

Original study

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Advanced education for NCMs' professional career development: a conclusive experience?

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the results of a research which assessed whether the Knowledge Acquisition Programme and the Non-Commissioned Member Executive Professional Development Programme contributed to the Non-Commissioned Members' effectiveness as senior leaders in the Profession of Arms within the Canadian Armed Forces. Thirty-seven Programme graduates from 2006 to 2015 received a questionnaire containing seven closed-ended general information questions and twelve open-ended programme/course specific questions. Seventeen graduates responded to the questionnaire. Manual coding was used to identify main themes and sub-themes. The research findings determined that both Programmes contributed to the effectiveness of senior leaders in the Profession of Arms within the Canadian Armed Forces. However, some caveats were expressed, and recommendations brought forward to enhance the Programme and to improve its future deliveries.

Keywords: career development, advanced education, critical thinking skills, Knowledge Acquisition Programme (KAP), Non-Commissioned Members Executive Professional Development Programme (NEPDP), Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada

1 Introduction

According to its traditional view, the Profession of Arms (PoA) used to recognise as truly professional only those who served as Officers because they possessed specific attributes, such

as expertise, responsibility, and corporateness (Huntington 1957). As such, those who served as Non-Commissioned Members (NCMs) were considered to be part of the organisational bureaucracy and not of the professional realm, as they were thought to possess neither the intellectual skill sets nor the professional responsibility of an Officer (Bentley 2008; English 2006; Lagacé-Roy 2008). Therefore, they were categorised as specialists in the application of violence and not the management of violence (Huntington 1957).

In 2003, the doctrinal document *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* was first published.¹ It clearly stated a view which is far away from the traditional one. It acknowledged "that all uniformed personnel fulfilling operational, support or specialist functions are considered military professionals" (Canada, Department of National Defence 2003a: p. 10) within the PoA in Canada. Consequently, it acknowledged NCMs' role as professionals and more specifically the role of its Senior NCMs (e.g. Chief Petty Officer First Class (CPO1) and Chief Warrant Officer (CWO)).

As well, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) recognises that Senior NCMs are pinnacle leaders within their Corps and that they represent people possessing a depth of institutional knowledge and experience (Okros 2012). They are strategic leaders, involved in matters related to national interests and CAF policy within domestic and international forums (West 2016). They must also be innovative and agile, as well as possess advanced critical thinking skills and knowledge in systems theory awareness to effectively function within a dynamic security environment (NATO 2013).

As a result of these recognitions, and to contribute to the enhancement of the NCM's skill sets and competencies, the founding document *The Canadian Forces Non-Commissioned Member in the 21st Century* (NCM Corps 2020) (Canada, Department of National Defence 2003) recommended that their professional *career development* include a level of advanced education.² First, the Knowl-

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¹ *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* was subsequently revised in 2009 and is currently under revision.

² This key publication is under review (Canada, DND, (2014) *Canadian Armed Forces Professional Development System Study – Final Report*, Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy (CDA)).

edge Acquisition Programme (KAP) (2006–2013) and later replaced by the *Non-Commissioned Member Executive Professional Development Programme* (NEPDP) (2013 to present) offered at the *Royal Military College* (RMC), were introduced specifically to enable NCMs to acquire a level of advanced education (RMC 2017).

Between 2006 and 2015, the timeframe of the research, no formalised measurement matrix existed to determine whether the education graduates received via both Programmes had contributed to their effectiveness as Senior NCMs. Therefore, in the absence of a formal review process, it was difficult to determine whether both Programmes met their objectives, i.e. developing the “intellectual, analytical, and reasoning skills of the CPO1/CWO who have been selected to hold key positions, senior appointments and Strategic NCMs, in the CAF” (RMC 2017). Based on these general objectives, there is an expectation that both Programmes provided opportunities, in terms of course offerings and course content, to develop the above-mentioned required skill sets.

In 2014–2015, a research was conducted by a NEPDP participant as part of the evaluation requirements of a year-long course at the RMC. The purpose of the research was to determine whether the graduates from KAP and NEPDP (2013–2015) (hereafter Programmes) consider that the Programmes have contributed to their effectiveness as Senior Appointees and Strategic NCMs (hereafter Senior NCMs). This paper presents the findings of that research and provides an opportunity to reflect on the NCMs educational needs in the context of both Programmes.

2 Conceptual Framework

Research done on NCM Corps in the Canadian context is very scarce. When research was done, it usually relied on doctrinal documents and on few articles. The terminology, used in this paper, is mostly found in official documents published by the Department of National Defence (DND) of Canada with few exceptions. Official documents by DND, such as *NCM Corps 2020* (Canada, Department of National Defence 2003), are usually strategic papers that define and provide guidance to NCMs professional development requirements (e.g. education). The small number of articles written on NCMs in the CAF, and published in military journals, generally address issues related to their evolving role within the PoA. As for strategic documents and academic papers, they both present similar themes that are introduced here and serve as the conceptual framework on which is built this paper.

