

THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

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For officers, the RCA is the unhealthiest Regular Force trade within the combat arms at 83 per cent strength.¹ The RCA is short 60 positions at the Lt/Capt level and 31 positions at the Maj level. The NCM side of the house mirrors this shortage, and it is especially felt at the MBdr-WO level. All ranks, in all positions, have a role to play in the fight. However, these positions are the workhorses of the RCA- especially within the field force. These shortages become amplified based on the critical functions they fill in terms of remits owed to brigades, divisions and ultimately the CA. Between April 2021 and February 2022, 30 trained officers, across all ranks, released from the CA.

With the aforementioned shortages in mind, it makes sense when the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) says, 'there is an urgent need to attract more CAF personnel amid a clear and present danger to the rules based international order.'² This reflects the sentiments of the CAF writ large on fixing the lack of soldiers across all ranks and all branches of service. However, the recruitment policies miss the mark if they are not complimented by formal retention policies and consider the impact training has to retention as well. Well-constructed attraction, recruitment, and training polices, executed in concert, are essential to augmenting CAF personnel numbers. This paper will provide an analysis of the concepts of retaining, attracting, and training soldiers with respect to providing solutions to personnel shortages. Further, the analysis will incorporate the policies of the CAF as a whole, as the fate of the RCA is in many ways beholden to the direction taken by the CAF.

Retain

The CAF has a fundamental flaw when it comes to their approach of the health of the force. There are no formal programs or policies in place to retain the skilled soldiers currently within the CAF. The CAF currently offers signing bonuses to 7 trades.³ All these trades are broadly in the medical field, but the fact the signing bonuses are seen to work is a good indicator that people are motivated by money. Further, through the Regular Officer Training Program (ROTP) new soldiers can receive an education covered by the CAF. Statistics Canada reports an average, annual, undergraduate tuition cost of \$6,693. Or \$26,772 for an undergraduate degree completed in four years. This cost does not include room and board whilst studying the degree. As such, the ROTP would likely be a very attractive enticement that is paid back in so many years of service. Conversely, if you serve in the CAF for six years you can receive up to \$43,885.98 and up to \$86,671.95 for twelve years of service through the Veterans Canada Education and Training Benefit. This is a phenomenal program that ensures soldiers who devote significant portions of their life to serving Canada are well-supported in their transition back to civilian life. The flaw is the CAF is willing to invest in personnel to join the CAF and to leave the CAF, but not those

¹ The ratio of trained effective strength to established positions.

² Turnbull, Sarah. CTV News.

³ Canadian Armed Forces Careers.

who desire to stay in the CAF. Any organization that does not invest in personnel who want to stay in is going to have retention issues.⁴

According to an internal DND document, *HR 2020 Internal Assessment*: "The cost to train an officer to LCol has recently been calculated at over \$1,000,000 for the Infantry, Aerospace Control, Combat Engineers, and Artillery MOC's.⁵ This number does not include the cost of paid education through the ROTP. Studies of civilian business 'have shown that it costs between 50 and 60 per cent of an employee's annual salary to complete the process of finding and hiring a replacement. This is in addition to the costs to train and education them."⁶ In this light, efforts focused on retention, even if they are purely monetary, could actually save the CAF money. Further, retention policies focus on the immense value experience has to the overall health of the CAF. Consider the Assistant Instructor-in-Gunnery Course currently being run at the RCAS. The average WO on the course has 15 years of service in the CAF. And they all possess a wide range of talents, courses, and operational experience. These factors are not only immensely valuable to teaching the next generation of artillery soldiers, but vital to the long term health of the RCA. Efforts that do not seek to retain these types of individuals not only, as previously stated, are detrimental to the CAF in terms of experience and money, it will take, on average, 15 years to replace the loss of any of those WOs. Further, the stored knowledge from their collective experiences will be lost. Comparatively, the US Army and the UK Armed Forces both have used monetary incentives, depending on the length of service extension, to promote retention. In the US Army 'the program retained 96.7 per cent of the officers the program targeted. While in the UK, in 2010, the armed forces reported the number of personnel leaving the force had fallen to its lowest in five years.⁷ The RCAF has also used financial incentives through DAOD 5049-1, Obligatory Service. The Pilot Terminable Allowance was extended to eligible pilots approaching the end of their contract who would then continue to serve for a specified period of time. This 'was the only time a retention bonus has been offered in the CAF. In total, 567 (65 per cent) of the 867 eligible pilots accepted the allowance.⁸ However, eligibility issues and the ability to equitably apply the policy, Direct Entry Officers not eligible, 'potentially explain why such a plan has not been used in the last 17 years.⁹

