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## **Tactical Leadership: Leading From the Front**

**Navneet Bakshi**

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

**Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw**, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



**Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC  
1914-2008**

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

# Tactical Leadership: Leading From the Front

**Navneet Bakshi**



Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



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# Tactical Leadership: Leading From the Front

## Abstract

The decisive resource of the Army, soldiers, has experienced a significant transformation from the medieval times, wherein they were peasants, criminals or farmers turned soldiers with their solitary underpinning was primarily loot, belongingness to a group or fear (Deremilitari, 2007<sup>1</sup>). The leader was an aristocrat who had positional authority and societal backing to be brutal and could impose discipline (War History Online, 2017<sup>2</sup>). The leadership was merciless, detached from the soldier and entirely task-oriented. Nevertheless, in the 21st century socio-economic environment, access to education and mass media has made the division between the leader and led unsuitable (Cenjows, 2023<sup>3</sup>). The exposure to resources, time, material, economic and political power, coupled with a comparatively higher level of education has made the soldier independent, critical and assertive (Smith-Eivemark, 2001<sup>4</sup>). The soldier has been 'humanified' from purely an 'instrument' and the leader has converted to 'One among Equals' rather than 'Superior Lord'.

The VUCA environment has dictated shortening OODA loop wherein orientation and discernment lead to quick action without waiting for the traditional delayed orders (Wikipedia OODA loop, 2003<sup>5</sup>). Thus, the hierarchical construct and the inflexible command chain may be failing quicker than we can adapt (Think Beyond, 2024<sup>6</sup>). With the upsurge of information warfare, asymmetric threats and the amalgamation of innovative technologies, the

soldiers are obligated to make swift decisions and demonstrate adaptability contributing straight to mission accomplishment (Kane, 2017<sup>7</sup>). “Educated Soldiers” with multidimensional skillsets which empower them to analyse developing scenarios and implement effective solutions have entrenched themselves as fundamental element in contemporary military effectiveness (Betts, 2022<sup>8</sup>).

Presently, military leadership stresses flexibility, cultural competence, and technological fluency. Educated soldiers must integrate cyber capabilities, intelligence analysis, and unmanned systems into their operational skills (Morris, 2008<sup>9</sup>). Leaders empower subordinate soldiers to make choices locally, improving responsiveness. Education also encourages ethical behaviour and respect for international laws (CENJOWS, 2023).

Espousing an educated soldier model benefits us to navigate contemporary battlefields and fashion adaptable force for the future (Nieves, 2022<sup>10</sup>). The soldier is increasingly wary of toxic leadership wherein fear is the chief motivator. The transformation from inflexible control to informed initiative echoes the demands of today’s multifaceted security environment (USI Journal, 2024<sup>11</sup>). The mutual consequence of educated soldier with prominence and inevitability of coherent decision at subordinate level autonomously to achieve the intent of commander prescribes a revolution in style of leadership (CENJOWS, 2023).

We all understand that the style of leadership would change with the level of command, from tactical through operational and strategic. However, to reduce the scope and focus the paper, we will discuss leadership style at tactical level only.

### **Aim, Scope and Relevance of the Paper**

This paper aims to analyse how tactical leadership within the

Indian Army, contribute to operational effectiveness amid complex operational and socio-economic environments. The scope encompasses Indian Army units operating in varied terrains and socio-economic contexts, accentuating leadership's influence to upholding operational readiness and enhancing soldier morale and cohesion (CENJOWS, 2023). This paper bears critical significance in the existing strategic environment, where leadership adaptableness and social consciousness form the Army's capability to respond swiftly and efficiently to security threats while supporting civil-military cooperation (Pandey, 2024<sup>12</sup>).

## Evolution of Military Leadership

Military leadership between the 19th and 20th centuries was defined by authoritative styles grounded in strict hierarchy (Adams, 1990<sup>13</sup>). These leaders exercised command through clear chains of control and submission (Canr, 2016<sup>14</sup>). The emphasis was on discipline, centralised decision-making, and preserving order in formations (SAGE Encyclopedia, 2015<sup>15</sup>). This classical method echoed the veracities of large-scale conventional warfare, accentuating standardisation and control to synchronize mass forces efficiently (Adams, 1990). For example, Napoleonic warfare necessitated unswerving orders and structured ranks to manoeuvre armies on the battlefield (Grace, 2024<sup>16</sup>).

By mid-19th century, advancements in technology and warfare began to test traditional command models (History of Military Technology, 2006<sup>17</sup>). Developments like rifled firearms and telegraphs augmented battlefield intricacy and frontages (Salik, 2022<sup>18</sup>). Leaders had to adjust to faster, more distributed combat where inflexible control decelerated responses (CIAO, 2019<sup>19</sup>). At this period, professional military education developed to promote understanding past submission, concentrating on tactics, strategy, and critical thinking (DTIC, 1993<sup>20</sup>).

Toward the late 19th century, leadership metamorphosed from unadulterated authority to value-based and adaptive models (SVI Monograph, 2022<sup>21</sup>). Leaders commenced empowering subordinates to make decisions within commanders' intent, reflecting the mission command viewpoint (Mulholland, 2025<sup>22</sup>). This modification was determined by the fickleness of trench warfare and evolving technologies like airplanes and tanks in World War I (Cambridge, 2012<sup>23</sup>). Leaders required flexibility and innovation to respond to fluid situations, rather than relying merely on top-down orders (Military Review, 2025<sup>24</sup>).

In the 20th century, value-based leadership amalgamated ethics, respect for soldiers, and fostering trust (Military Review, 2016<sup>25</sup>). Commanders understood morale and motivation prejudiced performance meaningfully (SAGE Encyclopedia, 2015). The change also incorporated decentralized leadership, pushing responsibility down to lower ranks to increase responsiveness and initiative (Wikipedia, 2005<sup>26</sup>). Examples include the German Auftragstaktik approach, where junior leaders played a decisive role in adapting plans to real-time situations (Mulholland, 2025).

Adaptive leadership established in importance in the latter 20th century as warfare further diversified (Army University Press, 2012<sup>27</sup>). Conflicts involved irregular forces, hybrid threats and complex political dynamics (N2Growth, 2020<sup>28</sup>). As Secretary of Defence Robert Gates highlighted, armed forces had to uninterruptedly evaluate and adjust to emerging threats (Gates, 2021<sup>29</sup>). Today's adaptive leaders balance knowledge, mental agility and ethical judgment (Army University Press, 2025). They empower their teams while navigating them through ambiguity with ingenuity and resilience (Albrecht, 2010<sup>30</sup>).

## OPERATIONAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The operational and socio-economic environment significantly influences leadership and operational effectiveness across various organizational settings (VIF India, 2024<sup>31</sup>). In the context of the Indian Army, where tactical leadership plays a critical role at the front lines, leadership directly impacts how units adapt to evolving battlefield challenges, manage limited resources, and achieve strategic and tactical objectives. Leadership effectiveness in such environments determines mission success and contributes to broader national security and socio-economic stability.

Tactical leadership in the Indian Army is in control for making instantaneous decisions, managing resources and personnel on the battlefield, and ensuring units effectively accomplish their missions (Pandey, 2024). Strong leadership nurtures unit cohesion, encourages adaptability and guarantees positive mission accomplishment even under resource constraints and intricate operational environments (SSB Crack, 2025<sup>32</sup>).

### Link Between Leadership and Operational Effectiveness

Tactical leadership is primarily related to operational effectiveness by controlling soldiers and units by means of judicious decision, well-organized resource management and preserving an adaptive yet disciplined organisational culture. Transformational and transactional leadership styles resonate with the Indian Army's leadership, where inspiring confidence, innovation and accountability unite with strict command obedience and operational control to achieve tactical superiority (CLAWS Journal, 2019<sup>33</sup>). Leadership also extends beyond the battlefield to influence civil-military relations and resource allocation for residents (The India Forum, 2020<sup>34</sup>). Conversely, leadership styles lacking decisiveness or engagement can degrade troop morale, operational coherence, and overall mission success,

thereby adversely affecting broader socio-economic aims (VIF India, 2024).

Leadership at the tactical level in the Indian Army comprises deriving mission objectives that align with higher command strategies while considering local socio-economic realities and resource constraints. Tactical leaders stress battlefield discipline, initiative and quick adaptability, which are crucial to achieving battlefield success in diverse and challenging environments (Pandey, 2024). The effectiveness of operations depends significantly on a tactical leader's ability to coordinate and integrate multiple dimensions, human elements, technology, intelligence, and civil-military relations, to execute missions efficiently while supporting socio-economic stability in the areas of operation (CENJOWS, 2023). Leaders are obligated to respect cultural sensitivity, display resourcefulness and establish healthy engagement with local communities to enhance operational gains (VIF India, 2024). Observed evidence demonstrates that Indian Army units led by transformational and situational tactical leaders commonly display higher operational standards. Such units continuously accomplish tactical objectives with reduced casualties and enthusiastically contribute to civil support operations (IJIP, 2025<sup>35</sup>).

## **Operational Environment**

This section delivers an understanding of the operational environment met by the Indian Army which includes contemporary threats, the need for multi-domain coordination and the transformative effect of technological modernisation. This forms a foundation for further search of specific leadership models in subsequent chapters.

## Contemporary Security Challenges

The contemporary security landscape for the Indian Army is marked by a complex array of threats, prominently including hybrid warfare, information warfare, and high-altitude warfare, each presenting unique challenges that necessitate adaptive leadership and operational innovation (CENJOWS, 2023). Hybrid warfare exploits ambiguity, leveraging asymmetric tactics such as insurgency, proxy warfare, and psychological operations to challenge adversaries while circumventing direct confrontation (CENJOWS, 2023). Tactical commanders must navigate cognitive and informational battlespaces to safeguard the integrity of command and control while exploiting enemy vulnerabilities (CENJOWS, 2023). High-altitude, characteristic to the Indian operational environment, brutally test physical fortitude and operational capability (Tribune India, 2024<sup>36</sup>). Leadership here necessitates acute situational awareness, acclimatisation protocols and pioneering logistical solutions to sustain combat efficiency (Tribune India, 2024). Tactical leaders play a pivotal role in this regard.

