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Organizational change in Canadian public institutions: The implementations of GBA+ in DND/CAF

Abstract: In 2016, the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) committed to the adoption of a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) toolkit across the forces. This article finds that the organizational culture of DND/CAF has helped them to adapt to this new policy approach, but that learning and transformation are not occurring. Based on DND/CAF documents, published internal DND/CAF studies, participant observation, interviews, surveys, and focus groups with DND/CAF staff, this article suggests that internal efforts to adjust to GBA+ continue to be challenging because of organizational culture.

Sommaire : En 2016, le ministère de la Défense nationale (MDN) et les Forces armées canadiennes (FAC) se sont engagés à adopter une trousse d'analyse comparative entre les sexes plus (ACS+) à l'échelle des forces. Dans cet article, nous découvrons que même si la culture organisationnelle des MDN/FAC leur a permis de s'adapter à cette nouvelle approche politique, l'apprentissage et la transformation n'ont pas lieu. En se fondant sur des documents des MDN/FAC, des études internes publiées des MDN/FAC, l'observation de participants, des entrevues, des sondages, et des groupes de discussion avec le personnel des MDN/FAC, cet article laisse entendre que les efforts internes pour s'adapter à l'ACS+ restent difficiles à cause de la culture organisationnelle.

In 1995, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, which emerged out of the *United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women* of the same year, made a commitment to implementing a gender-mainstreaming framework. Gender-mainstreaming is an approach meant to “change institutional structures, policy instruments, and priorities from a gender equality perspective” (Caglar 2013: 340).¹ As one of the signatories on the declaration, Canada adopted its own tools of gender-mainstreaming in the form of Gender-Based Analysis (GBA), which focused on the differential impact of policies on men and women. There were, however, many concerns about its implementation in the federal government, including the relative weakness of its organizing

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agency (Status of Women Canada) (Grace 1997: 593), insufficient funding (Dobrowolsky 2009; Knight and Rodgers 2012), a lack of community input into the design of the approach (Rankin and Vickers 2001), and the absence of intersectional considerations (Hankivsky 2005). The approach was eventually adapted in 2011, following a 2009 report by the Auditor General evaluating the success of the program. The new approach was reimagined to include an intersectional lens and was rebranded as Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+). Although the government made commitments to adopt GBA+, use of this approach was not mandatory across departments (Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2015). It would take a recommitment to the value of GBA+ by Prime Minister Trudeau, who has made numerous attempts to create a more feminist agenda, including the creation of the first federal cabinet with gender parity and the first Feminist International Assistance Policy, to once again bring this approach to the fore (Trudeau 2017).²

The most recent organizations to voluntarily adopt the GBA+ framework are the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Department of National Defence (DND), collectively known as the defence force, who make up Canada's "largest federal government department" (Government of Canada N.d.c). DND and the CAF, both of which were established by the National Defence Act, share a unique relationship. DND is a government department which, like other departments, is headed by a minister, only that minister is responsible to both DND and the CAF. Although their mandates are related, the CAF is a separate entity from DND, headed by the Chief of the Defence Staff – the most senior military officer in Canada – and its members are not public servants, but non-commissioned members, non-commissioned officers, or officers in the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, or the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Chief of Defence Staff is meant to facilitate the will of the DND minister, while DND also sees itself as supporting the CAF; in effect, DND/CAF are mutually supportive and inextricably tied organizations that share many parallel projects, of which GBA+ is no exception.

In 2016, the CAF announced their intention to integrate GBA+ across the forces, and DND and the CAF have since begun working to implement a series of joint initiatives on GBA+ (Government of Canada 2016).³ DND/CAF's commitment to the approach was reiterated in the 2018 Defence Policy, *Strong Secure Engaged*, which recognized GBA+ as a "key competency in support of the development of effective programs and policies for Canadians" (p. 24). The policy also stated that members of the defence team will be required to take GBA+ training, and that "all military personnel policies will be examined through a GBA+ lens" (Ibid.). The DND/CAF implementation strategy is based on recommendations from the 2015 Report of the Auditor General of Canada "Implementing Gender-Based Analysis" and the Status of Women's Action Plan on gender-based analysis (2016-2020),

and includes the creation of a joint DND/CAF responsibility centre to oversee implementation of the approach (Ibid.). Because the CAF is known for its masculine culture and historical exclusion of women from certain roles, its adoption of GBA+ has the potential to profoundly reshape the defence force. For this reason, the adoption of GBA+ by DND/CAF provides a particularly compelling case to explore the implementation of GBA+ and its potential to change the policies and priorities of Canadian government agencies.

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In this article, we question how the defence force, known for its focus on cohesion and hyper-masculine culture, has adjusted to the implementation of GBA+, a tool premised on the values of inclusivity and diversity. To assess these shifts, we utilize the insights of sociological institutionalism, which recognizes the role of institutional culture in policy uptake. Relying on a mixed-methods approach, which includes participant observation, focus groups, and surveys of DND/CAF members, we argue that transformative change within DND/CAF is unlikely to result from the implementation of GBA+. Rather, we contend that the defence force is working to adapt the approach to their existing institutional culture(s). While change is still possible with this approach, it is likely to be both subtle and slow.

