

# Bringing about Effective Transformation in the Armed Forces: A Behavioural Sciences Perspective

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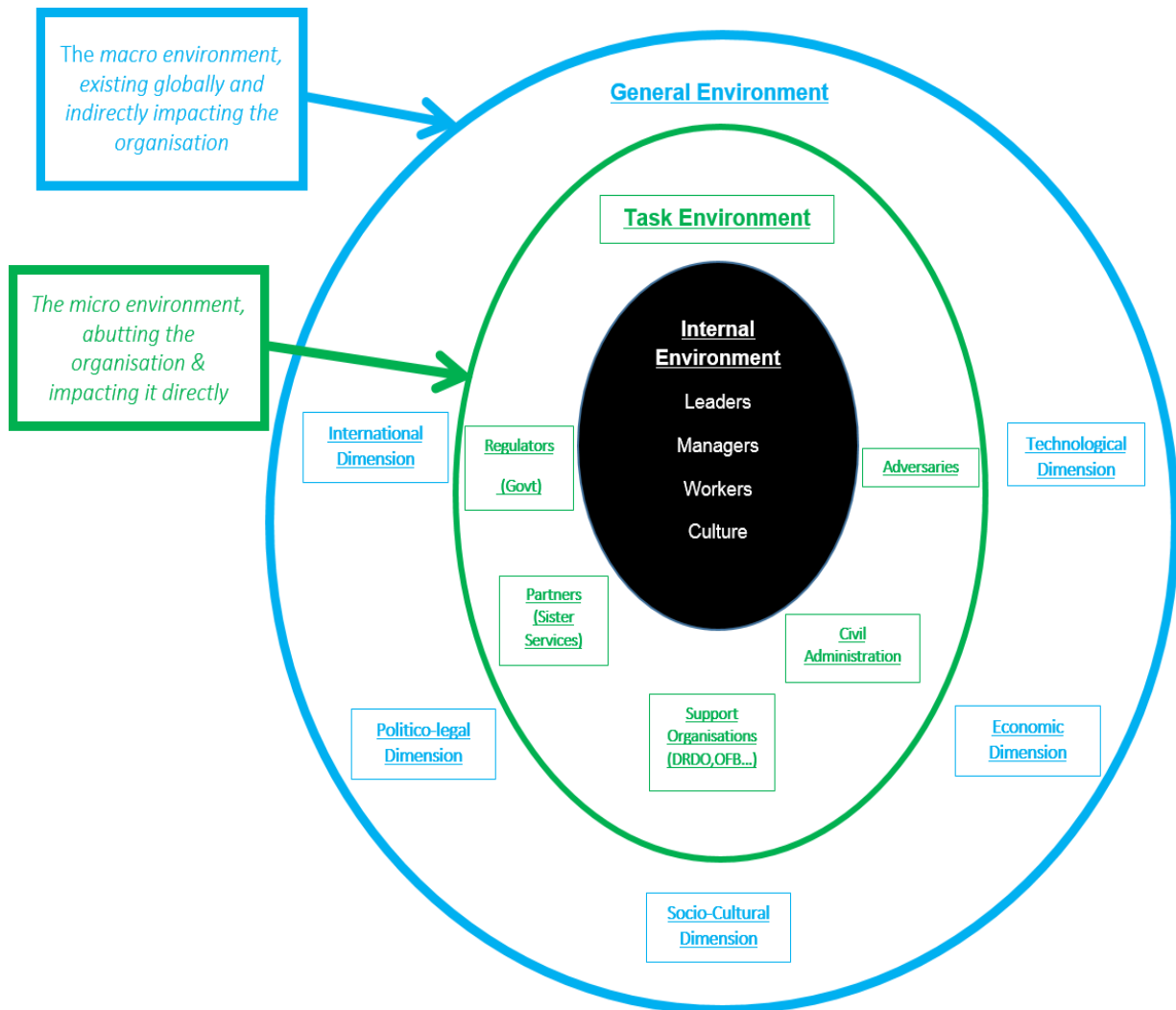
“The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out.”

