

APPLYING BLOOM'S TAXONOMY TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNING IN THE CAF: EDUCATION, POLICIES, AND CULTURE CHANGE

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Introduction

The current staffing crisis in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has left 10,000 positions unfilled.¹ Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) General Eyre explicitly stated that culture change remains the top priority throughout the strategic reconstitution process given the connection between an undesirable culture and the retention and recruitment of members.² The newly established Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) Initiating Directive acknowledges the complexity of culture change through its intent to establish culture change as an ongoing process that requires constant monitoring of progress and effectiveness. The Directive declares, “All members of the Defence Team will actively contribute to culture change and will galvanize to eliminate harmful mindsets and conduct.”³

Indeed, new policy that has emerged as a result of culture change speaks to the need for all members of the CAF to communicate, follow, and demonstrate the CAF ethos.⁴ Doing so in a way that achieves objectives for culture change will require that individuals have a good understanding of what changes are required and how these are to be achieved. Yet, such an endeavour would take significant investment in building skills and capabilities in CAF members that may not have been viewed as organizational necessities before.

Transforming the culture of the CAF requires an acknowledgement of the complexities that helped build it in the first place. Influences on culture include but are not limited to, formal training, peer pressure, leadership influence, tradition, rank structure, and discipline.⁵ In this paper, I examine training delivery for culture change initiatives and concepts by employing Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning framework.⁶ Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist interested in improving student learning, published a framework with collaborators Max Englehart, Edward Furst, Walter Hill, and David Krathwohl in 1956. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides a framework for organizing learning objectives and assessing student learning by

categorizing educational goals into six levels of complexity, from remembering and understanding to evaluating and creating. Considering the connections between various training activities with specific levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, trainers can design more effective learning experiences that challenge and engage learners at the individual level, leading to improved outcomes.

In this paper, I argue that Bloom's Taxonomy can be used to understand the limitations of current culture change efforts in relation to how individuals understand and engage with recent policy changes. I make the distinction between training and education by defining training as a process of acquiring specific skills, knowledge, or abilities in order to perform a particular job or task. I define education as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits through a more holistic and comprehensive approach to learning. I believe that the reimagination of culture change training as education could lead to sustainable change in individuals and, as they work for change, the organization as a whole.

First, I summarize recent policy initiatives to identify the types of knowledge and understanding expected of CAF members. Although these initiatives are not exhaustive of learning opportunities afforded to CAF members on select bases, such as leadership courses, they illustrate the approach the CAF often takes to teach CAF members about culture change. The method of policy implementation through basic online courses is insufficient in promoting long-lasting cultural transformation. I then present Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework to consider the levels of individual learning required and use the launch of the recent dress modernization policy as an illustrative reference point for the application of the Taxonomy. I will weave a connection between Bloom's Taxonomy and the implementation of new dress regulations. I conclude by making connections to how Bloom's framework can be applied in other areas of education related to social issues and culture change in the CAF.

CAF Reconstitution and Culture Change Directives

Reshaping a culture where members have been deeply socialized to conform to a militarized masculine prototype has proven to be a difficult process.⁷ “Culture is deeply embedded and layered in an organization’s psyche and any attempt at influencing change will be a complex process that must engage multiple levels of the organization.”⁸ The history of training in military culture has primarily focused on developing human capital rather than addressing social issues. This is due to the power based, hierarchal nature of the CAF that often teaches junior members what is right and wrong through reward or punishment.⁹ A form of punishment to reform a behaviour is often re-training. By employing re-training as punishment, this frames training as a punitive mechanism used to penalize or correct behaviour rather than a space for mutual dialogue and knowledge exchange. While training can certainly enhance self-insight and self-understanding, it is crucial to acknowledge that it can also be seen as harmful. Acknowledging both the value and limitations of training within the CAF demonstrates a need for education as a more appropriate way to inform members on culture change. Sarah Hampson and Nancy Taber assert that, “military adult education, therefore, is about more than simply training members of the armed forces to do their daily jobs. Education in the military is an ongoing process of professionalism.”¹⁰

The Path to Dignity and Respect addresses the complexity of culture change and states, “Cultural alignment will not succeed if the current culture is not well understood.”¹¹ Policies use direct language that can place undue burdens for change onto members by focussing on their individual buy-in to advance organizational culture change initiatives. It will be difficult to gain meaningful buy-in from members without first providing them with the necessary education to investigate and dismantle dominant views on CAF culture often learned through intense socialization processes.¹² Members should not be expected to do this on their own, but rather through meaningful education that seeks to dismantle the systems that work together to create and sustain culture, and shape the careers and lived experiences of CAF

members. Three recent doctrinal and policy documents have created new focus on additional skill and capability expectations for CAF members: *Trusted to Serve*, *The Path to Dignity and Respect*, and CPCC's *Initiating Directive*. Each are discussed in turn.

