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The role of Leadership – a leaf from the Armed forces

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ABSTRACT

Organizational agility is a reality when the work force consistently delivers successful results under challenging conditions. For the workforce to adapt to changing conditions the need is foresightedness and a strategically designed training policy, which enables the work force to be mentally flexible and adaptive to changing conditions. The role of leadership in this entire process of agile transformation is the critical factor which decides the success or failure of the transformation and delivery process. A classical and time proven organization, which has demonstrated agility and consistency in its delivery, is the armed forces across the world. The flexibility with which the entire team transforms itself to handle multifarious tasks and deliver successfully against all odd is worth studying and emulating by business organizations. While the long term focus on the defined role of defending the nation against external threats and aggressions calls for specialization of skills, the short term strategies of nation building demands a “jack of all trades” approach. Situational Leadership plays a pivotal role in balancing the challenging demands of flexibility and rigidity of functioning under divergent conditions, without creating a conflict of thoughts in the minds of the team members. Apart from communication which is a key driver enabling this flexibility, the humane side of leadership and effective stakeholder engagement are the other factors which are leveraged by the leadership to build this agile organization. While policies are rigid and top down, leadership flexibility at functional levels encourages creativity to bring agility.

INTRODUCTION

In a chaotic environment in which markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die, one of the primary determinants of a firm's success is strategic agility, the ability to remain flexible in facing new developments, to continuously adjust the company's strategic direction, and to develop innovative ways to create value. In recent years Globalization, rapid technological change, codification of knowledge, the internet, talent and employee mobility, increased rates of knowledge transfer, imitation, changes in customer tastes, and the obsolescence of products and business models have all caused a turbulent environment and accelerated changes and disruptions. These trends are expected to continue, producing ever more rapid and unpredictable changes.

We have entered an era of unprecedented changes, wrenching economic instability and business discontinuities that demand organizational agility and resilience. Organisational agility is a core differentiator in today's rapidly changing business environment. To be competitive, the ability to transform information into insight in response to market movements is core to sustainability. Since 2001, researches are being carried out by experts all over the world to study on what drives true organizational agility. What differentiates those organizations, teams and leaders that are able to sense and respond better and faster than others in this increasing turbulent world ? Armed forces across the world have displayed its capability to respond rapidly to unforeseen change or even

chaotic disruption through its ability to act with speed, grace, determination and precision. In this chaotic revolutionised world, the practices followed by the Armed Forces through their robust leadership in order to maintain their flexibility to handle multifarious tasks and deliver desired results in unpredictable conditions are worth studying and followed. This can help in developing model suitable in achieving flexibility in any other organisation and industry.

From times immemorial, the Indian Armed Forces have always done a commendable job both in war and peace. They have consistently proved themselves be it during military operations or when called to aid civil authorities, especially, in the wake of natural calamities or man-made disasters. The Indian armed forces have rendered disaster aid to a number of countries in the past, adding yet another dimension to the international disaster response. The Armed Forces is built with a culture of purpose, empowerment, trust and accountability under a strong leadership that ensures the requisite skills to flourish in ambiguous and uncertain environments. The Armed Forces has been structured and developed in a time tested manner to meet agility required to face the uncertainty and deliver without fail. The practices followed by the Armed Forces for achieving the requisite agility is worth studying and incorporating in business/ service models that can result in increase in agility. This paper thus highlights the role of leadership and linked parameters in ensuring the desired agility in Armed Forces.

DETAILS OF THE PAPER

AGILITY IN ARMED FORCES

The biggest strength that Armed forces of any country possess is its flexibility, mobility and ability to deploy and reorganize. This is imbibed by strong leadership, regular training and laid down practices which are followed by all. The army works hard to bring down its mobilisation time to the minimum possible to gain maximum surprise on the adversaries. This quality and agility has made the forces the best option for disaster management. Timely and effective employment of the armed forces in search, rescue and relief operations can pay rich dividends in terms of limiting damage and saving lives.