2.1 Learning, training, and (advanced) education

The roles associated with the NCMs within the CAF have evolved over time. Regarded as the backbone of the CAF (Bland 1999), their technical expertise coupled with their traditional functions, as disciplinarians and trainers, have long been their hallmark (Horn 2002; Smith 2005). As conflict and battle space evolve within a dynamic and unpredictable security environment, so does the necessity for a professional NCM (Mercer 2013). While technical expertise is part of their professional realm (Lagacé-Roy 2008), the nature of a professional NCM goes beyond that type of expertise. In fact, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (Canada, Department of National Defence 2003a) specifies that their roles and responsibilities have broadened to include advisory functions, institutional leadership, and co-stewardship of the PoA.

As NCMs move away from the tactical level, where training is an essential component of their professional development, to a more strategic level, advanced education becomes a requirement, as it complements their overall professional and intellectual development (Canada, Department of National Defence 2014). They will acquire an advanced education different from their training, as it will provide skill sets necessary to critical thinking processes (Canada, Department of National Defence 2011a). Moreover, it ensures that NCMs are not only experts within their occupations, but also practitioners of a professional body of shared knowledge within the PoA. While training focuses more on acquiring skill sets to perform specific duties, advanced education focuses more on developing one's ability to identify, analyse and foresee future situations (Canada, Department of National Defence 2014). Yet both types of learning, as well as experience and self-development are essential for the overall development of an NCM (Canada, Department of National Defence 2011). More so, the transition becomes more essential as a NCM progresses through the ranks (Rondeau and Tanguay 2013; Belanger 2016).

2.2 KAP and NEPDP

Because of the transition needed, from a tactical level to a strategic level, KAP was first created at the RMC in 2006. It provided advanced education to NCMs who had been selected to hold senior leader positions in the CAF. KAP was flexible in nature as candidates could take

self-selected courses (e.g., *Canadian Politics & Society*) in addition to compulsory courses (e.g. *Introduction to Psychology*) to further their professional development. At the end of the year-long programme, a certificate of attendance or an academic recognition was awarded. While KAP was viewed as providing an introduction to intellectual studies, the Canadian Defence Academy's (CDA) senior leadership found that it "lacked a degree of discipline and focus" (Tremblay 2011, personal communication, 21 October). To remedy this situation, the Canadian Chief of Staff for the Strategic Training and Education Programme (STEP) and RMC personnel developed the NEPDP with a designed curriculum leading to a Certificate of General Military Studies (CGMS). NEPDP was formalised in 2013. Thereafter, NEPDP included four compulsory courses selected from the fields of History, Political Science, and Psychology and Leadership, and five elective courses chosen from the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences.³ Besides receiving a CGMS upon completion of the Programme, the credits received for the courses taken could be used for a Baccalaureate in Military Arts and Science (BMASc) degree if the candidates chose to further their studies (RMC 2017).

2.3 Evaluation, programme, and effectiveness

The goal of this research is to determine, through an evaluation, if both Programmes contributed to the effectiveness of NCMs in senior positions. For the purpose of this research, evaluation is viewed as the assessment of objectives, structure, content, and mode of delivery. The term programme, within the context of this evaluation, is defined as "the complete set and sequence of courses [...] prescribed by an institution for the fulfillment of the requirements of a particular degree" (OUCQA 2017: 1.6 Definition).

In the field of programme evaluation, effectiveness is achieved when "the intended results and outcomes occur" (Menix 2007: p. 204). Because the research was carried out in a military context, the Department of National Defence's definition of effectiveness was used. It is defined as "the extent to which stated objectives are achieved" (2005: p. 130). Finally, programme objectives are the foundation

on which a programme of study is structured and evaluated (Tyler 1949).

3 Methodology

This research used a qualitative methodology to gather relevant data using a two-part questionnaire. The first part consisted of seven closed-ended questions to gather general classification data about the participants (e.g. gender). The second part consisted of twelve open-ended programme-specific comprehensive questions (e.g. course choice) to elicit participant-relevant information pertaining to the research (Berg 2001). In this context, the data collected from the qualitative methodology was used to determine whether the Programmes met its stated objectives and produced the expected outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al. 2004).

3.1 Participants and research period

The research attempted to gather information from different cohorts, namely serving and retired graduates from both Programmes, i.e. KAP (2006–2013) and NEPDP (2013–2015). The research took place between April 28 and May 17, 2016. The number of potential participants was thirty-seven graduates. However, only seventeen graduates answered the questionnaire ($N = 17$) (see Table 1 – Potential versus actual research participants).

