

SHORTAGES IN OFFICER'S CADRE IN INDIAN ARMED FORCES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract :

Tough service conditions with high risk, relatively poor salaries, poor promotional avenues and frequent transfers, separation from family leading to disruption in family life and children education are some of the reasons due to which the Indian Armed Forces are facing a severe manpower crunch as a result of falling intake and rising premature retirements. Effective recruitment, competitive compensation, and efficient training and development to retain the manpower available, has therefore become a greater challenge to the military leaders. Some of the HR practices prevalent and refined over a period of time by the Corporate sector may become relevant in the Armed forces to attract and retain the best in Armed forces..

Key Words :Optimizing Human Performance,changing Morals and Ethics,supersession,best Human Resource practices

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Introduction

The human resource is the most valuable and scarce resource available to all organizations including the Indian Armed Forces. The importance of integrated development of human resource for the good of society, of which the Armed forces is an important part, with the overall aim of nation building thus needs no elaboration. The Armed Forces are the pride of the nation and one of the best functioning institutions of the country but unfortunately the human resource management in the forces appears to have taken the back seat, guided more by history and tradition and less by rational and fundamental research.

Free India retained the British steel frame of the Army, since ours was a non-violent freedom struggle and we did not have a Liberation army that could have replaced the colonial army. This was because the Indian national leaders who became free India's rulers did not perhaps have the sufficient inclination to reorganize the Armed forces. The excuse for not effecting any radical change was, that the system was well tested and worked well.

After the independence, the Armed Forces, however, slowly reorganised themselves and periodically updated in consonance with the changing socio-economic scenario without compromising on its core values and fundamental interests. However, in the last three decades, certain changes at rapid paces have evolved into major challenges, which are critically affecting the forces.

Modern wars, in the present context, are going to be short and intense because both warring sides are likely to have limited war enduring potential and near parity of forces. The fact the man is and will remain the most important instrument of war has been acknowledged by great military leaders and thinkers since time immemorial and continues to hold true even today. The difference between the victor and vanquished will be made not by the gun but by the man behind the gun. Forces equipped with relatively inferior weapons have won decisive victories by successfully energizing the man power resources and using it as force multipliers. Human resource is very important component of warfare, which must be cultivated to harvest the rich dividends that lie hidden within its fold. It will not be merely the numbers that tilt the balance, but the selection, training, professionalism and motivational level of men that will be the arbiters

of victory at Air/Land/Sea. 'The Human Dimension White Paper' of United States Army issued in October 2014 on the subject of "A Framework for Optimizing Human Performance", states,¹

"To dominate on the battlefield of the future, the Army must not only invest in long-term technological and equipment solutions, it must also invest in its people as the most agile and adaptive Army resource. While preserving a technological edge will remain important, developing better equipment without developing better people is an insufficient strategy to retain overmatch in the face of highly adaptive adversaries. By investing in human capital, the Army will be capable of fielding a future force that maintains and exploits a decisive cognitive edge, physical supremacy, and cultural understanding over potential adversaries. Achieving this cognitive edge requires a renewed investment in education, training, ethics, leader development, talent acquisition, and talent management. Likewise, achieving physical supremacy requires investment in holistic health, injury prevention, and total fitness"

The vision of Armed forces should thus encompass the human resource management and development processes by which man power would be selected, trained and prepared to meet the challenges of the future. While all efforts are being made to attract and get the best people to join Armed Forces and improve their career prospects, there is a need to initiate suitable measures with a view to enhance retention and utilization of this limited manpower particularly in the officers cadre, to enhance effectiveness of the Indian Armed forces.

