



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE  
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

# **CAF Reconstitution and Culture Change: Summary of Findings and Policy Recommendations**

by Charlotte Duval-Lantoine  
February 2024

# SERIES REPORT

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*Over the course of the Spring and Summer of 2023, the Canadian Global Affairs Institute organized a series of webinars and papers to examine the path forward for culture change and reconstitution in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Guests included the three service chiefs, Chief Professional Conduct and Culture, the DND/CAF Ombudsman, as well academics and emerging scholars from across Canada and the United States.*

*The series is available here: [https://www.cgai.ca/2023\\_culture\\_change\\_series](https://www.cgai.ca/2023_culture_change_series)*

*This document is a summary of the findings and recommendations that came out of these conversations and publications.*



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## **Be deliberate with the values you espouse, examine the values you embody**

A central theme of the “culture” aspects of the conversations revolved around values. When addressing culture, understanding the concepts of espoused values (i.e., the values the organization claims to have) and values-in-use (i.e., the values reflected in the organization’s structures and the behaviour of its members). It is quite common to see values-in-use that do not fully align with the espoused values. Therefore, it is critical for organizations, when working on issuing value statements (e.g., *Trusted to Serve*), to examine the potential effect of such documents once it is socialized among members and confronted with the culture on the ground. This applies not only to the concept of the “warrior ethos” or “fighting spirit,” but also to values such as loyalty (e.g., how a whistleblower is seen in the ethos and doctrine might be that of a courageous and loyal member; but in actuality they might be perceived as betraying the institution and/ or their unit).

Thankfully, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have the right tool to examine those potential unintended consequences: Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+). The role of GBA+ is not just to reflect on the impact of some policies on women; rather, it should serve to identify how initiatives, value statements, policies, directives, and regulations may affect people on the ground. For the military, this includes a large number of subcategories, e.g., officers v. non-commissioned members (and ranks more specifically); occupation; service and environment (such as the base where they are located); in addition to their more general demographic markers such as gender, race, age, socio-economic background, and sexual orientation. The [consultations](#) conducted by Chief Professional Conduct and Culture found some interesting elements concerning how certain values get translated on the ground.

Such research should continue and need to go further into identifying the structures that lead to a warped expression of values, and how to correct them, which an effective oversight body could help do.

## **It’s all about the group**

Conversations with the Commanders of the Army and the Navy highlighted the role of small group identity and dynamics in not only shaping culture, but also driving retention. The role of senior non-commissioned members, in particular, was highlighted. As the leaders whose responsibility it is to “lead people,” non-commissioned members – particularly sergeants, warrant officers, and petty officers – are at the forefront of culture and identify issues that can contribute to attrition. The Commander of the Navy suggested going back to the 1949 [Mainguy](#) report and find a 21<sup>st</sup>-century implementation of the divisional system, one that empowers the lowest levels to solve problems, identify and mitigate risk factors that can lead to a member leaving the Navy.



This leads to the question of empowering not only members of the CAF that operate at the tactical level, but also members from historically excluded groups. Here, two – possibly interconnected – approaches came up: effective professional military education and mentorship. Dr. Vanessa Brown, Walter Callaghan, Marshall Gerbrandt, Dr. Nancy Taber, and Dr. Randy Wakelam offered that a professional military education can go a long way to help service members reflect on culture and examine how their own behaviours shape it. Dr. Sandra Biskupski-Mujanovic, on the other hand, offers that formal approaches to mentorship, especially for women and other underrepresented groups in the military, can help advance their careers and drive retention. Additionally, Lieutenant-General Jocelyn Paul suggested that leveraging the mentorship of junior officers by senior non-commissioned members has been and continues to be a useful source of experiential learning, which can free personnel time and help cope with personnel shortages.

But how can senior leadership ensure this translates into the culture change the CAF wants to achieve? How can senior leadership obtain the buy-in at the middle and lower levels? Examining the reward system and aligning it with the CAF's objectives should be the next path forward, as argued by Dr. Allan English and Charlotte Duval-Lantoine.

