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## NCM EDUCATION: EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE NOW

by Ralph Mercer

### Introduction

The requirements for Non-Commissioned Member (NCM) education are very different than they were ten years ago. The combination of technological advancements, changing global culture, ubiquitous social computing, and environmental and economic factors have combined to transform and complicate military operations. The support of Whole of Government (WoG) and multinational operations within this dynamic and ever-changing security environment is now commonplace. NCMs, as a result, must be innovative, mentally agile, and capable of multi-layered critical thinking.<sup>1</sup>

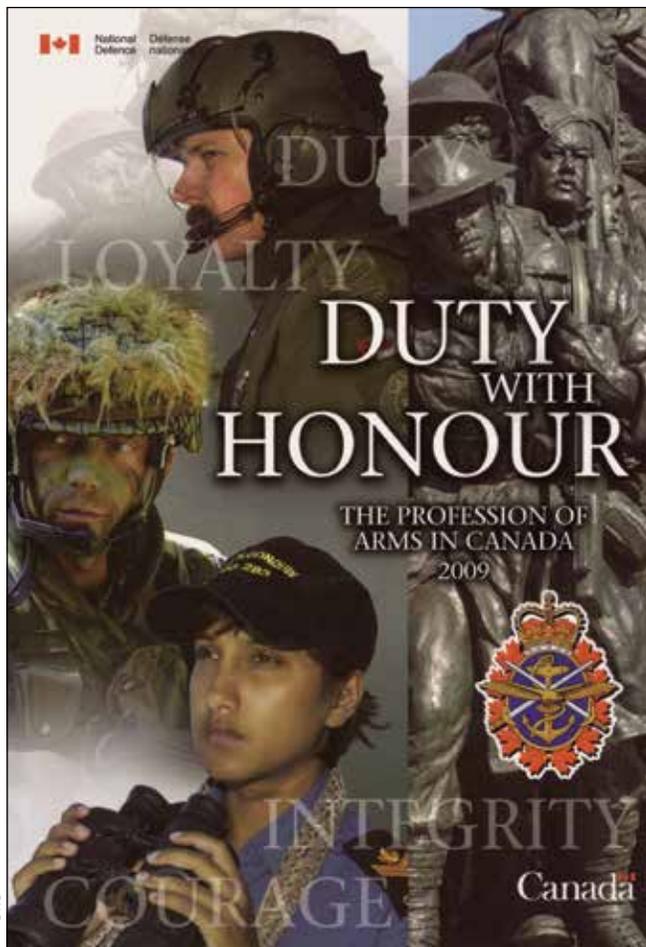
Evolving technologies place increasing responsibilities upon NCMs, and they demand personnel with commensurate levels of intellectual capacities. Additionally, the recruit of the future will come from a technologically-connected and culturally-diverse Canadian society, with an expectation of a high level of digital sophistication within the military learning and working environment.<sup>2</sup>

If we are to be considered a modern learning organization, the NCM Corps must commit to providing a continuous career-long learning environment for NCMs, to enable and encourage them to improve upon education and upon professional competencies in order to meet the challenges of an ever-changing security environment. These requirements and changes to the

education of the NCM Corps must be captured both in doctrine and in general specifications to build an enduring reference point upon which future generations can build.<sup>3</sup>

NCMs will increasingly expect a learning environment to be inclusive of their needs, and educational backgrounds where they participate as the learner, content provider, and peer mentors, working in collaborative groups, and focused upon knowledge attainment and understanding. To make this successful, the NCM Professional Development (PD) system will need to be responsive to the expectations of this digitally-connected generation in order to provide an education system that takes advantage of new digital literacies to instil core CF military values and ethos, while offering flexible academic and career opportunities.

