

Personality Assessment of Officer Cadre of Indian Armed Forces: A De Novo Approach

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ABSTRACT

The present selection system of the officer cadre of the Armed Forces has stood the test of time. However, owing to the transformations and developments in the society, a need was felt to upgrade this system. After a number of interactions and deliberations, a new programme called 'De Novo system for the Selection of Personnel in the Armed forces' was initiated. To identify the domains that need to be assessed through this system, job analysis was carried out. Data were collected from the presently employed officers of the Armed Forces, and the officers were asked to fill out survey performa, critical incidents record, task inventory and attribute questionnaire. Job analysis identified 5 domains of assessment, namely, cognition, affect, behaviour, psychomotor, and values. 16 Attributes of military leaders under these 5 domains were also identified. Tests were developed under the three techniques (psychological, group testing, and interview) to assess these 16 attributes and the 5 domains. The prototype of the tests was developed following an assessment centre approach and the trials for the same are due in the coming months.

Keywords: Assessment centered approach; De Novo approach; Job analysis; Selection system

1. INTRODUCTION

The present selection system of the officer cadre is in vogue for the last six decades. In spite of our perception that it is a time tested system, we cannot ignore the fact, that with the changing operational scenario, technological advancements, transforming society in economic, social, cultural aspects, academic advancement in the field of psychology, personnel selection and research methodology, there was certainly the requirement of having a relook into the officer selection system being followed in the Indian Armed Forces.

The research and development activities involved under the programme were planned in three phases, which were executed simultaneously:

- (a) Job analysis of the armed forces.
- (b) Development of personality assessment system; Identification of psychological constructs, designing of tools for assessment of different domains and facets of personality.
- (c) Integration of the assessment procedure and structure for the officer selection system.

2. JOB ANALYSIS IN DE NOVO SELECTION SYSTEM

The scenario of Indian Armed Forces has drastically changed in respect to several dimensions. In the operational scenario, there is no clear enemy, there is situational uncertainty, network centric warfare and speed and precision are given primary importance. In the scientific scenario there is existence

of non-traditional job construct, need to counter coaching effect are some of the important aspects. Today the candidates appearing in the armed force selection have a completely different view about the Indian society as from a few decades ago. Thus the upgrading of the selection system of the Indian Armed Force is also a necessity. In this perspective, renewal of the psychological selection system of the Indian Armed force is required instantaneously.

2.1 Procedure

Job analytic survey of the currently employed Armed force officers was conducted as group administration in selected armed force/ units stations as per the permission and guidance from Integrated Defence Head Quarters, Delhi. The data collections were carried out from Northern Command, Eastern Command, Western Command and Southern Command, covering the sample of 3210 senior, middle and young officers. The officers were given survey performa, critical incidents, task inventory and attribute questionnaire.

2.2 Survey Performa

In this performa, the subjects were required to report the most desirable qualities and attributes of ideal military officers under physical abilities, intellectual abilities, emotional abilities, social skills and physical abilities. They were also asked to report the most undesirable qualities and attributes of ideal military officers. The military officers were required to report their views and suggestion about the effectiveness of the present selection system.

2.3 Critical Incidents Record

Critical incidents is a situational analysis technique in which actions and behaviour of employee is recorded and examined to ascertain the actual requirement of successful operation. In this booklet the officers were asked to remember and recollect significant examples of the critical incidents that have led the involved personnel show (in) effective performance. They were required to report the critical incidents without revealing the identity of the person and asked to rate his/her performance as Poor - Highly ineffective job performance, Adequate - Acceptable /Average job performance and Good - Highly effective job performance.

2.4 Attribute Rating Scale

Attribute rating scale has sections pertaining to questions about job-related abilities, work-related knowledge, work-related skills, work activities, work style and personal attributes dimensions, motivation, integrity, affect, cognition, physical ability, skills and knowledge.