- B. H. Liddell Hart

1. The post-modern world is a place where the pace of change has accelerated to unprecedented levels. The environment is dynamic and constantly in flux. Change is an inevitable part of life and there can be no running away from it. If well planned and executed it can produce great benefits, however in spite of planning, change is hard to incorporate, accept and appreciate. Successful organisations recognize this fact and cater for adapting to the changed realities, those that fail to do so rapidly lose relevance and are inevitably sidelined. This is a risk that the nation can ill afford to take when it concerns a vital institution like the armed forces.
2. Burns, in his seminal work on power and leadership states that real change involves a transformation to a marked degree in the attitudes, norms, institutions and behaviours that structure our daily lives. He goes on to bring out that such changes need to embrace not only *new cultural patterns* and *institutional arrangements* but also *new psychological dispositions* since it leads to changes in the felt existence, the flesh and fabric of people’s lives. (Burns, 1978) The human element in change or transformation is therefore all important and needs to be addressed adequately along with all other material aspects This paper seeks to explore a behavioural sciences perspective on how successful transformation can be brought about by Leaders & Change Managers, including:-
  1. Establishing the need/ rationale for change – *Why to Change?*
  2. Deciding which aspects of the organisation need to be addressed - *What to Change?*
  3. Exploring a Change Process which can provide broad parameters for implementation of change – *How to Change?*
  4. Identifying the natural psychological stages that organisation members experience when subjected to change.

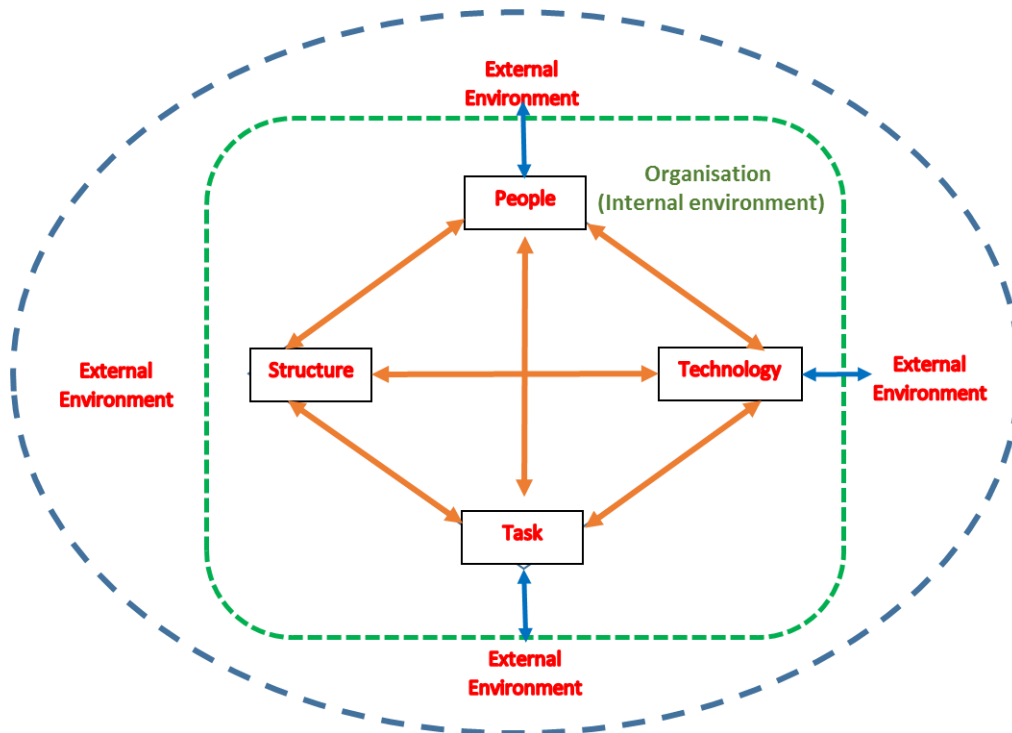
## Why Change: Establishing the Need

3. The armed forces like all other organisations derive their purpose from the environment. The environment may be sub divided into external and internal environment with the external dimension being further sub divided into the task & contextual (general) dimension as under :-



**Figure 1: Components of Environment as Relevant to Organisations**

4. Morgan has likened organisations to organisms, which must achieve an appropriate relationship with their environment, if they are to survive and flourish. (Morgan, 1986) In the context of the armed forces the environment, especially the context environment has evolved significantly in recent times and therefore the ‘organism’ too must evolve if it has to flourish.
5. In this context Harold Leavitt’s Diamond (Leavitt, 1965) provides a simple model to understand complex organisations and the dynamics of change within them. The four main components of an organisation are **People, Task, Structure** and **Technology**, Leavitt emphasized that change in any one of the element necessitates a corresponding change in the others, failing which the organization would become incoherent.



