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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ARMED FORCES: AN IAF PERCEPTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is a world of changes with the most pertinent change of being a change in the managing of different sectors with the help of enhanced updated new knowledge. Armed forces being a technologically intensive service, knowledge management becomes all the more important in today's high tech world where knowledge creation is galloping exponentially. The capturing of tacit knowledge and converting into explicit knowledge is the biggest challenge for all organizations and the armed forces is no exception. A leaders' function is to disseminate the knowledge to lower echelons of the pyramid so that employees have a better knowledge and are able to minimize their weakness. Today's requirement is to attract and retain best talent who have potential to excel as professional air warriors, ready to fight air battle in today's net centric environment. In sharp contrast to the civil organizations, the goals of a military organization are substantially different. The goal of Armed Forces is 'National security', which being non-negotiable, requires a total belief and commitment from its leaders. It requires a different type of followers and, more importantly, a leadership style that transcends onto a much higher plane through collective wisdom, knowledge management initiatives so as to arrive at innovative and effective solutions to various complex operational issues. The researcher attempts to find out the importance of transformational leader which is vital element to execute and implement the policies and procedures with the dissemination of knowledge in armed forces. Views expressed in the paper are author's view and do not reflect organizational views.

KEYWORDS

knowledge management, transformational leadership, pest, motivation and aspirations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Various approaches to the study of leadership, viz Traits approach, behavioural approach, situational approach and functional approach have been widely practiced in the Armed Forces globally since time immemorial and IAF is no exception. These approaches relate more or less to the general tenets of leadership irrespective of time. With growing industrialization, burgeoning population, increasing aspirations of better quality of life, higher stress levels at the work place and the perpetual need for change management, some contemporary concepts like Transformational leadership etc. have gained increasing acceptance in the corporate world as also in some of the Armed Forces world over. However, it needs to be understood that while these contemporary concepts may be considered new discovery in the Western world, in the context of Indian Armed Forces, these concepts were practiced by successful military leaders from time immemorial. It can even be stated that it is a re-discovery of age old tenets of leadership.

The 21st century poses a lot of challenge to the leaders of armed forces to make their presence felt in dynamic environment. The air campaign of 21st century will certainly be different than what have been seen so far. This is, primarily, due to explosion of knowledge and technological advancements which have taken place over the years. Under these circumstances, armed forces being one of the biggest and potent forces of the world has no option except to take cognizance of the fact and embrace knowledge management in a big way to remain relevant and current with exemplary leadership styles.

With the increase in workforce diversity it becomes pertinent to continuously enhance the knowledge base of the organization through new ideas, innovative methods of working and better cordial relationships. Globalization, rationalization and automation has furthered the cause of sharing and enhancing of knowledge. The armed forces have undergone sea change over the years to keep pace with the change and has become technology- driven force. It has transformed from a parochial, inbred instrument of battle to a highly sophisticated, multifunctional organization closely linked to society. The socio economic environment has made inroads into the forces as well. To make optimal use of all resources, it is incumbent on the part of armed forces to have a robust mechanism with visionary leadership which percolates to the bottom of the pyramid. Change is required in leadership across all quarters in dealing with interpersonal relationships so that goals can be achieved in harmonious manner with endeavour for greater success.

2.0 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to analyse whether there is a need for a change in the leadership styles practiced in the IAF to keep pace with multi-dimensional changes in the environment.

3.0 HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

To study the gamut of leadership in Indian Air Force (IAF), keeping the aim in mind, a questionnaire addressing the following issues were administered to the IAF officers to seek their responses along with personal interviews. 100 questionnaires were distributed out of which 80 were completed and returned. Simple random sampling technique was used to distribute questionnaires to officers of Group Captain and below the hierarchy level. The questions were judged on Likerts scale. Some of the questions are reflected below.

1. Are Officers (Group Captain. and below) of the Indian Air Force satisfied with the Leadership attributes and behaviours of their superior officers?
2. Is there a need for change in the leadership attributes and behaviour of officers in order to enhance the effectiveness of leadership and enhance organizational efficiency in the IAF?

HYPOTHESIS

Null hypothesis and alternate hypothesis was formed regarding expectation of change in leadership attributes of officers. The hypothesis were:

H_0 : There is no need of change in leadership attributes and behaviour of officers in the IAF.

H_1 : There is need of change in leadership attributes and behaviour of officers in the IAF.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

Ho: There is no need of change in leadership attributes and behaviour of officers in the IAF.

A null hypothesis was framed to assess whether there is a need of change in leadership. The above stated hypothesis was analysed by using one sample t test applied on the measure to assess the attitude of employees towards need of change in leadership through a scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

To judge the above stated hypothesis the test value of t is set to be at 3 (Neither Agree nor Disagree or Neutral) as null hypothesis states that there is no need of change in leadership in influencing behaviour of employees.