Regular Force members releasing from the CAF conducted exit surveys between 2013- 2017. Table 1¹⁰ below outlines the primary reasons for release and financial compensation was the tenth most cited factor.

⁴ A counterpoint could be the existence of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). However, the current status is that new applicants are advised that they have not been Endorsed or Funded since 08 May 2019.

⁵ Graham, Maj S., 45.

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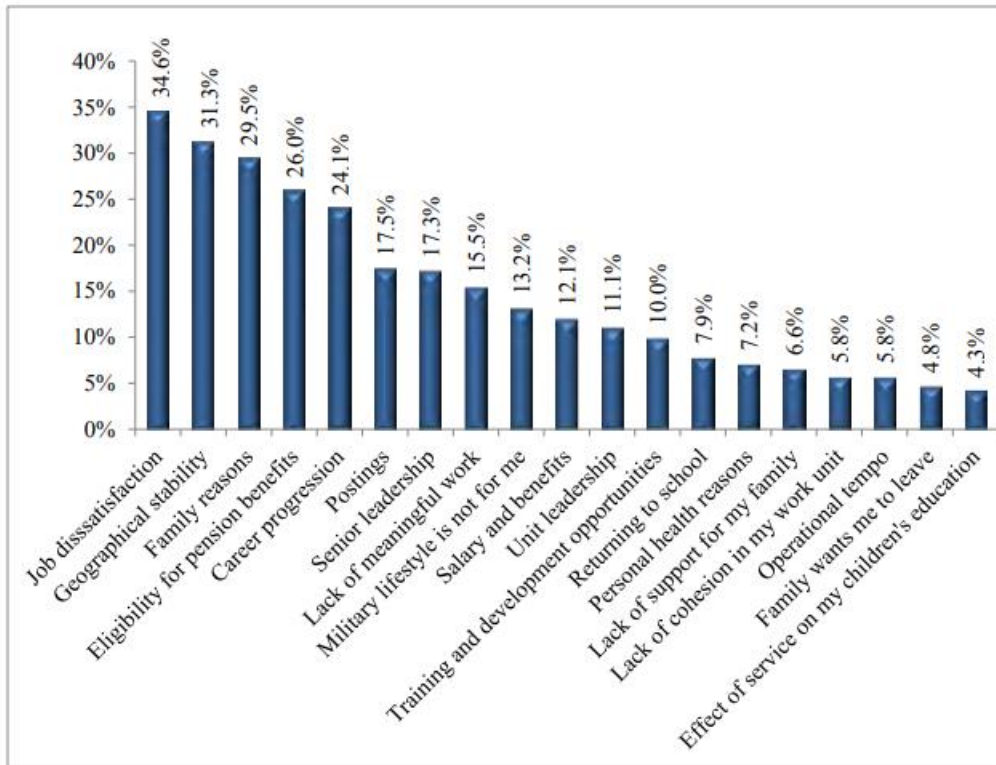
⁷ Graham, Maj S., 44.

⁸ Turenne, LCol D.K., 70.

⁹ Carrière, LCdr P.J.J., 5.

¹⁰ El-Beltagy, Maj V., 12.