**Figure 2: Leavitt’s Diamond depicting components of organisation, their interplay and relation to the environment**

6. In the context of the armed forces three of the elements of Leavitt’s diamond have undergone significant changes:-

Caselet 1

In 1962, an Inf Div involved in peacetime construction activities at Ambala was moved to NEFA, thus changing its **Task**. However no corresponding changes were made in the **Technology** (.303 rifles, clothing...), **Structure** (Infantry Div vis a vis Mountain Div) or **People** (Training) leading to disastrous consequences. Lessons were learnt subsequently and corresponding changes were made.

- a. **Technology.** Technology has made inexorable changes and rapid strides with developments in material sciences, IT, robotics and communication technologies being at the forefront. The next revolution driven by breakthroughs in quantum computing & communication is now lurking around the corner.

- b. **People.** Driven by socio-economic developments the rank and file of the forces too have evolved at the psycho-social level.
  - c. **Tasks.** With the emergence of non-state actors, unconventional means of warfare and increasing natural calamities the tasks of the forces too have moved from the purely conventional to include hybrid warfare and HADR amongst others.
7. Given that these three elements continue to change dynamically it is important that suitable modifications be made in the fourth element as well in order to retain balance and address inefficiencies which have crept in. Based on a similar analysis RAND corporation has defined Military Transformation as “adjustment of the armed forces to achieve a correct fit” which needs to be undertaken continuously in a dynamic environment. (RAND, 2018) It opines that historically transformation is needed both for reasons of opportunity and necessity:-
- A. **Opportunity.** For example, if Modern Technology is available to substitute manpower therefore we may look at leaner forces.
  - B. **Necessity.** As the adversaries adopt new technology and new tactics, we need to adapt as otherwise traditional forces become vulnerable. For example enhanced battle field transparency necessitates investment in stealth technology.
  - C. This can be amplified by considering the opportunities that technology provided which created the necessity in RMAs over the millennia :-

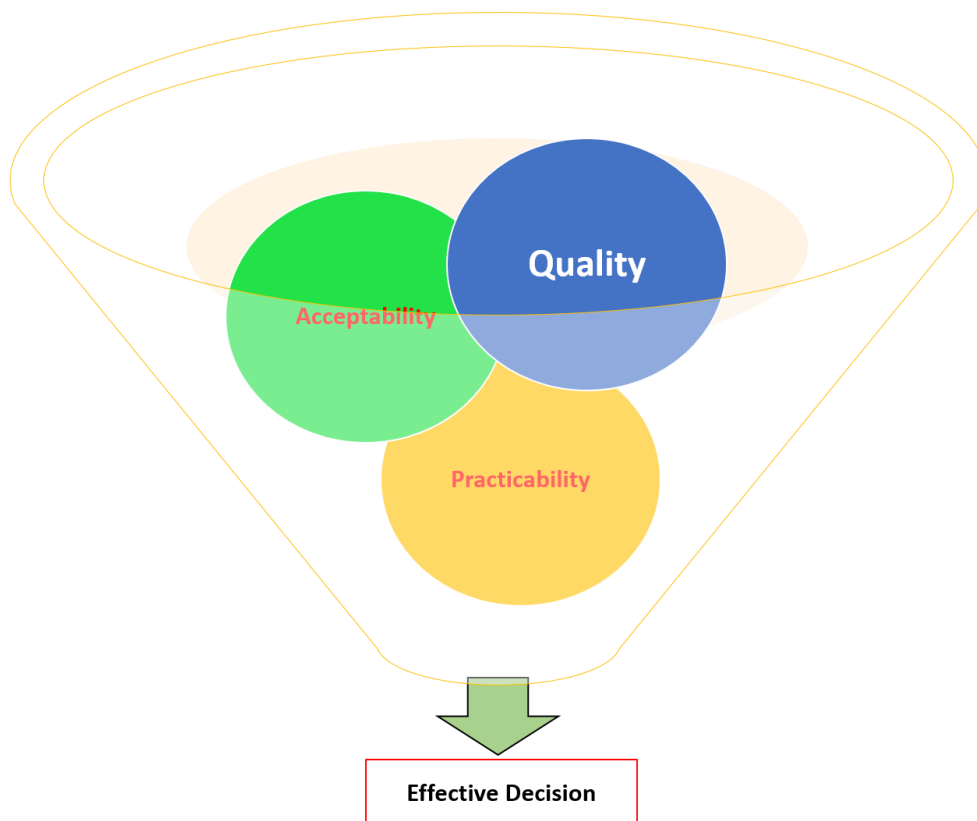
Caselet 2	
<u>Emergent Tech as the Driver</u> <u>(Opportunity)</u>	<u>Retooling of Organisation &amp; Doctrine</u> <u>(Necessity)</u>
✓ Metallurgy - Forging of the sword and shield	➤ Massed formations, line and column tactics
✓ Introduction of the bow and arrow	➤ Stand-off attacks and counter measures
✓ Invention of the saddle	➤ Introduction of cavalry and emphasis on speed and maneuver
✓ Emergence of navies	➤ Multipronged attacks from land & sea, emergence of amphibious forces
✓ Food processing & containerisation	➤ Innovations in logistics
✓ Aviation	➤ Introduction of Air Forces and Air Defence
✓ Breach loading weapons, machine guns and indirect fire	➤ Trench Warfare
✓ Tanks	➤ Blitzkrieg Operations
✓ Nuclear Technology	➤ Deterrence.
✓ AI, ML, Quantum Technology	➤ ???

