

ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FOR ENHANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH ARMY: A STUDY

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Introduction

The recognition of knowledge as a key strategic asset is very popular today which explicitly brings the issue of Knowledge Management (KM) in the forefront of the organizational strategy. Since the beginning of the 1990s this KM has gained a significant role in research as well as in practice in today's global organizations. Due to the knowledge emerging competitive pressure of globalization and the knowledge economy, organizations are now focusing on the management of the knowledge of their employees, just as they do for the other resources. Alongside this, the spectacular take-off of KM is now placing great emphasis on the management of the possessors of the knowledge asset i.e. Human Resource. Because many technicist and IT driven approach to KM, primarily adopted by many organizations, failed largely due to ignoring the people issues associated with KM (Scarbrough and Swan, 1999). A mutual reinforcement between KM-related HR practices is assumed to be critical KM features (Oltra, 2005; Hansen, 1999). HR functions are now therefore, being aligned with the competing perspective of integrating the management of people into the management of knowledge. All these empirically suggest that there is a practical need to maintain a degree of congruency and symbiotic positive link between HRM and KM in the organization to foster better organizational performance. In the Defence sector, the new era of warfare highlights the rising importance of having a knowledge advantage over adversaries. Thus it brings KM to the fore of commanding operations. The concept of transition in the military from traditional soldier to knowledge worker is globally under way to achieve knowledge supremacy. A US

Marine Corps General introduced the idea of the strategic corporal in 1999, and since then the concept of KM has gained widespread academic and military recognition (Byrne and Bannister, 2013, p. 71). Modern militaries are now embracing credible changes in the HR practices to influence their KM doctrine. The capture of knowledge is now a big challenge for most organizations, but even more so for military and defence sector. There comes the unique role of HRM. Given the current global scenario, Bangladesh Army like other armies of developed and developing countries are also facing an operational environment that is changing at an increasingly rapid pace. Over the last few years, Bangladesh Army has embraced the need of knowledge and learning and enhanced structures for education and training. It has also modernized its weaponry, network arrangements systems and procedures to face the needs of tomorrow. However, as a concept and strategy it is yet to draw the right attention of the hierarchy. There is also a lack of correct information in different processes, for different people at different levels. Many are exiting the forces at different stages of their career with significant explicit and tacit knowledge which seems a great loss on the part of the army. On the other hand, the HRM issues are still being dealt by a traditional concept of personnel administration (Sagir, 2013) by different branches and directorates with seemingly incoherent focuses. Besides, it is apparently observed that persons with right knowledge and aptitude are sometime not being positioned at right place and at right time. Consequently, individual knowledge is sometimes remaining unutilized or underutilized and thus is fading over time. It is also assumed that a lifelong learning culture and motivation is somewhat missing to some extent due to lack of appropriate and sustainable organizational support. All the above observations epitomize that some drawbacks or inefficient management of certain HR functions may be significantly affecting the enhancement of overall KM in Bangladesh Army and consequently challenging its competitiveness.

Existing HRM and KM Practices of Officers in Bangladesh Army

The HRM in Bangladesh Army is a kind of bureaucratic “Personnel Management” form of operation. The population in the organization is categorized in basic three classes namely; Army officers, JCOs and Other Ranks, and civilian employees. With the purpose of ensuring better management, different branches and directorates in the Army Headquarters mainly develop strategies and policies on HR issues and implement those through formations, and units. They also monitor the results of those strategies and policies and revisit them as and when required. On the other hand, the KM in Bangladesh Army has not been adopted as a separate strategy. The KM functions of the officers are, by and large, planned, coordinated and executed by the General Staff Branch at the Army Headquarters. Formations also plan and execute some KM functions within their scope and purview. Besides, some other branches and directorates in the headquarters also support the KM initiatives in tandem from their point of view.