Mixed-method approach to assessing change

Gaining insight into a concept as nebulous as an institution's culture necessitates a multi-pronged approach. To this end, we employed mixed methods: document analysis, interviews, focus groups, participant observation of GBA+ training, and surveys of trainees. We started with an exhaustive content analysis of DND/CAF documents on GBA+. While the utility of document analysis and ethnography is limited in the study of organizational culture, these approaches provided useful data for our analysis that we then complemented with other qualitative and quantitative methods.

To learn more about the implementation of GBA+, we conducted focus groups with Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in both DND and CAF. GFPs are tasked with implementing "gender perspectives within the plans, tasks and evaluations of their branches and units" (GAC 2018: 16) and are the first points of contact for any and all questions about GBA+. GFPs are responsible for building "organizational capacity" by acting as a resource for GBA+

requirements, providing guidance, and supporting equality assurance, making them important individuals to assess institutional culture as it relates to GBA+ (GAC 2018: 34). There is at least one GFP in all unit headquarters. Notably, there is no standardized procedure to select GFPs in either DND or CAF – some self-select into the role and some are asked or ordered to take it on.⁴ Once selected for these positions, they are meant to spend 10-15% of their time on GBA+ issues (DND and CAF 2018).

In total, we conducted four focus groups in October 2018 – three with GFPs and one with the Directorate of Gender, Diversity and Inclusion, the DND branch charged with the implementation of GBA+ – to assess how DND/CAF staff have adjusted to GBA+. We did not have access to the contact information for all DND/CAF GFPs, so we relied on a DND staff member to send an email invitation that we composed to all GFPs in the defence force asking them to participate in a focus group. Interested participants were to respond directly to us so that DND/CAF would have no knowledge of the identities of potential participants. Participants were made aware that any identifying information would be anonymized, and that only the researchers and other GFPs in the room during their focus groups would be aware of their participation. We then asked respondents to select the session they would like to participate in based on their views of GBA+, as negative, neutral, or positive, or to contact us directly for a private interview. We took this approach to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to share their feedback in a non-adversarial environment; we were aware participants may have felt hesitant to share views that were in opposition to the rest of the group. In total, five individuals opted to join the positive group, three the neutral group, and one the negative group. We also had one request for a one-on-one interview. Finally, we held a focus group with seven members of the Directorate of Gender, Diversity and Inclusion to learn about their implementation strategies. We asked all participants to refrain from using the names of their colleagues in the group discussions and noted that their comments would be collated and anonymized in our study. To further protect anonymity and ensure as much candidness as possible, we did not audio-record these groups, but we did take detailed notes on the conversations held. We then conducted a qualitative review of our findings, in which we looked for patterns. Where these patterns were evident, we referenced existing secondary literature to aid in our interpretation of their significance.

We also had an opportunity to observe the training of GFPs in DND/CAF, to learn more about the messaging they are given and what they take away. The goal of the GBA+ course is to “Enable GFPs (Gender Focal Points) to conduct GBA+ analysis and integrate gender perspectives; build [a] GBA+ network within the CAF/DND (GFPs); [and,] offer a platform to share lessons-earned, examples and best practices” (GAC 2018). The GBA+ training course for DND/CAF was designed by the Centre for Intercultural

Learning to assist in graduating civil servants and CAF personnel into becoming GFPs. We conducted participant observation of the two-day course in Ottawa on October 23 and 24, 2018. Our own insights and observations of the course are noted in this article.

In order to gain a more precise reading of their experience of the course and perceptions of GBA+, we also administered a pre- and post- survey to the participants. Before the session began, participants signed ethics clearance forms explaining that the survey was voluntary and that results would be anonymized to protect their identities. We also had an opportunity to explain our role as researchers to the group. Pre-surveys were then distributed to all 28 participants before the course began, and post-surveys at the end of the second day. We had a 97% response rate on both surveys, which contained the same demographic, worldview, and confidence-based questions to allow us to assess changes in attitudes that might be attributed to the course. The surveys differed in that the pre-survey included questions about participant expectations for the course, while the post-survey addressed the perceived goals and efficacy of the training, as well as the comfort-levels of participants in acting as GFPs based on what they had learned. Results were then coded and tabulated.

Change at Canadian public sector institutions

In trying to study and understand change in public sector institutions like DND/CAF, political science and public administration have generally given little credit to organizational ecology as a factor. Too often, political scientists have failed to understand the importance of the internal structure, mandate, culture, and behavior of public sector institutions. Organizations have been studied as “empty shells or impersonal policy machinery to be manipulated by other actors,” which are assumed to have “no ontological independence” (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 704). Or as Peters (2015: 219) puts it: “There is a tendency, in both academic and popular discourse to speak of ‘The Bureaucracy’ as if it were an integrated whole.” In this view, public sector institutions and public servants are seen as mere vehicles of implementation for the power, interests, and control of cabinet and the government; a change in government or in policy priorities is all that is necessary to explain changes in policy outcomes. Thoenig (2003: 3) aptly summarizes this view of public sector institutions when he explains that:

The public sector, especially the emerging welfare state, should be treated as a homogenous and coherent actor relying upon a tightly coupled set of specific entities (ministries, agencies, etc.) subordinated to the will of its leaders and able to define a general interest criterion. Legal authority and political legitimacy should provide the backbone of governance.

