

Better Management of Army Officers

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INTRODUCTION

There is general dissatisfaction amongst the Army officers, a strong feeling that they are not being managed well. Many weaknesses in the organisation have started to surface, which would worsen with time, if corrective steps are not taken now. The golden rule that "Every officer must be assured of a good career", since motivation is all important, is not being followed. The JCOs cadre has been getting weaker, thus throwing additional responsibility on the officers. Most officers feel frustrated in the Army due to the prevailing environments. New attitudes like yesmanship, careerism and undue subjectivity in reporting system, have eroded many of the basic values of Army life. Discipline, fitness for war, good leadership - all are declining. We need far better management of our officers cadre, if they are to provide the high class leadership that our Army needs.

The Army is faced with a worsening crisis of leadership. The officer cadre is in disarray. Despite cadre reviews, there is considerable stagnation in the middle ranks. The post 1962 intake has created an unmanageable "Bulge", so many deserving officers would be forced to retire, having been approved for promotion. 20 years ago, one became a brigadier, major general and lieutenant general, in the general cadre, in about 21, 26 and 30 years; now this takes 25, 30 and 33 years respectively; this time frame may increase further. The general officers are doing very short tenures, bad for their further development and organisational efficiency. No wonder long term planning or thinking are now missing.

Superseded and low medical category officers in major units are two or three times more, reducing their battle worthiness. Present commanding officers (colonels) are too old, being around 40 - 45 years and many are not fit to effectively lead troops in difficult field areas. The same applies to many brigadiers. There is marked dissatisfaction with the quality of SSC, ACC, SL and RC* officers. Most COs feel there are too many of these low quality officers in a unit, further reducing its performance and battle worthiness.

There is also wide spread dissatisfaction with the system of performance appraisal, the Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) and the selection system for promotion. A substantial percentage (40 or more) is being left out at each

*Short Service Commission (SSC), Army Cadet College (ACC), Special List (SL), Regimental Commission (RC)

stage, leading to tremendous dissatisfaction. Many deserving people are not promoted while many mediocre officers are. The systems of selection, pre and post commission training and promotion do not dovetail. Much refinement is needed to ensure better utilisation and less wastage of our most precious resource - the human element. This large scale rejection is increasing the number of superseded officers, leading to greater frustration, reduced efficiency and a general lowering of the morale of the officers cadre. With very little incentive to serve and no avenue for lateral movement for a fresh start, these disgruntled superseded officers pose a very serious problem to the Army.

Management of officers is a vast subject so here only some of the more important aspects are being covered, like initial selection, pre and post commission training, performance appraisal, promotion system, lateral induction, deputation, early retirement and certain other measures. Obviously, it is no use having good officers, if we cannot retain them by managing them well and keeping them highly motivated.

VITAL LEADERSHIP NEEDS

Proper Tenures for Senior Officers. Good growth occurs only in a conducive environment. Our main problem area is the senior leadership, which would rapidly deteriorate in the near future, due to many reasons. The lack of proper tenures in the higher ranks is seriously affecting the efficiency of the Army. Tenure of Corps and Divisional commanders are just about 15 to 18 months. Even the senior staff tenures average only about 12 - 15 months. This rapid "musical chairs" in the top appointments has led to the virtual break down of long term planning in the army. Most senior officers are mainly concerned with immediate results so that their efficiency and capabilities are appreciated by their superiors. They pay little attention to long term planning or thinking.

Stagnation. The slow and late promotions upto the rank of brigadier and the rapid rise after that, has also led to a deterioration in the capabilities of our senior officers. The officers stagnate in the junior ranks, getting just one or two promotion, (upto Colonel) in his first 22 to 24 years of service. Even the very best find that they have only a few years in which to rise from there to the rank of lieutenant general. One bad report can spoil their entire career, so total emphasis is on being in the good books of the superior. Thus sycophancy and yesmanship have become the order of the day. Tenures being relatively short, now it is a question of just earning one or maximum two good reports. So why spoil it all by disagreeing with senior? How often has one heard "how can such a mediocre officer rise to the rank of lieutenant general" said about one or the other senior officer. The system is not en-

couraging excellence, but conformity and mediocrity.