Trusted to serve: Policies that have emerged as a result of culture change speak to the need for all members of the CAF to communicate, follow, and demonstrate the CAF ethos. While the directives are explicit in the CAF's intent on culture change, effective training required to communicate these changes remains minimal to non-existent. As stated in *Trusted to Serve*:

The CAF does not expect recruits to fully understand and comprehensively apply the CAF Ethos right away. However, socialization, or more simply, an ongoing discussion between leaders, subordinates and peers, helps to deepen our understanding of its application to military service and our daily lives.¹³

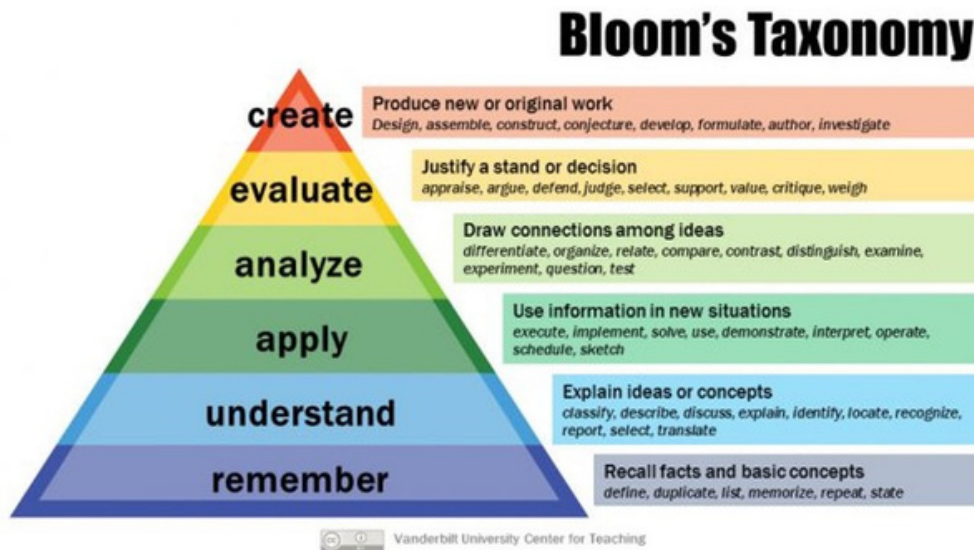
Without a clear plan to guide recruits to understand and apply the CAF Ethos, there is already a lost opportunity for guiding its members towards productive culture change.

The Path to Dignity and Respect: *The Path to Dignity and Respect (The Path)* is a culture change strategy designed to prevent and address sexual misconduct in the CAF. *The Path* states, "Once the vision is clear, the existing culture can be evaluated to see how it is contributing to, or detracting from, that vision and the extent of change that is needed."¹⁴ CAF members should have the opportunity to also understand existing and desired culture on a deeper level through facilitated learning.

CPCC Initiating Directive: In 2021, CPCC was stood up to unify and integrate all associated culture change activities across the Department and become the centralized hub of expertise for professional conduct and culture. Acknowledging the correlation between an undesirable culture and issues with retention and

recruitment, culture was formally raised as a systemic problem in the *CPCC Initiating Directive*.¹⁵ The inclusion of all members to correct the culture of the CAF is continually highlighted throughout CPCC policy.¹⁶

A key conclusion that emerges from these doctrinal and policy documents in relation to CAF culture is that CAF members are going to require well designed learning to support intended changes. A challenge is that they are being asked to imagine a culture which is different than the one in which they are currently embedded. Change of this kind will require learning that goes beyond simplistic presentation of factual information.¹⁷ Bloom's Taxonomy provides a useful framework to assess how this learning may be limited:¹⁸



CAF Learning Objectives: Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning

Bloom's Taxonomy of learning is a practical way to illustrate how the CAF directs its learning. Bloom's Taxonomy of learning employs various cognitive domains attached to different learning outcomes.¹⁹ The six levels of instructional objectives in the cognitive domain indicate levels of understanding where instructors develop activities that build from simple to increasingly complex forms of knowledge.²⁰

Situated in a triangle, the levels build as they reach the top and increase in complexity. The elements do not work independently of

one another, but achieve different outcomes. Thus, they can be used in conjunction with one another, or independently, depending on the learning outcome desired. The three lower levels can also be characterized as “training”, while the highest three levels are characterized as “education”. Starting from the bottom of the triangle and moving upwards, the first cognitive domain “remember” asks the question “Can the student recall or remember the information?” Next, “understand” asks “Can the student explain ideas or concepts?” and finally, “apply” asks “Can the student use the information in a new way or context?” The taxonomy progresses towards higher level of understanding and application through the next three domains and are applied through education rather than training. “Analyze” asks “Can the student distinguish between the different parts and identify relationships and connections?” Next, “evaluate” asks “Can the student justify a stand or make a decision based off the information?” and finally, “create” asks, “Can the student create a new product or point of view?”