Deficiencies in the Officer Cadre

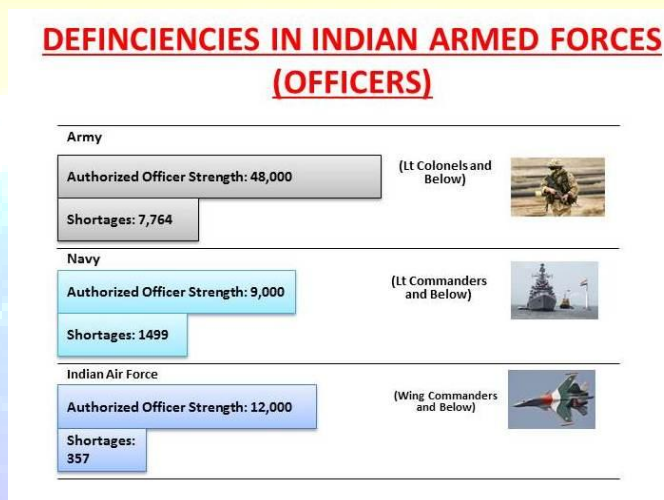
Rajat Pandit in Times of India 01 December 2014, states that *"It is the young officers who lead troops into battle, fly fighters to bomb targets or command submarines that silently prowl underwater to unleash havoc on enemy forces. But the Indian Armed forces continue to grapple with huge shortages in the 'fighting ranks of its officer cadres'*. Latest statistics tabled by Shri ManoharParrikar, Hon'ble Defence Minister in House, in 2014, show huge shortages in the armed forces in the ranks of Lt Colonels (Commander in Navy, Wing Commander in IAF) and below. The 11.77 lakh strong Indian Army, the second-largest in the world after China's People's Liberation Army, for instance, alone is short of 7,989 officers in its total 'authorized strength' of 47,574. Alarming, the shortfall is 7,764 among Lt Cols, Majors, Captains and

¹The Human Dimension White Paper(2014)

Lieutenants. The shortfall of Lieutenant Commanders and below in the Navy stands at 1,499, while it is 357 in the ranks of Wing Commanders and below in Indian Air Force. He further states :-

“The 6th Pay Commission has made military salaries more attractive than ever before but they are far outstripped by the pay packages and perks brandished by the corporate sector, Glitzy advertising campaigns to attract youngsters to become “officers and gentlemen“ are obviously not doing the trick.”²

Figure 1



Managing 1.4 billion strong Armed Forces which is manpower intensive is therefore, a complex and dynamic process. The Armed forces leadership sometimes believes that the concept of HRM means only ‘looking-after personnel hygiene factor’ and relies too heavily on the sense of values which the soldiers have inherited from their ancestors, still rooted in traditional mindset. However, with rapidly changing socio-economical, organizational and technological environment in armed force too, traditional means of HRM are no longer valid to a large extent.

Reasons for shortages in the Armed Forces

These are as follows:-

- ❖ **Socio-Economic Changes.** The major changes are economic boom due to enhancement in education and resultant employability, liberalisation and globalisation and breakup of joint family system. The common man in the Indian society has become more materialistic and self-centered. Loss of agricultural land and recurring natural

²Pandit,Rajat. (2014)

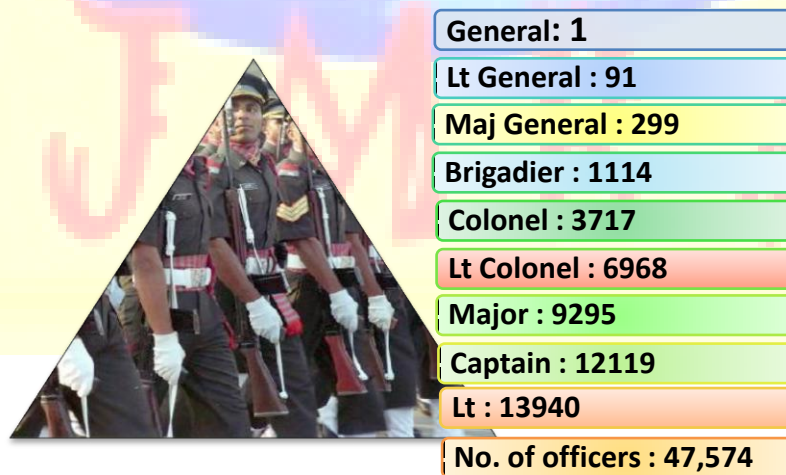
calamities and population explosion has left a long trail of have-nots. The concept of 'money mantra' has also affected the defence personnel's status in the society. Absence of the joint family system has deprived the soldier of the emotional and social support, which his separated family used to enjoy. The creation of a nuclear family has enhanced the liability of the soldier, increased worry about the education of the children and personality clashes with other earning members of family are all the by-products of this process.