3.2 Ethics review, recruitment, and data analysis

Once the Ethics Review Board accepted the project, a package containing a letter of invitation, an electronic questionnaire, and a list of definitions were emailed directly to graduates from the pool of potential survey participants using their CAF email accounts (see Annexure A: Survey Questionnaire). As well, attempts were made to contact the seven retired graduates from the pool of potential survey participants using their social media accounts (e.g. Facebook). Correspondence with people who decided to participate in the survey was conducted through their personal email accounts. The electronic survey questionnaire specified that a returned completed survey was considered as an implied proof of consent to participate in the research.

There was no attempt to generalise the results of the survey as the sample was too small to do any

³ Some graduates also took electives outside the Humanities and Social Sciences. *CCE220 Contemporary Chemistry* from the Faculty of Sciences is a good example

Tab. 1: Potential versus actual research participants

Rank	Potential research participants				Actual research participants			
	Programme (NEPDP/KAP) graduates		Gender		Programme (NEPDP/KAP) graduates		Gender	
	Serving	Retired	Female	Male	Serving	Retired	Female	Male
CPO1/CWO	30	7	2	35	16	1	1	16
Total	37		37		17		17	

randomisation; and that only the graduates from the two Programmes, i.e., thirty-seven NCMs were purposefully sought after as the non-probabilistic, intentional, recruitment (purposive) strategy was preferred for the research (Bernard 2002; Lewis and Sheppard 2006).

Once the responses to the questionnaire were received, the researcher conducted two separate data analysis, that is, one for the seven closed-ended questions and another for the twelve open-ended questions. A 'paper and scissors' data analysis method for the open-ended questions was adopted as the number of questionnaires and questions to analyse was very low. The data analysis steps was performed in a successive and cumulative manner, and the steps included the reception of a questionnaire, reading over the answers from the questionnaire to develop some familiarity with the responses; and start creating a list of recurrent ideas which means concepts and themes under each question from the questionnaire. This process was used after the reception of each questionnaire to adjust the list of ideas under each question. The research's trustworthiness was established through a process which included peer reviews (the research team) of every questionnaire and presentation of the data's interpretation to the research team.

4 Results

4.1 General information (Questions 1 to 7)

The following provides general information about the seventeen graduates who answered the survey. There was one female respondent from NEPDP. The sixteen male respondents were 35.3% from KAP and 64.7% from NEPDP. The respondents were 59.9% Anglophone and 47.1% Francophone. They overwhelmingly attended the English courses (86.7%). The respondents were 35.3% from the Navy, 29.4% from the Army, and 35.3% from the Air force. They had cumulated an average of 26.7 years of military service. Only one respondent was retired.

They predominantly all graduated from High School and attended some Officers Professional Military Education (OPME) courses (e.g. *Military Professionalism & Ethics*). Finally, 58.8% of respondents received a CGMS, while 23.5% received an achievement or academic recognition.

4.2 Programme specifics (Questions 1 to 12)

The following information captures the core of what was reported by respondents identified as NCM 01 to 17. KAP and NEPDP answers are presented together. When necessary, differences between both Programmes are specified.

4.3 Course choice (Questions 1 and 2)

For KAP and NEPDP graduates, most courses were chosen because of a personal interest and/or a personal end goal.

KAP:

I chose the history courses because I have always had an interest in learning history. (NCM06)

[...], I went with subjects that I thought would benefit me with my career and the knowledge required of a senior leader. (NCM07)

NEPDP:

I selected this course (*Introduction to Literary Studies & University Writing Skills*), to improve both my critical thinking skills and writing abilities. (NCM03)

[*Applied Military Psychology*] was recommended and turned out to be very useful in understanding the role of human nature in moral and ethical dilemmas presented during conflict. (NCM11)

4.4 Programme expectations (Questions 3 and 4)

All seventeen respondents commented on their personal expectations prior to attending the Programmes. Some

had low or no expectations, while others expected to acquire new knowledge and transferable skills. Finally, a few expected to mentor OCdts.

[I expected to] expand my knowledge base on various subjects, learn how to do academic research and improve my writing skills. (NCM04)

I had a personal expectation to be able to do some mentoring with young CAF Officer Cadet classmates. (NCM08)

[...] that this (programme) would enhance my critical thinking skills and that NEPDP would be of great benefit to me as I potentially move into higher positions of influence. (NCM09)

[...], I did not have a lot of expectations. (NCM10)

I anticipated that KAP would provide a good opportunity to access Military Education in a very unique and privileged way. (NCM12)

Fifteen respondents mentioned that their expectations were met while two stated that they were not met. Some reasons stated were either general or personal in nature.