Canadian political science tends to discount what happens inside public sector institutions, as well as the roles of public servants in receiving or implementing change, meaning factors like institutional ecology and organizational culture are often overlooked. Yet, there is a growing appreciation for organizational ecology to assess how departments adjust to changes in policy and services, and their inevitable effect on policy outcomes.

Sociological institutionalism's contribution to political science has reinvigorated interest in the use of organization theory to study politics (see Powell and DiMaggio 1991). Sociological institutionalists examine internal socialization, learning, culture, ideologies, and norms as explanations of policies and behaviour within institutions (see Hall and Taylor 1996). Although they take a variety of methodological approaches, they are united by the belief that ideas, culture, norms, socialization, and other intangibles are important to the study of politics. Moreover, that to understand what happens inside organizations, we need to "go micro" in our analysis by looking inside-out (see Johnston 2001) – that is, we need to look at organizational theory to understand change within public sector institutions.

This *going micro* is even more important when trying to understand how normative changes are absorbed into an organization. As Scala and Paterson (2018: 211) note in their discussion of gender-mainstreaming (GM), "how these forces are understood and expressed at the local level in the day-to-day work of actors tasked with enacting GM policy 'on the ground,'" remains understudied. Although sociological institutionalism recognizes the importance of systemic factors, such as power, the whole of government, and state interests, they add that we need to look at organizations like public sector institutions as social environments that often behave in ways that challenge or complement system-based explanations (see Johnston 2001). Critics have often charged that sociological institutionalism incorrectly overestimates the autonomy and devalues system-based factors of organizations. However, this criticism is based on a mischaracterization of the approach, which does not, in fact, suggest that organizations are closed-systems where a government department is self-contained and independent of power considerations in government and cabinet. The point is that public sector institutions can act in ways that most political science explanations fail to consider. As Thoenig (2003: 135) explains:

As field observation consistently suggests, incongruities exist between the declared ends and those that the public organization actually achieves or seeks to achieve. It pursues self-support and self-maintenance goals, as well as productive ends. It may turn into a polymorphous system whose struggle to survive may induce it to neglect or to distort its goals. Organizations may be passive instruments, they also possess a life of their own and become active entrepreneurs. People who participate are complete wholes, they do not act solely in accordance with the roles assigned to them.

Hence, sociological institutionalists see public institutions as ones that operate in an open-system, where domestic system factors are more important to some organizations than to others. Organizational change is possible because most organizations belong to a fluid open-system where political factors can be important variables of change. Nevertheless, public sector institutions are also bureaucratic entities with their own internalized sets of norms, ideologies, and cultures that need to be considered when studying their behavior and responses to policy change. To understand public sector institutions, like DND/CAF, including how they absorb change like the introduction of GBA+, we frame our findings from established organization theory.

Sociological institutionalists and organization theorists argue that one of the most important factors to consider within organizational change is culture. Change in organizations is, arguably, difficult and slow because organizational culture is deeply embedded in the routinized and day-to-day structure of organizational behavior. Organizational culture is defined as “the shared beliefs, attitudes, and values of members that determine organizational norms of behavior” (Heffron 1989: 155). Organizational culture is transmitted to members of the organization through the continuous socialization of both existing and new staff members. The dominant organizational culture is reproduced and entrenched with new recruits who are both screened and socialized to fit the organization’s culture. Success of organizational change is best determined by how receptive an organization’s culture is to the proposed change. Simply put, if proposed organizational changes conflict with the underlying organization’s culture, then change will be met with resistance and fail during implementation (Ibid.). Understandably, proponents of change are more successful at implementing organizational change when the proposed alterations mesh with the existing cultural expectations of an organization’s staff (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Those who recommend radical changes will be met with resistance and non-compliance.

When organizational adjustment to change does occur, it involves either *adaptation*—where incremental change occurs without shaking the organization’s *raison d’être*—or *learning*—where change is more substantive because it stirs and forces the re-evaluation of the organization’s underlying values (see Haas 1990: 3; Fiol and Lyles 1985). The former can often appear to be cosmetic and pro-forma; whereas the later requires an internalization of change as necessary and useful. Both forms of organizational change are invariably slow. Organization theorists, however, argue that for organizational change, adaptation is more likely than learning because adaptation is less challenging to the dominant culture and invariably to dominant interests. As Hamel and Zanini (2014) note:

The reality is that today's organizations were simply never designed to change proactively and deeply—they were built for discipline and efficiency, enforced through hierarchy and routinization. As a result, there's a mismatch between the pace of change in the external environment and the fastest possible pace of change at most organizations. If it were otherwise, we wouldn't see so many incumbents struggling to intercept the future.