- ❖ **Denudation of Recruitment Base.** There is a lack of attractiveness of the armed forces as a challenging career because literacy rate and economic growth have opened up additional avenues for the youth. There is an increase in the private sector demand for the kind of individuals, the military would like to recruit and retain. Ever blooming IT industry offers lucrative pay and perks to the eligible youth. The youth is driven by insatiable desire to earn higher income in short term. This is slowly denuding the fertile recruiting bases of armed forces.
- ❖ **Low Retention Capability.** To maintain youthful profile, full career option is available to only the selected few. Bulks of the combatants retire after 17 years of service in the prime age of 37 to 39 years. There is no institutionalised second career option. This not only affects the intake but also motivation level in the terminal stage of the career.
- ❖ **Changing Morals and Ethics.** Increasing criminalisation of society, declining moral values, increasing materialisation and higher individual aspirations are also impacting the armed forces. The time tested military values are under severe pressure. Outlook towards a military career within the armed forces to an extent, and in society at large is changing from institutional to occupational.
- ❖ **Impact of Education/Technology.** A doctrinal shift with greater emphasis on 'Revolution in Military Affairs driven Information Warfare' demands that the soldier be technology savvy, more aware and mentally agile. A thinking soldier is good for the organisation in the long run. High technology weapons and equipment will necessitate greater need for specialisation. This will require review of approaches to initial recruitment and subsequent career management.

❖ **Stress.** Combating violence in the forms of insurgency, terrorism, communal riots have resulted in continuous employment of army to handle internal strife. The soldier is always under stress for reasons like combat fatigue, hostile terrain and weather, perpetual risk life, protracted working hours, limited opportunity of promotion and separation from family. These cumulatively exert a lot of pressure on a soldier. Many a time when these cross the threshold, suicidal tendencies crop up.

❖ **Avenues for Promotion.** Search for recognition is one of the pursuits which all human beings indulge in and continuously strive for. For professionals, promotions and advancement in career are important aspects of their aspirations. In the services, rank achieved is a conspicuous and well-recognized measure of a soldier's professional competence and an indicator of his progression, as rank fixes one's place in the services hierarchy. In a steep pyramid-like organisation, promotions do not come easily. Promotions to higher ranks in the Armed Forces are vacancy based and follow a strict selection regime. Most of the officers retire as Lt Cols/ Colonels and equivalent as can be seen in the Figure 2 shown below.

Figure2

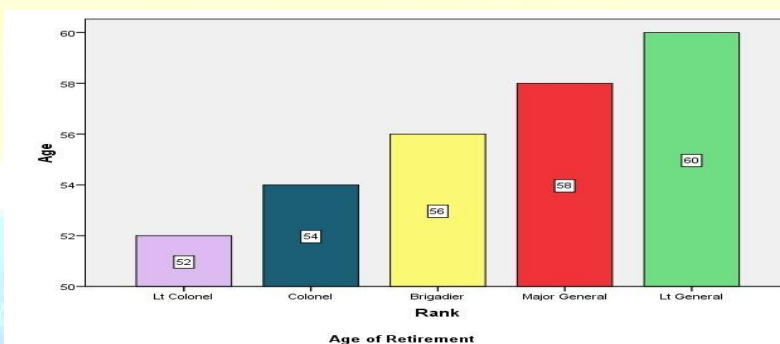


Out of 47,574 officers in the Army, there are only 91 Lieutenant Generals, 299 Major Generals, and 1114 Brigadiers whereas in Civil Services, most of the officers retire

as Joint Secretaries/ Additional Secretaries. As per Mr VK Gupta, DGP Human Rights Uttar Pradesh³, “most of the directly selected police officers retire as ADGP/DGP”.

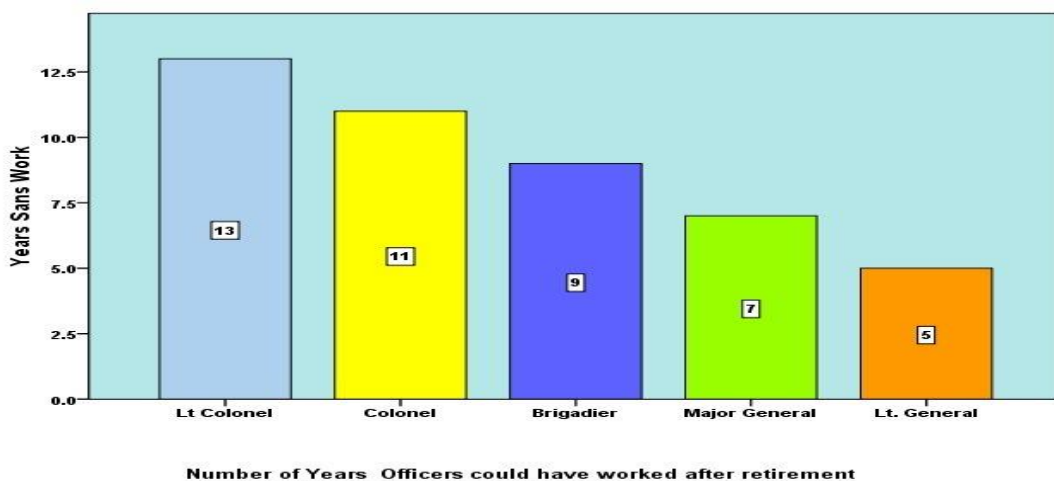
❖ **Retirement Ages of Armed Forces Officers** The retirement age of officers in the Armed forces is linked to the last rank held by them. A Lieutenant Colonel and equivalent retires at the young age of 52 years and a Lieutenant General at the age of 60, as can be seen in the graph 1 below:-

