

# WII



## STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES - KEY TO NAVY'S ORGANISATION ELECTIVENESS

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"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few". The importance of human element in war could not be expressed more articulately than this quote from Sir Winston Churchill, crediting his pilots during the Second World War. As technological advancement takes a dominant presence in the art of war in the 21st century, it is vital to look into the human element's contribution to the Armed forces and to navies in particular. Samuel Huntington brings out in his book, *The Soldier and the State*, that the modern military officer is a

professional man. He holds unique expertise in the art of 'managed violence', a skill that distinguishes him from his civilian counterpart. Officers and Sailors in the navy too are trained to succeed in the art of war, which becomes the overarching aim of the job of any officer or sailor. They are also different from their civilian counterpart as they are nurtured from their youth in the doctrines of the military and groomed to superior levels, unlike the civilian professionals where officers can join mid level or at senior levels from a different organization and take

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on the mantle of leadership. This is why the human resources management in military is unique in nature and will continue to be an important factor in spite of continuous technological advancement in the conduct of wars.

The complement requirement of the navies' force level is dependent on the strategic requirement of the respective countries. The size of human resources for manning a particular unit is again dependent on many factors such as availability of resources, manning capabilities of individuals, training imparted to individuals, automation of equipments and machinery in ships, and so on. An information exchange, on manpower requirements, performance and constraints, between units and headquarters will help in proper understanding of the human resources environment prevalent in different units at lower formations, and deployment of manpower with requisite expertise effectively. By using various information technology tools such as HR management Information system (HRMIS), Database management system (DBMS) etc, available human capabilities can be utilised optimally and an organisational structure in sync with the environment can be designed.

### **Is Navy getting its Return on Human Asset Investment?**

Navies desire younger profile when it comes to manning their fleet. This calls for officers and sailors who are physically fit and mentally tough. This requirement necessitates navies to maintain a low age profile, from the Commanding officer to the seaman, for her fleet to be fighting fit. A low age profile ensures officers and sailors are fitter, daring to take risk when called to action in demanding situations. However, availability of adequate officers with the requisite qualification in many navies is easily said than done. We can see that the glamour of a career in the navy has slowly lost its attractiveness due to the more tempting corporate career. The foremost challenge is to get the requisite manpower without relaxing the qualitative requirements. The second challenge

is retaining the recruited workforce within navy so that the officers and sailors have a prolonged career in navy. This ensures that the asset value built in to the naval manpower is not lost before its due worth is taken from it. This is really tough in the present era and is likely to become more difficult due to opportunities available outside navy. The ageing of quality manpower stems from the inability of navies to fill in their ranks by attracting efficient manpower. The difficulty in retaining experienced manpower due to ever-rising attrition adds to the woes. This compels navies to man their operational platforms with older workforce and may affect the operational capabilities of navies' fighting units. How can navies overcome this problem?

### **Recruiting fast**

The key to having an efficient organisation is to have an efficient recruitment system in place. World over, recruitment is transforming from an HR initiative to an operational function and is gaining in importance in strategizing the organisation. Operational qualitative requirement is being integrated with recruitment rather than treating recruitment as a pure HR initiative. An efficient recruitment mechanism should be able to do the following functions effectively :-

- Act as a human resource pool that can feed the navies' requirement for manpower.
- Attract manpower with wide and diverse background that can be used to navies' advantage by suitable talent management.
- Identify and select the right people for the job in the shortest possible time.
- Act dynamically to meet changing qualitative requirements of navy and accordingly meet the requirement within the shortest possible time.
- Keep the cost and time of recruitment low.
- Have an excellent forecast of requirement and availability of human resources aimed at maintaining the balance of supply and demand.



Innovative techniques of attracting talents and making the entire recruitment process smoother and faster need to be evolved. Navies face a challenge in competing with the corporate sector in the field of recruitment. One way of overcoming this challenge is to differentiate the Naval profession as unique as compared to the corporate sector and position it with a unique identity as perceived by the potential recruits. Assistance of professional advertising agencies can be used to project brand equity for navy. The other successful means of attracting talent is by offering better pay, position, power and promotion at par with the competing industry. This again depends on the financial resources of the government. Though the second method of attracting talent may provide immediate results, the former method is more permanent and will enhance the loyalty factor and help in reducing attrition among naval manpower.

Even referrals by serving officers and sailors are a good way of attracting potential talents. Fortunately recruitment through referrals has more chances of succeeding because the recruits would have been well informed on the scope of the job and would come fully prepared with higher confidence on what navy has to offer them.

Coming next to attracting talent is the process of identification and selection of the right people for the job. Unlike the corporate structure, navies cannot afford to recruit middle level managers from outside and then induct them in to the mainstream. The officers need to be recruited at the lower most level in the hierarchy and then trained and groomed to reach senior levels. This is in order to preserve the culture and ethos of the navy, which forms the bedrock of naval foundation. It is very important for the functioning of navy that this factor be uppermost in the recruitment mechanism. It is imperative that the potential recruits are well informed in the scope of functions of naval officers and sailors. This not only helps in dispelling unnecessary doubts and fears in recruits but also helps in attracting diverse talents.

Any process that offers an end product stretching the two main resources that is time and cost, is bound to become a failure. It goes for recruitment also. Navies need to evolve a recruitment process that is fast and cost effective. Innovative methods such as creating specialised departments in assessing potential talents from CVs, conducting multiple stages of assessments and measuring and reviewing recruitment processes on key matrices will help in approaching recruitment in a scientific manner than in a pure functional manner and thus reduce cost and time.