Current Shortcomings in HRM

- **Inadequacy in Branding:** Amidst emerging challenges of enormous prospects in the dynamic domestic and global job market, our army’s marketing campaign is falling short to attract the desired section of talented youth. Survey found that marketing and recruitment tools appear to be working just fine in terms of quantity but unable to present the army as a profession in right perspective to attract attention of aspiring talented section of the youth.
- **Mismatch between the indicated Academic Quality and Actual Academic Quality:** Grade Inflation is a matter of serious concern amongst the intellectuals, academicians and HR personnel of Bangladesh for last couple of years. The impact of this grade inflation

is aptly substantiated by the statistics from ISSB. Academic credential of the recently selected officers is well above the threshold, but this group of officers often falter in terms of depth of knowledge and application. At this backdrop, it may be argued that there may be a need of re-assessing the selection process and refurbish it appropriately.

Training, Development and KM

- **Limited and Formal Pattern for Knowledge Sharing:** There are limited opportunities to share knowledge through some structured form of interactions like, Study period, Model discussion, Tutorial discussions etc. Since these forms are quite formal, these do not contribute much to the creation of new knowledge. Besides, these decorum and formality do not adequately motivate or encourage the officers particularly the young generations to participate with open mind and unwavering interest.
- **Limited Exposure for Face-to-face Interaction:** The induction process of officers could not keep pace with the expansion of Army in the last six years. Therefore, the Army is running with almost 40% (MS Branch, 2018) shortage of officers. Conversely, professional, co-professional and extra-professional commitments have increased in manifolds. In such a situation completion of an event is more important than perfection. Officers are less interested in mentor-apprentice interaction while firefighting an event.
- **Contradiction in Priority Setting:** Traditionally, a key player of unit Basketball team is much adored by unit authority and enjoys a celebrity status in the unit; the best gunner of the unit is just the one who does his job well. On the other hand, consequence of a failed administrative event is so serious and persistent that it surpasses the reward of an excellent training event. In sum, there seems an inherent contradiction among the officers in particular, in setting their appropriate priority.
- **Lack of Online Training:** The current shortage of officers particularly in the units has almost gone beyond natural adaptability.

Although many corporate organizations are mitigating this challenge through appropriate delivering of training online, Bangladesh Army is yet to explore this on larger spectrum and use it as a way out to this menacing problem. However, it is needless to mention that something that need to be taught on ground must not be compromised through taping online advantage. An objective and balanced assessment is imperative.

- **Inadequate Focus for Creation of Hyper Specialists:** In the context of rapidly changing global environment, it is a need of time to create true specialists on aspects even beyond basic parameters and to keep them upgraded with new advents on a regular basis. Currently there are four approaches observed with regards to developing and employing hyper specialist in Bangladesh Army:
 - Develop hyper specialist and employ them effectively. Example: AMC and ADC.
 - Develop hyper specialist but do not employ them effectively. Example: EME, Sig and Ord.
 - The need for hyper specialist is felt, some effort is taken to develop but employ them as generally trained personnel. Example: AC, Arty and Engrs.
 - Do not feel for any specialization and no effort is taken to develop so. Example: Inf and ASC.

All the above suggest that there is need for progressive specialization all over in Bangladesh Army and make best and timely use of them for greater dividend.

Career Management and KM

- **Lack of Participation in Decision Making:** Study found that due to lack of adequate participation in the decision making process and the consequent individual emotional attachment to the organization,

many officers lack due commitment to the outfit and thus it affects the knowledge creation and sharing.

- **No Organizational Knowledge Repository:** Officers in various courses at home and abroad gain and develop their own knowledge banks which are worth useful. However, there is no organizational system to acquire and preserve those knowledge banks most of which could be used as reference for future discourses and decision makings.
- **Lack of Lifelong Learning Culture:** Officer's impulse for knowledge gathering and knowledge creation for certain time is observed to be driven mostly by the focus on optimum fulfilment of their promotion criteria, a power conduit indeed. Organization does not promote much on knowledge gathering as a lifelong learning culture. As such when the prospect of further promotion is sealed due to some limitations, most individuals' motivation for fostering knowledge required for the organizational development also lose their strength and belongingness. On the contrary, officers eventually plug in their focus for acquiring knowledge and expertise that will only benefit him or her for second career.
- **Insufficient Organizational Sponsorship for Higher Study:** The current policies although encourage higher study of the officers, however, very few get organizational sponsorship. Besides, there is no master plan for this higher studies that pursues synergy between organizational interests and personal needs. Nonetheless, the knowledge attained through higher studies are not recognized much and thus not utilized to the best of the organizational benefits. As such, wealth of this diversified knowledge together remains unutilized or under-utilized.
- **Lack of Preservation of "Lessons Learned":** There is no explicit provision of preserving the "lesson learned" in any form. Besides, general practices in the Army lacks in efficient and timely use of "lessons learned" as a source of further learning and decision making.
- **Lack of Timely Employment:** A good number of officers are being trained every year on different utility disciplines like GTO, BI, and OMP