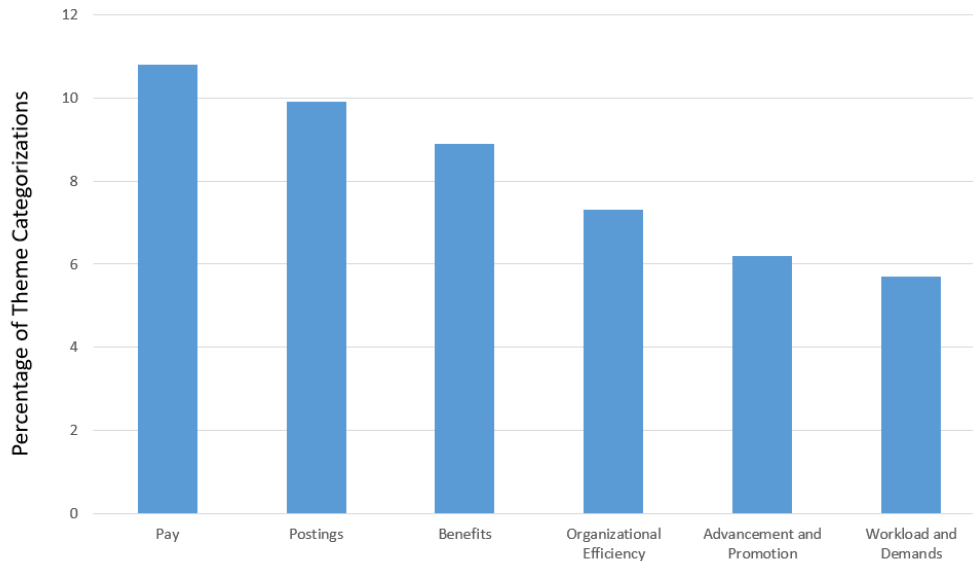
Table 1



Personnel were then asked what the CAF could do to encourage them to continue serving in the CAF. Table 2¹¹ below indicates pay as the top factor motivation continued service in the CAF. It is not a stretch that financial retention policies would help to offset personnel's job dissatisfaction, geographic stability, and family circumstances that ultimately lead to a soldier releasing.

¹¹ El-Beltagy, Maj V., 13.

Table 2



Current CAF policies reflect that people are motivated, in part, by financial incentives. However, the CAF prioritizes financial incentives, at this time, for personnel who are entering and exiting the service. The glaring fact becomes that the CAF, absurdly, does not offer financial incentives for personnel to stay in the CAF.

Attract

'If you want an elite force, selection is critical.' -Gen (Ret'd) J.N. Mattis

Gen (Ret'd) Mattis served two tours on recruiting duty throughout his career in the United States Marine Corps (USMC). He highlights the USMC philosophy of recruiting for attitude and train for skills. Mattis says, 'an attitude is a weapon system. And as such we searched for intangible character traits: quest for adventure, desire to serve with the elite, and the intention to be in top physical condition.'¹² In light of lagging recruitment, the Chief Military Personnel Department has stated, 'professional skills and competence are not defined by the length or the colour of your hair. So this will be the first visual display of our culture and honestly a very clear signal that the CAF is evolving into a more inclusive organization.' Obviously hair colour has no causation to how good of a soldier you are. These sorts of recruitment concepts focus on attributes that have no connection to a potential soldiers' attitude and character. Two traits that should be sought out and selected for.

¹² Mattis, Gen (Ret'd) J., 15.