Organizational theorists contend that individuals resist change because they fear the unknown, have selective attention to, and retention of, new information, prefer habit and routine, need the security of the known, and feel threatened by change (Trice and Beyer 1993: 393-428). At the group level, organizations therefore resist change because there is a lack of trust, differing perceptions and goals, social disruption with change, and a limitation of resources to devote to change (Ibid). Put simply, change requires significant shifts in an embedded organizational culture, which is difficult to achieve (Ibid).

Institutional culture: DND and the CAF

Before we can evaluate potential pathways to change in DND/CAF, it is first necessary to take a deeper dive into their organizational cultures. In our attempts to characterize the specific institutional cultures within DND/CAF, we relied both on the data we collected in the field (e.g. focus groups, participant observation, and surveys) and a rich scholarly literature on the subject. Despite being deeply tied, DND and the CAF have distinct, if overlapping, institutional cultures. Notably, the CAF's institutional culture has been studied at length, while no specific studies have focused on the organizational culture within DND.

In general terms, militaries are known for having "a specific occupational culture which is relatively isolated from society" (Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2006: 237). They also tend to be slow to change, because they prioritize stability, and major changes "may be at odds with the structural and cultural inertia" which characterizes them (Ibid. p. 253). More specifically in the case of Canada, the culture of the armed forces is often characterized as one of militarized or hegemonic masculinity (Taber 2018; Poulin et al. 2018; Lane 2017). This culture prizes a limited range of hyper-masculine traits, including physical strength, valor, and a high tolerance for violence. These traits are cultivated and nourished by a cohesive and hierarchical organization that expects troops to follow orders and commands by superiors (Poulin et al. 2018: 68).

Despite official policies of inclusion, Eichler (2013: 258) stresses the ongoing "tensions between 'equality' and 'difference' [that] continue to shape public debate on women in combat as well as women's experiences in the military," which she suggests requires increased feminist attention. Indeed, a lack of certainty about how women in the CAF ought to be

perceived is evident even in attempts to justify their inclusion. For example, when women are included, they are still expected to conform to a more traditional masculine model. Even when tasks which women are seen as excelling at are essential to successful operations, these tasks “may be dismissed as unrelated to a traditional view of military fighting power,” or as “non-essential and peripheral duties” (Egnell 2016). Of course, culture is not static, and neither is the military culture isolated from Canadian society writ large. Lane (2017: 465) stresses that, if we recognize Canada and the CAF as sites of “relational dynamism” rather than “as unchanging, patriarchal monoliths,” it becomes possible to see subtle cultural shifts. Indeed, one of the goals of GBA+ is to produce such transformations.

Militaries are also deeply hierarchical organizations, which function on loyalty and obedience. Although DND is also hierarchical, public servants are not motivated by the same mechanisms as members of the CAF; rather, they are often career public servants, who may well move between different government departments throughout their careers. While the specific culture in DND has not been studied, it does share a mandate with the CAF, as well as many shared initiatives. Indeed, these shared endeavours, which are evident in the implementation of GBA+, make the cultural and organizational implications difficult, if not impossible, to effectively parse out. Even where we were able to differentiate participant responses based on DND or CAF membership, as in the pre- and post- GFP training survey, we noted no significant differences in responses, attitudes, or knowledge between the groups, which speaks to the deeply interwoven nature of GBA+ in the defence force. As we will discuss in the following section, however, we do not believe that a sizable culture shift is likely to be the result of GBA+ policy; rather, we suggest that GBA+ will be adapted to the existing cultures within DND/CAF rather than affecting transformative change.

Notably, there was a great deal of overlap in the views of the defence force from those living it and those writing about it. One of the most direct characterizations of culture occurred during our participant observations of the GBA+ training course, which featured an exercise that required participants to reflect on their organizations. The exercise invited all attendees to brainstorm in their groups (which were each a mix of DND and CAF personnel) and choose a character from fiction that they feel represented their organization. Responses included Elmer Fudd, who the team described as “a goal determined character”; Shrek, who is “big and slow, and while scary to those on the outside, Shrek tries to do the right thing.”; Captain planet, “a diverse character that tries to work with others, believes in morality, supports a sustainable earth, and believes in team work”; Thomas the Tank Engine, who is “dependable, but has to work with his team and finds it difficult to work with old equipment”; Kim Possible, she “...looks like an average teenager but is a superhero working to save the world. She’s collaborative

but faces her own demons”; and, Optimus Prime, who “...is diplomatic and knows how to work with various groups and is conscious of the outcome of his actions.” When course participants were asked to reflect on what the shared characteristics of these characters were, a number of participants responded that they “share the attempt to do the right thing,” that “none of them are villains and we see ourselves as good people”, and finally, that the “gender of the fictional characters were mostly male.”