I was shocked at how much I learned during that year. Every course provided me with valuable information that I use to this day. My expectations [...] were exceeded. (NCM01)

This Programme (NEPDP) taught me how to better time manage my tasks, prioritise and more importantly, develop my analytical mind [...]. (NCM02)

I believe I gained a wider perspective of issues outside the sometimes rigid, stove piped perspective of the Army. (NCM11)

The reasons cited for not meeting their expectations were related to the knowledge (or lack of) about the Programmes and the lack of critical thinking skills learned.

I had no real expectations, as my knowledge of the Programme was limited to what the acronym meant. (NCM03)

I did not believe I learned critical thinking [...]. (NCM07)

4.5 Course usefulness (Question 5)

Respondents from both Programmes answered this question either at the department level or at a course level. At the department level, courses from the following departments were considered useful: History (2 KAP respondents and 2 NEPDP respondents); Political Science (1 KAP respondent and 1 NEPDP respondent); and Psychology and Leadership (1 NEPDP respondent). However, courses from the following Departments were not found to be useful: History (2 NEPDP respondents); Psychology and Leadership (1 NEPDP respondent); and Business and Economics (1 KAP respondent).

At the course level, respondents from both Programmes indicated that the following courses were useful: *Organizational Behaviour and Leadership* (3 KAP respondents and 3 NEPDP respondents); *Military Professionalism and Ethics* (1 KAP respondent and 3 NEPDP respondents); and *Applied Military Psychology* (1 KAP respondent and 2 NEPDP respondents).

Respondents from either KAP or NEPDP indicated that the following courses were either useful or not useful: *Human Resources* and *Organizational Theories*⁴ (KAP: 1 respondent from each course found them useful and 1 respondent from each course didn't find it useful); *Introduction to Psychology* (NEPDP: 1 respondent useful and 3 respondents not useful); *Applied Military Psychology* (NEPDP: 2 respondents useful and 1 respondent not useful); *Canadian Politics & Society* (NEPDP: 2 respondents useful and 1 respondent not useful); and *Advanced Leadership* (NEPDP: 1 respondent useful and 1 respondent not useful).

Only one KAP respondent chose the courses *Introduction to Contemporary Strategic Studies, Terrorism, History, and Strategy* and *Law of Armed Conflict*, and mentioned that they were useful; while only one NEPDP respondent chose the following courses: *Introduction to International Relations, Introduction to Literary Studies and University Writing Skills, Canadian Military History, Naval History the Age of Sail, Naval History the Age of Steam*, and *International Organizations* and indicated that they were useful.

One NEPDP respondent chose the courses *Contemporary Chemistry* and *Introduction to Military History and Thought* and mentioned that they were not useful. Noticeably, 4 NEPDP respondents found that the *International Relations Theory* course was especially useful.

Respondents mentioned the four reasons for considering if a course was useful or not: military content, applicability to their future roles, debates with peers, as well as with OCdts during class sessions.

(The course) provided an excellent means to share different views and debate on relevant issues and dilemmas. (NCM04)

Much of the content was of military nature or was closely related, thereby, enhancing my knowledge of global affairs. (NCM07)

(The courses were) particularly useful in the context of our roles as senior military leaders. (NCM12)

Comments concerning the courses that were found not to be useful were related to the lack of military content, no consideration for adult learning methods, and information learned not transferable to real life situations.

⁴ These courses were taken in French: Gestion des ressources humaines and Théorie organisationnelle.

[The course] may have missed the opportunity to present the case [...] in a military context. (NCM12)

Having to memorise large amounts of information gave me very little as a mature student. (NCM14)

This should be development education not confirmation. (NCM15)

As a mature student, most of what was covered was familiar to me. I call it 'life' experience. (NCM16)

4.6 Programme effectiveness (Questions 6 to 8)

Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged that they were using the education they received, either directly or indirectly.

The skills I learned continue to help me analyse problems, research potential solutions [...] both in oral and written forms. [...], these are essential competencies which I credit to NEPDP for helping me hone. (NCM04)

This Programme provided the bridge between an operational and an occupational-focused career, and the move into a Senior Appointment. (NCM08)

The ability to communicate more complex concepts clearly in a manner that is familiar to senior officers brings credibility to my work. (NCM14)

Most respondents agreed that both Programmes contributed to their effectiveness while in leadership roles by increasing their awareness of the "whole picture" and by enhancing their role and contribution at the strategic level.

[The Programme helped me] evaluate a broad range of viewpoints and perspectives and maintain an open mind to alternative interpretations. (NCM01)

[...] allowed me to leave the operations focus behind and to view an organisation through strategic lenses. (NCM08)

[...] the Programme has enhanced my capacity to provide to my Commanding Officer advice that looks below the surface for solutions. (NCM11)

[I felt that I am] more skilled at thinking through problems and perceiving the greater picture. (NCM12)

It helped me better understand why certain decisions are made by our superiors and political leaders. (NCM16)

4.7 Need for programme experiences (Question 9)

When asked if KAP and NEPDP experiences were necessary for Senior NCMs, four out of the seventeen

respondents answered positively, eleven answered negatively, and two chose not to respond. Those who answered positively focused their answers on the skill sets gained.