- 8. History teaches us that with evolution of technology a RMA leading to transformation is inevitable, the only question is will it take a disastrous war to trigger it or would it be the fruit of enlightened National Self- Interest?

9. Having established the relevance and inevitability of transformation let us attempt to understand the behavioural sciences perspective on how such change can be brought about most effectively. The process of change may be understood to occur in the four sometimes overlapping stages of Decision Making, Unfreezing, Change Implementation and Freezing.

**What to Change: Effective Decision Making.**

10. The commencement of the change process inevitably starts with the decision to change. Before any reform we need to ask, what problem are we solving, and is it the correct problem? (Singh, 2018) This is to be followed by a decision on the most desirable nature of the change. This decision is critical as it provides us with a vision of what the transformed organisation should be and therefore which are the organizational areas to be addressed. This has to do with both the Means and the Ends. This is a very critical start point on which the success of the transformation hinges.
11. While there are many structured and semi-structured approaches to decision making propounded by behavioural scientists, let us dwell on what constitutes an effective decision. As per the widely accepted model for an effective decision, two dimensions viz “Quality” and “Acceptability” appraise a decision’s potential effectiveness. (Maier, 1963) A third dimension “Practicability” is also recommended to be included by some theorists as a non-implementable decision would be ineffective even if it met all criteria of quality and acceptability. (Shull, Delbecq & Cummings, 1970) We may therefore consider an effective decision to be a function of Quality, Acceptability and Practicability.



**Figure 3: Components of an Effective Decision**

12. It is important for the leadership to work on all three aspects to arrive at an effective decision:-

### Caselet 3

The Kargil Review Committee was widely acknowledged as having made very high **Quality** recommendations. However, two decades later in the absence of **Acceptability** & **Practicability** most key recommendations are still a *work in progress*. (From Surprise to Reckoning, The Kargil Review Committee Report, 199)

- a. **Quality.** Drucker has stated that effective decisions result from a systematic process with clearly defined elements that is handled in a distinct sequence of steps. (Drucker, 1967) In order to ensure quality it is important that due process be followed, adequate alternatives be generated, evaluated and the most deserving selected. (Simon, 1947) Cognitive biases need to be recognized and an objective assessment of the chosen alternative is a must.
  2. **Acceptability.** Building acceptance should be recognized as a key leadership function and the leader personally as well as through the team must devote time and resources towards by exploiting all communication channels available. (Maier, 1963)
  3. **Practicability.** A decision must be practically implementable in terms of the technology as well as the skill sets of the organisation members, otherwise the decision would remain utopian and may lead to incoherence in the organisation.
13. In an era wherein the defence budget is under pressure from competing requirements, what to change becomes an important decision. (Chinn, 2013) The obvious answers to achieve economy in defence spending is reduction in manpower, fewer weapon systems and deferring modernisation projects through prioritization. Is it possible to achieve the objective through improving functional efficiencies, realigning strategies, unlocking cross service efficiencies and streamlining logistics? The decision if vetted on the triple touchstone of Q, A & P deliberately can be a great aid to decision makers in taking decisions which are likely to prove effective.