These responses were given at the outset of the training course on GBA+, but even in this context, it quickly became apparent that most groups did not take diversity or inclusion into account in their attempts to characterize the defence force. Instead, they tended to favour characteristics like toughness (on the outside), collaboration, and diplomacy. They also believed that the objectives of their institution were fundamentally good. Notably, in many respects, these perceptions track with the scholarly work on culture within the military.

Adjusting to change: The introduction of GBA+

With their organizational culture(s) more clearly articulated, we now move to a discussion of the implementation of GBA+ within the defence force. As noted at the outset of this paper, the CAF announced its commitment to implementing GBA+ in 2016, and both DND and the CAF have since moved to rapidly rollout the program. As will become evident in this section, when GBA+ was first introduced, only minimal supportive infrastructure was in place. DND/CAF have since been working to create the infrastructure and lay the foundations of this approach.

Most members of DND/CAF were first introduced to GBA+ through an online course designed by Status of Women Canada that is open to the public and not specific to DND/CAF. This course, which was updated in May 2017 following recommendations made in a 2015 Auditor General report, is designed to offer “a basic introduction to GBA+” (Status of Women Canada n.d.). All members of the defence force are required to complete this course (Government of Canada n.d.b). Completion of the course is necessary because, although they have resources available to help them, all members of DND/CAF are responsible to complete their own GBA+ analysis.

Personnel assigned more specific roles relating to GBA+ support are also offered additional training as either GFPs, who serve as first points of contact across units, or Gender Advisors (GENADs), who act as resources to the Commanders responsible for the integration of gender perspectives. A joint-responsibility centre on GBA+ was also recently completed, which is home to the Directorate of Gender Diversity and Inclusion on the DND side and the Directorate of Integration of Gender Perspectives on the CAF side,

as well as gender and inclusion champions, who act as advocates to support and promote a range of gender and inclusion programs. This centre was created to offer further resources and support on GBA+. It was within this organizational structure that GBA+, it is hoped, will help to create lasting change to the diversity and inclusion of the defence force.

The implementation of GBA+ within DND/CAF has been framed as enhancing existing values and objectives within the organization as outlined in the DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics, which includes principles necessitating personnel “Respect the dignity of all persons,” including recognition of the benefit of diversity, and the need to “Obey and support lawful authority,” which includes respecting the rule of law, and upholding the values exemplified by these laws, such as Charter guarantees of equality (DND and CAF 2012). Although we noted widespread confusion about the actual objectives of GBA+ during focus groups, these objectives have since been laid out in the newly redesigned GFP handbook (GAC 2018: 4), distributed during the training course, as follows:

1. To ensure the benefits do not accrue unequally to some, and that the risks are not unequally borne by others
2. To improve design, diagnose deficiencies, develop better targeted programs, that take into account diverse users or clients
3. To promote equality, diversity and inclusiveness by addressing barriers and gaps

Although it is certainly helpful to have a clearer articulation of these values, equality is not laid out explicitly as a value in the DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics and, in many ways, its recognition seems to run counter to the culture within the forces. Egnell (2016) explains that there is concern within militaries that “the inclusion of women and gender perspectives will ruin unit cohesion and military culture,” which are premised on masculine norms. Heteronormative discourses are used to reinforce and “support military culture in the name of operational effectiveness” (Davis 2009: 449). Indeed, a certain level of unit cohesion, which does not allow for diversity and difference, is often seen as necessary to assemble an “effective fighting force” (Rennick n.d.). Others, however, like Donna Winslow and Jason Dunn (2002: 642) nuance this finding and explain that this resistance is much stronger in the combat arms, which are “far more removed from civilian society.” As a result, DND/CAF as a whole is, in many respects, already beginning to show changes in attitude, and they posit that “intergenerational attitudinal differences may resolve themselves in time” (Ibid. p. 663).

Of course, as discussed in previous sections, true transformation in an organization requires seeing the value in change. While many individual actors within DND/CAF certainly see the potential of GBA+ in bringing about a cultural overhaul, these hopes did not always line up with the

broader attitudes within DND/CAF. Instead, we continued to see members of the community committed to the old way of doing things. This was noted in our findings from meetings with focus groups participants and in surveys of DND/CAF members who undertook GFP training.

When we asked focus group participants how they proposed to influence organizational culture change, they began by suggesting that the culture within the forces “has actually shifted quite a bit,” but that, “you don’t waste too much energy on resistance unless you need to, and the resisters will be brought down, or not.” Rather than trying to change the culture where resistance is greatest, they suggested the need to secure buy-in from leadership, both formal and informal. That said, members of the Directorate of Gender Diversity and Inclusion also stressed that they are working to “build a network that is not composed of experts,” in an effort to increase uptake and shift the culture. To this end, all members of the DND/CAF are responsible for their own GBA+ analysis, with the expectation that they will help to develop a global strategy on GBA+ from the bottom-up. Although this approach may sound counter-intuitive, there are arguments in the GBA+ literature that bottom-up approaches to implementation are more likely to produce culture change, because they help to create ownership and buy-in at lower levels of an organization. That said, in Canada, the literature has pointed to grassroots movements external to organizations to avoid the “more integrationist” approach of experts, who are less liable to challenge the institutions they are working in, rather than the base of an institutional hierarchy (Patterson 2010: 397).