This was a bridge. [...] transition period for me. [...] the academic programme provided the springboard to advance and excel in Senior Appointments. (NCM08)

Yes, I believe it is. CPO1/CWOs at the senior or strategic level need to know how to read and write and to digest vast amounts of information quickly so it makes sense. It also allows you to become aware of your own thinking and develop intellectual tools [...]. (NCM01)

[...], I believe that the capabilities developed and improved during the conduct of the NEPDP are crucial to my current position. [...] I am much better situated and capable of distilling my input into audience appropriate [...]. (NCM03)

Those who chose to answer negatively mentioned how both Programmes can be considered an asset but it is not necessary for senior positions.

I don't think the Programme was essential, but the Programme is a definite asset to anyone who is employed at senior levels. (NCM11)

I wouldn't call it 'necessary' but would call it a 'great tool' to succeed in the future. (NCM16)

4.8 Need to attend RMC (Question 10)

When asked if it was necessary for them to attend RMC to acquire the knowledge provided by a higher learning institution, both Programme respondents answered positively or negatively to the question, but added comments that would clearly indicate its value.

KAP:

Yes, I think attending RMC provides the focus required to be successful. (NCM11)

I would not say necessarily, but it gave me a different experience and helped me understand what the Officers Cadets are going through [...] and [...] understand the way RMC works. (NCM10)

NEPDP:

Yes, attendance at RMC was necessary in order to provide both the experience and the observation of the learning process of the Officer Corps. (NCM06)

As for the question answered negatively, three KAP respondents felt that other means could have been chosen to deliver the Programme. However, they weighed their answer by adding that there are definite advantages to attending RMC. This was echoed by six NEPDP

respondents who recognised that while there are other means, RMC provided definite benefits.

[...], doing it on Campus is the way to go. Had I had to do all these course on Distance Learning, I do not believe I would have succeeded the way I did. Being in the classroom with the professor, exchanging face-to-face with other students is so much easier than to have to type (and talk) to a computer screen. (NCM16)

The class size [...] allows for a greater one-on-one time between students and professors. In turn, this one-on-one time allows for coaching. (NCM03)

I believe the organisation and structure [...] contributed greatly to the capacities developed through the learning process. (NCM03)

It is also through RMC that graduates interacted with OCdts.

It was great learning the history of RMC and interacting with the young military officers and how they are developed over the four years at RMC. It also provides an opportunity to mentor some students as they progress. (NCM07)

4.9 Timeline for attending programme (Question 11)

KAP respondents gave four different suggestions when asked at what stage of an NCM's career one should attend the Programme. Two respondents mentioned the CPO1/CWO rank.

It should ideally be delivered as that individual moves into a position of legitimate competition for a Senior Appointment. Delivering it earlier than after the first tour as a CPO1/CWO would not maximise the bridging effects that are the noteworthy results of the programme. (NCM08)

Two respondents suggested that succession planning should play a part in deciding when to attend higher education. To that effect, another respondent mentioned the importance of considering the length of time remaining to serve in the CAF.

I really think it should be provided for succession planned MWO (just before getting promoted to CPO1/CWO). (NCM10)

Care must be taken to select the individual who requires what the program delivers and not selecting a candidate who simply meets policy eligibility requirements. (NCM08)

Four respondents mentioned that the CPO2/MWO rank was the right level to attend.

This rank is the right leadership/management level to complete the level of education. (NCM13)

Two respondents considered suggesting the P01/WO rank.

[...] would certainly consider the right P01/WO after having been 2–3 years in rank. (NCM17)

I'd like to see it introduced at the WO level. By that time, we ought to have figured out which of our folks are demonstrating potential to succeed at the strategic level. (NCM12)

Finally, one respondent mentioned that the Programme should be offered at a larger audience without using face-to-face interactions.

The remaining NCM corps should be offered the programme through Distance Education. (NCM15)

NEPDP respondents, when asked the same question, gave seven different suggestions. One respondent suggested just after being promoted to CPO1/CWO.

Providing the programme at that stage will give the tools to the new CPO1/CWO to better excel at the senior/strategic level. (NCM06)

Two respondents suggested that the CPO1/CWO rank, but added some caveats.

As CWOs, we should already have the necessary tools to perform at the strategic level or be effective in working with Senior Officers. (NCM14)

[...] that may already be too late, and in terms of 'bang for the buck' what does the institution get back? (NCM03)

Two respondents suggested that all NCMs identified as progressing to senior ranks.

As a general rule, [...] all NCMs identified as progressing to CWO should retain the NEPDP [...]. (NCM03)

Nine respondents suggested the CPO2/MWO rank, because of value for money.