TABLE 1 A: ONE-SAMPLE STATISTICS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Leadership Change Measure	80	3.93	1.251	.140

Source: Researcher data analysis

TABLE 1 B: ONE-SAMPLE T TEST OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Leadership Change Measure	6.616	79	.000	.925	.65	1.20

Source: Researcher data analysis

The table 1-B shown above indicated that Significance value (p value) of two tailed test is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 (α value) at 5 % level of significance so the null hypothesis is rejected.

Again the critical value of t for 2 tail test at 5 % level of significance for 79 degree of freedom is 1.99 and the calculated value of t test is 14.15. Now since $t_{calculated} > t_{critical}$ the hypothesis is rejected.

The table A also shows that Mean of Leadership Change Measure is 3.93 which is inclined towards positive side of the scale. This implied that opinion of officers is towards the statement that there should be change in leadership.

As null hypothesis is rejected we accept alternate hypothesis which states that there should be change in leadership attributes of officers. The statistical analysis further states that officers are though satisfied with the leadership attributes and behaviour of senior officers, meaning that dissatisfaction among mid-level and younger officers with the senior leadership of the IAF is not yet catastrophic, still officers have simultaneously agreed that there is a need for change in the leadership styles, attributes and behaviour of senior as well as junior officers in order to make the leadership more effective and the organization more productive. The varying nature of the response indicated the soundness of fabric of military leadership in the IAF, which has withstood the pressures of changes in the environment so far and the continuing trust of mid-level and younger officers in the leadership prevalent in the IAF. At the same time, it also suggested that it is perhaps the right time that we begin to think about the future and bring about a paradigm shift in the leadership styles and behaviour of today's and tomorrow's leaders – a shift in focus from the self (and individualistic aims) to organizational goals and basic needs of individuals to higher-order needs of self-esteem and self-actualization.

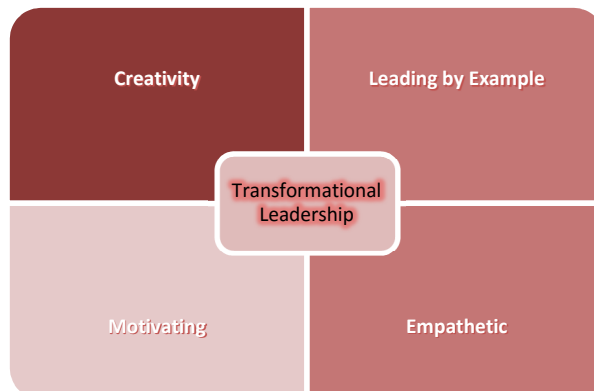
Perceptions, aspirations and expectations of today's young officers are bound to differ from those leadership attributes and behaviour practiced by senior officers, which were predominantly based upon Traits, behavioural, Situational or Transactional approach of leadership learnt from and passed down traditionally through their superior officers. With growing aspirations for better quality of life, larger exposure to technological advancements and societal changes, high level of stress in work places as well as normal living environment and ever changing roles of the Armed Forces, the Young officers aspire for more contemporary concept of leadership that attempts to arouse enthusiasm, faith, loyalty and pride through holistic growth of those being led.

There are proven records to show that large numbers of organizations who have embarked on a knowledge management program have immensely benefitted which include better decision making, improved communication, enhanced collaboration, improved employee skills etc. Therefore, there is a well-established fact to suggest why armed forces should go for knowledge management in lines with other big forces of the world.

5.0 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The term transformational leadership has its roots when, in 1973, in the study conducted by J.V. Downton author of the research study *“Real Leadership, Commitment & Charisma in the revolutionary process.”* used this phrase. If we take orthodox implication of leadership, the advocates believed in dominance of one person while the rest followed the instructions. But with the advent of knowledge workers this way of routing commands has become obsolete. Today's generation has much more expectations from its leaders. They want to be the part of change making mechanism. This necessity has given way to new breed of leadership i.e. transformational leadership. This style encourages all the participants of the group to generate new ideas and be responsible for their tasks. Many studies have in fact proved that teams where leadership is shared are much higher performing teams'. A leader sets an example for its followers by displacing these characteristics which are essential for the development of organization and employees:

