SUPERSESSION AND MOTIVATION IN INDIAN ARMY: AN ANALYSIS OF CERTAIN ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Army along with the Air Force and the Navy are entrusted with the defence of the nation and maintaining its sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. It also has a secondary role of assisting the government in their fight against proxy wars and internal threats as well as providing assistance to the civil administration, when requisitioned. The army is the final bastion in the hours of crisis. This mandates that the human resources in this organization are highly motivated. Indian Army is an officer led army where the officers lead their men in even death defying circumstances. The motivation levels of the officers, therefore, assume prime importance. Supersession, too, is a reality in the army because of its highly pyramidal hierarchical structure. With supersession come the attendant problems of loss of morale and motivation. This article aims to highlight certain aspects related to hygiene factors and motivators in relation to superseded officers based on a survey conducted by the authors. It also covers a brief theoretical perspective on motivation. Suitable corrective measures to address certain issues related to superseded officers will lead to a better organizational environment and higher motivation levels in the army.

KEYWORDS: Indian Army, Superseded, Supersession, Motivation, Hygiene Factors, Motivators.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Army is known the world over for its professionalism, motivation and steadfast dedication to its duty towards the nation and its countrymen. The army, alongwith the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy, has the onerous responsibility of safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the nation from external threats, which is its primary role. This is achieved by having a standing army which acts as a deterrence to such threats or by waging a war to counter any such overt threat. It is also responsible, in a secondary role, for assisting government agencies in their fight against 'proxy wars' and internal threats as well as providing assistance to the civil administration in case of natural calamities, breakdown of law and order or essential services, when requisitioned to do so. Thus, the tasks to be performed by the army are vast, varied and complex. Another important and distinct fact is that given a task, the army ensures that it reaches its rightful conclusion even if it involves the supreme sacrifice of laying down one's life. 'This makes the Army the final bastion and invariably the most reliable asset that the Nation can fall back upon during the hours of crisis' (Sabharwal, 2013). It also mandates that the organization is manned by highly motivated individuals who are capable and professionally competent to uphold the trust reposed in it by the whole nation. The management and orchestration of the human resources constituting the organization, therefore, assumes prime importance so that the potential of the army can be fully exploited

It is also a well-established fact that the Indian Army is an officer led army where the officers lead their men, against all odds, in varying circumstances including   combat operations against conventional and unconventional threats. The leadership of the army has to be of a very high caliber. It also requires that the officers, who lead their men, have very high motivation levels to inspire their men to victory, even in the face of death. It is this leadership factor which creates the difference between victory and defeat. Thus,   the management of the officer cadre assumes great significance. It is this issue which needs greater attention and sensitivity in application for the army to ensure that its cutting edge is not blunted. This aspect assumes greater importance because of a significant increase in supersession of a large number of officers at a relatively young age and service due to certain steps taken post the Kargil War.

GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM

During the Kargil operations, the average age of the Commanding Officers was between 42-44 years. The nature of the operations and terrain dictated that a younger age profile was required for leading operations in such situations. Consequently, a committee was set up under the then Defence Secretary, Ajai Vikram Singh, to look into this issue and suggest remedial measures. The Ajai Vikram Singh Committee (AVSC) made certain recommendations based on which the age of Commanding Officers was reduced to 36-38 years. The promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonels was done away with and made a time scale promotion on completion of 13 years of service. The promotion board for Lieutenant Colonels to Colonels was recommended to be held at 16 years of service. This did reduce the age profile of the Commanding Officers, but since the selection rate is just about 45%, it led to supersession of about 55% of officers at a young service of 16 years. The superseded officers were to be given a 'time scale' promotion to 'Colonel' rank on completion of 26 years of service i.e. 10 years post supersession. This system began in the year 2005 and is still in vogue. Though about 750 additional vacancies for Colonels were also released but the number of promotion boards per year were also increased to bring in a younger 'Command' profile in the initial couple of years from 2005 onwards. This lead to a large number of officers being superseded at a young service of 16 years and at an age of 36-38 years. With the retirement age of Colonels being 54 years, these officers have a 16-18 years residual service with nothing much to look forward to. The percentage of these superseded officers is likely to reach nearly 25% of the sanctioned strength of the army by 2021. The management and motivation of these officers is a real challenge and the organization needs to find ways and means to ensure that they contribute meaningfully to the organization rather than biding time and waiting for superannuation. In the case of officers who make it to the rank of Colonel in the promotion board only about 20% make it to the rank of Brigadier. The balance 80% has a residual service of 7-9 years post supersession. These two ranks i.e. Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel have to be managed by the organization for the rest of their service without anything to look forward to and with no challenges in their work profile.