The USMC are the masters of recruiting new personnel to join their ranks. For the past '36 years, the USMC has discharged roughly 75 per cent of first-term Marines each year and then recruited about 36,000 new marines to replace them.¹³ Part of the problem was that the USMC is so good at recruiting that they've created a system that places a premium on recruitment over retention. Further, the USMC has realized that this policy does not use resources efficiently and does not reflect newer science 'that shows physical and mental advantages come with a slightly older force. Such advantages would play a key role in a future war against China, which will see Marines asked to do things they have never done before.'¹⁴ Gen David H. Berger, USMC Commandant, says they are in the 'market for talent. So the Marine we have trained for four to ten years, we need to work hard to keep. And if the reason that they're leaving is they can't see past either, 'I can have a military career, or I can have a family,' we have to pull out the stop to try to find ways where we can keep them.'¹⁵ With personnel being at the heart of everything the CAF does, it is not surprising 'the CAF should invest so much in Recruiting and Retention (R2) initiatives. What is surprising is the fact initiatives are heavily focused on the recruiting aspect, with very little in the way of specific retention programs.'¹⁶ Further, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* discusses the CAF recruiting system as 'too slow to compete in Canada's highly competitive labour market and does not effectively communicate the exciting and fulfilling employment opportunities offered by military service.'¹⁷ Prioritizing recruitment over retention does not coincide with the CAF's statement that personnel are its most valuable resource. The CAF has also admitted its recruitment process is not effective in the Canadian job market. And, seeing as the CAF operates in the same contemporary operating environment as the USMC, prioritizing new recruits over retaining experienced personnel may not prepare the CAF for the future operations.

Currently, the Canadian Army (CA) has implemented a plan to essentially pause all training beyond DP 1, to mass train the large numbers of new recruits who upon being trained will solve the issue with personnel shortages. In 2010, for their Master of Defence Studies research project, now BG Steven Graham's thesis noted, 'that in 2010, the CF officer ranks were short 15 per cent majors, and 20 per cent captains.'¹⁸ Clearly officer shortages is not a new issue and the problem in 2010 is still being realized today in 2022. The thesis goes on to offer a stark warning that is relatable to the current CAF plan to train large numbers of personnel to fix shortages in the CA. As BG Graham related, 'dramatic increases in the number of recruits going through the training system are difficult to manage. This problem was highlighted by the Auditor General who noted that the increases were causing bottlenecks and stretching the capacity of the CF schools.'¹⁹ Case in point, the Royal Canadian Armour Corp School graduated 245 students in 2000/2001. In 2008/2009, the number was 1,314. 'This resulted in a dramatic increase in the requirement for augmentee staff to help run the courses. When augmentees are not available due to operational tempo elsewhere, the school is forced to double task its own people, resulting in increased attrition due to burnout and reluctance among personnel at other units to accept postings to the

¹³ Schogol, Jeff. Task & Purpose.

¹⁴ Athey, Philip. Marine Corps Times.

¹⁵ Lamothe, Dan. Washington Post.

¹⁶ Carrière, LCdr P.J.J., 1.

¹⁷ Strong, Secure, Engaged. 2017.

¹⁸ Graham, Maj S., 11.

¹⁹ Graham, Maj S., 11.

school.²⁰ Similarly, the RCAS has had a historic problem of instructor burnout, not to mention fighting to create a reputation that appeals to personnel, in the field force, to come to the school as future instructors.

For all the aforementioned reasons, primary focus on recruiting and training new personnel to augment personnel shortages not only can be shown to be ineffective, it displays a fundamental lack of prudence in terms of the immense value experienced personnel have to an army.

Train

The best way to have innovative and valuable training is to let the army be the army. This does mean that more people should be jumping out of planes, conducting mountain and urban ops, airmobile ops, and overall spending more time in the CAF training areas.²¹ This does come with an added expense. Merely looking at the cost of running more of these courses and not factoring in the cost of losing trained personnel in terms of money, development time, and the lost skills and experience is folly. The CA's Advancing with Purpose supports the aforementioned points by stating, 'the credibility of an army as a fighting force can only be demonstrated and maintained on operations. However, it must be underpinned by a modern and robust training system. Competence in field craft and manoeuvre must be regularly demonstrated in a field environment.'²² That is, personnel on various IT courses beyond standard career courses and confirming those skills regularly in the field. All to be executed within the arcs of the CAF's current expeditionary operations.

