

**“Principles and practice: Institutional standards;  
environmental adaptations; civil expectation and military  
task; monitoring and impact of integration.”**

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**ABSTRACT**

Central to the discussion will be the question of how the military must define and maintain the essential principles of its activity while it shifts the paradigm of human resource management issues and relationships that it has evolved over the past few decades. Matters of resource management (fiscal and human), policy development, articulation and implementation, internal and external communications and institutional obligation will be touched upon.

This presentation will draw together issues relating to the role of the military in Canada, public understanding of the internal and external communications and/or analysis on the institution. Questions of how the military can ensure that the potential and the limitations of change are fairly understood and accurately reflected through process, leadership and practice, of the need for new approaches to research, analysis and application of knowledge, will be engaged. Issues here will range from the provision of appropriate resources to support ongoing critical monitoring and research in times of fiscal constraint and downsizing, through the updating of criteria for reward or punishment and the redefinition of necessary skills and abilities for leaders, to developing a posture receptive to internal procedures that adhere to basic standards of individual rights and protections without compromising the ability to meet military objectives. They will also include an examination of the difficulties and benefits of external observation, monitoring and research in meeting the demands of public accountability.

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**Speaking Notes for a Presentation to the NATO PANEL 8 WORKSHOP - OPTIMISING THE PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES OF NATO****Session 3: Policy, Management and Social Issues**

*"Principles and Practice: institutional standards; environmental adaptations; civil expectation and military task; monitoring the impact of integration."*

**Dr. Katy Bindon (Canada)**

In this presentation, I would like to discuss some of the practical aspects of managing gender integration in the Canadian Forces from the perspective of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's requirement that integration occur in terms of both policy and practice.

***Institutional Standards***

There is a general concern that allowing women to enter combat occupations will result in a lowering of the institutional operational standards. In Canada's case, this has been further compounded by a great deal of confusion and fear about quotas and affirmative action that might be implemented. This has never made much sense from my perspective, since the Tribunal specifically stated that they did not want the CF to adopt quotas. The point was unequivocally stated: the CF is a volunteer institution, and it would be impossible to fill quotas if women did not choose to volunteer.

That this is a double-edged sword is evident from the current conundrum that faces the Land Forces, where the paucity of women makes implementing change in any convincing manner extremely difficult. Nevertheless, for many years the question of establishing even notional targets that could be used as benchmarks during the transition period were obfuscated by concerns about whether a quota system was creeping in through the back door of the Tribunal decision. For the same reason, targeted recruitment strategies were not developed, and matters of selection standards and procedures were not given the kind of development and resource priority that would have supported the transition process more fully.

The advantage that lies in the Tribunal's clear rejection of quotas is that the CF is free to define its institutional standards in terms of its military task. That such definitions must be articulated from a new, gender inclusive perspective, and that their application and interpretation must be contemplated in terms that are free of inherent or systemic bias, either physical, psychological, social or cultural, means that old language and procedures cannot simply be translated to the new institution. Assumptions must be tested, methodologies must be reviewed from new angles, and education and training to new standards and understandings of workplace relationships are all aspects of this process. But the essential point is that in allowing a transition period, the HRT provided the CF with the opportunity to take control of the process, to review its practice and formulate new approaches consistent with its military task.

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Of course, one of the major complicating features of arriving at this new definition of institutional standards is that it requires a new emphasis on personnel issues. For gender integration goes far beyond the ability to lift, shoot, fly or navigate: it requires a new perspective on the men and women who must work together to meet the operational standard, and demands that matters of personnel policy be given a higher priority than was required in the all-male institution. In the Canadian case, the ultimate test of whether the CF has met the requirements of the HRT decision will, I believe, not be decided on the basis of scientific research or sociological surveys: it will come down to the critical review of individual complaints, in which the military will be held accountable for the ways in which they recruited, developed, trained, exposed and treated their members. This is neither easy nor without cost. But it is possible, and reflects in many ways some of the basic tenets of good leadership as it is traditionally defined in the military. Through shifting the paradigm and rethinking priorities for research, action and policy development, the CF will be able to hold on to the principles of its military task, and represent the reasons for its standards in an appropriate and convincing manner.

The other golden lining in this approach to the matter of institutional standards is that it suggests that the process of gender integration can actually come to an end, at a point where there are clearly stated, fully understood notions of requirements and tasks for all occupations within the CF. While it is true that issues of human resource management generally will probably never decrease in importance within the forces, it is entirely possible that if the CF does a thorough job of establishing standards appropriate to a fully integrated military, working together will become a matter of course rather than an endless experience.

One final note on this matter is that if the CF does not engage the process of establishing defensible institutional standards for the integrated service, someone else will do it. And those other agencies--whether political or non-governmental (the Human Rights Commission, for example) will apply a construct that is neither sensitive to nor reflective of the military task. And even if they are not on a similarly tight schedule, most NATO nations are grappling with gender integration and are experiencing, to some measure at least, similar public pressures.

### *Environmental Adaptations*

I raised this area for comment because it exemplifies one of the fundamental truths of the early stages of integration. Recognizing that many armed forces do not enjoy the kind of cross-environmental transferability of personnel that characterizes the CF, there is much to be learned through considering the impact of placing poorly prepared or selected women into the military workplace.

First impressions are, in this case, hard to counteract. The negative impact of a woman's failure during the early stages of training bears no relationship to comparable failures on the part of men. It impacts upon other women who are capable of doing the job, and contributes to the stress of the situation. The news of female failure, moreover, spreads throughout the service, potentially compromises the possibilities of success for years, and reinforces the cultural folklore which often underpins systemic bias.