etc. However, study found that considerable portion (67%) of them are employed according to their specialization between 5-10 years of the completion of training. Besides, even a part of them (approximately 10%) are not employed at all on their fields of specialization in their entire career. The similar picture is also prevalent in case of foreign courses and higher studies. Thus it reveals that certain part of knowledge and efficiency is being wasted, lost, or remaining unutilized in the process due to lack of proper and timely planning of employment.

- **Frequent Posting and Lack of Priority of Placement:** Frequent and premature posting are sometime affecting the learning process. Officers in their process of learning, develop certain informal groups for sharing their knowledge and experience. If they are posted frequently, this team building efforts and stability get hampered which in turn affects the motivation and commitment for learning and exploration of knowledge. Besides, it is also observed that for posting officers, staff and instructional appointments are given priority. Thus, units are generally being deprived of the service of high quality officers which in turn is affecting the learning environment in the units.

Rewards, Benefits and KM

- **Insufficient Linking of Rewards to KM Functions:** It has been observed that individuals are most commonly rewarded in the Army for what they know, not what knowledge they actually share. As a result, officers often hoard their knowledge for personal gain only. This is hindering the free sharing of knowledge across the organization and promoting unethical culture of showing highhandedness within the organization.

Challenges to Efficient KM

- **Absence of Organizational KM Concept and Strategy:** Knowledge in Bangladesh Army exists in doctrines, policies and procedures, operations and training manuals, information systems, workflow and database etc. However, it is still in nascent stage to manage its rich

treasure and fructify. There is a lack of awareness and understanding about KM as a whole in the organizational context.

- **Inadequacy of Quality HRM Approach:** The current HR functions in Bangladesh Army do not adequately follow modern approaches of HRM which is a separate and most vital aspect in today's corporate management. Many of our officers and men working in different HR functions do not have appropriate academic knowledge on HRM. Neither qualification in HRM is a prerequisite for such placements. The HR functions are mostly being managed by some policies and recurring practices which, at the best, are sometime modified to suit the critical needs. It is more of general management than professional HRM. As a result, the professional linking of various HR functions to efficient KM is not receiving appropriate consideration.
- **Lack of Structured Organizational Memory:** Bangladesh Army has a very traditional concept of maintaining organizational memory. Libraries at different garrisons and training institutions are, by far, the major knowledge store for officers and men. However, most of these libraries are not connected to global hosts of e-books and journals. Besides, there are very few websites at Headquarters level which store very limited policy related information. More so, those are not very interactive and not well connected to other global knowledge nodes which could facilitate the officers to find the probable links to their professional interest and encourage for further search. Alongside, there is no e-platform where officers can share their professional knowledge and meet their queries electronically from any location which could benefit the officers and organization as a whole.
- **Individual Fear of Uncertainty:** Survey found that the majority of the officers' pursuance for higher study is mostly driven by the tacit fear of uncertainty about individual post-retirement value perception in the global market. As a result, there is an absence of interest in choosing the subjects for higher study having organizational relevance.

There is also a lack of motivation to use this knowledge explicitly for attainment of the service's goals and objectives.

