

TEAM D+: Innovation in Promoting Diversity

Col Stéphane Boucher
Commander, 2nd Canadian Division Support Group
CANADA

ABSTRACT

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is a reflection of Canadian society, and in order to promote the increased diversity of Canada published the Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy in 2017. The CAF leadership endorsed the strategy at all levels, explicitly supporting its members as they promoted the principles contained in the strategy. Within 2 Canadian Division Support Group, members approached the Commander to create Team Diversity + (D+) to not only support the strategy but promote the inclusion of all groups into the Canadian Military. The strength of the group comes from the fact that it is volunteers which are interested and vested in the promotion of the principles in the Strategy, and not directed uniquely by the chain of command. The Team D+ membership no only proposed solutions to problems, but ideas on how to promote diversity, and engage stakeholders inside and outside the CAF. Team D+ has had successes since its creation, and those successes suggest that it could have enabled the integration of women into Canadian Army combat units thirty years ago. More importantly, the Team D+ construct could probably assist militaries going through the integration process today.

1.0 BACKGROUND

In 2017 the Canadian military released the *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy* in recognition of the increase in diversity of Canadian society, and based on our operational experiences overseas that demonstrated that diversity is a force enabler. Our Chief of Defence Staff provided the following vision statement, “A CAF that is comprised of members who reflect the rich diversity of Canada and who are recognized and encouraged to maintain and contribute through their unique experiences, abilities, and perspectives within a respectful and inclusive environment”.¹ The *Diversity Strategy* included principles, strategic goals and objectives that indicated how the CAF would achieve this vision. The strategy is put into effect through the *Diversity Strategy Action Plan* under the responsibility of our Chief of Military Personnel.

Following the release of the *CAF Diversity Strategy* members within 2 Canadian Division Support Group (2 CDSG) proposed the creation of Team D+ (Diversity+). The members of the formation were interested in promoting diversity and inclusion within its ranks and in 2nd Canadian Division at large. The value proposition rests in the desire of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) volunteers wanting to bring positive change to the organisation, rather than being ordered to do so. The fact that the idea to form Team D+ came from volunteers, rather than be directed by the chain of command is its strength. The team is comprised of a number of committees that focus on particular groups in order to better understand the challenges they face and make proposals to the chain command. Groups represented by Team D+ are: women, handicapped persons, aboriginal people, LGBTQ2+, visible minorities, and the different religious/spiritual populations. The purpose, ultimately, is to improve the quality of life for all and promote diversity in 2 CDSG, 2nd Canadian Division, and the CAF.

Team D+ is relevant to the forum “Integration of Women into Ground Combat Units” as its adoption by other militaries, could assist women as they integrate into the combat role. This did not exist in Canada 30 years ago when the Canadian Army started its process to bring women into this role, and our first female pioneers faced incredible challenges to join the male-dominated environment. At that time there existed no mechanism

¹ *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy*. (Office of the Chief of Defence Staff, Government of Canada, 2018), 2.

for women or their proponents to bring issues to the chain of command to facilitate the integration. After three years in operation it is a fair assumption that Team D+ could have enabled this. This paper will provide the fundamentals upon which Team D+ operates, the objectives of the team, and the factors that lead to success. Early success of Team D+ and some arguments how teams of this type could enable the integration into combat units will be explored.

2.0 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The CAF views diversity as the “...respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, language, gender, age, national origin, disabilities, sexual orientation, education, and religion.”² This key to this definition is the inclusion of all Canadians, to ensure that the strengths, skills and talents of all can be put to use within the organization. Within the CAF, as has been observed outside our military, diversity promotes employment satisfaction, creativity, as well as retention.³ This then facilitates recruitment, and ensuring that the CAF attracts the best elements of Canadian society.

Operationally the CAF has observed that diversity not only promotes sound organizational practices, but enhances success. From our experiences in Afghanistan one study indicated that diversity enhanced group cohesion “...because soldiers are valued for their differential contributions to mission success and to the social functioning of the unit.”⁴ The success on operations and an increasingly diverse CAF led members of 2 Division to create Team D+. It compels people to act, mobilized them to take a stand and make our organization better for the future.