Graph 1



It should also be noted that there are approximately 7000 Lt Colonel as compared to 91 Lt Generals. As the age expectancy is on increase, most of the Private sector companies have raised the retirement age of their employees to 65 years. As can be seen from the graph 1.2 below, the Armed forces officers retiring at an early stage remain without a gainful employment for as much as 12 years.

Graph 2



³ Mr VK Gupta, DGP Human Rights in an interview with the research scholar

- ❖ **Lack of Motivation due to Supersession** An officer gets promoted to the rank of Lt Col or equivalent at an age of approximately 30/31 years, a Colonel at 34/35 years, a Brigadier at 46 years and a Major General at 52 years. A Lt Col who gets superseded after being considered thrice for promotion has to continue serving in the same rank for next 20 years till he retires attaining age of superannuation of 52 years. As there are no further avenues for promotion, this effects motivation, morale and efficiency of these officers whereas their counterparts in civil services continue to get promotion as per length of service.
- ❖ **Short Service Officers not opting for Permanent Commission** The entry to Armed forces comprises of Permanent Commission through National Defence Academy and Indian Military Academy. Officers are also commissioned for Short Service comprising of seven years to fourteen years. As per Major General Anil Oberoi, Ex Additional Director General Recruiting, “**approximately 30-35% short service officers leave service after seven years due to better avenues available and also partially due to tough and hard working conditions in the Armed Forces**”⁴.
- ❖ **Media Proliferation.** In order to insulate from controversies and remain apolitical the Armed forces have always remained away from the media. In today’s era of the seamless communication and media driven image projection, they can no longer be left alone. Insensitive reporting by a section of media increases the pressure and stress on the personnel engaged in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorism operations. Any aberration in carrying out of operational and non-operational activities is snared up and sensationalised by the media.

Best HR Practices

In the present competitive world, all is also not well in the Corporate Sector too, the companies / organisations are also facing skill shortage, talent crunch and attrition which are reaching historically high ever. It has made the companies realize that the internal customer is equally important as compared with external customers, as such every company is trying to devise *innovative HR practices to attract best talent, providing conducive environment to work with, thus enabling the company to retain talents.*

⁴ Major General Anil Oberoi, (Retired), Vice Chairman ALCHEMIST Group in an interview with the research scholar, unpublished.

Best HR practices can easily said to be superior management practices that are readily identifiable and transferable across organisations to attain performance improvement. These practices help to create unique competencies that result in growth of firms. Pfeffer (1998)⁵ found that “substantial gains, on the order of 40 percent or so can be obtained by implementing high performance management practices. He identified these practices as:-

- ❖ Employment security.
- ❖ Selective hiring of new personnel.
- ❖ Self-managed teams and decentralization of decision making as the basic principles of organizational design.
- ❖ Comparatively high compensation contingent on organizational performance.
- ❖ Extensive training.
- ❖ Reduced status distinctions and barriers, including dress, language, office arrangements, and wage differences across levels.
- ❖ Extensive sharing of financial and performance information throughout the organization.

It has also been seen that High performance companies are using HR practices of comprehensive employee recruitment & selection procedures, incentive compensation, performance management systems & extensive employee involvement and training. Huselid (1995)⁶ found that the relationship between HR practices and corporate financial performance was mediated by turnover and productivity. The implementation of these practices reduces turnover and increases productivity, thus having a positive effect on corporate financial performance.

Good HR practices can thus create and add value for the organization. The Corporate Sector has slowly evolved and adopted a number of contemporary and good HR practices to effectively manage their human resources.

⁵Pfeffer, J. (1998).

⁶Huselid, M. A. (1995).