### How to Change: The Change Process

14. Unfortunately, knowing that change is required and even picking the right changes cannot guarantee its success. It is documented that upto 70% of all change efforts end in failure. (Pasmore, 2017) Change is multifaceted, complex and unsettling. Effective change requires a methodical approach which caters for the inevitable organisational turbulence as change is likely to take the organisation

and its members out of their established comfort zones. This is especially true for the military as it is inherently an organisation designed not to change. (Rosen, 1994) Military organisations are highly resistant to change owing to their, size, complexity and culture. (Dowdy and Chinn, 2014) Insights offered by Change Theorists can be invaluable for military leaders attempting transformation.

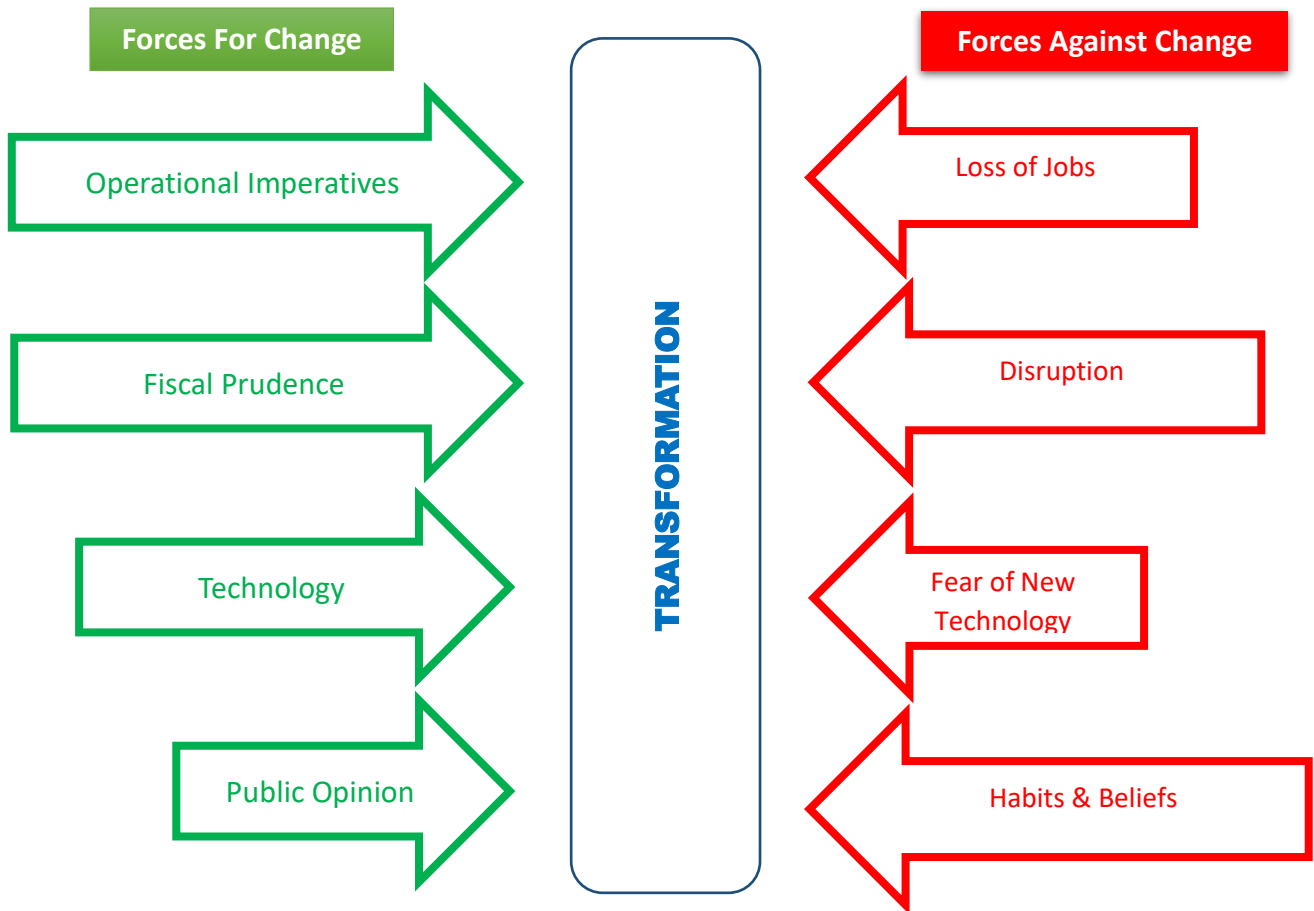
15. Kurt Lewin, the pre-eminent change management theorist has recommended a three step process for implementing effective change (Myers, Hulks & Wiggins, 2012):-