Team D+ was also driven by the concept of inclusion, which ultimately is about empowerment. In their study Deloitte proposed an inclusion model predicated on four elements: “1. Fairness and respect, 2. Valued and belonging, 3. Safe and open, 4. Empowered and growing.”⁵ These elements, although not laid out as such in the CAF Diversity Strategy, are fundamental to Team D+ and key to its success.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF TEAM D+

As mentioned Team D+ is an all-volunteer team, that is supported by the chain of command in its mandate. As it focusses on issues that preoccupy each of the groups (D+ community) represented by the sub-committees, it has the following objectives:

- a. Propose to the chain of command innovative solutions to preoccupations of the D+ community;
- b. Assist the chain of command as it issues plans and directives that could affect the D+ community;
- c. Host activities that address the preoccupations of the D+ community;
- d. Advise the chain of command on ways to get involved in activities external to the CAF and engage the stakeholders; and
- e. Propose to the chain of command how the D+ Community could be involved in all military activities to further promote diversity and inclusion.

Just as the CAF has worked to improve diversity and inclusion, the civilian business community has as well. In the *2018 Diversity Disclosure Practices* report, premiere businesses in Canada reported that companies with

² Ibid, 1.

³ Frances J. Milliken and Luis L. Martins, *Searching For Common Threads: Understanding the Multiple Effects of Diversity in Organizational Groups*. (Academy of Management Review, 1996), 402.

⁴ Anne Irwin, *Diversity in the Canadian Forces: Lessons from Afghanistan*. (Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 2009), 504.

⁵ Juliet Bourke, *The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths*. (Deloitte Review 2018), 7.

diversity and inclusion committees had greater success. ‘These committees are often chaired by key players in the organization, which reinforces their importance. It is a positive development...’⁶

4.0 SUCCESS FACTORS

There are many reasons why Team D+ has had early success. The first, and most important is leadership buy-in, or inclusive leadership. As Commander of 2 CDSG, like my predecessor, I have chosen to support this invaluable team. Inclusive leaders show, ‘...optimism, promote collaboration...want to see the group success...understand the importance of the team member in team work.’⁷ This is essential, too often policy statements are made without the proper tools to implement or support. Positive and effective leadership is required to promote diversity and inclusion, without this there can be no sustained cultural or organizational change.

In line with leadership, the CAF have long directed the appointment of Champions for many of the groups represented by Team D+. In 2 Division Formation and Divisional Units Commanders champion the handicapped, the aboriginal, women, LGBTQ+, and visible minorities. These leaders then optimize Team D+, where available and practicable, to promote each of these groups. This is leading by example. The involvement of our leadership allowed Team D+ to reach out and connect with stakeholders both in the CAF, and in the surrounding communities, thus reinforcing success. In fact, the *2018 Diversity Disclosure Practices* suggests that networking is essential for advancing women in the workplace.⁸

The aforementioned Champions are key to the development and promotion of Team D+. They also bring institutional credibility, which is critical when reaching out to the business world. For example, later we will show the success of connecting with *La Force au Feminin*. The Champion for women, accompanied by senior female leadership makes the promotion of Team D+, diversity and inclusion all the more possible. Similar trends are seen with the Champion for Aboriginal people as she connects with local tribes, and contributes to programmes that promote our first peoples.

The third is the time to act, and when Team D+ was created the time was right to act. Although we had experienced success on operations and at home, the creation of Team D+ on the heels of the release of the CAF Diversity Strategy was key. Not only did it reinforce the message of our Chief of Defence Staff, but it became an actualization of the Strategy where our people worked. Building on this momentum, Team D+ supported activities to promote activities on our bases and garrisons, and connected with external stakeholders.

Finally, constant communication is fundamental to the success of Team D+. Through its activities and its quarterly meetings Team D+ is able to discuss issues facing the different groups represented, and interact with the chain of command. There are two facets key to communication. First is internal, as we promote diversity and inclusion within the CAF. Empowerment of our different groups requires them to not only feel welcome, but that they are part of the team. Constant communication reinforces this, and that diversity is not a token gesture. The second is external, as it allows the CAF to connect with stakeholders and shows Canadians that the military is an inclusive and diverse team. Team D+ generated activities are supported by a communications plan and stakeholder engagement.

⁶ Andrew MacDougall and John Valley, *2018 Diversity Disclosure Practices: Women in Leadership Roles in TSX-Listed Companies*. (Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP, 2018), 44.