They are utilized on routine and mundane tasks which are detrimental to the organization since these officers are a repository of knowledge, vast experience and expertise which remains largely unexplored and underutilized for organizational benefit.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MOTIVATION

For any organisation to be productive, it is essential that it attracts people to join it and also to remain in it; that the people it engages do their jobs in a dependable manner; and finally, the people as engaged go beyond dependability to spontaneity, and even innovation (Katz, 1978). Thus, this directly indicates towards motivation as the prime factor on which the productivity or effectiveness of an organisation is dependent. The term 'motivation' was originally derived from the Latin word 'movere' which means 'to move' (Steers, 1991). Theoretically speaking, the various definitions of motivation indicate towards three defining characteristics: reasons for initiating the human behavior, what channelizes this behavior and what are the reasons for this behavior to be sustained or maintained. Thus, a broad based model of motivation will include some needs or expectations which lead to a certain behavior towards the achievement of certain goal/goals and some sort of feedback loop (Dunette, 1965). However, a practical model, to be created in a work environment, is totally different and not so simplistic. A theory of motivation pertaining to a work related environment must take into account at least three important set of mutually interacting variables related to the work situation – characteristics of the individual, the job and the work environment (Porter, 1974).

Theories of motivation can be broadly classified into two categories based on perspectives – the content theories and the process theories. The content theories are based on the 'what' that motivates people and deals with the concept of individual 'needs/wants' and 'goals'. The process theories are based more on the 'how' responsible for the occurrence of motivation. These are more concerned with the 'process' which is responsible for motivation. The major contributors to the content theories have been Murray, Maslow, Alderfer, Herzberg and McClelland whereas the process theories have been largely contributed to by Vroom, Porter and Lawler, Adams and Locke.

The content theories started with the concept of Hedonism, found in early Greek writings which advocated the idea that people seek pleasure and avoid pain. This failed to explain as to why people indulge in physically tortuous activities and was deemed to be too simplistic. A number of psychologists like Sigmund Freud, believed in the 'Instinct Theory' based on Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution' and used instinct as a part of their theories of motivation. These included William James, William McDougal and Sigmund Freud and their belief was that motivation is a result of the inborn, unlearned natural instincts of individuals that guide their behavior. Despite creating a large family of instincts to explain human behavior, this theory failed to gain traction as it was established that much of the behavior was learned

rather than being inborn or natural or inherited. This then lead to the idea of needs to explain human behaviour. Murray (Murray, 1970) believed that needs are mostly learned and not inherited and are activated by receiving cues from the environment. Need was defined as an internal state of deficiency or dis-equilibrium which has the capability of triggering a human behavioural response. Maslow explained needs in a hierarchy, starting from the basic to the more complex ones, which began with physiological needs, followed by safety and security needs, social needs, esteem and ego needs and finally the self-actualization needs. He contended that the lower level needs needed to be fulfilled for the next level needs to manifest. This contention could not be substantiated since a review of the greatest artistic and cultural contribution in society had been produced by people who were highly deficient in their lower level needs (Maddi, 1972). Maslow, however, did acknowledge the fact that his theory needed further research to go beyond his clinical observations. Clayton Alderfer refined Maslow's theory and condensed the hierarchy of needs to three – Existence needs, Relatedness needs and Growth needs. He contended that all the three needs could simultaneously act in motivating a person. This is referred to as the 'ERG Theory' (C.P.Alderfer, 1969). McClelland, in his 'Theory of Needs' propounded three needs behind motivation – need for power, achievement and affiliation – and associated these to the various management levels in organisations (McClelland, 1988). Another major content theory is Herzberg's 'Two Factor Theory' also called the 'Hygiene-Motivation Theory'. Herzberg's theory challenged the assumption that "dissatisfaction was a result of an absence of factors giving rise to satisfaction" (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Hygiene factors are those that do not give positive satisfaction, though dissatisfaction results from their absence. These are extrinsic to the work itself, and include aspects like organisational policies, wages/salaries, supervision, physical working conditions, and relations with others. Motivators, on the other hand, give positive satisfaction, and arise from intrinsic conditions of the job itself, such as recognition, responsibility, achievement, and personal growth, including promotion opportunity.