**Figure 4: Lewin's Model of Change**

### **Unfreezing**

16. The importance of unfreezing or preparatory stage is often underestimated and this is a key reason for many well-meaning change – initiatives being ‘still-born’. Since most people naturally resist change, the goal is to create awareness on how the status quo is hindering the organisation. This has to be preceded by a sound analysis of the internal and external environment to gain a clear focus. For this purpose the system of Force Field Analysis developed by Lewin is a simple and effective method. (Lewin, Field Theory in Social Science, 1951) In this method the Forces For and Against change are identified and may also be quantified. This enables the Change Managers to clearly identify the critical drivers against change which need to be addressed. The idea is to gradually reduce the resisting forces till the equilibrium is effectively shifted against the status quo. One rudimentary analysis in the context of military transformation is as under:-



**Figure 5: A Sample Force Field Analysis**

17. The above model provides a generic template to assess the forces in favour and opposing change. Once identified the Change Managers need to address the forces against change through various methods at their disposal. In most instances the resisting forces have predominant psycho-social dimensions. Effective Communication is the most effective weapon in a leader’s arsenal to address these forces. Fears must be allayed, opinions built up and benefits highlighted. Kotter has emphasised the importance of creating a suitable climate in the following steps (Kotter, 1996):-

**Caselet 4**

The Goldwater Nichols Defence Reorganisation Act of 1986 was proposed in different forms since the 1970s in the aftermath of the Vietnam war & other incidents leading upto the invasion of Grenada. However, recognizing that opinions had to be shaped and resisting forces diminished, a prolonged period of **“Unfreezing”** was entered. Only once the Driving Forces were overwhelmingly in favour was the Change introduced. Having implemented Change, numerous reinforcing or **“Freezing”** measures such as compulsory service in joint offices for career officers as an eligibility for promotion were introduced. (Lofaren. 2002)



- a. Create a **Sense of Urgency** or as Lewin calls it ‘**Survival Anxiety**’ (Lewin, Field Theory in Social Science, 1951), By discussing the possible threats and solutions members should be made aware of the need and urgency for change (Mulder, 2012).
  - b. Build a **Guiding Team** of dedicated **Change Managers**.
  - c. Develop the **Vision & Action Plan**. Both of these have to go hand in hand, for as it is said; *Vision without action is a daydream and action without vision is a nightmare!*
18. This step corresponds with the effective decision making process in terms of building acceptability and practicability. Once unfreezing has been undertaken effectively the stage is set for implementing the change.

**Change Implementation**

19. Once ‘unfrozen’ the organisation and its’ members can transition to the new state. This is when change is actually implemented and the members are faced with the new realities. The role of the leadership at all levels is critical at this stage. It is important that they understand the nuances of the intended change and are able to implement it faithfully. Appropriate Organisational Communication is once again key to the success of this step. Leaders must stay engaged, guide and even hand-hold where required during this critical phase. Kotter gives the following steps for engaging & enabling the organisation and implementing change (Kotter, 1996):-
- A. **Communicate the Vision**, this must be articulated and shared in a manner so as to build up support and excitement amongst members.
  - B. **Enable action by removing barriers**. Structural barriers must be consciously addressed.
  - C. **Create Short Term Wins**; this is the beginning of the next step of change implementation; small wins form the molecules of the transformation.
  - D. **Sustain acceleration**; press harder after the initial success, leverage increased credibility to initiate change till the vision becomes a reality.