It is important that we retain the essential traditional roles of NCMs, while augmenting professional development with sound educational opportunities. These educational opportunities should be guided by the core and supporting knowledge contained within the *Duty with Honour* manual and a career-long educational vision that prepares NCMs to successfully operate at the three levels of leadership.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the modern NCM educational system must provide opportunities for NCMs to take lateral career paths, based upon knowledge, and not upon occupations, while linking career-driven learning to deliberate succession planning to develop, employ, and sustain future key and senior appointments for NCMs.<sup>5</sup>

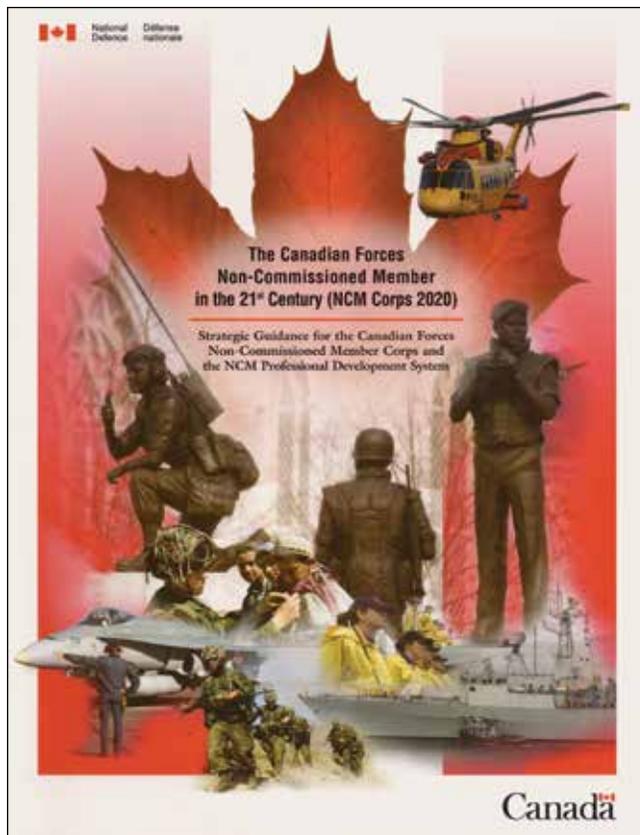


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The Canadian Forces (CF) has an inclusive view of the membership in the Profession of Arms. This inclusiveness was first articulated in the release of *Duty with Honour* in 2003, and further refined in the 2009 edition of the manual, therein stating: “All regular force and primary reserve members of the Canadian Forces, of all ranks, are members of the profession of arms.”<sup>6</sup> It was from this foundational concept that the Armed Forces Council approved and commissioned *NCM Corps 2020*. It was to provide the strategic guidance for the professional development of non-commissioned members for the next 20 years.<sup>7</sup>

*NCM Corps 2020* was published in 2002, nearly a decade ago, as a strategic document that defines and provides guidance to PD requirements (moral, ethical, educational, and leadership qualities) for NCMs into the 21st Century. It speaks to the requirement for NCM mental agility, critical thinking, and understanding of the common body of knowledge related to the profession of arms.<sup>8</sup> It prescribes moving forward on the basis of a strong, complementary, and mutually-supporting officer/NCM team concept that meets the challenges of the contemporary operating environments. While great strides in NCM professional development were made from this document, the academic development identified in the document remains largely unfulfilled.

Both *Duty with Honour* and *NCM Corps 2020* have been re-focused upon NCM development through the lens of the



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recent publication *Beyond Transformation*, the Chief Warrant Officer Strategic Employment Model. This strategic guidance document provides the NCM Corps and stakeholders with the intent to develop a progressive model which strengthens future command/senior leadership teams by ensuring that NCMs, and, in particular, Chief Warrant Officers (CWOs) have sound intellectual preparation for immediate and meaningful contributions, both institutionally and operationally.<sup>9</sup>

The NCM who will become the CF CWO in 2040 is in the NCM Corps now, and we have an obligation to prepare that cadre of NCMs for challenges of leadership positions in roles that we do not yet understand. Just as the role and scope of duties of the CF CWO is different from that of 20 years ago, it will be significantly different 20 years from now. Our recruits will come from a technologically-connected and culturally-diverse Canadian society, and they will increasingly demand a learning environment where they are a partner in the learning construct, working in collaborative groups, and focused upon understanding, rather than a competitive grading system. New members of the CF will view access to the social web as a fundamental personal right. They will congregate towards careers that allow them to remain connected with their social peer groups, and we must be able to provide an education system that takes advantage of this digital literacy to instill the core CF military ideology while offering flexible academic and career opportunities.