- **Shortage of Officers:** The shortage of officers currently distracting and undermining both individual and collective KM. It is not possible to cover up this growing shortage overnight. Therefore, the existing potency of officers has to be managed very prudently so that their productivity is maintained and enhanced. In this regard, Bangladesh Army needs to have a holistic concentration to redefine the aspects to see that the basic knowledge process is not hampered.
- **Absence of Systematic Approach to Knowledge Transfer:** There is no systematic approach to knowledge transfer particularly from one who is leaving the organization on retirement to those remaining. As a result, huge knowledge repository along with its contexts and contents is lost in the process.
- **Lack of Joyful Knowledge Sharing Culture:** It is often claimed that knowledge add value when it is shared with others. However, majority of the respondents perceive that Bangladesh Army lacks joyful learning and knowledge sharing culture. It seems people are just selectively focused to acquire or share knowledge to meet short term needs mostly under pressure. It is more of managing things than thriving for gaining expertise or fostering learning across all members for value creation that would lead to sustainable organizational performance.
- **Scarcity of Up-to date Knowledge Database:** Although Military Secretary Branch in the Army Headquarters maintains individual service profile but this does not include the informal knowledge discourses one undergoes in his or her career. This data shortage often impacts the employment decisions by underemphasizing one's knowledge potentials. This, in essence, is hampering the motivation of the officers in pursuing advance learning.

- **Impacts of Internet and Social Media:** The current surge of Internet and social media have offered seamless opportunities to officers to enhance their knowledge for professional development. However, too much of living in the virtual world is although keeping them more connected socially but is holding them from learning on ground through mutual person-to-person interactions, which is an antecedent of organizational knowledge development. Thus, knowledge sharing in the overall context in the army is suffering. Absorbing this phenomenon and yet creating scope for training and education through building relationship is therefore, a great challenge for the current leadership in the army.
- **Limited Organizational Support for Knowledge Rehabilitation:** Almost all the officers at the verge of their retirement endure their service with certain level of pre-occupation of concern about their secure rehabilitation. Army authority has very negligible support in this regard. Consequently, many officers suffers from cognitive dissonance of perceived shortcomings of qualifications to market demands. Besides, the huge deposits of professional knowledge has very scarce scope for re-use in the army. As a result, army is losing huge potential of this knowledge acumen. This needs to be addressed appropriately so that organization can salvage and reuse this valuable knowledge repository for future discourses.

Suggested Reforms in HRM for the Enhancement of KM in Bangladesh Army

Strategic Level

- **Adoption of Knowledge Management as a Strategy:** The foremost priority task for enhancing the knowledge management in Bangladesh Army is to acknowledge the “Knowledge Management” as a key concept in the basic fabric of the organization by its hierarchy. The decision makers should conceive the paradigm shift and changing landscape of the modern world to knowledge age and set “achievement

of information and knowledge superiority” as a distinct service goal. This once achieved sufficiently, the follow up action would be to support and facilitate in designing and implementing strategy and tools, processes, systems, structures, and cultures and allocate resources and capabilities to improve the creation, sharing, and use of knowledge.

- **Formulation of HRM Strategy and Policy:** An efficient KM is the process outcome of best HRM practices. Therefore, Bangladesh Army should formulate a more effective HRM strategy and policy that synchronizes all requirements emanated from the knowledge management activities. It should address the aspirations of the officers’ about knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and focus exhaustively to maintain their motivation and commitment.
- **Establishment of Separate HRM Branch:** The Hierarchy should conceive the need for a separate HRM Branch given the existing seemingly disharmonized and silo like HR practices of multiple branches and directorates. For that, we need to revamp our current HR practices to identify the core issues and go away with the redundancies. This will not only revitalize the potentials of human capital but also explore the knowledge potentials to attain better organizational performance.
- **Adoption of Knowledge-oriented HR Practices:** Bangladesh Army should re-evaluate its traditional HR practices and tune those as a consistent and cohesive approach forming a knowledge-oriented fit among all its activities. All the HR practices must consciously address the competitive value of knowledge and leverage knowledge internally and externally to create a knowledge sharing environment.

Functional Level

- **Encouraging More Candidates from Cadet Colleges and Military Administered Colleges:** The finest outputs can significantly

be attributed to optimum quality inputs. Similar with the case of Knowledge acquisition where its quality largely depend on the quality of the knowledge beneficiary alongside the acquisition process. On the current context, Bangladesh Army need to focus on revamping the tools for attracting the talent pool of candidates. In this regard, it must concentrate more on the ready pool in the cadet colleges and the army-run schools and colleges and motivate them through teachers, by organizing interactive workshop, offering incentives, counseling etc.

