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# Transformation: A Human Resource Challenge

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## Introduction

The recent transformation of the Indian Army has been aimed at developing a high mobility, lethal and quick responsive army. The induction of new age weaponry in the coming years makes it imperative to have qualified manpower to absorb and operate the high end technology equipment. The 'man behind the gun' and the 'right man for the job' has always been a human resource challenge for our army. A well-structured enrolment system coupled with the traditional Indian valour has well compensated for the man behind the gun even when equipped with comparatively inferior equipment vis-à-vis the adversaries. Also, for a well oiled army to function smoothly, an efficient staff support system requires the right man for the right job. In today's technologically advanced and evolving army, these two issues need a fresh impetus into, and relook at, our enrolment and staffing policies.

## Evolution of the Staff System

The French were the first proponents of the staff system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when officers were seconded to commanders to assist them with operations. The Prussian Army was among the first to have evolved a workable staff officer policy in early the 20<sup>th</sup> century wherein staff work was considered an essential element of military planning and officers were rotated from command to staff appointments to familiarise them with the nuances of staff work. This model has been followed with local variants in armies all over the world. The Indian Army's

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staffing policy is a flow out from the British system wherein, due to shortage of officers during World War II, they alternated between staff and command appointments and tended varied appointments in all spheres of staff work. Thus, all officers, irrespective of aptitude, were posted on staff appointments. They were not trained for the job and learnt it their way in time. The result was the creation of a *generality model*, wherein an officer did not have sufficient staff expertise in one particular aspect of staff work. The purpose of a military staff is to provide accurate and timely information to a commander which by category represents information on which command decisions are based. Hence, today *specialists* versus *generality model* has become a matter of debate and different armies have tried to evolve their own workable models to meet their operational requirements. In today's world, a competitive environment, availability of cutting edge technology weaponry coupled with shortage of officers necessitates a move towards the excellence model.

### **The Indian Army Model**

The Indian Army tends to follow the generality model, believes in giving exposure in varied appointments for all round development of an officer. Short tenures and varied tenable appointments interlinked with a need to know basis have nurtured the generality model over the years. This has resulted in mediocre level staff officers at all levels. The reason is not the officer's calibre, but because by the time he has understood the nuances of his job, it is time for him to move to another appointment. The requirement of training is more essential in higher headquarters, corps and above, to enable understanding of the finer aspects of any case, especially when dealing with other governmental departments. The need of the hour is to have qualified staff officers at each level and do away with the *on the job learning system*. With large infusion of equipment and resources in the army, personnel for key appointments must have organised training before being posted so that they are conversant with all the procedures and latest policies. Else, mistakes due to ignorance will cost the army dearly. Also, there is no such thing as a natural staff officer. The staff work has to be learnt and it can be best learnt when young. To this end, it is imperative to follow the "two stream concept" of command and staff. Officers having an aptitude for staff work must be identified early i.e., the first screening should take place at the major's level and nominated officers must be seconded to one of the three streams: operations, logistics and administration. The officers must have some avenues of promotion and with time, they will become

highly effective staff officers. This move will generate an efficient stream of staff officers and considerably improve the functioning of the army. A fine balance will have to be achieved between both the streams for the career management of officers.

## **Management of the Officer Cadre**

The officer cadre in the army is very large and being a pyramidal structure, it leads to a large wastage rate at the middle level. A large wastage rate contributes to inefficiency within the organisation and low satisfaction levels. There is a need for radical overhauling of the present structure. The officer cadre requires a support system in the form of a secondary cadre with a two-fold aim: to reduce the heavy workload on the officers and to decrease the size of the officer cadre to manageable limits to afford better promotion avenues. The absence of a secondary support cadre forces the officers to shoulder all the responsibilities.

This secondary support cadre is necessary to have a smaller officer cadre which will enable all permanent commission officers to at least attain the rank of brigadier. To achieve this, a three-point approach is required:

- Firstly, entry to the army should be through the short service commission. A permanent commission can be offered to keen candidates after five years of service as per present norms. This will help in filling up critical shortages at the junior level. Also, this pool of trained resource can be seconded to/ absorbed in central police organisations (CPOs) for adding the expertise at the junior leadership level. Institutes like the National Defence Academy (NDA) should change their education pattern from BA/ BSc degree to B Tech so that all the officers can meet the challenges of understanding the complexities of new equipment. The navy has already taken a step in this direction wherein naval cadets are now leaving the NDA after the fourth semester and completing their degree in various engineering streams. Thus, all naval officers being commissioned now are technically qualified. The army can also follow suit and empower its officers.
- Secondly, direct entry junior commissioned officers (JCOs) must be taken as part of the support cadre. The system of direct entry JCOs is already prevalent in organisations like Military Engineer Services (MES). After serving for 20 years, they should be commissioned as captains and retire at the rank of lieutenant colonel. This will provide a backbone structure at the working hand level and also ensure that vacancies at the higher level are available for permanent commission officers. The direct entry JCOs will infuse the junior

leadership like the present young officers and also provide a mix of youth and experience at the JCO level when combined with climbing up the rank JCOs. Also, deserving other ranks can compete for commission as direct entry JCOs after completion of 10 years of service. There is also a need to review our authorisation of officers in the units. With a support cadre in place, suitable appointments can be identified for direct commissioned JCOs and this will automatically reduce the strength of the officer cadre. In the initial stages, 10-15 percent appointments can be notified as dual appointments and then suitably increased.

- Thirdly, there must be a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) system after 15 years of pensionable service. Officers leaving after 15 years have a significant chance to be gainfully employed in the civil sector.

### **Rethink of the Recruitment Policy**

The selection policy for the other ranks also needs a rethink. In the present system, a soldier undergoes the selection process and after selection, he is assigned a secondary trade as driver/clerk/welder, and so on. He may not have the right aptitude but our present system spends time and effort to train him for the job. The situation is more complex in the technical arms wherein almost 10-15 percent of the manpower is away on higher trade training every year. In a classical case, six months of trade training added with three months of leave, makes a soldier available for only three months in a year to his unit. Given the resources spent on a soldier's training and his absence from the unit for higher classification of trade training, there is a need to directly recruit trained manpower in the army. The Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and other vocational training establishments have a pool of trained manpower available. Thus, without diluting the laid down standards, skilled manpower can be enrolled in the army. This will free large resources dedicated to training and increase the availability of soldiers to the organisation. The need of the hour is to evolve with the changing times. A change in the staffing system and a lateral shift in the recruitment policy will cut the flab and move the army towards a more productive model.