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To support employees in their GBA+ analysis, a network of GFPs has been created across the forces. Indeed, the deputy minister sent out a directive that someone needed to be trained as a GFP at each L1/BRANCH. As part of this initiative, a training course was launched in June 2018. In its first iteration the course was only a half-day (of which only two were delivered) but has since been extended to two days (of which only four were delivered since our field work in October 2018).⁵ During this training, GFPs are given a handbook, which offers breakdown of GBA+, including its history and key terms and ideas, step-by-steps guidelines to its application, and some examples of policy that has been through GBA+. Next, they are walked through the fundamental motivations for adopting the GBA+ initiative and its basic

theoretical underpinnings and given an opportunity to attempt GBA+ analysis of existing policies.

In our focus groups with GFPs, we asked them to reflect on GBA+ and the challenges of absorbing its toolkit into their work. GFPs who responded that the GBA+ course was a positive experience had some criticism of its vague application. They commented that “the structure and culture of DND is not yet moved along far enough that senior staff know how to apply GBA+,” and that, although the course was helpful in completing the paperwork necessary for GBA+ analysis, “it hasn’t gotten into people’s consciousness.” Others echoed this idea, suggesting that a “culture change in DND/CAF” is necessary for the successful implementation of GBA+, an approach which itself is attempting to institute such a change, but that such a change faces serious resistance because “[l]eaders are not always on board and can just pay lip service to GBA+.”

In the focus group that was critical of GBA+, participants noted how the toolkit was too top-down and mandated for “political purposes.” Among the descriptors we heard about GBA+ were: “esoteric,” “blurry,” and overly focused on “political correctness.” We also heard that, because CAF personnel in particular are recruited from isolated Canadian communities, the progressive values that they are being asked to adopt in training “fall flat.” Often this is because the objectives of the approach have not been clearly laid out or are misinterpreted. As one CAF personnel noted: “The GBA+ course is fluffy. The way it is packaged is not applicable to the military. My troops think it’s about op-honour, transgender bathrooms, lady issues, breastfeeding rooms, that time of the month...” Another CAF member who critiqued the GBA+ course said “The rollout wasn’t great. It added too much work to our plate. It’s the ‘how you do it’ that’s the hardest part. I wish it wasn’t such an uphill battle and that it was more clear. People grumble about it because it is not always applicable.” We also held a one-on-one interview with a DND staff member who wanted a private conversation. They pointed out that GBA+ was important because “as former military personnel, a lot of our training and equipment was geared to men and not women,” but went out to suggest there were challenge with how GBA+ has been introduced in the department.

Nevertheless, focus group participants were quick to defend the value of GBA+, even if they were not pleased with its implementation. It was called a “fantastic tool,” which allows the activities of the defence force to “apply across a range of people.” Other forms of affirmation were more qualified, as exemplified by one participant who said: “No one is opposed to it, they grumble about it because it’s arduous, but no one’s hostile to it.” All told, these responses suggested that, regardless of the feelings of individual participants, the culture within DND/CAF does not allow for overt criticism of the values underlying the approach. The continued uncertainty we

witnessed concerns the theoretical compatibility of values like equality and diversity with mandates like operational effectiveness. It is here that we saw resistance to *learning* and a reliance on *adaptation*. In other words, GFPs do not see GBA+ as a process that requires them to re-think their entire approach, but rather as a secondary exercise that complements ingrained thinking. Although the issue was not articulated in these terms, many GFPs seemed to perceive GBA+ as irreconcilable with their other objectives and were uncertain what to think about this perceived conflict.

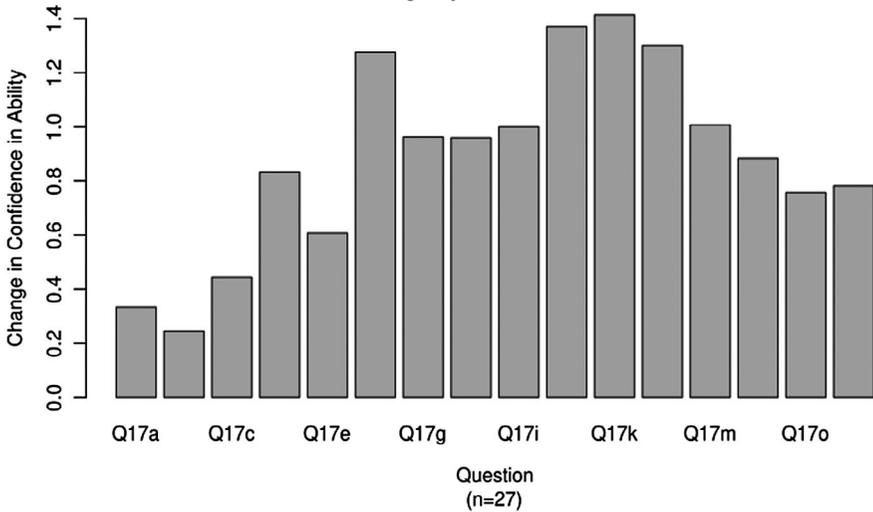
The continued uncertainty we witnessed concerns the theoretical compatibility of values like equality and diversity with mandates like operational effectiveness