- **Counselling Potential Candidates by Formation:** Different Formations should counsel the potential candidate pool in their respective areas in a prescribed way in collaboration with BNCC authority and civil administrations as a standalone effort or as a subsidiary task during any outdoor deployment. While doing so, formations must organize the best team of officers with moderate knowledge and experience on the likely aspirations of the candidates and should go prepared. Local visit to different formation activities may also be arranged for those potential candidates. However, security must not be compromised.
- **Matching Training Needs with Appropriate Job Specifications:** In the case of the existing acquisition process, Bangladesh Army should come out of its traditional concept of training to more demand-driven and technology based education and training. Individual must understand and believe in the purpose of acquiring of the knowledge and be able to relate his knowledge on ground very quickly and easily. For that a sound estimation of training need is a primary necessity. Military Training Directorate should diligently match every training requirement with the appropriate job specifications with a clear understanding of purpose and strong focus on future utility. Alongside, timely selection of the most competent person for training needs a thoughtful setting where Military Secretary Branch has its role to play.

- **Encouraging Knowledge Acquisition outside One's Main Domain:** Authority at different tiers should encourage the acquisition of knowledge outside main domain through policy and incentives. The training curricula of different training courses should also focus on expanding the knowledge horizon of individual trainees beyond just traditional concept. This will broaden officers' intellectual horizon and push their efficiency towards current and future organizational needs and aspirations.
- **Creation of Hyper Specialization:** Keeping in mind the emerging changes in the warfare and technology, Army should focus on creating hyper specialists on various professional aspects and invest right efforts to keep them optimally functional. Individual must also be convinced and encouraged for such specialization. For this, we should first identify the critical elements at different levels of dispositions and select the best lot of officers and men for turning them to hyper specialists. They should also feel dignified for their specialization irrespective of their career prospects.
- **Encouraging, Incentivizing and Supporting New Creation:** Bangladesh Army should readily look for in-house creation of new knowledge on many contemporary and competing aspects by encouraging, incentivizing and adequately supporting all such creative efforts. Our existing training system both at institutions and units or formations must add this "phenomenon of creation" as a priority feature. Alongside, our existing posting phenomenon and other related policies should remain flexible to adequately backup any new knowledge creation effort.
- **Revitalizing the Knowledge Sharing Culture:** Organizational learning culture should encourage sharing of experience on diversified professional events as a regular trend instead of just confining it within some formal or semi-formal educational and training events. The working procedure and environment should be more flexible and learning-oriented and leave aside the petty formalities.

- **Cultural Adaptation:** Bangladesh Army should be more accommodative to the diversity of its men and leave its “melting pot” idea that people will automatically assimilate into the existing culture. Rather, our Army should recognize the differences in its generations and adapt its culture and expectations accordingly keeping the fundamentals intact. This will foster mutual trust, respect, better understanding and confidence within its people.
- **Timely Placement:** Officers must have adequate scopes to utilize and test their knowledge and skills at appropriate time and place. Individual will feel contented once he will have right and timely placement where he can make best use of his full potentials. This will also make him more committed to enhance his knowledge. Military Secretary’s Branch should have a thoughtful fore planning so that there is no or limited time gap between training and employment.
- **Encouraging Higher Study through Utilizing the Knowledge for Organizational Development:** Bangladesh Army should remain considerate and acknowledge all kinds of higher studies pursued by individual officers whether it followed proper permission or not. This will encourage them to pursue more studies. More importantly, Army should have proper record of all higher studies and make best use of this huge knowledge deposits for organizational development. This will lower the dependency on external service providers and reduce cost incurred there from.
- **Valuation of Accrued Knowledge after Retirement:** Army should recognize the value of the long-earned knowledge and experience of retired officers and think of utilizing this strong base of knowledge for the progress of the Army in particular and for the country in general. To do so, Army Welfare and Rehabilitation Directorate may maintain a database of knowledge and experiences of officers like bdjobs.com, explore its network and connectivity outside in the corporate market and open up avenues to suit them in as per different organizational requirements. The Directorate may also act

as an intermediating platform to provide advices to officers on the contemporary requirements of higher study or other potential job requirements of the job market. The existing structure and facilities of RAOWA committee may be capitalized for this purpose. Besides, Army should also look for their employment opportunity within and may employ them as resource personnel (very limited use in NDC in practice). Besides, Bangladesh Army, as a long term priority, may think of having a separate think tank institutes of its own comprised of eminent retired military personnel. The benefits of these efforts will be exponentially exciting and self-explanatory in the context of the global strategic environment.

