

# Career Mobility and Job Satisfaction in the Indian Army: A Perspective

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## Introduction

*Do you have it in you?* they ask; and implore all those who feel that they have the qualities 'to join', only to find after a certain period of time, that a large number of officers did not have the requisite qualities. Sounds disconcerting, but a hard reality faced by the Indian Army due to its hierarchical and pyramidal structure. After supersession some of the officers seek premature release to change track, while others continue to serve in a disinterested manner. Due to loss of interest and negativity creeping in towards their present job, they become an excess baggage for the organisation to carry. There are only a few amongst them, who work with the same zeal after getting 'overlooked'. This results in uneven distribution of work, for the 'performers', who get entrusted with additional workload. This contributes to increased pressure on the performers to achieve desired results. That is why it is said, "80 per cent of work in the Army is done by 20 per cent of the officers". This affects the morale of the 'doers' and efficiency of the organisation to a great extent.

The problem is getting further compounded due to an acute shortage of officers being faced by the Armed Forces. According to some reports, Indian Army faces a shortage of 25 per cent of its authorised strength which itself adversely affects the efficiency of the Armed Forces. Hence, there is a need to examine the system holistically so that the organisation becomes career friendly. The officers should remain positive, oriented and continue to contribute meaningfully for betterment of the organisation.

This article is a modest attempt to understand the factors that influence individual performance in general and the Indian Army in particular, and to analyse measures that could enhance the performance of the officers beyond the shelf life i.e. supersession and thereby contribute to the overall efficiency of the organisation.

## Factors Affecting Individual Performance

For any organisation to grow and function efficiently, full hearted performance of employees is of utmost importance. An organisation can be only as effective as its employees want it to be. Besides educational qualification training and individual traits, performance of individuals depends on intangible factors such as motivation, morale and job satisfaction also.

*Motivation* can be defined as the willingness of individuals to exert high level of efforts towards achieving organisational goals and objectives<sup>1</sup>. It is absolutely essential for an organisation to have highly motivated group of employees as motivation provides the stimulus for high morale. *Good morale* leads to employee enthusiasm, voluntary conformance with rules and regulations, and willingness to co-operate with others in accomplishment of an organisation's objective<sup>2</sup>. In an organisation like the Army, *peer-group relations* / organisational cooperation is of paramount importance, as officers have to work as a team, communicate ideas / evolve and execute plans and involve everyone in the task. A lot depends on interpersonal relations within the team. In fact, all the variables viz motivation, morale and interpersonal relations are interdependent and contribute towards organisational efficiency and the resultant output, and are influenced by administration in the organisation.

Every person has individual expectations and aspirations in life and every one strives to make sure that most of them are met. Some of them even choose their careers keeping in mind their larger goals in life. When aspirations are met, individuals derive a sense of satisfaction and then they perform better. *Job satisfaction* represents a positive emotional state, resulting in self appraisal of one's job in defining social realities. Job satisfaction depends on different variables which could be classified either as organisational or personal or a combination of both. The organisational variables include appointments, assignments, job challenges, leadership, pay and allowances, promotional avenues and work ethos; whereas, personal variables range from place of posting, educational advancement, requirements/aspirations of the family to quality of life<sup>3</sup> etc. Thus, it can be concluded that 'job satisfaction' and 'career mobility' are two important factors that play a major role in fulfillment of individual's expectations and aspirations; hence they determine the health of an organisation and contribute towards achieving organisational efficiency and future growth.

One of the major problems in the Army is the hierarchical and pyramidal structure of the organisation. It has a direct bearing on promotions within the military that lends itself to the largest number of superseded officers, with corresponding loss of motivation and morale. With fast changing socio-economic environment, aspirations of the officers are on the rise; however, with limited avenues of promotion/career mobility and early supersession, the commitment of the stagnated officers towards the organisation is receding day by day. Further, supersession carries a stigma, which creates a psychological strain on the officers and affects their efficiency. Thereafter, difficult service conditions, continuous work related stress and frequent postings to distant and difficult places other than those suited to an officer's potential make him more disgruntled. Therefore, since he has nothing substantial to look forward to, performance of the affected officer drops drastically, and he becomes dead wood with passage of time, adversely affecting the work culture and ethos of the organisation. In some cases, they even become detrimental to the growth of the organisation by dissuading and de-motivating the officers 'still in the run'.