Lack of Responsibility. Apart from this very serious pitfall, the lack of shouldering responsibility at a young age would also lead to denial of growth of the officers. Strong stimuli encourages rapid growth. Where there is stagnation, there can be no growth, actually regression takes place. This is the unfortunate situation now. Most people respond positively to responsibility at an appropriately young age. There have been exceptions of late maturity, yet most outstanding persons have become so due to responsibility coming their way at a young age. Today, officers are denied this opportunity. This also indicates the need for more lateral movement and deputations, outside the service, so that more senior officers can do more responsible jobs, at reasonably young age.

Learning by Mistakes. The other serious problem is that of "No Error Syndrome". This is directly the result of short tenure of senior officers and play safe attitude. "You may not do anything good, but you should not make a mistake or get caught at it", seems to be the guide line today. It is well known that real learning is mostly by trial and error. A person develops his personality and improves his decision making only by taking decision, accepting responsibility, making mistakes and learning thereby. Every human being has strong and weak points, so errors have to occur. We seem to have forgotten a golden adage "To err is human, to forgive Divine". Yet we do not accept mistakes. The system does not accept any weakness reflected in the ACRs, however these may be off-set by other strong points.

INITIAL SELECTION OF OFFICERS

The initial selection is a vital step in having a good cadre. Selection is based generally upon a qualifying written test conducted by the UPSC, followed by personality assessment by the Services Selection Board (SSB) and lastly checking medical fitness for the Service. Only a few entries like Technical Graduates (TG), Education Corps Officers etc. are not required to sit in the written examination.

In the more popular entries like the NDA and IMA, a merit list is drawn up, based upon the marks earned at the UPSC and SSB and only the top performers are accepted. The remainder have to reappear if interested, going through the entire process afresh. The basic system is quite sound, but there is scope for improvement.

Employment situation in the Country and over-population have affected entry to every service in the Country - the Army is no exception. The written tests by UPSC serve a useful purpose, by initial screening, otherwise the SSBs would be overwhelmed. However, a right balance between standard of mark-

ing at UPSC and SSB needs to be made. At present, boys doing better at UPSC have a great advantage in the final merit list. The UPSC tests need to be made more difficult, with a qualifying standard of 40%, so that about the same numbers as at present qualify at that level. At present, the cut off line is about 65% (for the NDA/IMA), yet the tests are failing to screen out some weak boys.

Many changes are required at the SSBs. A SSB has service officers as Interviewing Officers (IO) and Ground Testing Officers (GTO) and civilian Psychologists (Psys). The theoretical training imparted by the Director of Psychological Research (DPR) is inadequate, and does not prepare them fully for their difficult job of personality assessment. The training needs to be more comprehensive, especially for the GTOs, and more practice should be given before assessors are passed fit for their jobs. The very selection of service officers is not rational and some officers, who are unsuitable due to their own personality traits, come as assessors. Presidents SSB who should play a vital role in monitoring and guiding the other assessors are often unwilling to come to this post and most are due to retire. Their role is vital and only volunteers and those with a future and stake in the Army should be selected. The Psys have poor career prospects and get into a rut. They need to be rotated with desk jobs in DPR and career prospects improved.