## Joint Operations and Multi-Domain Integration

The pattern of conflict has progressed to impose joint operations and multi-domain integration to attain operational synergy across land, air, sea, cyber, and space. This maximizes complementary capabilities allowing for synchronised operations with common situational awareness and swift decision cycles founded on real-time data (Tribune India, 2024). Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) epitomise the strategic progression from jointness to integrated cross-domain effects designed at overwhelming enemies by convergence of kinetic and non-kinetic resources (CENJOWS, 2023). MDO necessitates agility, information superiority and redundancy of capabilities to guarantee resilience

against sophisticated hybrid threats (Centurion Defence Academy, 2025). Decentralised command permits tactical units on diverse fronts to adapt dynamically in multi-domain battlespaces. Coordination among cyber units, space-based ISR assets and troops augments operational effectiveness while minimizing resource consumption and collateral socio-economic disruption (CENJOWS, 2023). Tactical leaders link strategic command vision with ground-level realities, promoting cohesion and mission focus amid complex joint operations (Centurion Defence Academy, 2025).

### **Impact of Modernisation and Technology**

Modernisation programs in the Indian Army have enhanced the amalgamation of advanced technologies with tactics redesigning the operational environment. The implementation of artificial intelligence (AI), autonomous systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), precision-guided munitions and secure communication networks has significantly enhanced situational awareness and combat effectiveness (CENJOWS, 2024). Further, cutting-edge surveillance technologies and real-time intelligence data permit tactical commanders to make informed decisions (Centurion Defence Academy, 2025). Cyber warfare abilities have become essential for defending vulnerable infrastructure and maintaining operational momentum (VIF India, 2024). Technological innovation is correspondingly transmuting logistics and force sustainment, particularly in harsh terrains such as high-altitude sectors. Mechanised supply chains, drone resupply and remote monitoring systems optimise resource deployment and decrease the physical strain on soldiers, contributing to continuous operational readiness (Centurion Defence Academy, 2025). The Indian Army's modernisation ambition also embraces doctrinal shifts incorporating multi-domain integration and hybrid threat counter measures. As warfare develops swiftly due to technological advances, continual leadership development concentrating on

technology exploitation and human factors remains vital (CENJOWS, 2024).

## Socio-Economic Environment

This section emphasises how the socio-economic environment forms the Indian Army's human resource composition, soldier behaviour, and welfare priorities, which are essential to sustaining operational readiness and institutional strength. The interaction of demographics, education, digital influence and welfare opportunities demands adaptive leadership and policy innovation for durable organisational effectiveness.

## Profile of the Modern Soldier

The modern soldier is moulded by educational, social and technological changes profoundly influencing military roles and expectations. Education for soldiers now encompasses outside tactical skills to embrace critical thinking, ethics, digital literacy and strategic awareness, which prepares them to operate complex technologies, analyse intelligence and make decisions under stress (CENJOWS, 2023). Socially, current soldiers are more diverse and related, regularly coming from experiences accentuating individual rights and civic responsibilities, which swings leadership expectations toward clear communication, respect and trust-building, marking a change from obedience-based leadership to a partnership model (Liseanu, 2023<sup>37</sup>). Technological progress is a foremost driver of transformation; soldiers use digital tools like AI, unmanned systems and cyber tools for navigation, communication and situational awareness, reinforced by training using virtual simulations and AI-driven mentorship programs that accelerate leadership development (ICT USC, 2025<sup>38</sup>). These deviations redefine leadership expectations toward adaptability, empowerment of junior ranks and balancing mission focus with concern for soldier well-being, emphasising resilience, stress

management and mental health (APA, 2025<sup>39</sup>). Operative leadership today necessitates clarity, trust, ethical rigor and constant learning in digital skills, enhancing unit cohesion, operational success and soldier motivation, all critical in navigating the intricacies of contemporary military operations (Brooks & Greenberg, 2018<sup>40</sup>).

### **Changing Demographics of Recruits**

The composition of recruits entering the Indian Army has suffered substantial transformation in current era, reflecting wider socio-economic and demographic transformation in India. The demographic profile displays a younger generation predisposed by urbanisation, education and diverse career aspirations, with India's youth bulge, though levelling off, still supplying motivated recruits driven by patriotism, economic security and career prospects (The Amikus Qriae, 2023<sup>41</sup>). The presence of recruits from non-military backgrounds augments the Army's human capital but stresses adaptive training and leadership to sustain cohesion (VIF India, 2024). The multi-generational officer cadre and enlisted ranks pose both opportunities and challenges as younger recruits, predisposed by modern social attitudes, challenge traditional military customs, prompting leaders to balance institutional discipline with contemporary expectations through innovative leadership styles (CENJOWS, 2023).

### **Influence of Education, Social Media and Civil Exposure**

Education levels among recruits in the Indian Army have enhanced meaningfully, with several candidates now holding higher secondary or graduate credentials. This increasing educational accomplishment influences leadership dynamics and soldier behaviour, fostering critical thinking, technical proficiency and augmented awareness of rights and responsibilities (Chaturvedi, 2024<sup>42</sup>). Educated soldiers and officers incline to

demand transparency, meritocracy and fairness in organisational practices, subtly reforming command relations (Forceindia, 2024<sup>43</sup>). The pervasive effect of social media and digital connectivity enhances complexity, with platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and X transmuting information propagation and personal interactions among soldiers. While social media helps preserve family ties and morale, it also poses perils like misinformation, operational security breaches and ideological polarization (Sinha, 2025<sup>44</sup>). The Indian Army has changed by issuing strict guidelines on digital conduct and incorporating social media literacy training to harness its motivational benefits while mitigating risks (Hindustan Times, 2024<sup>45</sup>). Enlarged civil exposure during peacekeeping, counter-insurgency and civil-military operations has elevated soldiers' social awareness, demanding cultural sensitivity, empathy and community engagement skills in tactical leaders.

### **Economic and Welfare Expectations of Soldiers and Families**

Financial security and welfare requirements remain critical to soldier morale and retention. The Indian Army delivers an all-inclusive package of financial and social benefits spanning active service, retirement and family support, including salaries, pensions, and allowances designed to offer stable income despite inflation challenges (Vikaspedia, n.d.<sup>46</sup>). Welfare schemes guarantee medical care, housing, education and employment assistance for soldiers and their families (PIB, 2016<sup>47</sup>). Educational scholarships and reservations in Kendriya Vidyalayas, Sainik Schools, and Rashtriya Military Schools facilitate upward social mobility for military families (Law4u, 2025<sup>48</sup>). Families of martyrs and disabled soldiers receive ex-gratia payments, special pensions and government job reservations, reflecting societal gratitude of sacrifice (PIB, 2023<sup>49</sup>). Recent policy initiatives have enhanced welfare through increased pension benefits and skill development

programs assisting resettlement (DGR India, 2024<sup>50</sup>). Leadership aligns welfare efforts with morale-building and sustainable force management (VIF India, 2024).

## Synopsis

The operational environment and socio-economic framework overwhelmingly impact the leadership and operational effectiveness of the Indian Army. Leadership at all levels plays a pivotal role in how the Army adapts to complex and evolving security challenges, manages finite resources, and achieves both tactical and strategic objectives essential for national security and socio-economic progress (Pandey, 2024). Modern security challenges such as hybrid warfare, information warfare and high-altitude warfare present unique stresses on tactical leadership. Hybrid warfare combines conventional and unconventional methods, including cyber-attacks, psychological operations, and insurgency, requiring leaders to adopt flexible and innovative approaches (CENJOWS, 2023). Information warfare emphasizes control and protection of data and communication networks, necessitating cyber resilience and strategic information dominance (Centurion Defence Academy, 2025). The demanding high-altitude terrain in Indian border areas tests physical endurance and operational adaptability, with tactical leaders playing a critical role in maintaining troop morale, situational awareness and resource optimisation (Tribune India, 2024).

Joint operations and multi-domain integration have developed as decisive elements of modern military effectiveness. The Indian Army gradually operates in concert with the Navy, Air Force and specialised agencies encompassing space and cyber domains. Tactical commanders are empowered to implement decentralised command, leveraging real-time intelligence and cross-domain assets to maintain operational tempo and flexibility. This

integration augments the Indian Army's capability to meet sophisticated hybrid threats and achieve strategic dominance (CENJOWS, 2023).

The socio-economic milieu also impacts the Army's leadership landscape. Shifting demographics echo a more diverse and educated cohort of recruits drawn from across India, challenging traditional recruitment patterns and demanding adaptive leadership styles to preserve unit cohesion and morale (Nitin Gokhale, 2024).

Economic and welfare expectations of soldiers and their families are fundamental for motivation and retention. Evolving societal ambitions drive continuous policy innovation to support career transitions and family welfare, highlighting leadership's role in supporting soldier welfare in conjunction with operational readiness (VIF India, 2024).

In conclusion, Indian Army leadership is characterised by a merger of discipline, adaptability, strategic foresight and human-centric values indispensable for operational success in a multifaceted security and socio-economic environment. Tactical leaders are at the forefront, integrating traditional combat leadership with modern technologies and societal changes to ensure mission accomplishment while supporting national development goals and soldier welfare. This synthesis of leadership, operational excellence and socio-economic engagement is crucial for sustaining the Indian Army's legacy as a formidable and respected institution (Pandey, 2024; Centurion Defence Academy, 2025; VIF India, 2024).

### **ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS OF SOLDIERS**

The Indian Army is experiencing a transformative swing in the attitude and ambitions of its soldiers. Recent recruits and serving

personnel bring with them growing expectations fashioned by socio-economic vicissitudes, educational progression and larger exposure to civil society and global information. These influences jointly redefine the motivational drivers and career viewpoints of modern soldiers (Sreeramulu & Sharma, 2021<sup>51</sup>). Previously in independent India, motivations were ingrained in patriotism, duty, honour and economic security, particularly among chiefly rural and martial community recruits. However, today's soldiers progressively combine these with personal ambition and quality of life seeking career progression, skill development and continuing welfare for themselves and their families (Chandra Sekhar & Nair, 2021<sup>52</sup>).

Improved education levels may be contributing to this outlook, promoting larger consciousness about rights, career options and military technologies, which in turn fuels higher expectations of leadership quality, transparency and meritocracy (Ravinder Gosain, 2023<sup>53</sup>). Digital connectivity and social media have supplemented changes by relating soldiers to broader societal narratives and peer networks while raising perception about mental health, work-life balance and social welfare, thereby inducing morale and leadership interaction styles (Grinev, 2024<sup>54</sup>). This multidimensional inspiration dictates adaptive leadership that appreciates developing soldier psyches and aligns institutional goals with individual aspirations to preserve cohesion, motivation and operational effectiveness (Chaturvedi, 2024).

Understanding these nascent mindset and expectations is indispensable for effective leadership, human resource management and policy formulation designed at nourishing a motivated, skilled and socially responsible force proficient of meeting contemporary security challenges (Sreeramulu & Sharma, 2021).