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A similar impact is observed when very capable women are transferred to unfamiliar environments without proper preparation. Imagine, for instance, the stress of being posted to ship for an air force female supply tech. Ergonomics aside, maintaining stores on an air force base is a pretty linear task compared to storing a destroyer. And if no-one bothers to educate the woman transferred in to the "tricks of the trade", all of her practical knowledge needs to be reinvented, and the mistakes made can contribute to both an image of incompetence on the part of her peers and cynicism and hostility on the part of those she supervises. When this retraining is occurring within a workplace which is at best ambivalent, and at worst hostile to her presence, the demands on even the best of female professionals are clearly compounded.

The solution is pretty common sensical in all of these cases--provide appropriate training, make sure that both formal and informal learning are recognized as aspects of doing the job, and ensure that accommodations practice and communications lines recognize these needs.

### *Civil Expectation and Military Task*

When contemplating the integrated armed force, it is natural to wonder about the level of social tolerance that truly exists for the full employment of women in war. Again, I speak from the Canadian perspective, but I would be surprised if some of what I have to say is not applicable to many NATO nations in light of recent global changes and civil-military relations.

The truth is, the Canadian public is neither terribly well informed about nor critically interested in the military task period. As you will have noted, there is a tendency for our citizens to get upset if anyone dies, male or female, whether running on the track or in the line of duty. On the other hand, Canadians expect that our military will continue to play a role in peace keeping and peace making, will participate in limited conflicts in support of our allies, and will display without fault the attributes of professionalism and training that have become a part of our national sense of self--all of this, of course, with little reference to the impact of downsizing, shrinking budgets and aging equipment.

In the matter of gender integration, there is no doubt that the death of the first Canadian female military member will evoke rhetoric and passion. But it will not cancel out the larger demand that all Canadians, irrespective of sex, have access to full career development in their chosen field. In my musings about the Canadian reaction to the death of a female soldier, I suspect that the criticism will hone in on some flaw in the institution--poor preparation or training, inadequate equipment or poor leadership--more than it will focus on gender.

This suggests to me, at least, that it is imperative that the CF undertake to ensure that their institutional standards, policies and practices are internally generated in terms of the military task, and that matters of personnel selection, training, education and leadership must be given the highest priority. If this is not done, the institution will be vulnerable to criticisms that will strike at the root of the organization, and merely be compounded by the sex of the casualty.

While Canada has had no experience of "general war" that would serve to educate the public

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more fully, and while we have lost remarkably few members in our recent engagements in the Gulf, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, we have observed the experience of our neighbours to the south who have lost female members in action. As closely as the Canadian public is alert to events in the United States, it is fair to state that there was no major reaction against the employment of women in our armed forces as a result of these events. In fact, during our engagement in the Gulf War, there was a fair bit of public commentary about the benefits of parental bonding between fathers and children--an indicator, I think, of how the Canadian public contextualizes gender integration in the CF as well as the limits of their sense of the military task.

### *Monitoring the Impact of Integration*

As I have previously stated, my role for the past six years has been as an "external monitor" reporting to the Minister of National Defence on the process of gender integration in the Canadian Forces. This is a potentially uncomfortable and difficult situation for any institution, for none of us appreciate outsiders looking over our shoulders and asking uninformed or even stupid questions. The process can mislead those who govern or those who serve, and take a great deal of time and energy from those who are responsible for managing fundamental change.

The truth is, there is no room for "virtuous amateurs" who work to their own agendas in an external monitoring function. It is absolutely essential that there be a core of expertise and knowledge that is appropriate to the task. Further, the limitations of the mandate must be established, adhered to carefully and communicated to all who have access to the process.

The value of an external monitoring function is that it can bring to the process an objective perspective. In framing questions, identifying concerns and making suggestions, such a function can provoke new approaches, fill in gaps, and basically provide a platform for both reviewing and rehearsing for public scrutiny of institutional policy and practice. External monitoring can also ensure that connections are being made within the institution, thus supporting the development of integrated planning and problem-solving processes.

The monitoring that truly matters, however, is the internal monitoring function. If there is not an integrative function at the Headquarters level, through which information and communications regarding policy and practice are channelled, and where new approaches are reviewed, tested, standardized and adapted, valuable time is lost in the process of implementing integration.

The establishment of an internal, comprehensive monitoring function symbolizes a number of things. It reflects a top down investment in the process, and at the same time signals to all that there will be an expert military hand at the helm of the process. It also ensures that appropriate research and data gathering is undertaken forces wide, and provides a voice in support of shifting the paradigm and resourcing the personnel and research activities that are essential to effective process and public accountability.

I cannot stress the importance of effective and accurate communications throughout the process

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of integration, and an internal monitoring function can ensure that this occurs across the environments. To bring the discussion back to the topic of this meeting, I remind you that we have heard from many presenters about the difficulties members have in understanding gender difference in matters of strength and fitness testing and training. The argument that we are striving for equity, rather than equality, holds little currency for the infantry private who observes that the women are expected to do less than he is. This is not to suggest that the private is not smart enough to understand the concept--in my experience, most of them are--but rather to point out that no-one is bothering to explain what is actually going on here. And this is true of any number of issues that attend gender integration, ranging from its root causes to the parameters of its viability. Again, the solution is pretty common sensical--communications, education, training, and clear enunciation of standards that relate to the task rather than the sex of the member are not factors foreign to the notions of military leadership and process, although the context and manner in which they must be applied in the contemporary integrated institution clearly requires some investment in finding new ways to do old business.