There is no proper system of monitoring the work of the individual assessors, either at the SSB or by the Directorate of Recruitment (D Rtg) at Army Headquarters. At present, very little feed back and practically no guidance is given to them, by the DPR or D Rtg. A major weakness, this lack of monitoring and guidance encourages the assessors to drift towards "safety first" marking. They tend to mark over strictly, thus failing many otherwise deserving candidates. Many candidates who deserve to pass thus fail. Based on a year's experience of president of a SSB, the writer is confident that atleast another 5 to 10% of the total candidates for NDA and IMA, who appear before the SSB, deserve to pass. As their marking is strict, so the bulk of those passing are placed at the minimum pass level of 40%. This compares unfavourably with the cut off point of the written examination, (NDA around 60 - 70%). Total marks for UPSC and SSB are the same, so in the final merit list, those boys who have done better in the written examination get in, while those who have done better at the SSB may not. Actually it should be the other way round. It is necessary to have regular feed back and monitoring for guidance to the assessors, by the Presidents and the D Rtg. The D Rtg has to be an officer who has served as President SSB earlier. To date, no Adjutant General or Deputy Adjutant General has served in this appointment, so little improvement to the system has taken place. The recruitment of officers and men is basically different, so two separate posts would be ideal. Otherwise, an ex SSB President be in charge of all the SSBs.

TRAINING AT THE ACADEMIES AND POST COMMISSION TRAINING

The main draw backs of the present system are repetition, spoon feeding and boredom. Training period at the Academies is too long. With better training aids and systems, we can easily reduce the training periods, e.g. NDA entry can be three rather than four years. Training in Units also leads to wastage of time, boredom and loss of interest and slow development of the officers. A young officer is already trained to the platoon commanders in the IMA and handles most of the platoon weapons. It has at last been realised that to put him again through a 5 months Young Officers Course and reteaching platoon weapon and tactics, both of which he has just learnt, are wasteful. Sensibly, the YO course has been recently restructured. Much of the training imparted to the officer in his subsequent military career is wasted, and often useless. Most officers do not hold appointments for them to put into practice the training they have undergone. The younger officers average about 2 Army Courses every 3 years, while they would hold an appointment for an average of 2 years. Thus, in the first 12 years of service, each officer is doing about 2 to 3 courses uselessly - almost a year wasted! Too many courses also deprive the officers of valuable practical leadership opportunities and compound the problems of the COs, who are faced with chronic shortage of officers. Also, many Army Courses cover subjects that can be learnt otherwise, either by self study or shorter cadres at formation level eg All Armd Field Engineering, Officers PT Courses. A detailed study should enable one third to half reduction in the training at the Army Schools and Colleges.

There is not much difference in the syllabi of the Junior Command (JC) and Senior Command (SC) course, both cover many subjects which have already been dealt with during the unit and formation training. There is similar overlap between Staff Course and JC Course and SC & Higher Command (HC) Courses. Schools and Colleges of various Arms and Services run their own JC and SC Courses. It is apparent that over the years, training at Army Schools has been allowed to grow haphazardly - possibly but mistakenly "fattening" Institutions to allow upgradations to take place during Cadre Reviews. There is need for a thorough re-examination, a "Systems" Approach, to the need for training of the officers. All the Army courses teach a great deal of theory, much of which the officer is not required to use in his practical day to day working. Many of the courses can be deleted while others be combined or reduced.

Some of the prestigious Courses e.g. Staff Course, HC, Long Defence Management (LDMC) and National Defence Courses (NDC) also need a fresh look. For administrative reasons, it is convenient to have these courses

run for a year, but the actual training requirement can just easily be met by a course of 3 to 5 months. Much of the syllabi on these courses has already been covered on other Army courses. By careful pruning, 2 to 3 times more officers can attend these important courses. It is worth considering that the basic aim of some of these courses be changed. When officers are to serve for about 30 - 35 years, and hold about 4 to 6 staff appointments in their career, they all need to be trained in correct staff work. So, every officer should attend the staff course, when he has around 6 to 10 years of service. This training would also help to reduce the rejection rate at the Promotion Selection Boards. Similarly, the more senior officers considered eligible for promotion must all attend HC, LDMC and NDC.