## Education, Regional Diversity and Digital Literacy

The profile of the modern Indian Army soldier is an echo of India's socio-economic revolution and demographic changes. Education has appeared as one of the significant characteristics distinguishing today's soldier from those of previous generations. This upsurge in educational attainment augments technical aptitude, critical thinking and the capacity to espouse complex information, talents indispensable in today's technology driven and multi-domain operational environments (Nitin Gokhale, 2024<sup>55</sup>).

The diversity is accompanied by a growing regional footprint of recruitment. While states customarily associated with martial traditions such as Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir continue to contribute, additional recruits now come from underrepresented states including those in eastern and central India. This not only expands the Army's community base but also augments its cultural fabric, requiring leadership to foster unit cohesion amidst linguistic and cultural diversity (VIF India, 2024). Digital literacy creates another vital facet influencing the modern soldier's profile. Access to smartphones, internet connectivity and social media has drastically transmuted soldiers' communication, information consumption and social interactions (Sinha, 2025). Digital tools enable training, situational awareness and connect soldiers to families and wider social networks, enhancing morale and psychological resilience. However, this digital atmosphere also poses challenges linked to operational security, misinformation and distractions, which the leadership moderates through training and strict conduct protocols (Chaturvedi, 2024). The interplay of education, regional diversity and digital literacy has imbued today's soldier with a new set of aptitudes and skills that demand evolving leadership approaches, ones that encourage intellectual

engagement, foster inclusivity and exploits digital platforms positively (Nitin Gokhale, 2024).

## Shift from Collective Identity to Balanced Individual Aspiration

Conventionally, the Indian Army's strength lay pointedly in the collective identity shared among its ranks. Entrenched in historic martial traditions, regimental pride and shared hardships, collective identity nurtures strong group cohesion, loyalty and obedience. Soldiers saw themselves principally as part of a greater whole, subordinating individual ambitions to regimental and national goals (Pandey, 2024). However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards harmonising this shared ethos with individual aspirations. Modern soldiers seek personal development, skill acquisition and career progression in conjunction with their obligation to the Army's mission (VIF India, 2024). Numerous socio-economic influences reinforce this change. Increased educational prospects expose soldiers to varied career opportunities beyond the military, inspiring them to view service as one stage of lifelong personal and professional evolution. Greater interaction with civil society and extensive access to mass media and social media introduce philosophies of individual rights, self-advancement and broader social participation. Soldiers gradually expect leadership to recognise and nurture their individual talents while maintaining collective discipline (Chaturvedi, 2024). This progression in soldier character necessitates leadership to adopt a more participatory and motivational style, recognising diverse aspirations without compromising organisational efficiency.

Training programs requires to incorporate leadership development, counselling and career management to ensure soldiers' holistic growth balanced by organisational needs.

Institutional welfare schemes also reflect this trend, emphasising not just financial security but education, health and family welfare (VIF India, 2024). Effective leadership lies in harmonising these elements into a cohesive and motivated force equipped to meet dynamic security challenges (Pandey, 2024).

## **Aspirations and Motivational Drivers**

The ambitions and motivational drivers of contemporary Indian Army soldiers are multifaceted, merging traditional values with modern demands. Recognition, welfare and self-development are critical pillars supporting morale and retention (VIF India, 2024). While operational challenges remain critical, the stress on work-life balance and family support highlights a broader organizational shift toward human-centric leadership (Chaturvedi, 2024). Correspondingly, there is an increase in the commitment to transparency and fairness underpinning trust and engagement within the force (Pandey, 2024). This orientation between organisational imperatives and individual aspirations is indispensable for sustaining a motivated, disciplined and mission-ready military force capable of challenging future security challenges with resilience and confidence (VIF India, 2024).

## **Evolving Soldier Mindset and Expectations**

Modern Indian Army soldier's attitude is undergoing a momentous transformation motivated by socio-economic changes, technological advances and shifting societal values. Although patriotism, duty and discipline persist contemporary soldiers progressively prioritise recognition, personal growth, work-life balance and a transparent, merit-based ethos. This swing imitates a larger universal transformation where people seek meaning, purpose and fulfilment in their careers outside mere survival or traditional concepts of service (VIF India, 2024).

## Recognition, Welfare and Self-Development

Recognition remains a prevailing motivational factor. Soldiers search for acknowledgment for their sacrifices, bravery and professionalism, essentials that corroborate their service in a society that values individual accomplishment. Formal appreciation in the form of medals, commendations and promotions serve as tangible symbols. Informally, soldiers seek respect from peers, superiors and the community, which boosts their sense of belonging and pride (VIF India, 2024).

Welfare schemes are essential to motivate soldiers and their families. The Indian Army has incessantly expanded its welfare initiatives, recognising that financial and social stability unswervingly contribute to morale and operational readiness. Self-development is increasingly prioritised by soldiers aiming to acquire new skills, certifications and academic qualifications. The Army's stress on vocational training, leadership development programs and opportunities for higher education reflects the appreciation that individual growth augments overall organisational effectiveness. Soldiers see their careers as a phase of lifelong learning (Chaturvedi, 2024).

### Work-Life Balance and Family Stability

Modern soldiers are also motivated by the desire for a balanced work-life environment that accommodates family obligations and individual well-being. The physical and psychological strain of military service, especially in high-altitude, counter-insurgency and peacekeeping operations, accentuates the centrality of work-life balance initiatives (VIF India, 2024). Preserving family well-being is regarded as indispensable for continuous operational effectiveness. Systematic interaction with families, access to healthcare, education support and community engagement foster a sense of normalcy and stability. Leadership recognises that

soldiers' morale is profoundly associated to their family environment, and therefore, family support initiatives have become a vital constituent of human resource management (Chaturvedi, 2024).

### **Need for Transparent Leadership and Fair Opportunity**

Transparency and fairness in leadership and career advancement are essential to sustain motivation, particularly amid younger recruits who are conscious of meritocracy, equal opportunity and accountability. Soldiers demand clear criteria for promotions, postings and awards, along with open channels to voice grievances and seek redress (VIF India, 2024). The Indian Army has introduced improvements to support transparency, including online tracking of career milestones, regular feedback mechanisms and the creation of grievance redressal systems. Soldiers' faith in the system boosts their motivation, fosters loyalty and inspires a performance-oriented culture (Pandey, 2024). Soldiers desire to contribute in diverse missions, advanced training and capacity-building programs as a reward for merit and effort. Leaders are tasked with guaranteeing unbiased admittance to these opportunities, which delivers sense of fairness and motivates soldiers to excel (VIF India, 2024).

### **Impact on Unit Cohesion and Morale**

Historically, the Indian Army depend on fairly homogeneous units drawn from definite geographic or ethnic groups, aiding instantaneous camaraderie through common language, culture and traditions. The modern Indian Army operates in an environment marked by profound diversity among its soldiers, displaying varying educational backgrounds, socio-economic origins, regional cultures and personal ambitions. Such diversity, while enriching, presents massive leadership trial in upholding unit cohesion and

morale, both of which are vital for operational effectiveness and mission success (VIF India, 2024).

Current recruits are frequently better educated and technologically savvy than predecessors, bringing broader worldviews and outlooks about fairness, career development and quality of life. Although this augments tactical and operational skill, it also means leaders cope with a workforce that is more vocal, aware and individually aspirational (Chaturvedi, 2024). Commanders must foster an inclusive environment where varied standpoints are respected and common goals are accentuated. They must inspire mutual respect and shared regimental pride while concurrently recognising individual contributions and career aspirations (VIF India, 2024).

Operational tempo and technological saturation present added pressures on cohesion and morale. The digitised Army depends on real-time information sharing, increasing transparency and blurring traditional hierarchical communication lines. Leaders must balance discipline with empowerment warranting soldiers remains mission-focused amidst probable information overload and digital distractions (Pandey, 2024).

Field units demonstrate the effect of leadership on cohesion. For example, counter-insurgency units in Jammu and Kashmir stress mentorship, peer support groups and culturally sensitive leadership to weld an assorted rank and file into a closely knit team. High-altitude units in Ladakh likewise focus on acclimatisation, physical and emotional support systems and appreciation ceremonies to increase morale. Joint task forces participating in tri-service exercises likewise leverage joint training and cultural exchange to build inter-service cohesion (VIF India, 2024).

The Indian Army's growing soldier diversity and budding expectations challenge traditional leadership models while offering

prospects for more inclusive, dynamic and resilient force structures. Leaders who successfully integrate diverse motivations, foster shared values, promote transparent and empathetic leadership enhance unit cohesion and morale, ensuring operational effectiveness. This change aligns with the Army's larger modernisation efforts designed at forming a future-ready force. Sustaining cohesion and morale amidst diversity necessitates constant leadership development, robust welfare support and a culture that balances individual aspiration with collective mission, an imperative to uphold the Army's esteemed legacy and operational excellence (Nitin Gokhale, 2024).

## Leadership Challenges in Addressing Diverse Motivations

Leadership in the modern Indian Army is encumbered with the daunting obligation of piloting a multifaceted montage of soldier inspirations that impact performance, behaviour and eventually operational accomplishment. The spectrum of soldier aspirations is no longer monolithic but it comprises deeply entrenched traditional communal ethics entwined with growing individual ambitions moulded by education, social awareness and exposure to global data tides. This growing dynamic dictates that military leaders personify not only tactical acumen but also emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity and agile communication skills to maintain cohesion, discipline and effectiveness (VIF India, 2024). Harmonising these twofold requirements, conserving the Army's hierarchical structure indispensable for discipline while nurturing an inclusive and participatory environment, is one of the primary leadership challenges currently (Chaturvedi, 2024).

Addressing such diverse motivations entails personalized leadership engagement. Similarly imperative is management of latent friction rising from divergent expectations, perceptions of favouritism or inequitable opportunities. Transparent and

equitable decision-making, in conjunction with open communication channels, helps mitigate discontent and nurtures trust (Pandey, 2024). Prevalent smartphone and internet access among soldier's augments connectivity and impact morale by enabling instant communication with families and peer groups. However, it carries risks of operational security breaches, misinformation and distractions that can dilute motivation. Leaders must instil discipline with respect to responsible digital usage, integrating social media literacy into training to harness its benefits for motivation and institutional messaging while governing its undesirable characteristics. Upholding operational security without seeming draconian stresses a nuanced approach, harmonizing authority with recognition of soldiers' digital realities (VIF India, 2024).