The current training delivery methods used by the CAF often reside in the remember, understand, and apply domains which are reflective of less complex and impactful learning outcomes. While these learning processes represent important foundational elements, this discussion suggests that CAF learning and development is relatively ineffective if limited to strictly remember, understand and apply. The preferred goals should reside in the domains of analyze, evaluate, and create and are characteristic of providing education to CAF members to reinforce and produce meaningful learning outcomes.

Current application: Focus on remember, understand, and apply

Currently, three key courses that address awareness and understanding of marginalized individuals and systems of oppression are mandated for completion through the distance learning network (DLN) employing a self-study method. The Introduction to Indigenous Culture course is a preliminary action towards improved intercultural understanding and a strengthened relationship with

Indigenous people in Canada.²¹ GBA Plus is an online self-paced course that provides an introduction to GBA Plus and how identity factors, such as gender, race, and disability can help to shape social, health, and economic opportunities and outcomes.²² The online course for *The Path* provides learners with basic knowledge of its policy and a set of guidelines to put this knowledge into practice.²³

These mandated courses operate in the lowest levels of Bloom's taxonomy: remember, understand, and apply. These learning objective domains are based on knowledge of factual information. These formats of training reinforce repetition and memorization of only tested material, leaving little room for critical thinking or analysis.

Preferred application: Focus on analyze, evaluate, and create

Understanding at higher levels is indicated by more complex skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Direction to CAF members on how to communicate culture change using new doctrine and policy identifies required skill sets that are related to the evaluate domain. Yet, CAF members have not been adequately prepared to carry out these directives through the current method of training on DLN. Training and education on culture change must provide members with the appropriate knowledge and subject material that empowers them to critically analyse and ultimately embody the desired goals of the CPCC Initiating Directive.²⁴

By way of exception, an example of a facilitated course that employs the domains analyze and evaluate is *Respect in the CAF (RITCAF)* which is an interactive curriculum intended to promote respect in the CAF through awareness and understanding, to empower CAF members to take a stand against sexual misconduct and to support affected persons. Members are able to engage with a knowledgeable facilitator, employ their knowledge through role playing scenarios, and gain valuable skills and resources.

As outlined, *Trusted to Serve*, CPCC, and *The Path*, not only expect – but *direct* all members of the CAF to ensure principles are communicated and implemented. This expectation creates requisite required training and education with outcomes in the analyze, evaluate, and create domains before members can be equipped to do so. Even more problematic, as frequently evidenced by conversations among CAF members, is the resistance to accept the new changes as well as to reimagine CAF culture. *The Path* references “the invisible dimension” of CAF culture, that is, is the underlying assumptions, beliefs, biases, and expectations held by individuals and groups and implicitly or explicitly endorsed by the organization.²⁵ The “invisible dimension” then creates unwritten rules, communicated and enforced at the interpersonal and social level.

In *The Path*, a message from the CDS states: “We need a holistic approach that is focused on creating a more inclusive culture in order to ensure an enduring effect.”²⁶ Delivering training on directives and policies with the training outcomes in the highest domains of Bloom’s Taxonomy may contribute to such a holistic approach that could bring about impactful change. The recent dress modernization of the CAF²⁷ is a clear illustration for the need to improve the design of training and education around the goals of the policy.

Application of Bloom’s Taxonomy: CAF Dress Modernization

The CAF Dress Modernization was implemented in September 2022.²⁸ Changes in dress policy resulted from the need to create a more diverse and inclusive CAF and remove antiquated dress standards representative of a society fifty years prior.²⁹ However, the roll out of the dress policy update left much to be desired within the ranks among those seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the changes beyond the minimal published information. Prior to the official release of the CANFORGEN, a link to the “Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Changes to the Canadian Forces Dress Instructions” was widely circulated.³⁰ Numerous questions that were included employed language that may have been new to some members. The use of

concepts such as inclusivity, gender diversity, and gender identifying would have been more effective and meaningful with initial training and education. Mentioned in the policy is language that was not clearly defined, such as diversity, inclusion, identities, and barriers to discrimination. While members may have understanding of these concepts, the importance of clearly defining what is intended by the use of those concepts by providing accessible definitions is an important consideration for those engaging in policy dissemination and implementation. Employing the domain of understand would have been an appropriate training objective in this stage of the dress change update roll out. While *The Path* was intended to prepare and inform members, the learning employed would have benefitted from the domains of analyze and evaluate, rather than remember and understand.