- **Provision of “One Stop” Knowledge Portal:** Bangladesh Army should accumulate all the knowledge (explicit and implicit) of its members in a knowledge bank and make a provision so that anyone in the organization can access in and make best use of its facilities for professional and organizational development. Our existing Army Basic Website should be redesigned and thoughtful a “One Stop” knowledge portal should be innovated using smart technologies and introduced by professionals where all officers should be encouraged through a comprehensive policy and incentives to deposit their knowledge stock for re-use. This will gradually become a huge asset of collaborative intelligence for the organization. The same portal can even be used for multipurpose issues like posting of national, regional and global contemporary news of professional interest, sharing of stories of new concepts and successful inventions, Sharing of pre-course materials of different training courses at home and abroad, query clarification through authorized experts, policy guidelines, posting of event calendars, health awareness notifications, etc. A part time core team may manage and supervise this portal.
- **Setting up of a “Lesson learned” Knowledge Warehouse:** Beside the above portal, Bangladesh Army may have a provision of a separate knowledge warehouse which will only store the “lesson learned” from

different wartime and peacetime engagements both at home and abroad. This can be managed by a specific group of subject matter experts.

- **Provision of Knowledge Connectivity:** As far the connectivity on the knowledge platform is concern, Bangladesh Army should pursue to have separate knowledge platform in every training institutions to act as a knowledge repository and then bring all these training institutions into a single grid through connectivity for easy sharing of training resources. By phase, this grid then should be connected to various national universities like BUP, MIST etc. for cross fertilization of knowledge through information sharing. Besides, the libraries should be upgraded as e-libraries through facilitating access to global hubs of eBooks. Institutions like NDC and DSCSC should be connected to different think tank institutions of interest both domestic and global like BIISS, BEI, Policy, Research Institute, CPD, BIPSS, BIDS, and Stratfor.com. This will help to pursue connectivity of ideas for mutual development.

Conclusion

The 21st century is predominantly characterized by rapid pace of technological change which highlights the rising importance of having a knowledge advantage over adversaries. Decision-making and situational awareness are far more complex in military context than ever before. The new focus on knowledge and knowledge processes has generated the concept and practice of KM. Many researches posit that there exists a relation between HRM and KM and that a knowledge- oriented HR system may enhance all the KM processes. For an organization to be knowledge intensive, they advocated for the need to have synergy between HRM and KM. Besides, they also highlighted to adopt this knowledge-oriented HR practices together, as a system that will fosters efficient KM. Like the corporate outfits, HRM and KM in the military are corollary to each other

that helps members in the military to achieve and sustain competitive advantage over others. On that pretext, Bangladesh Army is attempting to transform her manpower from moderate knowledge –intensive to high knowledge intensive, aiming to immerse herself in higher value added activities to continual sustain the competitiveness with the rivalries. Besides, the army is also recognizing that its HRM is an extremely vital issue as she draws critical strength from its soldiers and seeking for development in different HR activities involving preparation of human resource forecasts, recruitment, screening of prospective employees, the study of training needs, the development of compensation systems, performance appraisals and reward and recognition. However, it was hypothesized that there are missing links between its HRM and KM which suggested this research. The results of this research have duly answered the hypothesis and found that although the broad targets of knowledge are being achieved quite satisfactorily, there is still a long way to go in order to synergize the HR system with KM requirements in Bangladesh Army. There are certain areas in HR practices which need to be reformed to enhance the overall KM system of officers. Having those reforms accomplished will not only add value to current HR practices, but also increase the productivity of individuals and organization to a greater height by ensuring optimal utilization and proficient management of knowledge. A major issue to note that the role of HR issues in KM initiatives involve extremely complex dynamics. So, no “quick fix” solutions can be found. Instead, careful reflection by hierarchy on the specific, actual needs concerning KM essentials along with deep awareness of the underlying motivations for such initiatives and a sensible assessment should be the right approach.

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