⁷ Nicole Belanger, *Inclusive Leadership: If We Build it Will They Come?* (Canadian Military Journal, 2018), 38.

⁸ MacDougall and Valley, 40.

5.0 EARLY SUCCESSES OF TEAM D+

The release of the *CAF Diversity Strategy* raised awareness and promoted curiosity of the all members in the CAF. Questioning on issues facing groups supported by Team D+ contributed to the nascent 2 CDSG policy on unisex bathrooms to promote the inclusivity of transgender personnel. This is significant as there are no set national standards, but the Team brought to the attention of the chain of command the importance of this to promote inclusion. At the same time it ensured that some who are less comfortable with transgender personnel, for example women victims of sexual misconduct do not have to be side-by-side and thus contributes to retention.

With greater visibility is the work of the LGBTQ2+ sub-committee. Building off the momentum of our politicians participating in Pride Parades across Canada, and building upon our CDS direction that participation of uniformed members in these events is encouraged, 2 Division has participated in the Montreal Pride Parade for two years now. This external engagement demonstrated our openness as an organization, and we position recruiting teams on site to further promote diversity and inclusion. Internally, we now raise the rainbow flag on our Bases and Garrisons within the 2 Division Area of Operations to promote the concepts within the CAF. As previously mentioned, constant communication is encouraged in order to practice what we preach.

We also spend significant effort connecting with the Aboriginal communities within 2 Division. Internally we optimize Aboriginal Awareness Week, a national programme, to have a series of non-disruptive education events including themed meals in our Messes. Connecting the CAF to those outside our Bases and Garrisons, our Aboriginal Champion and Division Commander have promoted *Carcajou* (or Wolverine), a four-week course familiarizing Aboriginal military-aged youth to the CAF. To complement this we have built a spiritual lodge on one of our Garrisons, and we are in the process of doing the same on another Base. These initiatives allow the CAF to connect CAF members to Aboriginal communities.

For women we have been working with *Force au Feminin*, an external stakeholder, to promote the CAF as an inclusive environment. The *Force au Feminin* is a gathering of like-minded business people wanting to promote women in all facets of life. CAF presence at these gathering demonstrates our diversity and inclusion. Internally, we annually have a division-level Yoga event that we simulcast on FaceBook on International Woman's Day. Men and women participate, and we use the event to promote diversity and inclusion. All of the events mentioned reinforce the need for leadership involvement, communication and stakeholder engagement.

6.0 HOW TEAM D+ CAN ENABLE THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO COMBAT UNITS

Thirty years ago the CAF began integrating women into Combat Units, however it was not an easy transition. Despite having women in most non-combat functions, there was no voice for women amongst the leadership and thus no way to communicate the challenges. Team D+ would have been an enabler then, and could be for any military on the verge of integrating women into these units. The first and perhaps most essential asset of Team D+, to any military is facilitating communication. The direct access that Team D+ has to the chain of command, means that leadership has direct access of the preoccupations of the team. The team can raise the concerns and propose solutions, in order to facilitate the integration of women.

This also fosters inclusive leadership which is key to the success of any diverse organization. The direct link between Team D+ and the leadership in any organization, in our case the senior divisional leaders, will allow the early and immediate recognition of issues facing women. Some of these may appear uncomfortable, but is important enough for women and their proponents to raise, than they are important enough to prevent the inclusion of women into combat units. This does not mean that Team D+ circumvents the chain of command, rather ensures that the right information is in the hand of the decision-makers faster and more effectively.

Finally, Team D+ can also facilitate networking with organizations that have already completed similar integration. Engagement of external stakeholders, either other military organisations, first responders, or businesses, can bring fresh ideas to any military. Consultation with external stakeholders and other organizations that had integrated women into combat units brings legitimacy to the process. It also helps reinforce what could be a significant emotional event for an organization. Combat units around the world are not the first organizations to integrate women into a male-dominated environment, and the networking shares experiences facilitating the integration.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Team D+ should be viewed as an innovative way to promote diversity and inclusion. The fact that members of an organization believe in these values, as well as the organization demonstrates that these people care. So as organizations look to integrate women into combat units, they should examine the possibility of incorporating a team that promotes diversity as we have in the 2nd Canadian Division. Leadership engagement, communication and the engagement of stakeholders by, with, and through Team D+ will allow any military to open doors closed to those of different gender, sexual orientation, and beliefs.

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