FIG. 1: SOURCE RESEARCHER

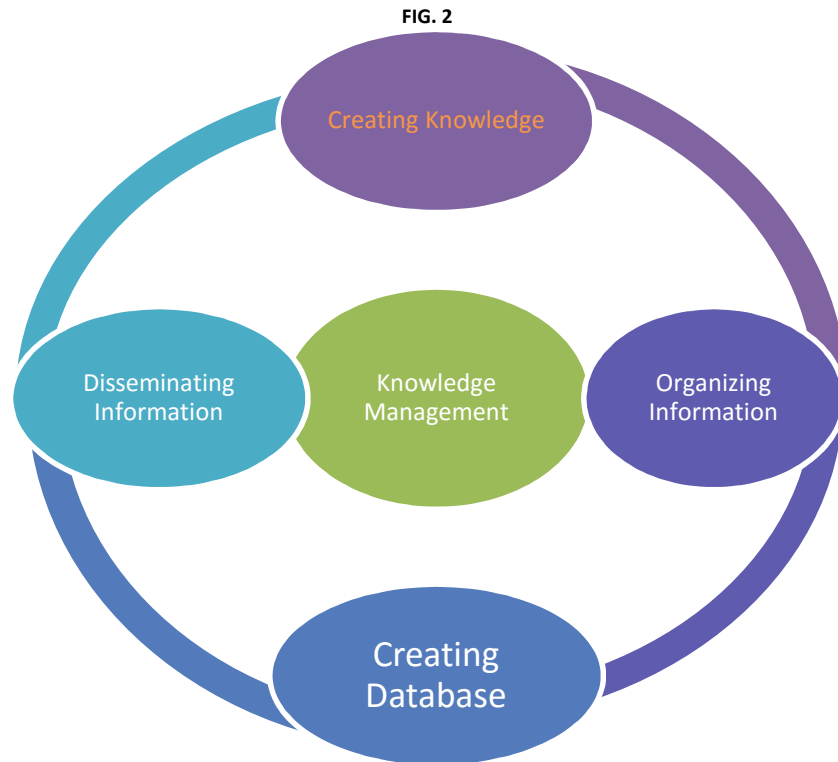


- **Creativity**- Leader should be able to inculcate and imbibe creativity and innovation among his followers. He should be ready to ward off the mistakes done during new idea generation and is pleased to displace off any redundant methodology used currently in practice in the organization even if it was his idea.
- **Leading by example**- An individual follows what he sees. If a leader displays ethical values, follows code of conduct the followers easily idealize him and want to step in his shoes. He becomes a role model for his employees.
- **Motivating**- A leader can be attributed as a true leader only when he can truly inspire his members to aim for the vision, mission of the organization. He is able to nurture a sense of commitment, responsibility and team spirit among the members..

- **Empathetic**-A transformational leader is considerate. He pays individual attention to the anguish of his members. He is not hesitant to provide them with autonomy which builds a climate of zeal in the organization. He is rational to the problems and pays individual attention to the problems be it personal or professional.

6.0 COMPONENTS OF MANAGING KNOWLEDGE

We have come a long way from management of information which was predominate from 1966-1995 to management of knowledge since the time when processing of data was predominant from 1945-1965. Knowledge management is basically the generation and systematic organizing of knowledge for the well-being of organization and its employees. Basically the term connotes how knowledge can be reached to masses or each individual for their betterment for the achievement of individual and organizational goals. The essential ingredients of knowledge management are as follows:



- **Creating Knowledge.** Nearly all organizations aim for becoming learning organizations. They are continuously looking for new information, new knowledge and try to collect it both from internal and external atmosphere. Employees are encouraged to experiment, innovate and generate new way of thinking.
- **Organizing Relevant Information.** Information gathered is stored and filtered. Only relevant information is organized and stocked for future usage.
- **Creating Database** Relevant information is then coded and kept in easy accessible format. The information is coded in an easy language which could be understood by all and can be used for present and future use.
- **Disseminating information** to employees which can be of current use with relation to PEST that is political, economic, social and technological environment. Tools and language both are kept simple so that all users can identify with it.

7.0 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN AIR FORCE

It is often believed that we have ample number of managers but dearth of leaders. To be in the forefront an organization needs a leader who not only changes their working conditions but also changes their thinking pattern and believes. Such a transformational leader will create a climate of growth of knowledge where people will be reluctant to share their ideas and would be ready to help each other. Through his exemplary behaviour he could inculcate a sense of responsibility in them and would be facilitator in their learning and sharing paradigms. Only then we see hope for a new ease of change in organizations. To operate / maintain aircraft and systems, expertise and knowledge of enormous magnitude are required. Therefore, systematic management of knowledge with visionary leadership becomes absolutely essential. Currently, few initiatives are being practiced in managing collective knowledge in air force. These are as enumerated below:-

- Knowledge learnt is shared after briefings, events and exercises.
- Regular briefing to technicians helps in knowledge sharing.
- Interactions in conferences and meetings help to dissipate knowledge
- Trainings are held regularly to update the knowledge and knowledge sharing.
- Interactions with other organization in India and abroad enrich the knowledge base
- Armed forces becoming more IT friendly with secure IT infrastructure in place for capturing, sharing and integrating knowledge.