The unduly inflated training institutions are also a drag on the officer strength. If training commitments reduce by about 1/3 to 1/2, as is easily possible much of the officer strength deployed in the large number of Army Schools would be available in the units in the fd fmns where they are needed most. And the "Teeth to Tail" ratio would also improve.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND SELECTION FOR PROMOTION

This is perhaps the most important aspect and needs careful attention. The present short tenures and certain other factors have played havoc with the system of performance appraisal. The command tenures of brigadiers and above have drastically reduced. The seniors play safe to get good ACRs in their brief tenures and no wonder their example sets the tone down the line. Short tenures mean there may not be a second chance, so somehow good reports must be managed. This has led to greater 'Yesmanship' and marked reduction in moral courage. Healthy disagreement and debate have disappeared, leading to a very unhealthy organisational climate, where real growth can not occur.

The seniors are also resorting to gross inflation of ACRs so that the subordinates are happy, thus the senior is thought to be a good leader, capable of running a happy team by his senior. Many Corps, Services and Regiments seem to be doing this as a set policy, to boost up their own officers. Little do they realise the enormity of their crime!

The bulk of the officers in any rank have to be average to high average performers in that rank, yet most of the officers to day are being graded above average. This has led to serious problems of objective assessment and selection by the promotion boards. The Board for selecting Colonels of 1962 seniority for promotion to brigadiers passed more than 100 officers. If the reporting had been objective, this figure should have been around 40.

Inflation of ACR is a very serious problem. If not checked, it will cause a

break down of the appraisal system. To bring the system back to the rails, the first and vital step is that the standard of selection to the next higher rank be realistically laid down, say at about 6 out of 9 mark level for upto Colonel, so that the reporting officers understand the correct level at which they must place the officers. The ACR form needs to be revised and the qualities on which officers are reported upon graded into 2 categories - Main and Minor qualities/performances. Certain vital qualities eg Moral Courage need greater emphasis. Others, like Bearing and Appearance, be deleted while some e.g. expression, written and verbal, can be combined. Every reporting officer, reporting on 10 or more officers, should be asked to conform to certain realistic norms, based upon the Normal Distribution Pattern, suitably skewed to conform to the selective population of each level. For example, upto Colonel level, percentage wise it could be 15 to 20 Above Average (with 1% outstanding), 50 High Average, 20 to 25 Average and the balance 5 to 15 less than Average. The percentage would improve slightly upward with higher ranks, since those towards Average till not be promoted. Correspondingly, the level for selection would also be slightly higher. The ability to assess ones subordinates must itself to be properly assessed by the seniors and those found inflating reports should themselves not qualify for further promotion. This step itself would remove more than half this problem.

Board to Board variations and subjectivity of the Board Members are serious impediments to rational selection for promotion. Guide lines issued by MS state that high average officers would normally be considered fit for promotion, but this is not the view held by many senior officers who comprise Selection Boards, which are assembled afresh at random, for each selection. To achieve uniform selection standards and greater objectivity, more permanent selection Boards are needed. There are many alternatives. We could have a permanent body, composed of selected serving senior officers, to do these selections. Somewhat on the lines of the Army Board in UK. This body can be allotted additional tasks, e.g. processing appeals, as also approve all postings of senior officers. Another suggestion is for recently retired senior officers, of proven outstanding integrity to form the Board. We could have a combination of these two, to have a third viable alternative. The Boards life could be 3 years, with one third being replaced every year, so that the correct balance between continuity and fresh thinking be struck. The selection board must have a degree of continuity and permanency, so that long term policies can be developed and subjectivity reduced, if not eliminated.

A REVISED SYSTEM OF PROMOTION

As stated earlier, 85 to 90% of those commissioned in the Army should make up to the rank of Colonel (less SL, RC etc) and 70 - 80% of the NDA and IMA stream to brigadier. Rejection should not be more than 10% to

20% at each rank. Basically these are the officers who were border line cases at the SSB or have got demotivated or developed some personality problems later on. Once an officer is superseded, the lack of incentive greatly demotivates him. It converts many of them into trouble makers. Being around 40 years of age, they have limited avenues for gainful employment in the civil commercial market at that stage. These dissatisfied officers continue to remain in the service for about 10 years, spreading discontent and lowering the morale of the officer cadre as a whole. When officers are being selected carefully after thorough testing and trained comprehensively before and after commissioning, there should be much less rejection for selection for promotion and lesser supersession. The real need is to have more outlets to move out these officers laterally elsewhere.

