was done to reduce potential “survey fatigue” amongst CF personnel as well as more specifically examine particular factors that have been shown to predict turnover. Selecting survey items was a process of making sure that relevant issues had come up in focus groups were included and ensuring that they represented factors associated with the Griffeth and Hom model.

Thematic Analysis

After the sessions were written up, they were given an initial analysis using NVivo qualitative software to develop themes. These themes became prominent by the number of focus groups in which the issue was discussed. Since the purpose was only to develop themes to generate survey items, an extensive qualitative analysis was not completed.

A number of themes arose from the sessions. They included : 1) training, 2) leadership, 3) family, 4) postings/moves, 5) resources, 6) career management, 7) QOL, 8) trust, 9) recruiting, 10) pay/benefits. Since these themes were meant to be used to develop questions, they were only analyzed in sufficient detail to gain context within the theme.

A two-day theme development and integration session was held to situate the focus group themes with the components of the Hom and Griffeth model. Once the themes were selected, 2-3 items were used from the old survey or were developed for each theme. This produced an appropriate balance between a proper factor structure and brevity. These themes were expressed as conditions of work, career management, training, unit level leadership, perceived organizational support, resources, family, and postings.

Future Plans

Once the questionnaire is complete, it will be incorporated into the next version of the Quality of Life (QOL) Survey that is administered to Canadian Forces personnel. Needless duplication of similar questions can be avoided if these questions are imbedded in the QOL survey. It will be analyzed with special emphasis on examining any differences between those who say they are leaving and those who say they are not in their reasons. One of the hurdles encountered in the focus groups was a tendency of having people list numerous reasons as career dissatisfiers. Thus, we had a good sense of the issues that bothered them but were less sure of what issues would cause people to leave. It is expected that we will be able to sift out a number of these by focusing on the reasons listed by those who intend on leaving the military. This will give us a more accurate picture of the reasons people would be thinking of leaving.

In summary, the Canadian Forces is maintaining its interest in monitoring attrition and the reasons that people are deciding to leave. This will result in administering an intentions to leave survey to personnel to more effectively understand reasons for leaving by assessing them as they are being formed instead of at the time they are leaving the organization. Moreover, having updated the items, the Canadian Forces is more comfortable that they will represent the actual reasons people are leaving the military.

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