2.5 Results

Item analysis and Factor analysis resulted in final 72 items with five factors such as values, affect and motivation, physical abilities, cognitive abilities. The five extracted factors accounted for 43.7% of the total variance.

The results revealed no significant effect of seniority on the attributes among army officers, naval officers and air force officers. Job analysis provided broad five domains of personality to be assessed in De Novo Selection System: Cognition, affect, behaviour, physical ability and values.

2.5.1 Cognition

The domain of cognition pertains to the capacity to accomplish a particular task or goal. In the De Novo selection system, an attempt is being made to assess the domain of cognition through the assessment of the three Attributes of military leaders (AMLs) of comprehension, expression, and problem solving

2.5.2 Affect

The concept of affect has been defined as denoting positive and negative feeling states that are less intense and more obscure than emotions and moods¹. Thus the affective domain includes the fundamental emotions, patterns of emotions, drives and their interactions. In De Novo, affect was operationalised as "...a convenient super ordinate term which refers to full blown emotions, sustained moods, information about preferences, and dispositions involving mood and emotions. It includes intensity and frequency of emotional states in various life domains and with a tendency to act".

2.5.3 Behavioural

Behavioural domain was operationalised in military context as, 'An individual's striving process to satisfy the need for affiliation, achievement and power as a precursor to self-efficacy' and it consisted of six attributes namely; courage, need for achievement, need for affiliation, need for power, self-efficacy and resilience.

2.5.4 Physical Ability

During the interactions with the training establishments of Indian Armed Forces, there were many observations from the training academies that the on-ground performance of the cadets is not up to the mark. A low physical fitness among recruits is likely to affect the military training as well as fulfilment of military duties². Furthermore, during operations, the physical performance of soldiers can decline fairly rapidly^{3,4}, and there is not enough time for maintaining or improving physical performance during periods of increased operational stress. For this reason, soldiers should be at a high level of physical fitness prior to the beginning of operations. Physical fitness and agility were assessed in De Novo Selection system.

2.5.5 Values

Values are codes or general principles guiding action, they are not the actions themselves nor are they special checklists of what to do and when to do it. The kind of value system a person relates to, also determine the person's integrity. A more principled ethical system leads to a higher integrity in individuals⁵. The definition of values was operationalised in military context as, "degree of honest, ethical, and just approach in personal and official dealings".

3. ASSESSMENT CENTRES APPROACH IN DE NOVO

In De Novo Selection System, an assessment centre approach has been followed. Which comprises a collection of structured assessment instruments such as interviews, simulation exercises, and leaderless group discussions, all of which are measured using multiple trained assessors⁶. Such approaches are more successful than other recruitment and selection methods as they focus on the candidate's actual behaviour⁷. An individual is assessed on the 16 attributes of military leader (AMLs) through three techniques: The psychological, group testing and interview technique. Each technique in brief has been described as under:

3.1 Psychological Technique

What a person perceives in the world around is influenced by his/ her own personality, his/ her needs, and attitudes and so on. The tests are developed to elicit from the candidates free responses to stimulus-situations. The assumption is that what he/ she perceives and records as response is a projection of his/ her own self. These techniques therefore, permit the subject to project his/ her personality in terms of free verbal responses about the stimulus presented. The theme is most likely to weave around a picture as in situation apperception test (SAT); free association to a set of selected words as in words association test (WAT), and handling the problems in situational judgment tests (SJT), etc. The technique helps in arriving at various attributes and thereby finding out the candidate's personality.

3.2 Interview Technique

It consists of establishing an effective two way communication process between the interviewer and the interviewee. The atmosphere throughout the interview is relaxed and informal. The questions are based on every day

experiences relating to the work, education, family and spare time activities, hobbies and interests. What the candidate has done till date with regard to their academics, achievements and extra curricular activities, interest in life, interaction with parents, friends and society at large. Candidates' general awareness, physical and mental fortitude, forms important facets to assist him in his assessment. Each candidate is interviewed for a duration ranging from 30 min - 45 min. The interviewing officer assesses whether the candidate has the acceptable level of attributes to become an officer in the Armed Forces.