GFPs do not see GBA+ as a process that requires them to re-think their entire approach, but rather as a secondary exercise that complements ingrained thinking

We also gained insights on the culture within DND/CAF through the pre- and post- surveys administered during the GFP training. From these surveys, we saw attempts to adapt the course to fit with the existing institutional culture. For example, we posed a series of sixteen questions and prompts on both practical and theoretical questions relating to GBA+, and asked participants to rate their confidence in answering them, from “very unconfident” to “very confident.”⁶ This was the only question on the survey in which we saw a statistically significant change between the pre- and post-survey (see figure 1).⁷ Notably, although increases in confidence were apparent across the board, these were greater on questions of a practical nature. This shift is interesting, as it suggests a focus on procedure within the course, as well as suggesting that participants may not be able to effectively link theory and practice. Again, the participants adapted to GBA+ in their existing mental frames, but the course did not achieve learning of new mental frames.

In our post-survey, we also asked GBA+ course attendees to note what challenges they foresee in acting as a GFP. Among these responses, a clear pattern emerged. By far the most common response was concern about the “lack of awareness” of GBA+ among other members of DND/CAF. Respondents noted that they anticipated “push back” and that people will continue to view GBA+ “as a check in the box” exercise, regardless of their actions. Similarly, a number of GFPs noted the ongoing challenge in the

Figure 1. *Change in Mean Confidence in Abilities of Participants on Gender-Sensitive Knowledge, by Question*



lack of “active engagement from people who don’t *get it*,” including “buy in from commanders and all members of CAF on the usefulness of using GBA+.” These are all organizational culture traits of resistance to internalizing change through learning. They do, however, clearly reflect a pathway of adaptation to change.

Finally, one rather telling finding appeared in our post-training survey, when we asked participants to rank, in order of importance, their perception of DND and the CAF’s goal in employing GBA+. The list of options included: increasing awareness of discrimination, increasing recruitment and retention of women and visible minorities, a transformation of the culture, improvements to operational effectiveness, and improvements to their public image. We then coded these results using five different social choice theories (pareto rule, borda count, plurality, simple majority and pairwise majority) to arrive at a group preference.⁸ Our overwhelming finding was that cultural change was perceived to be the rationale for adopting GBA+.⁹ In the context of our findings, which show a strong resistance to culture change from within the defence force in favour of adaptive changes that resist shifts in culture, it is notable that those within the organization still seem to believe, at least to some degree, that the work they are doing signals a cultural shift. This implies a lack of perspective on how these changes can be brought about, and what they require of individual members of DND/CAF.

Our overwhelming finding was that cultural change was perceived to be the rationale for adopting GBA+. In the context of our findings, which show a strong resistance to culture change from within the defence force in favour of adaptive changes that resist shifts in culture, it is notable that those within the organization still seem to believe, at least to some degree, that the work they are doing signals a cultural shift

Conclusion

We have argued that transformative change, the type of change necessary to secure an internal, cultural shift within DND/CAF, is unlikely to result from the implementation of GBA+ in the defence force. We have not seen a willingness, or indeed an awareness, that there is a need to revisit the institution's underlying values; or what is often called *learning* in organizational change literature. Rather, we have shown that DND/CAF is working to *adapt* the approach to their existing institutional culture, which continues to value traits associated with militarized masculinity, like valour and strength. These attempts have, at times, been fraught, where the values that underlie GBA+ have come into conflict with those of the institution. While change is still possible with this approach, we believe that it will be limited and slow; and change may also be cosmetic.

Within the GM literature, this dynamic is reflected in the distinction some scholars have drawn in the implementation of GM as either integrationist or agenda-setting (Jahan 1995). The latter approach demands transformative change within an institution's culture, including norms and power dynamics, while the former, evident in the case of DND/CAF, seeks to design tools and measurements of success, but without necessitating a shift to the status quo (Verma 2014: 188). This literature suggests that it is not the tool itself, but its implementation that determines its limited influence.

Of course, to say that change is limited in some way is not to dismiss the potential value of the implementation of GBA+ within DND/CAF. As traditional organization theorists have argued, organizational change is most often incremental, and at times short of ideal. This view is reflected in March and Simon's (1958) idea of organizational satisficing:

Most human decision-making, whether individual or organizational, is concerned with the discovery and selection of satisfactory alternatives; only in exceptional cases is it concerned with the discovery and selection of optimal alternatives... To optimize requires processes several orders of magnitude more complex than those required to satisfice. An example is the difference between searching a haystack to find the sharpest needle in it and searching the haystack to find a needle sharp enough to sew with (140-141).