### **Training and Upgradation of Skills**

The operational effectiveness of navies is directly dependent on the training of their manpower, which is highly specialised and unique in that, it cannot be outsourced to universities or private educational institutions where the officers or sailors can upgrade their skills and come and join the navy midway. The training has to be done by specialised naval institutions. Losing trained manpower, be it officers or sailors, prove very expensive both in terms of money and time. However the ever-diminishing shelf life of young officers compounded by attractive corporate careers and booming IT and BPO industry tends to increase the training cost of navies. To confront this challenge, navies need to devise methods by which the training cost is reduced without compromising the quality of training and up gradation of skills. Navies need to evolve innovative methods of reducing training cost, and following ideas if put to practice could result in bringing down the training cost :-

- By fragmenting the training in to many shorter training modules aimed at different levels of specialisation, losses of valuable trained manpower can be minimised. Sometimes we may have a situation that personnel who have undergone complete specialisation leave the organisation creating a vacuum. This can be avoided by having the same course split into differing levels of specialisation, so that loss of



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trained personnel is not very high, at the same time trained manpower requirement due to attrition can be ramped up faster.

- Advanced technology know-how's can be employed in training aimed at minimising the learning curve.
- Integrating the personal assessment system with training selection, thereby, specialisation and up gradation of skills are imparted to personnel who are more probable to continue in the organization.
- Suitable career planning mechanism that is dynamic and nimble enough is instituted at headquarters to adjust to the environment. This will ensure the optimal benefits of training reaching the desired end use.
- Cross training in different skills can be explored so as to maximise the training benefits.
- Institute suitable talent management programme to promote different skill sets in personnel.

### **Motivation and Morale**

Motivation and Morale are the key building blocks on which an efficient organisation runs. If you don't motivate your men, you are not getting an organisation of high morale. In the navy, prolonged operational commitment requires officers and sailors to push their mental and physical endurance to its limits and at the same time deliver highest standards of professionalism. How can navy keep her men motivated always?

- Pay and allowances, compensation packages need to be worked out at par with employment opportunities in private companies. There may be constraint of finance in the navies, but it is necessary to ensure that the naval officer or sailor is adequately rewarded comparable to his civilian counterpart.
- Patriotism and esprit-de-corps ought to be given a pride of place in officers and sailors. They

need to know that they are a cut above the rest and the call for duty for their country is supreme. HR practices that keep this objective are a must for navies to succeed in motivating.

- A high level of transparency in HR functions is crucial to set a moral credibility to the officers and sailors. This approach is very critical in building higher levels of motivation and morale in men.
- An effective personnel assessment system is the basis for having a leadership that rewards its men and recognises their contribution. This not only acts as a key motivator but also helps in identifying the weak links of the organisation.
- Participation of the officer and sailor in career planning by considering individual's choice for training, placements etc in a fair competition with his peers would also help as a motivator.

### **Right Sailor for the Right Role**

During this era of diverse and unpredictable threats, it is necessary to deploy units and position officers and sailors fast and effectively. The personnel of the required expertise need to be positioned at the required billet and thereby avoiding misplacements and inefficiencies. The challenge is to integrate the Navy's manpower, personnel, and training organizations into a single, efficient, human resource management system and avoid misalignments and inefficiencies. By harnessing information management systems, such as Navy's manpower database and linking with collaborative software suites, rapid deployment of manpower with requisite expertise to the required billets can be effected in the shortest possible time and efficiently. This also will help in tracking the units' manpower readiness by appropriate agencies to take suitable actions for human resource management.

### **Sea Warrior- US Navy HR Initiative**

US Navy's initiative in enhancing Human Resource management with technology is its "Sea Warrior"; a HR initiative to integrate the Navy's



manpower, personnel, and training organizations into a single, efficient, information-rich human resource management system. Its focus is on growing individuals, from the moment they walk into a recruiting office, through their assignments as master chiefs or flag officers, using a career continuum of training and education that gives them the tools they need to operate in an increasingly demanding and dynamic environment. Through Sea Warrior, it will identify sailors' precise capabilities and match them to well-articulated job requirements that far exceed the simplistic criteria used today. In addition, it will implement different types of incentives and flexible rotation dates and move the Navy toward a job-based compensation system. This is achieved by "sailor advocacy" a web based detailer where the personnel counseling, mentoring and assessing the sailor in his unit can profile the sailor's capabilities, strengths and weakness and motivational factors and his personal choices with regard to career placements, training and family requirement. This enables the Human Resource managers at the appropriate level to take appropriate decisions in placement, training and other career planning. This is made possible by corporate tested technological tools such as knowledge management packages, peoplesoft, skillsnet etc. This acts as a human resource enabler for the Navy in getting optimally trained sailor in the right battle

groups and also in meeting the sailors' requirement and acts as a key motivator as this enhances the visibility of placement process.

### **Furthering and institutionalising HR practices**

The HR practices needed to bring in a change in any organisation are bound to have high resistance and navies are no exception. But if navies have to meet the challenges of 21st century, changes that are essential have to be implemented with a strong commitment from the top management, without which it can fail. HR practices suitably evolved have to be institutionalised so that they not only succeed in planning but also in execution. A superior communication within the organisation is very critical to institutionalising the HR practices across the organisation. A HR audit by a neutral agency can also help in identifying the flaws and defects that may arise in implementation; and correct the process. With strong management support, innovative HR practices can help a navy evolve itself into a superior organisation that works cohesively as a single unit with uniformity in thinking and execution. Strategic HR management has become a process that is the key to organisational effectiveness, and navies with a vision to achieve excellence can ill afford to miss this opportunity.

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