3.3 Group Testing Technique

The primary concern here is to see how an individual will face the obstacles and the tasks allotted to him and his attitude towards other members of the group both while working with them and while directing them. The group testing technique (GTO) tests consists of group discussion, combined situation planning, outdoor task execution, leadership situation, and combined obstacle course.

3.4 Decision Support Tool

It has been a constant endeavour of the De Novo Selection System to minimise elements of subjectivity. All the five domains have tests wherein structured scheme of interpretation and scoring have been developed to the extent possible without diluting the psychological principles. The scores are normalised and percentile is calculated to place them under five categories, wherein '1' is the least accepted and '5' is highly accepted. So, a candidate gets a rating on 16 AMLs each and each rating is treated independently. Decision support tool (DST) has to be used during conference as an aid to assessors.

The board conference is the final event of the testing process, comprising all the assessors who have assessed the candidate. Applying DST Algorithm gives four categories of cases. The first one is clear reject cases. Second category of cases consists of borderline cases and third category is discussable and the final fourth category is recommended. Discussable and borderliners cases may have a tendency towards acceptance or rejection, which assessors need to discuss and come to a consensus during conference.

4. PRESENT SELECTION SYSTEM AND DE NOVO SELECTION SYSTEM

In De Novo Selection System the merits of the present selection system have been retained and the limitations have been addressed. The major differences between the present selection system and De Novo selection system have been enumerated as follows:

In the psychological technique, semi-projective tests have been developed as compared to projective tests in present selection system. A structured scheme of interpretation is followed by objective computerised scoring thus minimising subjectivity. The assessment is domain specific. This is an advantage over the present selection system wherein the interpretation of test results is highly subjective thus affecting the reliability and validity of results. Greater chances of errors and biases have been minimised in De Novo.

In the group testing technique, the assessment is split

over a two days process in the present selection system, thus affecting validity of assessment. The psychological principles have not been applied effectively in interpretation of results. Moreover, the rating and ranking procedures are not in sync with psychological scaling process. In De Novo selection system, the assessment has been confined to a single day that ensures that the continuity of behaviour is maintained. Effective application of psychological principles is ensured and errors in assessment are minimised by appropriate use of ranking and rating scale.

In the Interview technique, the OLQ based behavioural cues approach is subjective in nature in present selection system. Moreover, there is no separate jotting sheet. In De Novo Selection system, emphasis is given on identification of behavioural cues for each AML. A standardised jotting sheet has also been developed.

In the present selection system, the rating and marking procedure is based on aggregation of marks, which leads to loss of qualitative data. The initial marks are not the right representation of candidate's profile. Independent marks by three assessors are not the right representation of candidates' composite profile. In De Novo Selection system, no initial marks are awarded in the conference procedure. No tick aggregate is to be done. The composite profile is generated based on ratings of three assessors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- (a) De Novo Selection System has followed a systemic level comprehensive approach in addressing issues and concerns related to selection of candidates for officer cadres in the Indian armed forces. The trials for the prototype developed in 2014, are underway.
- (b) Extensive job analysis has been used for establishing better compatibility between transforming scenarios and assessing criteria.
- (c) The theoretical complexities and feasibility aspects were focused for their finer integration at every stage of development. Prototype has been designed and developed by incorporating latest theoretical positions on effective applications of principles for each technique with due focus on retaining the strengths of the system in vogue.
- (d) The mechanism of providing locational advantage to the candidates through decentralising was proposed to Services in order to attract potential candidates.
- (e) De Novo is designed to maintain the quality of assessment and scope for discussing more number of candidates that enables the system not to miss out a potential candidate.
- (f) Further, better Person-Job fit can be achieved by integration of selection concepts with assessment during training and job performance.

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She guided the research on every step, giving it the required direction. The whole De Novo Selection system has reached its present form under her supervision.