Those members have significant time to serve and the organisation can benefit from the experience and knowledge they gained at RMC. (NCM01)

[...] this provides the MWO with more time to continue their education while providing a payback for the CAF [...]. (NCM02)

Five respondents mentioned the P01/WO rank if they show potential for advancement.

[...], I would not be opposed if we identify keen members at the WO/P01 level who demonstrated the aptitudes and ability to lead at the strategic level. (NCM09)

The course should be given to Warrant Officers who show the potential to advance to the highest levels of the CAF. (NCM05)

One respondent mentioned that, one must consider the amount of time that will elapse between the course and the moment before being appointed into a strategic position while another one mentioned the importance of personal factors.

[...], there would be a diminishing return on the training, [...], not to mention the timeframe it could take for WO/P01 to achieve CWO/CPO1 rank, thereby causing a loss of the knowledge gained over time. (NCM06)

The family situation will affect this as well. Had I had young children, it would have been extremely difficult for me to succeed, as all your spare time is spent in the books. (NCM16)

Finally, one respondent suggested opening the Programme to all NCMs while another mentioned that it should be attended by NCMs who hold specific positions.

[...] the Programme should also be available for personnel wanting to complete it on their own time [...]. (NCM04)

[...], all NCMs identified as being employed in joint, international or multi-national units (posting vice 6-month tour) should also retain the NEPDP. (NCM03)

4.10 Recommendations (Question 12)

All KAP respondents answered positively except one, when asked the question if they would recommend the Programme.

I recommend it ... and would hope that we continue to expand on what we have. (NCM12)

I think that it is important for the NCM Corps to be educated to a certain level in order to have the cognitive abilities to better influence the decision-makers, better support our Commanders, and better develop our subordinates. (NCM17)

[...], this is of great value for the institution to have Senior NCM with great vision, approach and thinking towards resolving complex issues. (NCM13)

While their answers were positive, at least two respondents expressed concerns.

Care must be taken to select the individual who requires what the Programme delivers and not select a candidate who simply meets policy eligibility requirements. (NCM08)

The NEPDP as it now exists is an exercise in chasing a certificate not an education. (NCM15)

Most NEPDP respondents answered that they would recommend the Programme.

[...], I believe it is an outstanding developmental tool for our NCMs who will lead the institution. (NCM11)

The course not only helps you develop better reading/writing skills, ways of thinking and dealing with certain issues, it helps you grow as a person. It opens your eyes so that you may carry on with your career without 'blindness'. (NCM16)

[...], it has improved my critical thinking skills. [...] as I am progressing in my career, this critical thinking is being exploited more and more by my superiors. (NCM09)

Highly recommend for any member of the CAF who would like the opportunity to serve in a position of higher authority [...]. (NCM09)

They also mentioned other reasons outside the realm of the Programme.

[...], the understanding of how Officer Cadets are taught to think and write is an invaluable tool when called upon to provide Senior/Strategic advice to Commanders. (NCM06)

[...] it helps the CPO1/CWO understand what our young Officers have to endure to become leaders in the CAF. This programme allows young Officers to get to know, early in their careers, how to work with and take the advice of NCMs. It is a collision of both Corps at an early stage in both these leaders' careers (especially if NEPDP targets P01/WOs). (NCM01)

Some NEPDP respondents recommended the Programme but with some caveats.

NEPDP is not for every NCM. Succession planning is the preferred tool to identify the right individuals [...]. Mandatory classes should be negotiated with applicable RMC staff. [...] The majority of courses taken by NEPDP students should be selected with a specific and well-crafted intent. (NCM14)

[...] to the right people and at a lower rank so they will have many years left to serve and time to continue with their education. (NCM05)

Finally, one respondent mentioned that the Programme should not be a pre-requisite for senior positions.

I must close by emphasising that NEPDP should never be a pre-requisite for assuming Senior Appointments. (NCM07)

5 Discussion

5.1 Research question

Overall, the data collected indicated that the Programmes contributed positively to its graduates. While they joined the Programmes with some expectations, such as acquiring knowledge and learning new skill sets, all respondents stated that their education either enhanced their current skill sets and/or provided them with new ones. In fact, they stated that they acquired more than expected,

in terms of enhancing their mental processes for problem solving, as well as their communication skills. They also perceived that the Programmes helped them understand specific issues and provided useful information for their career growth.

In terms of contributing to their effectiveness as Senior NCMs, the results confirm that most graduates are using the education they received through the Programmes. In fact, the education received bridged the gap between the operational and strategic levels. For them, these newly acquired knowledge and skill sets were translated into positive outcomes, such as increasing credibility and competence when conversing with senior leadership and providing suggestions to their leadership, as well as to team partners on complex issues. Therefore, the Programmes improved their capabilities to hold senior leader positions in the CAF.