Improved consciousness of mental health and global well-being is additional substantial leadership factor influencing soldier morale and performance. Leaders require to follow empathetic leadership styles, attuned to recognizing and assuaging stressors distressing individual soldiers and teams. Initiatives like peer support groups, confidential professional counselling and resilience training should be progressively integrated within leadership development trainings appreciating that holistic care supports sustained operational readiness (Chaturvedi, 2024). Furthermore, generational multiplicity within the Army's ranks, from Baby Boomers to Generation Alpha entrants, contributes to wide-ranging communication preferences, work attitudes and motivational drivers. Leaders must link these generational differences, refining an institutional culture that compliments tradition while embracing innovation and individualism. This entails unceasing leadership training accentuating adaptability, emotional intelligence and mentorship (VIF India, 2024).

The Indian Army's leadership transformations and

modernization efforts reflect these essentials. High-level conferences and policy reviews highlight leadership development custom-made to evolving expectations, prioritizing inclusivity, transparency, welfare and professional growth opportunities. Leadership inventiveness now encompass beyond battlefield tactics to managing social dynamics, ethical conduct and mental resilience (Pandey, 2024). Modern Indian Army leaders act as integrators of a complex human system, balancing hierarchy and discipline with empathy and inclusiveness; blending collective mission focus with recognition of individual aspirations; harnessing modern technology prudently while safeguarding operational security (Chaturvedi, 2024).

Field experiences divulge that units excelling in leadership adaptability demonstrate higher morale and cohesion despite diverse soldier profiles. For instance, counter-terrorist battalions operating in Jammu and Kashmir, even though heterogenous mixed with short tenures, have employed mentorship programs and team-building exercises addressing both collective mission focus and individual welfare concerns. Leaders who adopt open communication and include soldiers in decision-making encourage trust and commitment, leading to enhanced operational outcomes. Likewise, high-altitude deployment units in Ladakh stress acclimatization, peer support and recognition ceremonies that honour individual and team achievements, strengthening morale amid harsh conditions. These units report rarer disciplinary issues and heightened resilience, highlighting the effectiveness of leadership in harmony to contemporary soldier subtleties.

## Synopsis

The developing socio-economic and operational framework of the Indian Army offers leadership with the dual challenge of honouring traditional collective identity and individual aspirations

while maintaining unit cohesion and morale. The Army's historical forte lies in its capability to forge a collective esprit de corps, deeply rooted in shared regimental pride, common values and a strict hierarchical command system. However, current realities have presented a more heterogeneous soldier prejudiced by varied educational backgrounds, regional cultures, digital literacy and personalized career expectations (VIF India, 2024). Effective leadership in this environment necessitates a nuanced and holistic style that not only conserves discipline and collective mission focus but also identifies the multiplicity of individual motivations. This comprises clear communication of expectations, equitable treatment in opportunities such as promotions and field deployments and responsive welfare support systems that address soldiers' and their families' growing needs (Pandey, 2024).

The digital era enhances complexity, challenging leaders to proficiently manage the benefits of connectivity while mitigating risks of distraction and information security breaches. Similar imperative is on mental health and well-being, driving leadership to adopt empathetic styles that identify stressors and foster resilience (Chaturvedi, 2024). As the Army continues its modernisation and diversification journey, a continuous emphasis on refining leaders fortified with emotional intelligence, cultural competence and transparent command practices will be indispensable. This would guarantee that the Indian Army preserves its legendary spirit and operational effectiveness, adapting gracefully to 21st-century while honouring its proud traditions of service and sacrifice (VIF India, 2024).

## **LEADERSHIP STYLES IN THE INDIAN ARMY AND ANALYTICAL MODELS**

### **Progression of leadership in the Indian Army**

The leadership trajectory of the Indian Army echoes a nuanced

evolution fashioned by historical, sociopolitical and operational exigencies (SP's Land Forces, 2024<sup>56</sup>). Initiating under colonial rule as a restricted interface sandwiched between British officers and Indian troops, the leadership model has gradually transmuted into a markedly Indian model encapsulating traditional military discipline intertwined with the requirements of contemporary strategic and human resource management (Wikipedia, 2003<sup>57</sup>). Originally, leadership in the Indian Army was largely top-down, characterized by a stern hierarchical chain of command with British officers exercising authority over Indian soldiers through threat of punishment (Physics Wallah, 2025<sup>58</sup>). This era ingrained principles of obedience, regimental pride and martial customs but was restricted in nurturing autonomous decision-making and strategic flexibility (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Independence in 1947 catalysed momentous indigenization of leadership, not only in personnel but also in organizational philosophy, encouraging a prominence on nationalistic fervour, self-reliance and adaptive operational art (Wikipedia, 2005<sup>59</sup>).

Post-independence Indian Army leadership absorbed lessons from early wars and peacekeeping operations to balance inherited discipline with evolving management concepts (Economic Times, 2024<sup>60</sup>). Leaders like Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw demonstrated this shift, employing a command style that integrated respect for subordinates with strategic foresight, thereby cultivating trust, morale and innovation within ranks (Right To Truth, 2025<sup>61</sup>). Manekshaw's leadership was famous for decisiveness, leading by example, integrity and a focus on welfare, unifying various forces into a cohesive unit, which was central for the 1971 India-Pakistan war success (LinkedIn, 2024<sup>62</sup>). Current Indian Army leadership is distinct for its capability to weave traditional military virtues with modern management frameworks, encompassing participative

leadership, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity and accountability (CENJOWS, 2023).

Furthermore, leadership advance in the Indian Army now enthusiastically integrates analytical models such as behavioural assessments, transformational and transactional leadership theories and situational leadership approaches (CENJOWS, 2023). Importance on character, ethical conduct and psychological resilience complements tactical expertise, ensuring leaders are prepared to foster unit cohesion amid diversity and technological disruption (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025<sup>63</sup>). High ethics of morality and professionalism are strengthened through institutional mechanisms at the Indian Military Academy and National Defence Academy, which entrench the 'Service Before Self' ethos indispensable for sustaining operational excellence (PIB, 2024<sup>64</sup>). The IMA focuses on moulding officers with balance between valour and wisdom, ethical conduct and tactical leadership capabilities, whereas the NDA stresses integrity, courage, selflessness and resilience, preparing cadets for leadership roles beyond the military context (LinkedIn, 2025<sup>65</sup>).

## **Traditional Discipline and Modern Management Concepts**

### **Observed Leadership Styles**

Leadership in the Indian Army fluctuates based on the mission, organizational traditions and the changing socio-cultural background of its personnel. The predominant styles comprise directive (authoritarian), participative (democratic), transformational and situational leadership. Each style offers definite strengths and limitations. These alterations are particularly pertinent in India, where the Army must uphold strict operational discipline while responding to modern human resource needs.

**Directive (Authoritarian).** Effective in combat, limits initiative (CENJOWS, 2023). Directive or authoritarian leadership is engrained in Army tradition, particularly in combat or crisis situations (SP's Land Forces, 2024<sup>66</sup>). It comprises centralized decision making, strict hierarchy and clear top-down instructions (Economic Times, 2024<sup>67</sup>). This method works well where rapid, coordinated action is essential, for example in combat operations, emergency response, or training for high-risk missions (Physics Wallah, 2025). Tight control eliminates ambiguity, speeds execution and keeps units aligned when time is critical (Wikipedia, 2003<sup>68</sup>). The disadvantage is reduced initiative and critical thinking among subordinates. Current military operations often take place in dispersed environments moulded by technological transformation and tactical uncertainty. These conditions mandate flexibility and problem solving, which rigid structures restrict (Economic Times, 2024). Army doctrine in India now stresses harmonizing directive leadership with space for junior leaders to act on their own judgment, especially at tactical and sub tactical levels (Right To Truth, 2025). Abuse of the authoritarian style leads to dependency on higher authority, lower morale and deteriorates flexibility in fast changing scenarios (LinkedIn, 2024).

**Participative (Democratic).** Builds trust, slower decisions (CENJOWS, 2023). Participative or democratic leadership comprises including subordinates in decisions, encouraging input from junior officers and continuing open communication (SP's Land Forces, 2024). In the Indian Army, it manifests most during peacetime administration, training design, welfare planning and non-combat problem solving (Physics Wallah, 2025). This style builds trust, raises morale and improves cohesion by respecting the experience and expertise within the team (Economic Times, 2024). Decision making takes longer due to consultation, but the outcomes are often better informed and more widely accepted (Wikipedia,

2003). This is advantageous when supervision organizational change or adjusting to new technology. Soldiers led this way tend to demonstrate stronger loyalty and repeatedly surpass minimum expectations. The approach has restrictions in high pressure or combat situations were hesitation risks mission success. It may also diffuse command accountability and create confusion if not handled sensibly. The Army therefore applies participative leadership during routine and preparation phases, but shifts to directive control when speed, security and clarity are indispensable (CENJOWS, 2023).

**Transformational.** Inspires innovation and motivation (CENJOWS, 2023). Transformational leadership has gained prominence in the Indian Army due to the prerequisite for innovation, resilience and purpose in multifaceted operational and social situations (Economic Times, 2024). Leaders practicing this style communicate a clear vision, set high expectations, motivate personnel to prioritise collective goals and promote intellectual and moral growth. In practice, this is seen in commanders who turn adversity into opportunity, encourage innovation in tough field conditions, and inspire exceptional commitment (Right To Truth, 2025). Such leaders act as mentors, role models and catalysts for cultural and technological adaptation (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025). This style is particularly appreciated during modernization efforts, organizational change and counter insurgency missions where adaptability and innovation matter most (Economic Times, 2024). However, this style demands leaders with strong emotional intelligence, authenticity and vision (CENJOWS, 2023). If overemphasis on vision or charisma predominates procedural discipline it jeopardises the structures needed for safety and accountability (LinkedIn, 2024).

**Situational.** Adapts style to context, most flexible (CENJOWS, 2023). Situational or adaptive leadership is perceived as the most

flexible and effective style in the Indian Army's diverse operational and socio-economic environments (Economic Times, 2024). It comprises regulating the style based on the mission, context, team structure and phase of operations (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Leaders utilising this style read their teams, understand dynamics and adapt their actions accordingly (Right To Truth, 2025). A commander might practice a directive style under fire, shift to a participative approach during planning or after-action reviews and apply transformational techniques to motivate troops before a challenging mission (LinkedIn, 2024). They also use transactional clarity to impose standards and guarantee accountability when essential. Its crucial forte is versatility, which is vital when handling high intensity conflict, peacekeeping, humanitarian missions or technology integration. Army doctrine nowadays trains officers to build this flexibility through reflection and self-awareness (CENJOWS, 2023). It also supports junior leader development, strengthening resilience across the organisation. This style mandates high emotional intelligence and sound judgment. Leaders must read situations precisely and adjust speedily (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Poor timing or inconsistent behaviour may destabilize trust. Clear communication and intent are critical to avoid perceptions of indecision (LinkedIn, 2024).