Many policies still state directives for communication by chain of command without clear training or advice on how to lead those conversations. It would have been beneficial for the chain of command to receive education rooted in the domains of apply, analyze, and evaluate to best inform their subordinates of changes and create meaningful conversations. A discussion document addressing key concepts and how they are interrelated may have provided a jump off point for leaders to discuss the directives. Leaders at every level would benefit from a developed training brief that can be used at unit training days to generate discussion.

Applying Bloom's Taxonomy to Educate for Culture Change

In order to see positive culture change as directed by numerous policies, it becomes increasingly important to address how CAF members understand and engage with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and policies. Policy is simply not enough to convince members to work toward creating sustainable culture change. Advising members to read policy or directing them to take a DLN course is simply not enough. The expectation that policy speaks for itself is not enough to equip leaders to impress culture changes

amongst their colleagues. Charlotte Duval-Lantoine echoes this idea by saying, “Leadership buy-in may appear to be yet another vague concept, but it can be attained, through both repeated statements and tangible actions.”³¹ With the addition of meaningful training and guiding documents to complement policy, the following connections to Bloom’s taxonomy may contribute to the cultural change being sought in the CAF.

Develop CAF learning objectives for culture change initiatives into the “analyze, evaluate and create” domains

Dover et al. assert, “managers committed to fostering a diverse workplace may need to spend a bit more time crafting messages and designing programs that are more effective because they come across as more inclusive.”³² Progressing from policy to culture change is a careful balance of performative prose to effective implementation. Intentionally designing learning that operates within the analyze, evaluate, and create domains would transform the CAF’s current approach from training to education. By employing empathetic centered facilitation, facilitator-led courses would approach the material from a place of curiosity that empowers learners to ask questions without fear of ridicule. For new topics that are designed to dismantle problematic systemic cultures, members may feel they are challenging their own deeply entrenched ways of thinking. Effective learning facilitation would, by design, create a psychologically safe environment that seeks to meet people where they are and considerately bring forth new ways of thinking. A way to approach this type of learning could be through employing heutagogy.³³ Heutagogy aims “ultimately to influence a shift in thinking within [learners] and those that they work with.”³⁴ A heutagogical approach emphasises that the highest levels of learning, as referenced in Bloom’s taxonomy, can be achieved through focus on “dialogue, self-reflection, [and] exchange.”³⁵ Intentional design and delivery of learning, and strategies which are mindful of power relations within learning environments³⁶ can help to ensure that Bloom’s learning objectives of analyze, evaluate, and create are met.

Encourage mentorship and reverse mentorship that foster organic and meaningful conversations on culture change

The CAF's biggest strength is found within its people, their lived experiences and diverse backgrounds. The CAF is beginning to tap into the power of its people through CPCC's initiatives and by highlighting the voices of members. However, it is important for units to also recognize that members of all ranks can contribute to meaningful conversations that lead to culture change. When considering the benefit of reverse mentorship—which is the opportunity for senior ranking members to be informed by subordinate members on issues or concepts they may be unaware of³⁷—generational difference can be capitalized on to the benefit of the CAF. Timothy Stackhouse discusses the differences amongst generational cohorts and the importance of recognizing the unique generational attributes of each.³⁸ For the Millennial cohort, there is a strong desire to have frequent contact with their leadership, promoting a sense of belonging.³⁹ Another notable characteristic of the Millennial cohort is that they expect that mentors will approach them rather than vice versa and that they seek different perspectives by engaging a range of mentors.⁴⁰

An additional strength that emerges from a sense of belonging is an enhanced feeling of psychological safety which is the result of trust and respect in the workplace. Amy Edmondson in *"The Fearless Organization"* asserts that psychological safety is a vital leadership responsibility.⁴¹ Bloom's Taxonomy domains are indicative of the types of learning activities that are employed to create safety in order for learners to be able to discuss difficult topics; voice concerns about culture change; or admit they do not understand or know how to do something. While psychological safety is often most notable when it is absent from an organization, its presence enables more effective and inspired employees as "It can make or break an employee's ability to contribute, to grow and learn, and to collaborate."⁴²

While the CAF has directed that culture change remain the top priority in the reconstitution period, it is imperative that approaches to training need to undergo critical examination and move towards education. Culture change requires a critical evaluation of the social environment within which the CAF currently operates. It cannot be expected that members understand and embody the evolving culture change without the appropriate education that teaches concepts such as inclusivity, gender diversity, and other tenants of culture change desired by the CAF. This article utilized the example of the policy changes to demonstrate the potential benefits, with respect to individual learning, of utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework for directing and designing education around key concepts. However, it is important to note that Bloom's taxonomy can be applied in many other contexts to promote more effective and sustainable education. The CAF should consider learning objectives that inform members of the intent of culture change so they can confidently communicate these values as directed.

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