Having said this, career mobility is not always about moving up. There are people in civil organisations who are happy with their current position and deliberately forego promotions to meet personal needs. Career growth means different things to different people. For some, promotion within the organisation means much, for others it may mean accepting a new assignment elsewhere or achieving the larger goal in life, like fulfilling family objectives or even achieving spiritual satisfaction. Growing in a career, as a matter of fact is taking out time to focus on the right things at the right time to keep the life moving in the right direction. Hence, it becomes a responsibility of the organisation to identify the needs of the people working in the organisation and institute measures to satisfy the aspirations and expectations within the organisational limits for all-round growth of the individual and the organisation.

## **Adverse Effect of Stagnation / Dissatisfaction in Career**

Having analysed the variables that contribute towards individual performance, it is pertinent to examine the impact of stagnation and job dissatisfaction on the organisation as a whole. Career stagnation, also referred as career plateaus<sup>4</sup>, if not handled properly can be damaging to the employee as well as to the organisation. The resultant effects / issues related to career plateaus are analysed in the succeeding paragraphs.

**Loss of Job Interest.** After supersession, with reduced avenues for career growth, bulk of the officers loose interest in the job and feel that they are now less responsible and accountable to the organisation. Some officers become totally unenthusiastic and begin to consider their work as routine, inconsequential, and of no real value. Approach to work accomplishment becomes as if one is doing a favour to the organisation. This creeping in of '*chalta hai*' attitude, adversely affects the job performance and the resultant output.

**Pessimistic Attitude and Low Morale.** Some officers perceive the system of empanelment as unfair and lack of recognition leads to sagging morale. Denial of making it to the next rank, induces a feeling of failure and has a demoralising effect on some of the officers. They become indifferent and develop a pessimistic attitude towards work in general and life as a whole. For them everything starts with a big 'No' and this affects the organisation adversely. Attitude of the overlooked officers further becomes indifferent when they have to work under a relatively junior officer who makes the grade, and this too adversely affects the team performance.

**Decreased Motivation and Interpersonal Relation.** The effect of stagnation on many individuals is overwhelming. They get completely de-motivated, withdraw themselves from the working environment and create a cocoon around them. Some develop an outlook of hostility towards the organisation and make it evident with outbursts of emotion on petty issues and an approach of non - cooperation with peers and team members<sup>5</sup>. This adversely affects the interpersonal relations and performance as a team.

**Dwindling Values and Ethos.** Organisational values and ethos embrace largely the informal rules within which organisations function. Like rules and other unwritten societal expectations, the institutional ethos imposes constraints on the behaviour of organisations and the people who work within them. Although various aspects of institutional ethos are difficult to measure and evaluate, they are nonetheless extremely important in moulding the behaviour and performance of organisations that evolve within the environment. On reaching the career plateau most of the officers evade these implicit codes of conduct which adversely affect the functioning of the organisation.

**Adverse Influence on the Family.** For some, non-empanelment affects their dignity. Loss of pride generates frustration and sometimes the resultant impact moves from office to home. Stigma of failure not only affects the personal life of the officer but the family members as well. Loss of poise sometime percolates down to the family members adversely affecting the performance of the children at school, social behaviour and social life as a whole.

## **Possible Measures to Enhance Organisational Performance**

On reaching 'career stagnation' and resultant drop in performance, the officers cannot just be weeded out, as the number of plateaued employees are simply too large. Besides, these officers, although they have reached the cross roads, are worthy and valuable, because they bring with them tremendous knowledge and experience required by the organisation. Career plateau can happen to every employee and it does not necessarily mean absence of skills or capabilities compared to others. In fact, human resource management research has recognised this phase as healthy and productive in an adult's development. In other words, the so-called plateau could represent a period of stability and maturity, where employees master work skills, pursue special family or personal interests; and improve functional, professional, and personal skills so that they can contribute more to their organisations<sup>6</sup>. Some of the possible measures that could be instituted to increase satisfaction and motivate officers for enhanced performance are as follows:-

(a) **Second Career Options.** There is a need to explore the avenues available to accommodate army officers in various specialised jobs / suitable positions in the private sector. Assured vacancies for lateral absorption into various civil administration, Central Police Organisations (CPOs) or PSUs need to be identified and guaranteed with statutory provisions. This opportunity should be extended based on the performance of an officer after supersession. This would motivate officers to do well and thus benefit the organisation.