**Summary.** The Indian Army now concentrates on integrating leadership styles instead of being partial to a single model (CENJOWS, 2023). Tradition and structure continue to be significant, but shifting threats, everchanging generational expectations and more complexity necessitate leaders who combine decisiveness with empathy, vision with accountability and order with empowerment (Economic Times, 2024). Directive leadership is essential during crisis and combat. Participative methods build trust and adaptability in peacetime. Transformational leadership drives motivation and change. Situational leadership ensures

flexibility in different conditions. Leadership progress now focusses on preparing officers to evaluate circumstances, adapt their approach and lead effectively across a range of challenges. This intermingled approach helps the Army maintain discipline and professionalism while continuing to innovate in a dynamic strategic environment (LinkedIn, 2024).

### Leadership Continuum (Tannenbaum and Schmidt Model)

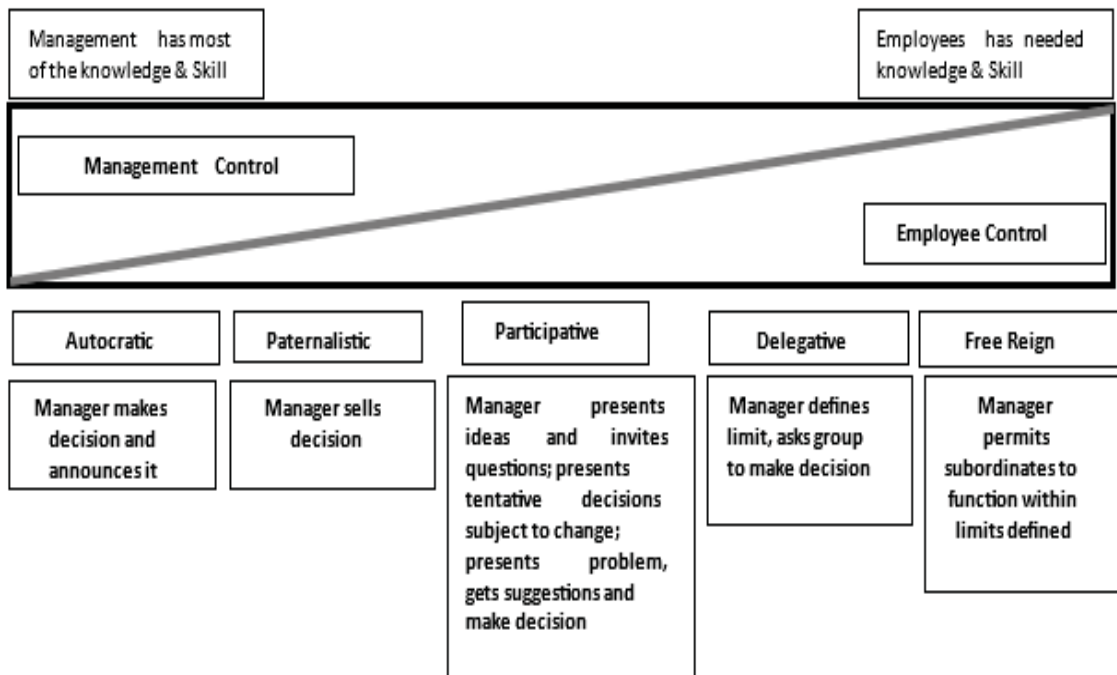


Figure 1: Leadership Continuum

The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum makes available a convenient framework for understanding the array between autocratic and democratic leadership styles (Robbins & Coulter, 2018<sup>69</sup>). It expresses leadership style as a scale that allows commanders to adjust authority and subordinate contribution constructed on the situation (Northouse, 2019<sup>70</sup>). In the Indian Army's varied operational environment, from conventional warfare to counter insurgency and peacekeeping, using this continuum is indispensable. It supports leaders to balance

discipline with initiative and control with empowerment (CENJOWS, 2023).

At one end of the continuum, leaders use full authority. They make decisions alone and give direct orders. This autocratic approach suits high stress, time critical or dangerous situations such as frontline combat where fast, clear decisions are critical. At the other end, democratic leadership allows subordinate participation in decision making (Robbins & Coulter, 2018). Leaders encourage consultation and build consensus. The autocratic form stresses obedience and is beneficial in high-stress, time-sensitive or dangerous situations where rapid decision-making and clear command are indispensable (SP's Land Forces, 2024). At the opposite end is democratic leadership, where the leader delegates decision-making, encourages subordinate participation, fosters consultation and builds consensus (Northouse, 2019). While, this advances motivation, trust and decision quality through collective input, but it has slow response time (Economic Times, 2024). The continuum suggests that effective leaders shift along this scale depending on the situation. They fine-tune control and freedom based on task complexity, available time, subordinate capability and external conditions. No single style fits all circumstances. The theory views autocratic and democratic styles as extremes. In practice, leadership falls between these points. The range stems from how much authority the leader selects to exercise. Moving right on the scale implies releasing control. Moving left means tightening it. Neither extreme benefit the organization. Leaders must find the right balance. When choosing an approach, they should contemplate forces associated with subordinates, themselves and the situation. Critics contend these factors are subjective. Reducing ambiguity necessitates understanding the specifics of the task and follower characteristics, which would be discussed later (CENJOWS, 2023).

## Application in Military Context

In the Indian Army, the leadership continuum is echoed in doctrinal and practical leadership styles across varied operations and training environments (CENJOWS, 2023).

**Autocratic Leadership in Combat.** In kinetic operations, especially high-intensity battles or surprise attacks, commanders exercise decisiveness and centralized control (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Clear orders, strict discipline and immediate obedience confirm operational effectiveness (Economic Times, 2024). For example, during conventional confrontations with adversaries or urgent counter-attack responses, autocratic leadership reduces uncertainty and enables rapid massed action (CENJOWS, 2023). Junior leaders implement commands rapidly without paralyzing deliberation and dispute (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Autocratic dominance is more pronounced during high-stakes operational phases where environmental harshness demands strict coordination and control. However, during acclimatisation and logistics planning, participative discussions improve problem-solving for mobility and sustainment challenges.

**Democratic Leadership in Peace and Training.** Conversely, in garrison duties, training institutions and administration, participative leadership dominates (Right To Truth, 2025). Officers encourage soldier inputs on welfare needs, training innovations, and morale-boosting activities (Economic Times, 2024). This participatory style supports soldier ownership of organizational goals, enhances morale and develops leadership skills at lower ranks (LinkedIn, 2024).

**Balanced Delegation in Counter-Insurgency (CI) Operations.** CI scenarios demonstrate the continuum's middle ground where flexibility and junior leader initiative is vital (CENJOWS, 2023). The Indian Army habitually delegates tactical decision-making

authority to sub-unit commanders operating independently in geographically isolated and ambiguous areas (Economic Times, 2024). Commanders provide clear intent, objectives and boundaries but encourage on-ground inventiveness (Right To Truth, 2025). This approach accommodates unpredictable insurgent tactics and socio-political nuances (CENJOWS, 2023). Leaders balance control with delegated freedom to sustain initiative, responsiveness and accountability (LinkedIn, 2024). Indian Army commanders employ the leadership continuum by giving experienced company and platoon commanders autonomy in patrol planning, engagement rules and civil interaction while administering overall operational directives centrally. This flexible delegation empowers local adaptation, ensures rapid response to fluid threats and respects the complexities of civil-military relations.

**Multi-Domain and Joint Operations.** Modern integrated battlefield environments, including joint tri-service exercises, dictate leader's proficient at shifting along the continuum. Commanders navigate inter-service coordination, integrating cyber, air, land and space domains with participating units holding variable expertise and autonomy levels (SP's Land Forces, 2024). Strategic goals demand unified command whereas operational accomplishment flourishes on decentralised decision-making within a defined framework (CENJOWS, 2023).

### Synopsis

The Indian Military Academy (IMA) and National Defence Academy (NDA) curriculum combine authoritarian discipline in foundational training with democratic approaches in leadership exercises, encouraging cadets to develop situational awareness, decision-making skills and the ability to lead diverse teams.

The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum proposition a robust analytical lens for Indian Army leaders to

vigorously attune the balance between command authority and subordinate freedom (Robbins & Coulter, 2018). Grasp of this continuum prepares commanders to adapt their leadership style to operational contexts, from autocratic decisiveness in combat to democratic consultation in training and welfare (Northouse, 2019). Counter-insurgency operations highlight the effective application of balanced delegation, accommodating complexity and uncertainty with trust and disciplined flexibility (CENJOWS, 2023). Constant leadership development fostering emotional intelligence, situational awareness and strategic insight is indispensable to advancing this model's practical application (LinkedIn, 2024).

### **Follower-Type Model (Kelley's Model)**

Leadership dynamics is contingent not only on the leader but also on the follower's behaviour and traits. Robert Kelley's Follower Type Model classifies followers into five types constructed on basis of engagement, critical thinking and participation. The types are alienated, conformist, pragmatic, passive, and effective. Alienated followers think critically but remain disengaged, Conformists stay engaged but do not question decisions, Pragmatics show moderate thinking and engagement while Passive followers contribute little and rarely think independently. Effective followers combine high engagement with critical thinking (AACN Nursing, 2020<sup>71</sup>). In the Indian Army, this is highly pertinent because Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers form the link between strategic command and frontline execution. JCOs, such as Subedars and Naib Subedars, lead troops, enforce discipline and manage administrative and operational duties. NCOs to Havildars, Naiks and Lance Naiks supervise soldiers, support training and implement orders as ground level leaders. Applying Kelley's model helps identify follower behaviour among JCOs and NCOs. Effective followers in these ranks show initiative, think critically in

tactical situations and participate actively, which supports mission success. Passive or conformist followers may need tailored leadership approaches to improve engagement and performance (Regent University, 2022<sup>72</sup>).