The 21st century has seen an increasing number of natural disasters with alarming intensity – the 2001 Bhuj earthquake; the 2004 tsunami; the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir; heavy rainfall in Mumbai in 2006; the 2008 Bihar Kosi river flood; the August 2010 cloud burst in Leh; the September 2011 Sikkim earthquake; the unprecedented flash floods and cloudbursts in Garhwal, parts of Kumaon and Nepal, and Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh in June 2014; the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir floods and recent Chennai floods in Aug 2015. Each of these disasters has seen the active involvement of the armed forces in the relief operations. Response to a disaster is a set of inter-related activities, which requires database, logistics, technological needs, self-reliance, communication infrastructure, emergency preparedness and forecasting. Deploying the forces in such a situation

has always been a popular decision by civil administration as the Armed Forces swings into action in the most professional manner without losing any time.

LEADERSHIP DRIVEN AGILITY

The ability to respond quickly, decisively and effectively to unforeseen and unpredictable situation by the Armed Forces can only be achieved by a strong leadership that sets the priorities, allocate the resources and makes the commitments to establish organizational resilience. Leadership achieves a balance between risk taking and risk containment. The leadership also ensures a resilient organisational culture built on principles of organizational empowerment, purpose, trust and accountability. This evolves systematically into networks of employees who self-organize into communities of practice for learning and mentoring, and who are empowered to participate, lead and organize teams through a strict hierarchy. People assume responsibility without question. People commit to action and do what has to be done — regardless of rank, title or job description. Frequent training and practices help in handling multifarious tasks without creating doubts in the mind of team members.

A resilient organization is a passionate organization, and it is this culture of passion that drives, achieves and rewards personal and team accountability. Systems development normally takes place in a specific organizational context, including organizational culture. Previous research has identified organizational culture as a factor that potentially affects the deployment systems development methods.

Armed Forces comprises of people who are properly selected, motivated, equipped and trained to overcome almost any obstacle or disruption. Work Force comprises of cross cultural motivated teams under a strong leadership who are trained in multitasking. Their quality of “jack of all trades” makes them potent force multiplier and adds to flexibility in the organisation. There are countless stories about individual heroism, self-initiative and self-sacrifice. Yet, to harness people's incredible ability to lead and respond during trying circumstances requires leadership skills and a strategy for systematic plan for selecting, motivating and developing task force with the requisite skills and demonstrated behaviours to operate effectively in a highly uncertain environment.

EXAMPLES

If we are to give example of the expertness and agility of our Indian Military, it has got to be some of the remarkable operations that were carried in India and abroad that speaks volumes about the inbuilt agility that helps in achieving the desired result.

OPERATION CACTUS (NOVEMBER, 1988). A coup d'état by the rebels from Maldives backed by some 80 members of People's liberation Organization Of Tamil Elam, a Tamil Militant organization in Sri Lanka, plotted to overthrow the government, an attempt that was thwarted by the IAF. Abdul Gayoom, the then President requested

military assistance from India. In response, within 12 hours, was sent 1600 paratroopers led by Brigadier Farooq Bulsara who quickly seized control and rescued President Gayoom. The mercenaries who were outclassed by the paratroopers tried to flee in a captured freighter to Sri Lanka but were intercepted by the Indian navy planes and frigates.

OPERATION MEGHDOOT (April, 1984). Pakistan, in 1984, decided to stake their claims with military deployment in the area of Siachen Glacier—a move which was countered by the India with the launch of Operation Meghdoot. It was one of the fiercest operations carried out by our military, the resultant being that India has now gained full control of the entire Siachen Glacier. It was the first assault to be successfully launched in the world's highest ever battlefield.

OPERATION BLACK TORNADO (November 2008). Members of Lakshar-e-Taiba attacked the Maximum City with 12 coordinating shootings and bombings at prominent places in South Mumbai in devastating terror attacks, widely known as the 26/11. But, well planned set of commandos of NGS and MARCOS swung into action, stormed into Taj Mahal and Oberoi Hotel as well as Nariman House and tacked the terrorists head on and rescued several hostages. Operation Black Tornado was the name given by the commandos. Amongst profound barrage of gunfire and resorting to firing in complete blackness, the commandos fought viciously and managed to save 9 hostages from the Nariman House, and 300 and 250 hostages from Taj and Oberoi Hotels, respectively.