8.0 FACTORS AFFECTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN AIR FORCE

Leadership and Culture of an organization is greatly responsible for the adequate management of knowledge. Air Force has beyond doubt introduced and implemented various measures for the effective sharing of knowledge but still certain areas require improvement. Some of the factors to enhance knowledge sharing are as discussed below:-

CULTURE: An open culture is pertinent for smoothing the functionality of the organization. An ideal organization relies on OCTAPACE values. These are Openness, Confrontation, Trust, Authenticity, Proactivity, Automation, Collaboration and Experimentation.. Interestingly, air force caters to all these factors in some form or the other. Still some lacunas do exist like briefings just become a routine affair and hierarchy comes in midway for feedback. It should be more transparent and devoid of any preconceived notions.

LEADERSHIP: It is a proven fact that strong leadership is an essential element for successful implementation of knowledge management program. They are required to create a conducive environment where knowledge creation and sharing become part and parcel of the system. The environmental changes in all the spheres of life is too rapid and this necessitates leadership to be more proactive and change friendly. Therefore, there is a system in place to look after the aspirations and growth of people in the forces. In fact, the officers serve as knowledge champions and change agents for the forces knowledge management program. They need

to have clear strategic direction and intent of the forces to make it happen. This would certainly contribute in enhancing organization effectiveness of the armed forces.

IT INFRASTRUCTURE: IT infrastructure serves as backbone to the organization when it comes to knowledge management. It means a better way of doing business with new improved software, better tools to ease the working and easy sharing of knowledge. An organization that has proper IT system can boast of channelizing new innovations, ideas with a click to all the employees thereby sustaining a culture of organization which is continuously learning and upgrading itself. IT infrastructure of air force is very comprehensive to take care of knowledge management issues. This needs to be tapped adequately by the air warriors to draw maximum gain out of the existing infrastructure. The **AFNET** is the right step in this direction..Need of the hour is Transformational leadership which mitigates the chiding of information and helps in creating an environment of knowledge sharing.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN AIR FORCE

Leadership in air force should focus on “**People First Mission Always**” as its motto proclaims. The challenges in the changed environment converge most forcefully at strategic levels and leaders at those levels must gain the appropriate frame of reference. A comprehensive leadership development strategy is required to be in place today for coping with the future challenges the forces is likely to face. Some of the recommendations are:

- (a) Top leadership needs to be sensitive to create awareness amongst all categories of personnel including civilians.
- (b) Knowledge management teams need to be constituted at unit, command and HQ levels to oversee the functions of knowledge management. Team would essentially include experts from all branches and trades and made to function under unit, command and HQ levels respectively.
- (c) Delivery of Knowledge management as a part of course curriculum in courses for various categories of personnel.
- (d) The entire environment in IAF needs to be sensitized about the behavioural pattern of the young officers. Their effectiveness need to be mapped in the light of leadership style of the superiors.
- (e) Delegation of authority and responsibility should be given due importance at all levels of functioning.
- (f) To begin the process of change and to manage the change needed in the leadership style in the IAF, open house discussions and debates may be held on the subject to sensitize all concerned.
- (g) Senior leadership needs to acknowledge the fact that environment needs change and they have to prepare themselves well for embracing change to keep pace with the changing world. They traditional leadership style may not give desired dividends in the changed environment.
- (h) Well thought out strategy needs to be put into place for effecting change any quick fix solution may be counterproductive.
- (i) Inspecting teams such as **DASI** may be tasked to carry out knowledge audit periodically to assess the gaps.
- (j) Strengthening of IT infrastructure to nurture knowledge management
- (k) Policies and procedures reviewed periodically with changing PEST that is political, economic, social, technological changes to smoothen way for knowledge management.
- (l) Incentives to be instituted to encourage sharing of knowledge.
- (m) Training in empathetic leadership should be provided. It must involve all individuals and not just the management.
- (n) Benchmarking of leadership and knowledge structure.

10.0 CONCLUSION

Armed forces are the backbone of the country. They need to strengthen their workforce through instilling motivation, knowledge sharing and strengthen their skill base so that they are ample leaders in the pipeline. Forces needs to create state of the art IT infrastructure to support knowledge management program. With the improvement in knowledge management, the effectiveness of the IAF is bound to go up and the air power of the nation will no doubt be a potent force to reckon with. But all this is possible with the combined efforts across the board. A transformational leader is imperative to build the trust of sharing among the warriors. A transformational leadership will change the perception of the warriors regarding sharing of new ideas and knowledge with their team. The new visionary warrior will further instil positivity enhancing the culture of the organization and enhancing free flow of communication among employees. The findings suggest that the effectiveness may get enhanced with the adoption of transformational leadership along with contemporary leadership being practiced in IAF. An organization needs a visionary transformational leader who has the vision of looking after all the segments of the organization along with having the people in high spirits. Only then can the organization hope to attain the zenith of glory.

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