Training, roughly speaking, is a function of money, equipment, and time. Col Dean Milner, past 2 CMBG Comd lamented that, 'personnel shortages in his headquarters caused by a deployment to Afghanistan forced him and his staff to work longer to ensure pre-deployment training was properly conducted and reduced his ability to carry out any training beyond the mandated minimum.'²³ Col Milner's reality is relatable to the contemporary situation being experienced by the RCA field force. Personnel shortages, and the extensive demands from DOMOPS, expeditionary ops, and exported IT severely restricts the ability for collective training beyond the bare minimum standard. Factor in officer and NCM shortages, and conducting meaningful training ends up being a significant challenge. Consequently, the ability to conduct innovative and exciting training is limited. To conduct any training, personnel need to be equipped with the tools and resources to be successful. And specifically in this case that is time. Time is always going to come at a premium with the tasks that continue to be put on an organization that has key personnel shortages. A potential solution is ensuring that training is facilitated by removing barriers to training, so as to be able to seize on moments when time to train is afforded. LCol D.C. Nauss, while at the Canadian Forces College, wrote a paper about adventure training's potential to develop future army leaders. He wrote about the immense value appropriately planned adventure training can have to develop said leaders. LCol Nauss highlighted systemic barriers to adventure training: units are solely responsible for planning adventure training with

²⁰ Graham, Maj S., 12.

²¹ Anticipated rebuttal to train to need. Consider urban ops course. The RCAS has been training urban gun deployments for several years. Inherently, if you deploy in an urban area, the battery needs to know how to defend itself in an urban area, clear buildings, etc. It would be damning to interrupt essential fire support due to a lack of TTPs when it comes to fighting in an urban environment.

²² Advancing with Purpose, 2021.

²³ Graham, Maj S., 6.

limited help from higher headquarters, geographic limitations in terms of obtaining the appropriate commander's approval, and that 'within the CAF there are no permanent programmes, infrastructure, or equipment available for personnel to use.'²⁴ Further, reviewing 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade's policy on Adventure Training indicates training within 3rd Canadian Division (3 Cdn Div) Commander's AO requires submissions at D-100, and training outside 3 Cdn Div Comd's AO requiring D-200 for submission. D-100 and D-200 are an unreasonable planning horizon given operational tempo. Further, adventure training is typically done at the lowest level, and no low level commander has a reasonable ability to forecast out 100 or 200 days. All training bases have templated ranges for specific training. This is primarily done to facilitate training and speed approval between the requestor and range control. Such a concept could be applied to adventure training to speed approval times. And the concept of facilitating training needs to be at all levels. In *Advancing with Purpose*, the CA says it must 'shed traditional thinking.'²⁵ Perhaps historical approaches to training requests, do not fit the contemporary environment personnel face when endeavoring to conduct training.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to tackle the challenges the RCA faces in terms of attraction, retention, and training. In so doing, it was shown, where all three aspects have links to each other and where poor policy choices in any of those domains can end up negatively impacting in the other. As well, the situation was examined at the CAF level, as the RCA is beholden to the direction the CAF chooses to tackle attraction, retention and training issues. Fundamentally, the CAF has serious issues with its approach to retention. While attraction is a part of the solving the personnel shortage issue, the CAF appears to be seeking to solve personnel shortages primarily through recruitment. This paper demonstrated that attraction without formal retention policies in place is not effective. Finally, training has a significant role to play in terms of retention and attraction. In light of current constraints, the CAF needs to aggressively pursue concepts that facilitate training. Retention, attraction and training policies effectively executed in concert will form a strong foundation for soldiers feeling valued. Soldiers who feel valued are highly likely to stay in the CAF.

²⁴ Nauss, LCol D.C., 47.

²⁵ *Advancing with Purpose*, 2021.

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