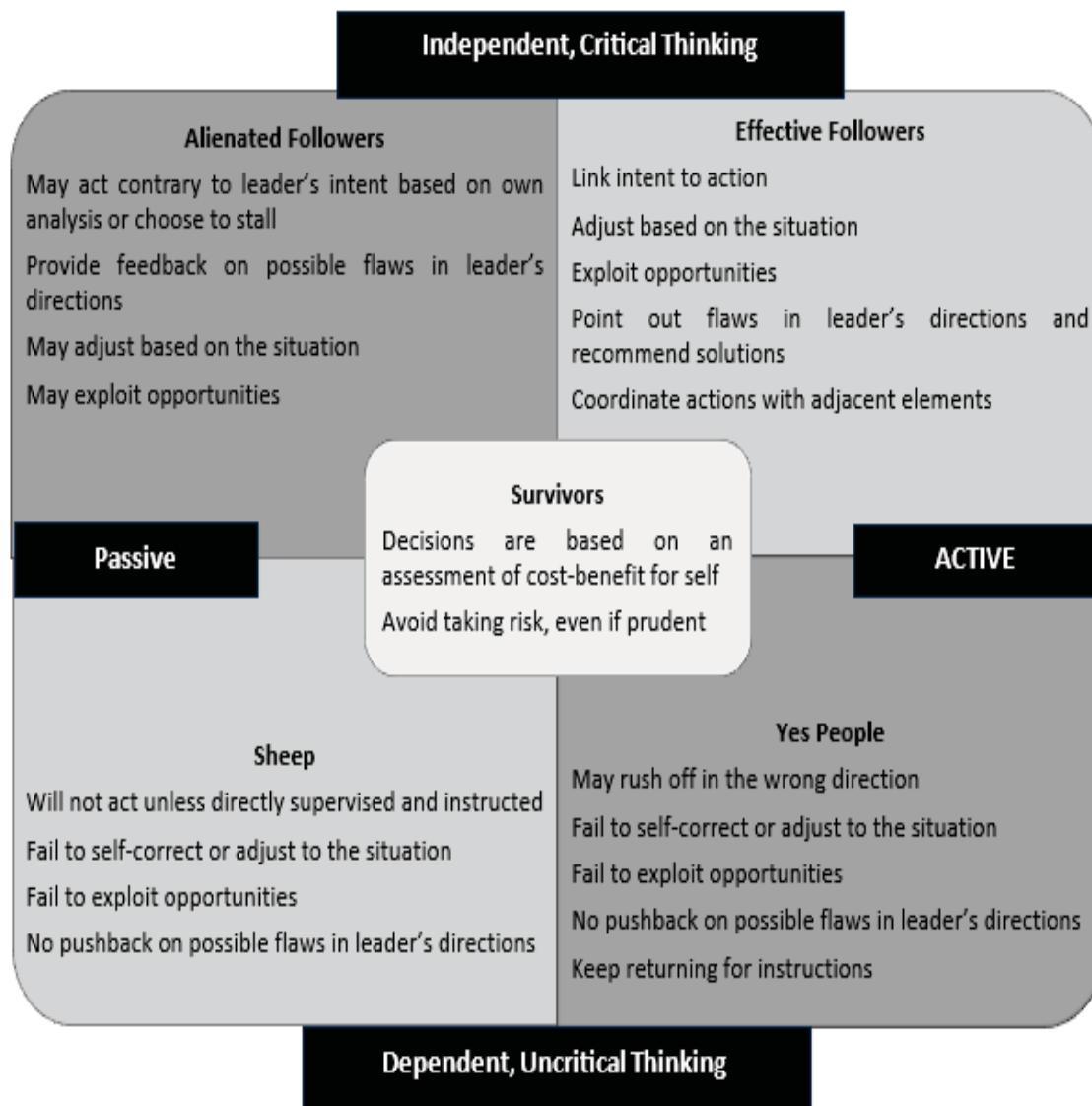


Figure 2: Kelley's Five Follower Types

### Kelley's Five Follower Types

**Alienated Followers.** Alienated followers are independent thinkers but disconnected or disengaged. They regularly exhibit scepticism, criticism and cynicism, potentially undermining leadership. This alienation may stem from previous negative

experiences, lack of trust or disagreement with organizational goals. While intellectually proficient, their absence of enthusiasm poses risks to unit cohesion and morale.

**Conformist Followers.** Conformists are extremely compliant and obedient but have a tendency to evade independent thinking or challenging authority. They “run with the herd,” supporting leadership decisions automatically. While they help sustain discipline and order, an excess may hamper innovation and critical feedback, essential for adaptive operations.

**Pragmatic Followers.** Pragmatic followers inhabit the middle ground, displaying a situational and cautious approach. They appraise the costs and benefits of engagement and align their behaviour accordingly. Their elastic engagement supports operational stability but may echo moderate commitment.

**Passive Followers.** Passive followers express little initiative or engagement, often waiting to be told what to do. This passivity might result from lack of confidence, skill deficits or insufficient motivation. Over-reliance on passive followers’ burdens leadership with continuous direction and oversight.

**Effective Followers.** Effective followers dynamically engage, exhibit critical thinking and remain committed to the organization’s goals. They support leadership while providing constructive feedback and exhibit initiative and accountability. They are vital to leadership effectiveness and organizational success.

### **Follower Maturity, Competence, and Leadership Effectiveness**

Leadership effectiveness is contingent on follower maturity. Maturity reflects competence, confidence and willingness to take responsibility (Regent University, 2022). Kelley’s model highlights that follower development shapes behaviour and guides how much

authority leaders should delegate. Leaders match their style to follower maturity. They use autocratic leadership for low maturity and participative or delegative methods for high maturity (AACN Nursing, 2020). This advances command and motivation. Follower maturity contrasts across the Army due to variances in education, experience and cultural background (SSB Crack, 2025). Organisational climate and regimentation also play a significant role in this aspect. JCOs and NCOs with high competence and strong followership act as tactical leaders and mentors. They work effectively with delegated authority, which supports quick decisions at lower levels (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025). Less mature followers need closer supervision and structured guidance, often through directive leadership (Regent University, 2022).

### **Application to Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers**

JCOs and NCOs are the Indian Army's critical tactical level leaders. Their follower maturity level directly marks leadership transmission, operational effectiveness and soldier morale (Regent University, 2022).

**Alienated JCOs/NCOs.** Some personnel develop disillusionment when they feel overlooked, lack career growth or face difficult operational conditions. This disturbs morale and may lead to resistance. Leaders need to act early, address concerns directly and restore motivation to prevent larger bearing on the team (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025).

**Conformist JCOs/NCOs.** Many JCOs and NCOs display stout conformity. They execute orders reliably and maintain discipline. This supports operational stability. However, excessive conformity restricts initiative. In counter insurgency or multi domain operations, leaders require personnel who think independently

and adapt. Overly conformist individuals struggle in such situations, which reduces effectiveness (SSB Crack, 2025).

**Pragmatic JCOs/NCOs.** Some reveal a pragmatic approach. They follow orders while taking initiative when necessary. They weigh risk and assess operational conditions before acting. This situational judgment helps sustain stability during changing tactical situations, however, may lead to inconsistent and delayed actions (AACN Nursing, 2020).

**Passive JCOs/NCOs.** Passive behaviour often stems from fatigue, limited training or low motivation. Leaders should devote effort in training, counselling and welfare support to counter passivity and improve engagement (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025).

**Effective JCOs/NCOs.** The ideal cadre comprises of effective followers who display decisiveness, innovation and accountability. They lead patrols, mentor soldiers and communicate efficiently across the chain of command. Their active involvement enhances leadership impact. It strengthens unit cohesion and improves operational outcomes (AACN Nursing, 2020).

### **Enhancing Follower Effectiveness in the Indian Army**

Training and education in the Indian Army emphasis on development of follower competence through programs designed to stress leadership at lower levels, decision making under uncertainty and ethical conduct. This reinforces critical thinking and initiative thereby preparing JCOs and NCOs for diverse operational demands (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025). Mentorship and counselling also play a central role. Senior leaders guide the junior or new JCOs and NCOs, address alienation, passivity and provide feedback that supports growth thereby bringing them into the effective followership category (SSB Crack, 2025).

Recognition and career progression follow clear and merit-based systems. This rewards effective behaviour, reduces alienation and encourages motivated conformity (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025). Empowerment within command restrictions comprises delegating authority built on follower maturity. This supports initiative while maintaining discipline. A culture of open communication promotes dialogue, feedback and critical thinking. This helps move conformists and pragmatists toward effective followership (AACN Nursing, 2020). The Army also runs specialised leadership and management courses for JCOs and NCOs, including programs with institutions such as MDI Gurgaon. These courses shape emotional intelligence, decision making, team building and problem solving. The aim is to develop confident leaders who make fast, sound decisions and lead effectively at their level (Indian Army Training Institutes, 2024).

Kelley's Follower Type Model propositions a vibrant way to strengthen leadership in the Indian Army. It helps leaders understand variances in follower maturity and engagement, then regulate their approach to expand initiative, cohesion and morale. This matters most for JCOs and NCOs, who form the key link between senior commanders and soldiers on the ground. When leaders use this understanding well, the chain of command functions efficiently from top to tactical levels. Evolving effective followers through training, mentorship and structured empowerment is indispensable in sustaining operational readiness and maintains the Army's professional standards in a complex security environment.

Above we discussed the leadership styles followed by Followers type. Now, let us look at the task matrix, which would establish the relationship between the mission and behaviour of leaders, to understand the leadership tactics required for the current Army.

## Task Matrix (Task vs. Relationship Behaviour)

The Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model offers an enlightening framework for understanding and tailoring leadership behaviour based on two central scopes: task behaviour (directive leadership) and relationship behaviour (supportive leadership) (Northouse, 2021). This bipartite method propositions four primary leadership styles captured in the task-relationship matrix, directive, coaching, supportive, and delegating, each suitable for distinct follower readiness levels and situational demands (Hersey et al., 2013<sup>73</sup>). In the Indian Army's multifaceted environment, ranging from intense field operations to peace and administrative roles, this model augments leadership flexibility, operational effectiveness and soldier motivation (Choudhary, 2019<sup>74</sup>).