To meet these challenges, the training and education system, and the culture that underpins the elements of what we believe a professional NCM constitutes needs to change. For

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the purposes of this short article, the education requirements for NCMs refer to the common knowledge and expertise found in *Duty with Honour*, and they do not encompass training for occupational or environmental duties. It is in these knowledge areas that cognitive development for NCMs must happen if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.<sup>10</sup> It also must be mentioned that the present training system is not broken, but, like the *NCM Corps 2020* vision, it has reached the apex of where it can take the NCM Corps into the future, and must evolve to remain relevant.

While most of the jobs we now fill did not exist 20 years ago, and many of the jobs for NCMs in the future have yet to be defined, we need a flexible adaptive and open education system to prepare us for the undetermined future. The present training and education system of the NCM is firmly rooted within the 20th Century, designed around conformity, compliance, and rote memory, which is unsuited for the challenges of society in the future.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally, the required expertise and knowledge needed to sustain the NCM professional development system was internally sourced and delivered from experts within the military profession, who then disseminated that knowledge downward to maintain a clear sense of identity.<sup>12</sup> Technology, social learning, and the ubiquity of mobile networks have made the wall of the school house transparent, and we are no longer the gatekeepers of our information. While disruptive to our training system policies, this presents us with an opportunity to open up our education and to actively partner with progressive civilian academic institutions to capitalize upon their learning networks and curriculum. This provides the NCM Corps with a low-cost, low-

maintenance path to professional and personal self-development opportunities that benefit the Canadian Forces.

This is an opportunity to seriously look at what we teach as a NCM Corps, and what can be accessed through other institutions. We should teach the areas wherein we are the experts, and what is core to our ideology, but for some of the educational requirements of an NCM, the experts reside outside our organization, and those are the resources we should exploit to provide the learning path.

### Conclusion

The classroom is no longer the refuge of learning. Most of what we need to know to have a successful career is best learned at the point of need. Our present learning networks and management systems are not capable of delivering the information content we need when we need it. We need a learning network that is resilient, open, scalable, and 'operating system neutral.' The Internet provides us with this network. We need to access it for our learning and collaboration now, free of unrealistic and 'one size fits all' security restrictions. The Internet is a cost effective and robust solution to network needs, a knowledge network for learning and education, and we need to make it available to all CF members immediately.<sup>13</sup>



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### The Way Ahead

It is from this vantage point that we can now look at what needs to change to accommodate the NCM education of the future. There is no 'just in time' education. It must be ambient, accessible, and progressive, building upon layers of experience and educational opportunities and funded with a long-term vision. We need to shed cultural biases of how education is viewed between the officer and NCM Corps. An educated NCM Corps is a force multiplier to the officer/NCM relationship, and it is a crucial element in the NCM Corps strategic development and acceptance of the responsibilities that come with membership to the profession of arms.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the full spectrum of activities within the NCM Corps cannot be reduced to a series of tasks within the NCM General Specifications, and arranged in a linear model for training and education. While the tasks may measure a job, the job is only a small portion of the career of a NCM, and it does not reflect the education and knowledge that is required to be truly successful. The effects of education are not always measurable, but they are always risk mitigating, determining how we deal with new situations, and how we understand the commander's intent. We need to provide opportunities for NCMs to learn things that cannot be reduced to a task statement.