New System. A number of measures are required to improve the Selection System. At every Promotion Selection Board, officers should be placed in four categories. The first be the top, 15% above average officers (including 1% outstanding). These should be given seniority for promotion, to the extent of 6 to 12 months, depending upon their exact career profile. The second category would comprise the 50% of high average officers, who should be promoted in their turn. The third category of 25% average officers should not be debarred for promotion and promoted only when they make to the grade of high average (2nd category) or above. This may take them a few years more. The last category would be about 10% below average, who are clearly unfit and should be eased out, possibly by early retirement, after 18 to 20 years. This system would mean that the relatively, more efficient officers are rewarded by gaining seniority for promotion. This should be awarded upto 3 times in a career, say at lieutenant colonel, brigadier and lieutenant general level. Thus an officer who maintains an outstanding to clear above average profile, can gain $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years by the time he is a Lieutenant General. On the other hand, those who are average to high average would also be promoted upto colonel or brigadier, but take a few years more than the bulk of their colleagues, who will continue to get promotion in their own turn and may end up as brigadier or major general. Bulk of Category 2 and possibly all of category 3 officers would get promotion in the staff stream. This is an essential point, to ensure that only the really high calibre would get command experience, but the tenures would be of adequate duration (ideal 3 years), both for individual growth and organisational efficiency.

Command and Staff Stream. The Category 2 officers would basically man the 3 to 4 times larger number of Staff (non-Command) appointments. Separation of Senior officers into these 2 streams should start with Colonel and go upto major general. This way alone can the Army have really capable officers developing in time for senior appointments. To provide adequate incentive, staff stream officers should be eligible for promotion, provided their

performance touches Category 1 standards. The system would have the advantages of proper recognition of merit and better incentive to all. The Army would have younger senior officers, leading to longer tenures in the higher ranks and an overall improvement in our decision making process. This system will work only when the ACR system has been refined to ensure objective and realistic assessment. Mass over-inflation would choke this system.

Vacancy Linked Promotion. Some favour that only that many officers (plus 10%) should be selected for promotion, as are the vacancies to occur in a calendar year. This system would suffer from too many disadvantages and should not be accepted. We know that quality wise, there are wide variations amongst officers in the year to year batches, in a random fashion. As such, with this system, both the organisation as well as individuals will generally suffer.

LATERAL MOVEMENT

By the time officers have put in 10 to 15 years service, a small percentage may not be happy to continue in the Army, due to variety of reasons, like medical problems, family problems or simply dissatisfaction with the Service. The Service may also find some officers not fully suited. These officers should be moved out, to get a fresh chance in some other Service or walk of life. Subsequently, and for similar reasons, some more officers including those superseded, may like to move out or the Services may want to off load some. Thus, lateral movement should be a continuous process, not only for the weaker ones but also for those who want fresher pastures. A very rough estimate may place the figure at about 1 to 3% of the total officers cadre, needing lateral movement annually.

This lateral movement should take place mainly to the Para Military Forces, Public Sector Undertakings, various Government Agencies and Autonomous and Semi Autonomous Bodies, all of which would themselves greatly benefit from getting these trained and disciplined "managers". Para Military Forces and PSUs need no elaboration. The former should also take the bulk of JCOs and soldiers retiring, leading to greater efficiency and considerable reduction of training costs. Banks, Air lines, various Public Services like DTC, BEST; Selection bodies like UPSC, State PSCs; Vigilance bodies, are only the examples of bodies where Service personnel can do good work. The list can be considerably expanded.