The major process theories include the equity theory, the expectancy theory and social learning approach. The concept of equity implies that the rewards form an organization should be commensurate to the work contribution of an employee. An employee with greater contribution deserves a greater share of the rewards. Equity theory explains how an individual's motivation to behave in a certain way is fuelled by feelings of inequity or a lack of justice (Kreitner, 2008). According to John Stacy Adams, motivation then depends upon how a worker perceives his outcome / input ratio as compared to others. The inputs, for which he expects a return, include education/ training, skill, creativity, seniority, age, efforts expended, personality traits and appearance. The outcome involves the aspects provided by the organisation, viz pay, fringe benefits, challenging assignments, status, job security, promotions, participation in important decisions, etc. The expectancy theory is based on the work of Victor Vroom. He expressed motivation to be a function of valence (positive/negative 'affective' orientations to outcomes), expectancy (a belief concerning the likelihood that a particular action will be followed by a particular

outcome), and instrumentality (a perception that an interim outcome will lead to another important outcome) (Hollyford, 2003). The stronger the expectancy, the more likely is the motivation in the person. Porter and Lawler (Porter, 1968) supported Vroom's original theory, but felt in addition that effort does not necessarily lead to a better job performance because Vroom's theory neglects to cover role clarity and ability. In effect, a highly motivated person may not be considered successful in his job if he is lacking in ability or understanding. Also, past learned experiences were the basis of future expectations. Social learning refers to the fact that we acquire much of our behaviour by observing and imitating others within a social context. Although traditional work motivation theories (like Maslow's Needs Hierarchy) explain the employee's need for social interaction, they do not explain the nature of the interaction. Social learning theory bridges this gap by giving attention to three important processes: vicarious learning or modelling (learning from others' example), symbolism and self-control. People's beliefs about their efficacy can be instilled and strengthened in four principle ways – through mastery experiences (gaining a resilient sense of self sufficiency by surmounting failures), modeling (emulating others), social persuasion (realistic encouragement from others) and through judgement of their psychological states (fatigue, stress, etc.) (Bandura, 1986).

ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

A survey was carried out by the authors on the hygiene and motivators related to superseded officers of the Indian Army of the ranks of Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels. Certain salient aspects related to these two factors are enumerated hereafter with the intent of giving positive indicators towards issues which need to be addressed to get the best out of these officers and enhance organizational effectiveness. The sample for the survey consisted of 562 officers. The sample included officers (young officers) having a service bracket of 8 – 13 years, superseded officers of the rank of Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels, and officers who have not been overlooked which also include Brigadiers and above (senior officers). The opinions of all these three strata in the hierarchy have been considered on certain important issues related to the motivation of superseded officers.