(b) **Encouragement and Assistance to Pursue Own Interests.** Another way could be to employ officers in the area of own choosing. After getting overlooked officers could be posted to their preferred field so that their contribution is meaningful and worthy. Choices could be asked from the officers for their preferences and tenures could be decided, where possible, based on the performance for a specified period/ probation.

(c) **Sponsoring Higher Education.** After evaluating an officer's performance for a fixed duration after supersession, the top performers could be sponsored for higher education in India and abroad. This could be in varied fields e.g. MBA, IT, Research etc. Incentives like this would encourage officers to put in their best and enhance the performance of the organisation as a whole.

(d) **One Rank Up on Release from the Army.** Officers with outstanding performance need to be recognised and suitably rewarded. Persons whose performance continues to be high average even after supersession should be promoted to the next rank before retirement based on the evaluation by a Selection Board as is done for other promotion boards.

(e) **Integrating Work and Family Needs.** One of the broader and more complex issues faced today is the family dilemma that confronts contemporary organisational life. For greater satisfaction the need is to achieve a better balance or integration between work and family needs and responsibilities<sup>7</sup>. While at the local level efforts are made to implement family-friendly policies / approaches for the workplace, however, entrenched organisational practices make

this difficult to achieve. At higher level, there is a need to recognise and evaluate various aspects influencing the social spheres of life and address the same for a meaningful transition in work culture. By scaling employee's need to balance work and personal life, the larger issue of increased efficiency at work and in turn the enhanced performance of the organisation can be addressed to desired effect.

(f) **Change of Attitudes towards Plateaued Personnel.** It is not unusual for senior officers and subordinates to give up on and neglect the plateaued personnel. Such actions are quickly picked up by the affected officers to their advantage and these only compound the problems. Imposition of faith and confidence in the employee's ability is of paramount importance for deriving maximum gains to the organisation.

## Conclusion

As far as career mobility is perceived, it is important to realise that it is not necessarily negative. Some organisations believe that 'plateaus' in career are necessary for keeping employees motivated and keep their energy and enthusiasm high while at work. Career plateaus are valuable to the individuals as they provide an opportunity to explore new ways of utilising one's skills and abilities, take more responsibilities and deliver better performance. Individuals who are successful in coping with this stage are more likely to plan better for the further stages of their career development, and are less likely to experience frustration and dissatisfaction. At the same time, while planning career mobility it is important to balance work with the other priority areas. It is important to revisit one's goals and ambitions keeping in mind the changing environment and formulate strategies to achieve the same.

Career management is arguably the most intricate and vital element for an organisation as large as the Army. This becomes more difficult in the wake of high expectation level of the officers and limited promotion and career development opportunities. Due to the pyramidal structure of the organisation, openings at higher echelons get reduced in inverse geometric progression and thus supersession at various levels of promotion is an inevitable reality. Further, factors such as economic, technological, policies and size of the workforce can and will impact on the career prospects. The existing vacancy based system may not be a correct measure of effectiveness/ efficiency of the organisation and needs deliberation.

There is, thus, a strong case to re-think the system of career planning and human resource development within and outside the Army. Time is now, to encourage officers to follow their interests and take advantage of the growing opportunities and contribute meaningfully for the growth of the organisation. The aim should be to reduce attrition and to remove disgruntlement amongst the officers who lose interest on getting overlooked and create conditions for increasing job satisfaction within the service. Measures like these will also assist officers to make a smooth transition to a second career. Besides increasing job satisfaction, there are other areas that can be improved to make the working environment more suitable to meet the post supersession needs and aspirations of the personnel, without compromising on the work ethos and culture of the Indian Army.

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