## **Going back to basics**

The conversations with the service chiefs, CPCC, and the Ombudsman's office have revealed the complexity of the personnel management system. Personnel-related responsibilities are across the services, Chief Military Personnel, and the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff. Additionally, central agencies such as Treasury Board issue policies that structure certain benefits and resources granted to service members (e.g., housing, relocation), and the provinces are responsible for health care, which is a central issue for CAF members who relocate to different parts of the country regularly.

DND/CAF Ombudsman suggested that certain personnel responsibilities that sit within Treasury Board should go back to the CAF or the Department – especially when it comes to ensuring CAF members receive the full set of benefits their families and them need. Charlotte Duval-Lantoine argued that unifying authorities and clarifying responsibilities and accountability mechanisms can go a long way to move culture change forward. The complexity, however, is to determine what office is best suited to take on specific roles, and how to manage potential conflicts between authorities. Furthermore, such a restructuring would be a herculean work that the CAF is too under-resourced to pursue.

## **Oversight and monitoring**

The role of the Ombudsman's Office underlines the importance of oversight bodies for the CAF. The Ombudsman's Office, Assistant Deputy Minister (Review Services), the Office of the Auditor General, as well as the External Monitor for the implementation of the Arbour Report all have



dedicated and knowledgeable staff whose responsibility is to conduct audits and investigations into the CAF's functioning (the Auditor General less so, due to their mandate that cover the entirety of the Government of Canada). They help bring critical issues to the senior leadership of the military and can effectively escalate problems for swifter resolution.

As it stands, however, for culture change and CAF reconstitution, the oversight mechanisms in place are limited. The External Monitor's mandate only focuses on the implementation of the 2022 Arbour recommendations, the Ombudsman's Office investigates individual and systemic cases, but the latter appear to be driven by the issues that are brought most frequently and the personality of the Ombudsman in Office. Assistant Deputy Minister (Review Services) also has a client-based model, which means that the topic of their audit is determined by leadership. At this stage, in February 2024, CPCC has yet to build the necessary oversight structure for monitoring its progress on culture change, and it is unknown if such structure exists for the implementation of the CAF Reconstitution Directive.

CPCC had to build itself from the ground since 2021, and with the pace of the machinery of government, it is no surprise that oversight has yet to be established. However, using the existing structures that are in place both internally and externally of the chain of command would allow for a faster creation of such systems. Leveraging ADM (RS), the Ombudsman's Office, or even the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (i.e., expand their mandate to include continuous oversight of culture and reconstitution and make their findings public) would be an easier feat, as they have the basic resources and knowledge base that are required to do such work. Increased budget would be necessary, evidently, but it would limit the time needed to put the right mechanisms in place, although policy change will be required.

## ► About the Author

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**Charlotte Duval-Lantoine** is the Ottawa Operations Manager and a Fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, as well as Triple Helix's Executive Director and Gender Advisor. She is the author of [\*\*The Ones We Let Down: Toxic Leadership Culture and Gender Integration in the Canadian Forces, 1989-1999\*\*](#) (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022). This book, which looks into the toxic culture of leadership in the Canadian Armed Forces during the 1990s and its impact on gender integration, was named among *The Hill Times*' Best Books of 2022. Her research interests include questions of military leadership, culture change, and personnel policy, topics on which she regularly comments in the media. For this work, Charlotte was recognized as a 2022 Women in Defence and Security Emerging Leader. She regularly participates in consultation organized by the Department of National Defence and has given talks to West Point and RMC cadets, to the National Strategic Program at the Canadian Forces College, and to the Australian War College. She is currently working on projects on civilian-military relations, the Somalia Affair, and organizational change in the Canadian military.

Prior to working at CGAI, Charlotte served as the Assistant to the Executive Director of Women In International Security-Canada and has worked as a research assistant and translator on projects about gender mainstreaming and integration in NATO Armed Forces and on the gendered dimension of veteran transition at Queen's University Center for International and Defence Policy (CIDP).

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