On the questions related to adequacy of office space, peripherals and office support paraphernalia and provision of transport facilities, the responses received indicate that about 48% of the respondents felt that it was adequate. About 37% respondents were dissatisfied and about 15% were non-committal. This shows that there is a definite need to look into this aspect to increase the satisfaction levels. An improvement in this will contribute positively to the organizational climate. Regarding a question on uniform application of organizational policies regarding postings and assigning of appointments for superseded officers and those who have not been overlooked, about 70% of the respondents felt that these are different for superseded officers. 19% feel that they are not different and 11% reserved their opinion. This clearly indicates that the policies are different or possibly are indicative of a lack of transparency in

application of policies. A more transparent and open system in this scenario is likely to address this issue and increase the confidence level of all officers in the system. This will also bring about clarity in the environment regarding issues related to postings and selection of officers for various appointments. It will also lead to mitigation of a lot of heartburns officers have in this regard thus improving organizational efficiency. Another important question was aimed at ascertaining whether senior officers showed discrimination against superseded officers. In reply, nearly 80% of the responses indicated that senior officers were biased against them. In fact, an average of 70% respondents belonging to the young officers and the senior officers category and 84% of superseded officers, believed this to be true. Such a bias does not auger well for an organization as the army or for that matter any organization. This is also indicative of a lack of motivation on part of the superseded officers and their dedication towards work. But, motivation in the army is a command function and hence it also indicates that the senior hierarchy has to make concerted efforts to eradicate this perception from the environment. Since the senior hierarchy is also responsible for formulation of policies, it is imperative that this notion be dispelled and not allowed to creep into organizational policies. An improvement in this aspect will lead to higher motivation level of the superseded officers and will greatly transform the organizational environment. Such a major change in the environmental perception will have to be top driven with a very deep sense of purpose and seriousness of intent. The chain of command at each level needs to be sensitized about this important aspect. About 65% of the respondents felt that superseded officers were less respected than officers who were not superseded. In an organization, where supersession is more because of the pyramidal structure rather than the caliber of individual officers, this is not a healthy trend. Seniority, experience and age need to be respected in any organization as it is an important ingredient for a healthy organizational environment which in turn greatly contributes to the motivational levels.

About 66% of the respondents supported the view that the achievements of superseded officers are not given due recognition as compared to officers who have not been overlooked for promotions. This aspect contributes towards further lowering the motivation levels of these officers which is detrimental to the organization. On a question related to assignment of professionally challenging tasks to overlooked officers, about 46% of the respondents felt that they are not given such tasks. About 33% respondents felt that superseded officers are assigned such tasks and nearly 21% were of a neutral opinion. The responses are indicative of a sense of hesitancy in assignment of such tasks to these officers. Alternatively, it may be indicative of a lack of the interest shown by these officers in such tasks. Neither of the two situations auger well from an organizational perspective. This aspect merits attention so that the knowledge, experience and expertise of superseded officers is tapped and they contribute meaningfully to the organization. The responses to whether superseded officers were hesitant in accepting professionally challenging tasks, 38% felt that they are hesitant, 44% felt otherwise and 18% were neutral. This appears to be an issue directly related to the motivation of these officers. Since motivation is a function of

command, commanders at all levels need to address this aspect so as to increase the motivation levels of these officers, which will lead to more acceptability in handling such tasks. 68% respondents feel that superseded officers are not considered for various honours and awards, 17% feel that they are considered and the remaining are neutral. An improvement in this aspect will definitely enhance the motivation level of officers and may also dispel certain reservations about the contribution of these officers to the organization. The responses to a question on sending superseded officers on foreign assignments, 75% respondents felt that their consideration for such assignments was negligible, 17% felt that they were considered and remaining were non-committal. An improvement in this aspect will lead to higher motivation levels in the superseded officers.

CONCLUSION

The survey results clearly bring out that there is a stark disparity in the hygiene and motivators related to superseded officers when compared with officers who have not been superseded. There is, therefore, a definite need to look into this aspect to dispel this perception since it has a negative impact on the organizational environment. The motivation of superseded officers is more related to respect and acceptability in the organization rather than to any other consideration. It is the responsibility of the system to ensure that their self-esteem is not lowered. On part of the superseded officers, it is expected that they shoulder responsibilities and make all efforts to be a part of the mainstream rather than shirking from it. It becomes incumbent on all commanders in the chain of command to ensure that superseded officers remain motivated and a healthy and vibrant organizational climate is maintained. All actions towards this end will go a long way in further strengthening this excellent organization.

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