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS



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The NCM Corps is one of the greatest untapped resources the CF possesses for sourcing solutions. We must enable collaborative networks that source the vast knowledge and skills of the NCM Corps and contribute to the collective knowledge of the Canadian Forces.<sup>14</sup> By partnering with academic institutions to provide education opportunities that compliment CF

*Academy Headquarters, tasked with modernizing the NCM PD framework and establishing academic partnerships with civilian institutions. He is a Masters Candidate in Interdisciplinary Studies at Royal Roads University, and is concentrating upon the future of education and effects of social computing on professional development. Chief Mercer is also a frequent speaker on the adoption of emergent technologies to accelerate organizational and personal learning.*

needs through CDA-selected programs that recognize the challenges associated with military service, we reduce costs, broaden our knowledge horizons, and become a career of choice for Canadians. By enriching the breadth and depth of education opportunities for NCM self-improvement, and, while fostering a culture that appreciates and rewards individual intellectual growth, the CF will mobilize its greatest asset for operational success, its people.

Chief Warrant Officer Ralph Mercer, CD, is a staff member at the Canadian Defence

### NOTES

1. Chief of the Defence Staff, *Beyond Transformation*, the CPO1/CWO Strategic Employment Model, (Ottawa: Chief of Force Development, 2012), p. 8.
2. The Canadian Forces Non-Commissioned Member in the 21st Century (*NCM Corps 2020*) KI 6, p. 8.
3. *Ibid*, p. 11.
4. *Beyond Transformation...* p. 9.
5. *Ibid*, p. 16.
6. Chief of the Defence Staff, *Duty with Honour*, The Profession of Arms in Canada, Ottawa/Kingston: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2003, p. 11.
7. *Ibid*, p. 1.
8. The Canadian Forces Non-Commissioned Member... p. 5.
9. *Beyond Transformation...*
10. M. Taylor, (2011). *Emergent Learning for Wisdom*, Palgrave Macmillan [Kindle Edition] Marilyn M. Taylor contends that solutions to adaptive challenges reside not in the executive suites but in the collective intelligence of the employees at all levels. The locus of responsibility for problem solving must be delegated to the people within an organization.
11. L. Koskela and M. Kigioglou, "On the Metaphysics of Production, IGLC-13." At: [http://usir.salford.ac.uk/9378/1/2005\\_On\\_the\\_metaphysics\\_of\\_production.pdf](http://usir.salford.ac.uk/9378/1/2005_On_the_metaphysics_of_production.pdf)
12. L. Ilon, "How Collective Intelligence Redefines Education," in *Advances in Collective Intelligence*, No. 113, pp. 91-102. At: [http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-642-25321-8\\_8?LI=true#page-1](http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-642-25321-8_8?LI=true#page-1).  
While collective intelligence systems become ubiquitous for learning in knowledge industries, civic life, and personal lives, they have yet to be embraced into formal schooling systems. Lynn Ilon examines the underlying logic of both collective intelligence and formal education systems, and traces education's reluctance to its roots in an industrial era, and the incentives prevailing in its structures. Embracing collective intelligence will require a redefinition of schooling, rather than a mere retooling.
13. D.Tapscott and A.Williams, (2010), "Innovating the 21st Century University: It's Time," in *Educause Review*. At: <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM1010.pdf>.
14. J. Verdon, "Stewarding Engagement, Harnessing Knowledge: Keeping the Future in Reserves," in *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 12, No.4. At: <http://www.jmss.org/jmss/index.php/jmss/article/view/357/379>.  
The 'wicked' problem for defence and security is the challenge of developing a social strategy consistent with an open society that enables an internal space for richer, more agile 'cloud-labour,' and 'talent-commons,' providing 'just-in-time' group-forming and peer collaboration within and between organizations. A social strategy that can extent the military network would increase the capability to search a larger solution space, enable knowledge to flow, and increase human and social capital and trust. These critical factors set the conditions for current and future operational agility.