**Addressing the Human Factor**

20. This is a stage wherein people experience a sense of loss as the familiar world with its attached values starts to transform and it becomes exceedingly important for leaders to understand the emotional state of the members. Behavioural scientists have found a resonance in Elisabeth Kubler Ross model of stages of emotions experienced by human’s going through a loss. (Myers, Hulks & Wiggins, 2012) As individuals experience the loss or threat of loss of a familiar working role, working relationships, power, influence & status, they begin to fear loss of autonomy and the feeling that change is being imposed on them against their will resurfaces. As a response most individuals undergo five emotions given in the table below. It is the duty of the organisation to understand and support it’s members as they transition through these stages:-

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Role of Leader/ Change Manager</u>
(a) Shock & Denial	This stage is usually short lived. The individuals put on a defence mechanism, not being able to digest that they need to adopt	Help employees understand why the change is happening and what to expect. Remove fear of unknown.

(b) Anger	Realisation that change is inevitable hits individual. He may look for someone to blame and become frustrated and irritable	Remain engaged; accept this as a natural transitory phenomena. Give leeway to employees to vent their feelings. Open upward channels of communication
(c) Bargain	As anger recedes, individual may think of ways to postpone the inevitable and try to negotiate for a less traumatic situation	Exercise patience. Enable best training and equip the member with new skills. Be understanding but firm on the decision for change
(d) Depression	As the inevitability of change dawns, individuals may feel sadness, regret and other negative emotions. The organisational future may seem dark and uncertain. Indifference, may be displayed	Be understanding. Make the training as exciting as possible, undertake team building activities to ensure bonding commensurate to the new structures
(e) Acceptance	Realize that fighting the change is futile, seek out good points and move on. <i>Those who are unable to accept, move away</i>	Help build new hopes and aspirations. Share results of increasing productivity

### Refreezing

21. Once the change is implemented it is important to reinforce, stabilize and solidify the change in order to ensure that organisations do not lapse back into their old ways. Cultural change is a time consuming process which is possible only over a longer period of time and if not seen through to its logical conclusion tends to be superficial and old tendencies and habits resurface. Reinforcements from time to time are therefore vital to help the refined culture to stabilize. As new norms emerge, the urge to revert gradually recedes. In addition, as over a period of time new members with new skill sets are inducted a new normal emerges and the dissonance disappears for good.
22. Kotter prescribes actions to **Anchor New Approaches in the Culture** as the key to refreezing. For a change to become truly ingrained it has to become a part of the culture of the organisation. The member's beliefs and values must stay aligned with the new reality. Regular evaluation and discussions about the changed milieu, especially the benefits accrued must be made. Fresh members who strengthen the new culture must be recruited. Old employees who have successfully embraced the change must be encouraged and rewarded. Stability returns to the organisation only once permanency of the new way of doing things is firmly established. (Lewin, Frontiers of Group Dynamics, 1947)

### Recommendations

23. As already done by the Indian Navy, other services as well as HQ IDS must adopt **Management of Change** as a mission. It must become a part of the curriculum of Leadership Studies especially at senior levels.
24. Leaders must identify **Change Management** as a key leadership function.
25. Change must be **planned and executed systematically** in line with the Change Management process given by various scholars such as Lewin & Kotter. Leaders must **guard against jumping ahead to Change Implementation without adequately addressing the Unfreezing** stage. Similarly post change adequate **reinforcers** must be catered to **Freeze** the change.

26. Leaders must focus on **creating acceptance** through awareness about need for change. For this he must have a **dedicated team** working to **communicate** his **vision** with his followers.
27. Leaders and Change Managers must accept that the **followers will undergo a series of emotional states** as explained by Kubler-Ross, this is **not an anomaly but a natural evolutionary process**.

### Conclusion

28. Technology and societal changes are dramatically changing the environment in which the armed forces are required to operate. The war scape of the future will be distinct and is evolving at an unprecedented pace. This requires for the armed forces to adopt a flexible structure capable of adapting to constantly emerging scenarios. The pressure on resources also makes it imperative that we constantly audit our structures and processes so as to optimize the output. Change must be accepted as normal. However, this brings along with it complex Psycho – Social dimensions which if not understood and addressed can present significant challenges. This paper has attempted to put this into perspective keeping in mind the current context wherein serious attempts are being made to restructure and optimize our armed forces, especially the Indian Army.
29. Change managers would be served very well by an understanding of this behavioural sciences perspective as they seek to usher in constructive, effective and long lasting change.

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