Organizational theorists expect that, in the process of introducing change, organizations set ideal standards and goals but often end up with solutions that can effectively satisfy all vested interests in the organization. So, even though GBA+ may not have achieved an ideal outcome, we might still think that it has achieved some positive change. For example, the language of inclusivity and diversity is now familiar across the defence force, and members are asked to consider these issues in their daily tasks.

It is still early in the implementation of GBA+ throughout the defence force, and the success of this initiative remains to be seen. It is also true that measuring the success of the initiative will be a difficult task. Because of continued ambiguity surrounding the end goals of GBA+, no clear metrics to measure its success exist. Nonetheless, we are cautiously optimistic about the potential for change with DND/CAF if they remain committed to GBA+. Although the change they achieve may not be paradigm-shifting, the incorporation of policies and programs developed with diversity in mind are likely, over time, to create a more effective and open defence force or, in the very least, lay the groundwork to recognize the value in such an approach.

Notes

- 1 The original, and more expansive, definition of gender-mainstreaming provided by the United Nations is as follows: “Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality” (1997).
- 2 It is worth noting that recent events in Canada, such as the SNC Lavalin affair, which saw Justice Minister and Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould step down alleging she was pressured by the Prime Minister and members of his office to resolve the Quebec-based engineering company’s corruption and fraud case without laying criminal charges, has called the feminist credentials of the Trudeau government into question. These events also led to the resignation of Treasury Board president Jane Philpott who, along with Wilson-Raybould, was expelled from the Liberal Party caucus in April 2019. The expulsion of two prominent women’s voices from Trudeau’s famously gender-equal cabinet has led many to ask whether or not his government can indeed call themselves feminist, although Trudeau has remained publicly committed to feminist values.
- 3 The specific motivations for the timing of the DND and CAF’s adoption of GBA+ were never explicitly stated, but it is worth looking at the context in which the policy was adopted. In 2015, the Deschamps Report (the External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces), convened in response to numerous allegations of sexual misconduct, found that “there is an underlying sexualized culture in the CAF that is hostile to women and LGTBQ members, and conducive to more serious incidents of sexual harassment and assault” (i). The findings from this report were met with widespread public condemnation and led to the creation of Operation HONOUR later that year, which aims to eliminate “harmful and inappropriate sexual behavior in the Canadian military” (Government of Canada n.d.a). We believe the timing of the Dechamps Report, in

- relation to the announcement that GBA+ would be employed across the forces, suggests an attempt to safeguard the public image of the CAF on gendered issues.
- 4 In the survey of GFP training we conducted, which is discussed later in the paper, we learned that, of our 27 respondents, 59% volunteered to take on their roles, and that almost everyone from the DND group volunteered, while only around 35% of the CAF group volunteered. When we compared GFPs who were asked or ordered to take on the role with those who volunteered, we found small differences. For example, voluntary GFPs were slightly more likely to think men and women were already equal in Canada, but our sample size was too small to determine if these differences were significant.
 - 5 Based on email communications with DND, we know that 68 DND personnel have undertaken the GBA+ training as of the date of this study (47 of which only received the half-day training). We estimate the CAF numbers to be similar because many of these workshops aim to have DND/CAF parity.
 - 6 Participants were asked to rank their level of confidence in answering each of the following questions/prompts: A) What is gender? B) What is personal bias? C) What is the relationship between personal bias and institutional values? D) What is intersectionality? E) What is a gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis? F) How do I apply a gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis to my work? G) How does a gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis improve the quality of my organization's work? H) Explain the key definitions and concepts of gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis I) Provide advice to Sr. Mgmt/ commanders and staff in integrating a gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis across the full policy/programming/procurement lifecycle. J) Explain the relationship of gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis to Canada's national and international policy frameworks K) Explain the key functions of a gender focal point I) Explain how to conduct gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis M) Identify and use relevant sources of disaggregated data N) How do gender- or intersectional-sensitive analysis improve the quality of my organization's work? O) Reflect on my own unconscious bias P) Identify manifestations of structural inequality. The goal in asking these questions was to evaluate how the GBA+ training course influenced their confidence in addressing each question or prompt.
 - 7 We measured the average treatment effects in the matched sample using difference in-means testing. We also compared differences using analysis of variance, linear regression and chi-squared testing. Results were considered statistically significant when they occurred beyond a 95% confidence interval. Missing responses were excluded from the analysis of those questions.
 - 8 The most demanding of these tests are the pareto and simple majority, as the former requires unanimous agreement in the sample, and the latter requires a majority of the respondents to give the same response. The pareto coding yielded no results, which we anticipated because the parameters of the test are so high. The pairwise majority considers relationships based on ranked pairs, while in the borda rule, each ranking is associated with a point-value. Finally, the plurality measure ranks responses based on which categories had the greatest responses as compared with the other categories.
 - 9 Culture was the first result selected using the borda, plurality and pairwise majority measure, as well as the simple majority measure.

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