5.2 Addressing issues

However, graduates not only mentioned positive Programme outcomes. They also raised particular issues which indicate that some aspects of the Programme need to be examined in order to be fully effective, so that the programmes will meet the NCMs' needs and expectations.

Most graduates mentioned that they did not know what to expect when enrolled into the Programmes. In fact, they did not know their goals or intent. The reasons for the lack of knowledge about the Programme could be two fold. The first one could be related to the broad nature and focus of the Programme, i.e. cognitive learning objectives: increasing intellectual, analytical and reasoning skills. It might be difficult for some individuals to conceive what these objectives concretely mean. Using other types of objectives (e.g. affective and behavioural) could provide a more balanced curriculum to develop critical thinking. The Programme objectives need to be specific and defined in such a way that not only the material to be taught and learned can be derived from them, but that the expected outcomes can be clearly identified and measured (Bresler et al. 2001). The second reason could pertain to how the Programme is presented to potential participants. This raises questions about the marketing strategy used to attract NCMs to the Programme. One may believe that NCMs are sent to the Programme because of succession planning. If this is not the case, there is a need to reflect on, first, the best moment in one's career to attend the Programme and,

second, the preparation that is required before enrolling into the Programme.

According to the data, the choice of courses was a challenge for some graduates. Two reasons might clarify this difficulty. First, the Programme courses were selected from an existing course list with mandatory and electives courses. These courses were designed for a 4-year Programme, but not specifically intended for Programme participants. Second, pre-requisites were sometimes needed to register to some courses, which limited the number of courses participants could register to, because most didn't possess them when registering to the Programme. It appears that most graduates resolved this difficulty by selecting courses, not necessarily related to the Programme objectives, but out of personal interests (e.g. *History*) for practical reasons (e.g. course transferable to another programme) or because it had military content (e.g. *Military Psychology*). However, at least two graduates chose *Introduction to Literary Studies and University Writing Studies*. This course increases communication and writing skills needed for all Senior NCM positions. In terms of meeting the pre-requisites requirement, the Programme should recognise that NCMs possess knowledge obtained through other forms of learning, such as work experience and 'life experience'. If life and work experiences were accepted as pre-requisites, the *Introduction to Psychology* course, as an example, might not be considered mandatory for other courses (e.g. *Organizational behaviour*), therefore allowing NCMs to register to courses without meeting the pre-requisite requirement.

Some participants' desire to pursue two degrees (e.g. Certificate and Baccalaureate) simultaneously is another reason why they chose specific courses. While it could be advantageous to the participants that the Programme helps people acquiring both degrees, pursuing two degrees could jeopardise the attainment of the Programme's objectives. By selecting courses that meet the requirement of both degrees, graduates may not be focusing on courses that would provide and develop their intellectual, analytical, and reasoning skills.

It was suggested earlier that both Programmes influenced its graduates positively and the education they received contributed to their effectiveness as Senior NCMs. While these benefits are acknowledged, it is important to underline that twelve respondents didn't see the Programme as compulsory or necessary for holding or getting senior leadership positions in the CAF. However, they still perceived it as an asset, a tool, or useful to hold higher positions. In view of the fact that some benefits have been identified as valuable, some of the concerns

highlighted above may explain the strong opposition. In addition, another explanation may be related to the manner in which education is delivered at RMC. NCMs are 'adult learners' who possess a background grounded in education/training, as well as work and personal experiences (Cranton 1994). Therefore, they possess different education needs and expectations than young adults (e.g. OCdts). For them, memorising a large amount of information (e.g. in introductory courses) is not conducive to learning new skills. For NCMs, a learner-centric environment would be more appropriate because they would be active participants in the learning process of specific skills, such as critical thinking, by associating their meaning within the sphere of their overall learning experience (Zacharakis and Van Der Werff 2012).

Most respondents raised the issue about how the Programme should be delivered, i.e. on or off-campus. They mentioned that Distance Learning and/or attending another institution are possible alternatives rather than being on campus at RMC. However, while these alternatives were a possibility, they made frequent references to the benefits of being immersed in a Programme that is delivered through courses that are also attended by OCdts. The survey designed for this research did not ask questions regarding OCdts. NCMs themselves recognised the benefits of being immersed in the same learning environment as the OCdts. Such benefits may include learning how OCdts are trained and educated, and about the culture of the RMC as an institution. It is worth nothing that, besides being able to learn about the academic life of future officers of the CAF, NCMs mentioned that the Programmes provided them with the opportunity to mentor OCdts. The CAF encourages mentoring relationships (Lagacé-Roy and Knackstedt 2007). Therefore, the opportunity to mentor OCdts might be the pivotal factor explaining why Programme participants favour attending the Programme on campus.