### The Four Leadership Styles in the Task Matrix

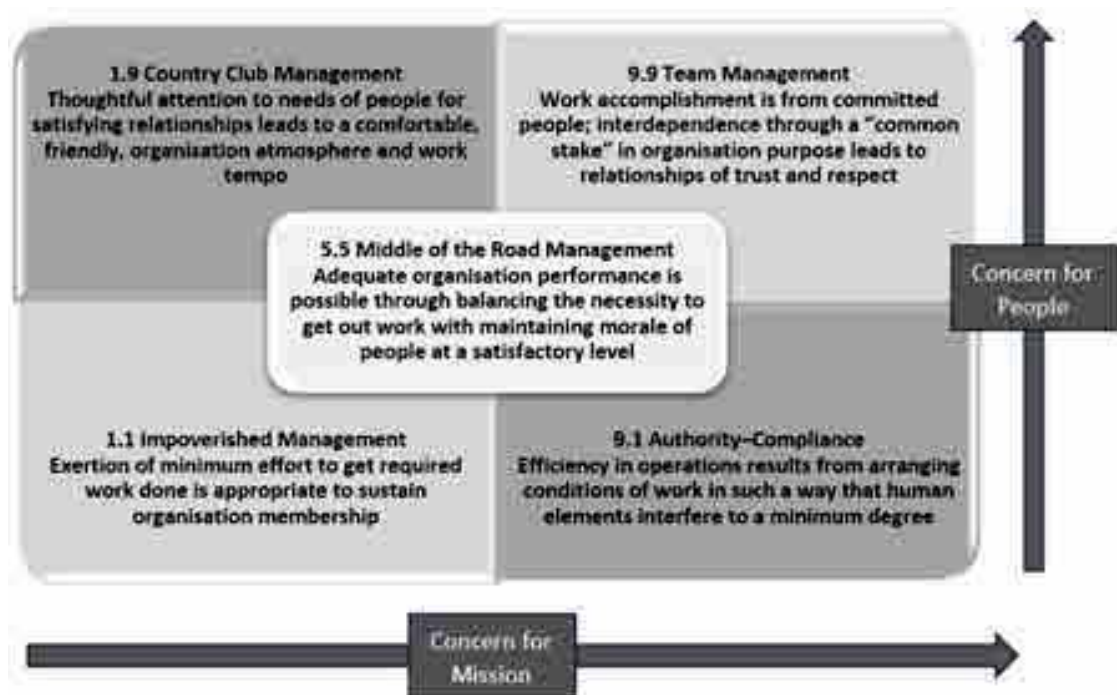


Figure 3: The Leadership Grid

Note: Sourced from RR Blake, JS Mouton, LB Barnes and LE Greiner, "Breakthrough in Organizational Development", Harvard Business Review (November-December 1964)

**High Task–Low Relationship (Directive Leadership).** This style delivers clear instructions, structured guidance and strict supervision with limited relational engagement (Hersey et al., 2013). Leaders outline what to do, when to do it and how to do it, leaving little space for subordinate input or emotional support. It works well when followers lack competence or confidence and need firm direction to perform tasks correctly (The Decision Lab, 2021<sup>75</sup>).

**High Task–High Relationship (Coaching Leadership).** Here, leaders use directive behaviour along with relational support. They guide subordinates meticulously while encouraging two-way communication (Situational.com, 2024<sup>76</sup>). They elucidate decisions, ask for input and fine-tune guidance while addressing social and emotional needs. This suits followers with some competence but low confidence or commitment who need encouragement along with clear instructions.

**Low Task–High Relationship (Supportive Leadership).** Supportive leadership centres on emotional support, listening and facilitation relatively than stringent task direction (College Hive, 2024<sup>77</sup>). Leaders work to build confidence, morale and autonomy, giving followers room to decide how to handle their tasks. This suits followers who have the skills but show uneven motivation and need encouragement to maintain strong performance (Wikipedia, 2012<sup>78</sup>).

**Low Task–Low Relationship (Delegating Leadership).** Delegating uses minimal guidance and support wherein the leaders trust followers with task execution and decision making. It assumes strong competence and confidence (Investopedia, 2024<sup>79</sup>). Leaders step back to focus on strategic oversight. This suits capable, self-motivated followers and strengthens empowerment with accountability (Louis Carter, 2025<sup>80</sup>).

## Application in the Indian Army

In frontline combat or counter insurgency operations, high task and low relationship leadership dominates during critical moments. Leaders stress obedience, fast execution and risk reduction (Indian Defence Review, 2024<sup>81</sup>). In unfamiliar terrain or high stress situations, soldiers need comprehensive orders to stay coordinated and safe (CENJOWS, 2023). As experience raises or conditions stabilize, leaders shift to high task and high relationship coaching. Commanders direct and motivate at the same time (Wavell Room, 2021<sup>82</sup>). They clarify intent, address concerns and build trust, which supports adaptability in fluid battlefield conditions (Republic World, 2025<sup>83</sup>). In integrated battle groups or multi domain operations, commanders manage varied readiness levels. Skilled cyber or ISR personnel receive autonomy. Those in newer roles receive structured coaching.

Peacekeeping, civil support and long deployments necessitate supportive behaviour. Low task and high relationship leadership benefits to sustain morale when soldiers have the skills but face psychological or social pressure (People Matters, 2023<sup>84</sup>). Support without weighty command reinforces resilience and cohesion throughout protracted peace operations (Indian Military Academy - Wikipedia, 2005<sup>85</sup>).

Training institutions practice all four styles based on cadet experience and task demands. Early stages depend on directive leadership (Indian Military Academy - Wikipedia, 2005). As competence and confidence rise, coaching and supportive approaches become more common. Administrative roles often use delegating leadership to sustain efficiency while empowering proficient subordinates (Indian Defence Review, 2024).

Current doctrine promotes fluid movement across the task relationship spectrum. Leaders develop emotional intelligence to

judge capability and motivation, then apply the right balance of direction and support. This improves engagement, reduces burnout and raises performance. Utilising the task relationship model successfully entails management of cultural and institutional challenges. Leaders balance hierarchy with participation, address generational skill gaps and manage stress in high-risk settings. Leadership programs at institutions such as the Indian Military Academy build situational awareness and practical adaptability (New Indian Express, 2025<sup>86</sup>). JCOs and NCOs apply situational leadership daily. They may delegate freedom to experienced soldiers while coaching newer personnel (CENJOWS, 2023). This flexibility encourages initiative and professional development. The Army also responds to shifting societal values, the need for transformational leadership, and the push for merit-based advancement (Indian Defence Review, 2024). Stress management through training, counselling, and support remains central to sustaining leader and soldier wellbeing (Academia.edu, 2022<sup>87</sup>)

The Hersey-Blanchard task versus relationship behaviour matrix offers Indian Army leaders a versatile and pragmatic leadership toolkit. By calibrating directive and supportive behaviours to follower readiness and situational needs, leaders can sustain operational discipline, soldier motivation and unit cohesion across a broad spectrum of roles. Mastery of this model enables leadership to be both effective and humane, preserving the Indian Army's storied tradition while advancing its modern professional ethos.

### **SWOT Analysis of Indian Army wrt Leadership Lens**

The Indian Army has a robust legacy of discipline, operational success and performance across challenging operational environments (Saxena, 2023<sup>88</sup>). A SWOT view helps us to

appreciate how internal factors and external conditions shape leadership and effectiveness (Kumar & Singh, 2024<sup>89</sup>). This analysis is vital for strategic planning, policy formulation and enhancing future readiness (Chakraborty, 2025<sup>90</sup>).

### Strength

**Discipline** forms the foundation of the Indian Army's operational excellence (Rao, 2023<sup>91</sup>). Engrained in rigorous training, codified regulations and a shared esprit de corps, discipline guarantees that soldiers respond with precision and reliability under stressful and disordered conditions (Menon, 2024<sup>92</sup>). Units respond quickly and maintain order during complex operations. This discipline is evident from basic training institutions to the highest echelons, where adherence to rules, accountability, and professionalism are non-negotiable (Indian Army Doctrine, 2024<sup>93</sup>). This foundation limits friction and supports harmonised action in multi-domain settings (Saxena, 2023).

**Cohesion** is a key factor enabling rapid mobilization, synchronized action, and effective small-unit tactics in counter-insurgency, mountainous, and conventional warfare (Chakraborty, 2025). Despite increasing demographic diversity, leadership efforts maintain unit solidarity through rituals, mentorship, social support networks, and collective success celebrations (Sharma, 2023). Modernisation, integrated battle groups and revised training help the Army adjust to societal and generational change (Indian Army Doctrine, 2024). Strong cohesion improves morale, reduces attrition and supports effective action in counter-insurgency, mountain warfare and conventional battles (Patel, 2024).

**Adaptability** allows the Army to handle conventional conflict, hybrid threats and peacekeeping operations (Jain, 2024<sup>94</sup>). Adaptability echoes the Indian Army's capability to respond dynamically to evolving threats and environments (Rao, 2023).

From conventional border wars to hybrid conflict and complex peacekeeping missions, adaptive leadership integrates technology, jointness, and cultural sensitivity (Saxena, 2023). The Army's modernization plans and integrated battle group doctrines showcase its obligation to innovation and flexible command structures (Jain, 2024). Adaptability also manifests in embracing new doctrines, training regimes and personnel policies responsive to generational and societal change (Sharma, 2023). This strength ensures the Army remains relevant and capable amid unpredictability (Patel, 2024).

### Weaknesses

**Bureaucratic Rigidity** is one obstinate internal challenge is bureaucratic rigidity characterized by hierarchical inertia, procedural delays and resistance to change (IDSA, 2025<sup>95</sup>). While discipline ensures order, excessive bureaucracy can stifle innovation, slow decision-making and reduce responsiveness (IJIIRT, 2024). Procedural complexity repeatedly extends to procurement, personnel management and modernization efforts (The Wire, 2025). This inflexibility can exasperate junior leaders, impede talent retention and deter exploitation of emerging technologies (Samaa TV, 2025<sup>96</sup>). Efforts at streamlining command and administrative processes have been ongoing but require continual revitalization to remain effective (Press Information Bureau, 2024<sup>97</sup>).

**Feedback Constrains** is a limited culture of upward and lateral feedback constrains leadership expansion and organisational knowledge (CENJOWS, 2023). Traditional hierarchical norms emphasise deference and chain-of-command compliance, which can constrain candid communication of problems or innovative ideas from lower ranks (Indian Defence Review, 2024). Enhancing institutional channels for constructive feedback and encouraging

psychological safety for dissent are essential to augment operational effectiveness and human resource management (SSB Crack, 2023<sup>98</sup>).

### Opportunity

**Globalisation** and strategic partnerships afford the Indian Army opportunities to absorb from diverse international military doctrines, joint operational concepts and best practices (Kumar & Singh, 2024). Participation in multinational exercises, defence diplomacy and officer exchanges supplements professional knowledge and cross-cultural competence (Chakraborty, 2025<sup>99</sup>). Accepting fruitful foreign models, altered to India's context, can fast-track doctrinal innovation, interoperability and modernization (Jain, 2024<sup>100</sup>). This experience expands strategic vision and offers benchmarks for capability development (Saxena, 2023<sup>101</sup>).

**Digitisation of warfare** presents opportunities to integrate advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems (Rao, 2023<sup>102</sup>). Implementation of artificial intelligence, machine learning, electronic warfare and autonomous platforms can increase situational awareness, decision speed and precision (Indian Army Doctrine, 2024<sup>103</sup>). Tech-driven command systems permit multi-domain operations and decentralised decision-making, critical in modern battlefields (Patel, 2024<sup>104</sup>). Investment in cyber defence and resilience also reinforces operational security (Menon, 2024<sup>105</sup>). Leveraging technology will redefine Indian Army leadership's role as enablers of information-centric warfare (Saxena, 2023).