Best HR Practices in vogue in Corporate Sector

❖ **Working Conditions and Environment.**

- Open Book Management Style.
- Clearly Defined and Measurable KRAs.
- Job Rotation.
- Flexi Time.
- Stress Relieving Measures.
- Professional Counselling Services. (for personal issues only)
- Staff Management; Safe, Healthy and Happy Workplace.

❖ **Training & Development**

- Coaching and Mentoring.
- Cross-Functional Training.
- Employee Assistance Programs.
- Knowledge Sharing Sessions.
- I4 Teams – Ingenious, Idea, Incubation and Implementation.
- Code Camp Workshop.
- Cross Functional Team.
- Competency Mapping.

❖ **Performance Appraisal**

- Fair Evaluation system.
- 360 degree Performance Management Feedback system.

- Open Door Policy.
- Open House discussions & Feedback Mechanism.
- Mentoring.
- Coffee with Boss.

❖ **Rewards & Recognition**

- Performance linked Bonus/Incentives.
- Highlight Performers.
- Delight Employees with the Unexpected.
- Rewards and Recognition.
- Leisure and Entertainment Activities.
- Idea Acceptance Reward.
- Employee of the Month.
- Calling Everyone by Name.

Need for a Change

Perspectives do change and these definitely have changed for HR in the armed forces too. On careful observation, one can clearly see the shift that is occurring in the way HR is perceived and is expected to function. The Armed Forces are rapidly breaking out of their insular past. Interaction between the Services and the National environment is increasing which would lead to situations with which the defence officers, however, may not be very familiar. The rapid changes in the socio-economic aspect of national life will have their impact on the Services too, especially on the personnel. Traditional views about military management and methods followed to solve various management problems may be inadequate and perhaps, illogical to meet the challenges in the modern times which may inhibit or slow down the process of change in management attitudes and approaches. Age old tested management techniques are also becoming irrelevant and somewhat ineffective. It is, therefore, important to study the modern HR

management practices prevalent in corporate sector to ascertain their relevance and application in the Armed forces.

A study of salient HR issues and challenges in the Indian Armed Forces would be both interesting and instructive. People are the key to superior performance and it is this resource, which makes the difference. The Indian Armed forces are a virtual treasure trove of HR issues, challenges and best practices. Today's challenges require informed decisions on force structure requirements, recruiting and retention programs, well-being programs and personnel readiness from both individual and unit perspectives. There is a need to examine the effects on core values consequent to changes in socio-economic conditions and enhanced aspirations at all levels and highlight the importance of stress management in combat, field, peace and Low intensity conflict situations. There is also a need to arrive at commensurate concepts to evolve a pragmatic approach to the management of human resource in the Indian Armed Forces by creating awareness regarding the complexity of HRM and man management in the changed environment.

There is also a need to identify military leadership requirements to cope up with the challenges in the technological-strategic and socio-economic environment and evolve HR policies and programmes for the forces to deal with the changing environment. With all organizations vying for the best, talent will be at premium, attracting, retaining and motivating will remain a constant challenge for the forces. Incorporating best HR practices in policies relating to selection system, training and development, appraisal, leadership styles, organizational climate and people orientation, revisited, will help in meeting that challenge.

Another important aspect to be considered is that prolonged and extraordinary service conditions generate acute stress and tribulations which in turn necessitate extraordinary remuneration and pay, which unfortunately is not commensurate as compared to corporate sector. The unlimited scope and liability of Armed forces to almost all national endeavors substantially mitigates congeniality and excellence in service conditions. The Armed forces are therefore the least preferred employment option amongst the Nation's youth and the trend of professionally competent and trained armed forces personnel leaving the forces is on the rise. Since the human resource in the Indian defence forces is a scarce, dynamic and complex resource and hence, it must receive major attention from the military commanders / leaders to facilitate effective management of the military manpower through HRM and good HR practices.

Conclusion

The management of human resources today is faced with many challenges. The Armed forces are getting more and more technologically oriented and preparing the work force to accept technological changes is a major challenge. There is boom in terms of opportunities brought about by globalisation and a progressive economy. Personnel joining the services are much more knowledgeable and informed than they were a decade ago. As more and more organisations realize that success depends on the human capital: every organisation would seek to recruit the best and thereafter manage and retain the best. HR managers play a major role in this process, and there is now a need to develop competent HR professionals who are sound in HR management practices. There is also a need to lay special emphasis on the study of human resource development as part of the subject - Organisational Behavior, in which an attempt to enhance leadership potential and human skills through an understanding of human behavior and the motivational process, and the process of organisational development through the application of contemporary management principles must be made.

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