The agility and quick responsiveness displayed in above observation is a result of high level of motivation and good training. Such well trained and motivated work force only can achieve desired standards of resilience under a strong leadership in not only Militarised operations but also during aid to civil authority. Although, the armed forces are supposed to be called upon to intervene and take on specific tasks only when the situation is beyond the capability of civil administration, in practice, they are the “core of the government response capacity” and tend to be the first responders of the Government of India in a major disaster. The recent flood in Chennai is an example of the agility with which the forces responded. Most of the low lying areas in the city of Chennai were submerged in water. Hundreds of lakes in the area were also overflowing resulting in rising of water levels. More than 50,000 people were shifted to relief camps by the Armed Forces under "**OPERATION MADAD**". A joint effort by Army, Navy and Air Force along with national disaster management force personnel evacuated thousands stranded in floods in Tamil Nadu. Three naval warships carrying small boats, divers and other equipment moved to Chennai from Visakhapatnam as naval air base INS Rajali, located around 60 kms from Chennai, became hub of the relief operations in "Operation Madad". In a joint and well coordinated operation, the Navy and Air Force evacuated nearly 6000 persons from submerged parts of city through their multiple flights while the Army inducted 40 rescue and relief teams along with five engineer teams for carrying out rescue operations in the most critical areas of Chennai. Over 30 Army Trucks were employed by the rescue teams to ferry stranded people to safe places while nine rescue teams along with medical team were kept ready for addressing contingencies. With civil communication and Mobile towers out of communication in critical areas of Chennai, the Army resorted to its radio

communication for coordinating rescue operations and also successfully re-established communication at some essential locations.

Yet another example is that of **Common Wealth Games of at New Delhi** when the agility and swift action by the Army saved the nation from huge embarrassment. The future of the Games was thrown into doubt when the suspension bridge outside the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium crashed onto a road beneath it, injuring 27 workers. The accident became a symbol of the chaos surrounding preparations for the event in New Delhi. It took seven years and Rs. 5 crore for a company to build a Foot Over Bridge (FOB) near the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The Indian Army, which was called in to salvage the Delhi's pride and build a temporary FOB, did the same job in four days flat and at a fraction of the original cost, after a desperate Commonwealth Games Organising Committee and the Delhi government called them in to erect the temporary structure. The Bailey bridge is being built at the exact spot where its collapsed predecessor stood. In February, when the Organising Committee of the Games realized that they have over shot the budget and left with little time to complete the work in hand, asked the Sports Ministry to call in the Army for assistance. Nine hundred jawans and 60 officers of the armed forces were stationed at the Games Village and the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium to complete the electrical and plumbing work. The Army was also entrusted with the opening and closing ceremony of the Games held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. Besides, the army was also handling the security and possible terror threat during the games.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACHIEVING AGILITY

The flexibility in an organisation as in Armed Forces is attributed to dynamic and effective leadership. In Armed Forces, the leadership is nurtured and developed as per the organisational culture. However in enterprises, most of the failures can be attributed to ineffective leadership. On all sides there is a continual search for persons who have the necessary ability to enable them to lead effectively. This shortage of effective leadership is not confined to business but is evident in the lack of able administrators in government, education, foundations and every other form of organisation. In an agile organisation, effective leadership is the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives. It is an interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of specialised goal. The Organisational system in Armed forces lays stress on development of leadership at all level starting from a section of 10 people to an army of 1.2 million. At all level, a person is trained with leadership quality that can influence an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.

Areas that require more emphasis is conduct of coordinated training based on situations likely to be faced in form of mock drills that can further increase the agility and help to identify task forces best suited for different kind of jobs. This will further fine tune the drills otherwise being carried out independently. Foresightedness of leadership plays an important role in visualising the requirement and optimally meeting it within the time frame. Template based on desired results can be prepared that can be documented and circulated for the entire team to understand and know their respective role especially when multitasking is being resorted to. Plans can only be

validated by practise under motivation of a strong leadership that can draw out lesson learnt and carry out analysis for continual improvement of the system. This is required to be documented to ensure a proper follow up and corrective action.

CONCLUSION

It is important to develop robust organizational system which sets forth a framework for creating a highly agile, synchronized and knowledge based organization. The template followed by Armed Forces can help organizations to respond and flourish in an environment of hyper-change. The organization should be build on culture of purpose, trust and accountability with selected, motivated people who have the requisite multitasking skills to flourish in uncertain environment all under the ambit of effective and strong leadership. A leadership that through its foresightedness can visualize and plan future requirement and accordingly prepare a motivated, well trained work force that can produce the desire result. .

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