Finally, some respondents suggested that all NCMs identified as progressing to CWO should, as a general rule, attend NEPDP. If this is the case, potential candidates should be succession-planned, as mentioned earlier in this section. The data seems to indicate that succession planning might help alleviate some concerns, such as the amount of time selected candidates have to work before retiring from the CAF. For selected candidates, succession planning would give them enough time to prepare for their future entry into the Programme. Such preparation could include, but not limited to, getting familiar with the Programme's design, goals and expected outcomes. A minimum preparation

could also alleviate frustrations about course selection and/or pre-requisites, and provide a positive feeling about the Programme.

6 Research Limitation

Three research limitations have been identified, which are participant recruitment difficulties, survey validation issues, and the under-representation of graduate female respondents. The difficulty recruiting Programme graduates and getting them to respond to the email survey questionnaire negatively impacted the sample size. Therefore, the research results are only the views and experiences of those who responded to the survey questionnaire, and they may or may not represent entirely the views of the other graduates. Second, as the survey questionnaire was not validated, it raises the question about its soundness in terms of providing an answer to the research question. A validation of the survey would have assessed the survey questions' reliability. Third, the under-representation of female respondents was problematic, as it was not possible to draw any picture of their perceptions of the Programmes, or compare their responses to those of their male counterparts.

7 Future Research Possibilities

This research project provided a snapshot of seventeen graduates' perception of the contribution of both KAP and NEPDP to their effectiveness as Senior NCMs. Since then, other NCMs have enrolled and graduated from NEPDP. A future research project with new graduates holding senior leadership positions could provide further insight into this research question, and inform leadership about how they assess the Programme.

The research project highlighted the lack of female Programme participants and graduates. A future research project, with female only participants, could explore their specific needs and perceptions about the Programme, as well as the difficulties they encounter when attempting to enrol into the Programme.

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to assess whether KAP and NEPDP graduates viewed the Programmes as

contributing to the effectiveness of Senior Appointees and Strategic NCMs of the PoA. Through the research findings, it was determined that the Programmes had an impact on the education of NCMs and contributed to their overall effectiveness at the senior leadership level. The responses also confirmed that the RMC provided them with a unique education opportunity, knowledge and skill sets, as some of its courses included a unique military content, as well as afforded them the opportunity to mentor OCdts.

Conversely, the data highlighted the fact that the Programmes required improvements. Such improvements included clearer objectives, increased course choice, recognition of past personal and work experiences, and an adult learner-centric approach to course delivery. As well, a marketing strategy needed to be created to disseminate the Programme's objectives and to increase female NCM recruitment. These improvements would help the Programme's effectiveness in preparing chosen NCMs for senior leadership positions.

As the Non-Commissioned Member Personal Development (NCMPD) system evolves to meet the demands of a dynamic security environment, it is essential to ensure that NCMs possess the skill sets to perform at higher leadership levels within the CAF. The research results confirm that NEPDP remains a great option for its effectiveness in educating NCMs to function as Senior Appointees and Strategic NCMs.

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Annexure A: Survey Questionnaire

For ease in answering the questions, the researcher recommends to keep this survey in its electronic Word format and use as much space as required to answer all of the questions.

A.1 General Information

1. What is your gender?	
2. What is your First Official Language?	
3. What is your element?	
4. Did you take KAP/NEPDP courses in English or French?	
5. What level of education did you have prior to KAP/NEPDP? (select all that apply)	
• High School (please specify which grade level you completed)	
• GEP	
• CEGEP	
• OPME	
• Certificate	
• Other i.e. university or college courses/programmes (please specify)	
6. How many years of service did you have prior to attending KAP/NEPDP?	
7. What achievement did you receive when you graduated KAP/NEPDP?	
• Certificate in Military Studies	
• Undergraduate Degree	
• Other (please specify)	

B. Programme Specific Questions

1. If a graduate of KAP, what courses did you choose and why?
2. If a graduate of NEPDP, what electives did you choose and why?
3. What were your expectations on what you would learn prior to the programme?
4. Were your expectations met or not met? Please explain your answer.
5. Are you using (or have you used) your KAP/NEPDP education in your role as a Senior Appointee or Strategic NCM? Please explain your answer.
6. Has your KAP/NEPDP education contributed to your effectiveness in how you perform your functions as a Senior Appointee or Strategic NCM? Please explain your answer.
7. Which courses of your programme were the most useful? Please explain your answer.
8. Which courses of your programme were the least useful? Please explain your answer.
9. Was the KAP/NEPDP experience necessary for you to perform as a Senior Appointee or Strategic NCM? Please explain your answer.
10. Was it necessary for you to attend RMC to acquire the knowledge provided by a higher learning institution? Please explain your response.
11. At what stage in an NCM's career should NEPDP be provided and why?
12. Would you recommend or not recommend NEPDP and why?