Deputation. It would be remembered that Gen Haig, US Army, ex-supreme Commander NATO and later Secretary of State, served on deputation to White House Staff, as a major general. Most western countries have a system of regular deputations to other Government Departments and Agencies. In the British days, many officers went on deputation to the Foreign and

Political services. The defence secretary was usually a major general, on deputation. The Services have failed to realise the benefit of this, both for individual growth and organisational improvements. All other Central Services have ensured that their officers are given a fair share of appointments at all levels, in various Government and other Agencies. The present Chairman Railway Board came after a tenure as Secretary and Mr Marwah, ex Commissioner Police Delhi, was earlier a joint secretary. We need to send out our high and above average officers, from rank of major to general, on various deputations.

The Army should send out only the better officers. Then only will people outside welcome them in their organisation, and ask for more. Officers like Lt Gen P.S. Bhagat, VC and Lt Col PN Wahi have proved very clearly that service officers can successfully tackle a variety of jobs. Many have served, with distinction, as governors and ambassadors.

Early Retirement. It is necessary to give an option to superseded officers to leave the service on early retirement (after 18 years), but the retirement benefits need to be made more attractive. The additional financial outlay would be a small price to pay for getting rid of 'dead wood'. In any case, with lateral induction, this Early Retirement can be kept very small. On a selective basis, this could also cover the small numbers of officers who do not want to continue due to serious compassionate grounds.

ONE PSO TO MANAGE OFFICERS

At present, there are many PSOs & Directorates at the Army HQ dealing with officers management. The MS Branch deals with career planning, promotions, postings etc. The AG Branch deals with recruitment, terms and conditions of Service, discipline etc. Director General Military Training and heads of Arms & Services deal with the training of officers at various levels. Many of our problems have arisen due to this diversified and disintegrated control. We cannot expect the COAS to coordinate the different directions in which the Branches - for very good reasons of their own, may separately take the officers cadre. Even cadre Review resulted in very sharp differences between MS and AG. It is suggested that the entire management of officers cadre be merged in one PSO, to look after the officer from 'womb to tomb' which, inter-alia, will give an integrated systems approach to this vital aspect of the Army.

CONCLUSION

The officers Cadre is faced with critical crisis of good management. This had led to serious dissatisfaction amongst the officers, whose leadership qualities and high morale are pre-requisite for success of the Army. This is

leading to lowering the efficiency of the Army - both in peace time and also in War.

There is a need to recognise the vital Leadership Needs that require attention. Present short tenures at higher ranks are resulting in serious deterioration of Organisation climate, leading to sycophancy, lack of moral courage, no error Syndrome and over inflation of ACRs. Stagnation in middle ranks is depriving good officers of opportunities for growth. We must give greater responsibility to promising officers earlier. The Promotion System should also push the really deserving to the top, while also minimising rejection.

Much improvement is possible at the stage of initial selection. Mainly, this is to give the correct balance between marking at SSBs and UPSC. Better quality assessors need to be posted to SSBs after more comprehensive training. They need to be monitored and guided, by the DPR and D Rtg.

Pre and Post Commission Training of officers needs an overhaul. Much training is useless or duplicated; many courses can be reduced or eliminated. Some important courses e.g. Staff, HC, LDMC and NDC should be attended by larger numbers.

System of Performance Appraisal and Selection for Promotion need a fresh look and some changes. Present over-inflation has got to be curbed - for this many a step have to be taken e.g. setting up of a permanent selection body. Selection System must recognise the worth of outstanding and clear Above Average Officers, who should be able to get seniority upto $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years. Supersession should be reduced to about 10 to 20% only.

This system would require Lateral Induction and Deputations, on an effective scale, to various Government and Other Agencies & Bodies. Deputation is for the good officers and would greatly help in improving quality of Senior Officers. In addition, small numbers could also be allowed Early Retirement. These three steps together would eradicate stagnation, the present curse.

Lastly, but an important point, let one PSO manage officers, from recruitment to retirement, on a "Systems" Approach. Then alone can there be correct, unbiased appreciation of the problems and measures taken to resolve them.

Poor Leadership is the difference between Good and Bad Armies. Let us act when there is still time.