### Challenges

**Generational gap** within the Indian Army poses challenges to preserving institutional culture, cohesion and leadership continuity (Jain, 2024). Younger recruits and officers differ significantly in

values, communication styles and career expectations associated to senior leadership necessitating bridging efforts (Sharma, 2023). Failure to resolve these differences risks eroding morale, loyalty and operational effectiveness (Patel, 2024). Comprehensive leadership development, mentorship programs and open dialogue forums are important to alleviate this threat (CENJOWS, 2023).

**Operational stressors** from unremitting deployments, complex missions and existential risks have heightened the psychological burden on soldiers (SSB Crack, 2023). Exposure to high-altitude, counter-insurgency and hybrid threat environments advances apprehensions about mental health, affecting retention and performance (People Matters, 2023<sup>106</sup>). Stigma surrounding mental health discussions and limited institutional resources compound vulnerability (Indian Defence Review, 2024). Progressive leadership identifying mental well-being's centrality to operational effectiveness must prioritise support systems, counselling and resilience training (CENJOWS, 2023).

**Modern societal influences**, exposure to widespread digital media and diversification in recruit socio-economic backgrounds increasingly test traditional military values such as unquestioning obedience, sacrifice and regimental identity (Sharma, 2023). While progress is inevitable, a cautious balance is obligatory to endure core virtues underpinning discipline and unity (Kumar, 2023). The peril is fragmentation in ethos and identity, waning cohesion if not well managed (Chakraborty, 2025). Continuous inculcation of values through education, symbolism and leadership example is crucial (Rao, 2023).

## Summary

The Indian Army's strengths in discipline, cohesion and adaptability underpin its historical and ongoing operational successes (Saxena, 2023). However, internal challenges such as

bureaucratic inflexibility and inadequate feedback culture constrain optimal functioning (IDSA, 2025). At the same time, opportunities stemming from international exposure and technology integration offer pathways for transformation and enhanced effectiveness (Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Concurrently, generational shifts, psychological stressors and societal changes impend traditional military values and operational cohesion (Sharma, 2023). Addressing these threats requires sensitive, inclusive leadership that balances tradition with innovation, cares for soldiers' holistic welfare and fosters organisational learning (CENJOWS, 2023).

A proactive SWOT-informed leadership and adapted management strategy will ensure the Indian Army's resilience and capability to meet future security demands, securing its place as a premier professional force in a rapidly evolving strategic landscape (Indian Defence Review, 2024).

### **RECOMMENDED LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR THE FUTURE**

Adaptive leadership matters in a volatile and fast-changing security environment as the Army prepares for excellence in conventional conflict, hybrid threats, cyber risks and peacekeeping (Saxena, 2023). Each setting stresses swift judgment and flexible leadership (CENJOWS, 2023). Leaders require to gauge the mission, the team's skills, and the environment and adjust their approach, using directive, coaching, supportive or delegative styles to protect morale and performance (Chakraborty, 2025). This flexibility supports decentralized decisions while keeping units aligned with higher intent (Jain, 2024). Adaptive leadership also motivates innovation (PeopleMatters.in, 2023). This approach supports resilience during long or difficult operations while the Army's move increasingly toward joint structures, modernisation and wider cooperation. This model links disciplined command

with newer management ideas so as to meet twenty first century demands with speed and cohesion (Kumar & Singh, 2024).

This chapter outlines the principles that shape adaptive leadership, shows how leaders apply it in the Army, and explains how it supports future readiness.

## **Recommended Style**

Leadership demands in the Army now encompass complex operational and organizational pressures (Saxena, 2023). Centralized control and strict obedience no longer meet the needs of fast and diverse missions (Indian Defence Review, 2024). We need a style built on Mission Command reinforced by transformational and situational ideas. Mission Command relies on trust, initiative and freedom of action wherein the leaders give clear intent, then allow subordinates to decide how to act which improves speed and precision in fluid settings (Chakraborty, 2025). Transformational elements strengthen motivation and align units during high-pressure tasks.

Situational leadership adds flexibility wherein we adjust our style to follower readiness, shifting between directive orders and supportive guidance based on skill and confidence. This combined approach supports decentralized decisions in volatile environments (Rao, 2023). It helps the Army stay agile, responsive, and prepared for future challenges.

## **Mission Command Based Leadership**

Mission Command, implemented by the Indian Army, emphasizes on strong articulation of intent while conceding subordinates autonomy to control how objectives are accomplished (Jain, 2024). It balances authority with freedom, enabling rapid, adaptive responses in fluid battlefield conditions (Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Central to Mission Command is trust, commanders must have confidence in their subordinates' judgment, and subordinates must trust that their decisions align with broader objectives (PeopleMatters.in, 2023). Leaders empower junior personnel with responsibility and authority, fostering initiative at the tactical level while preserving alignment with the mission (Indian Army Doctrine, 2024). This approach accelerates operational tempo, encourages problem-solving and strengthens resilience in uncertain environments (Saxena, 2023).

The Army's integrated battle group concepts increasingly reflect Mission Command, particularly in multi-domain operations spanning land, air, cyber, and space (Chakraborty, 2025). Leaders trained in this framework leverage technology, situational awareness and initiative to gain operational advantage (Jain, 2024). Personnel are expected to think critically, anticipate changes and act decisively (Kumar & Singh, 2024). Training programs stress nurturing this quality, from the JCO and NCO ranks upward, encouraging tactical flexibility and ownership (Indian Army Doctrine, 2024).

Decentralised decision-making decreases response latency and empowers units to exploit fleeting opportunities (Rao, 2023). Authority is delegated to the lowest capable level, enhancing local adaptation without compromising unity of effort (Saxena, 2023). Effective implementation requires disciplined coordination, ethical conduct and clear communication of intent, supported by continuous dialogue and digital situational awareness platforms.

Mission Command is most effective when integrated with transformational and situational leadership. Transformational leadership motivates and inspires beyond obedience, using vision, personal example and intellectual stimulation to foster commitment, resilience and ethical behaviour (Chakraborty, 2025).

Situational leadership enhances flexibility, allowing leaders to adjust between directive and supportive behaviours based on follower readiness and task complexity. Together, these principles create a psychologically harmonised, operationally effective and strategically comprehensive leadership paradigm (Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Training and education integrate Mission Command into curricula at the Indian Military Academy and Defence Services Staff College, emphasising ethical decision-making, clear unambiguous communication of intent and high level of initiative (Indian Military Academy - Wikipedia, 2005).

Leadership by example models transparency, accountability and empathy while maintaining discipline. Technology synchronization ensures decentralized decisions are informed and aligned. Psychological support sustains morale and mental health, critical for initiative and cohesion. Robust feedback and after-action review systems create adaptive learning organizations, continuously refining leadership practice to meet evolving operational challenges (Indian Defence Review, 2024).

The Indian Army's future leadership efficiency pivots on adopting a Mission Command-based style that embraces trust, initiative and decentralized decision-making. Amplified by transformational and situational leadership theories, this model addresses the complexities inherent in modern warfare and organizational diversity. By empowering subordinates, fostering motivation and maintaining adaptive command, Indian Army leaders can sustain operational superiority, cohesion and institutional resilience.

## Model Application

Effective leadership in the Indian Army depends on the

interaction between leadership style, follower traits and situational demands. Frameworks like the Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum, Kelley's Follower-Type Model and the Hersey-Blanchard Task Matrix offer tools to manage these complexities. Applying these models helps leaders encourage initiative, empower subordinates and align their behaviour with operational requirements which we would be discussing in this section.

### Leadership Continuum to Encourage Initiative

The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum present a spectrum of styles from autocratic to democratic which helps commanders regulate authority and participation based on situational demands and follower readiness (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958<sup>107</sup>).

In Indian Army operations, where situations change fast, encouraging initiative is vital for mission success. In high-pressure combat or emergencies, leaders bank on autocratic methods to issue clear orders and lessen ambiguity. As situations stabilise or as subordinates gain experience, leaders swing toward more democratic practices. A common example is empowering platoon leaders in counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir within definite intent parameters. Graduated empowerment strengthens junior leaders' confidence and decision-making which speeds tactical responses and eases command bottlenecks. It also brings diverse perspectives into planning and improves adaptability during fluid operations (Indian Army leadership practices, 2025<sup>108</sup>). This balance requires clear communication and trust. Commanders need to define intent and limits while maintaining accountability (Army Training Command initiatives 2024<sup>109</sup>). They also need to accept the operational risks that come

with delegated decisions (Leadership Challenges in Indian Military Context, 2023<sup>110</sup>).

## **Develop Effective Followers through Empowerment and Education**

Kelley's Follower-Type Model expresses effective followers as active, critical thinkers who support organizational goals and take initiative (Kelley, 1992<sup>111</sup>). The Indian Army works to build this follower profile to reinforce decentralized and resilient units (Indian Army Leadership Training Programs, 2025<sup>112</sup>). Empowerment programs dispense real responsibilities, involve followers in decisions and build ownership. JCO and NCO leadership courses emphasis on ethical judgement, tactical autonomy and clear communication. Senior officers use mentorship to move passive or alienated followers toward active engagement (Military Followership and Leadership Development, 2024<sup>113</sup>).

Military training efforts advance competence through professional military education, vocational training, civilian academic pathways and digital skills. These programs prepare soldiers for modern operational and technical demands. A cultural shift promotes open communication, psychological safety and regular feedback (Military Psychological Well-being, 2025<sup>114</sup>). Soldiers feel respected and are more likely to raise ideas or concerns. Effective followership improves agility, morale and cohesion thereby reducing a leader's cognitive load and strengthens command capacity

## **Use Task Matrix to Align Leadership Behaviour with Operational Needs**

The Hersey-Blanchard Task Matrix links leadership behaviour to follower readiness using four styles, each demarcated by task

direction and relational support (Corporate Finance Institute, 2024<sup>115</sup>). Directive leadership is contingent on strong instructions and close supervision. We use it in high-risk or unfamiliar situations or when soldiers lack experience (Investopedia, 2024<sup>116</sup>). Coaching leadership couples strong task guidance with active relational support. We apply it when soldiers have basic skills but need confidence or refinement. Counter-insurgency, acclimatisation and complex joint exercises fit this style, since troops need direction and encouragement (Business to You, 2020<sup>117</sup>).

Supportive leadership decreases task control and increases relational engagement. It works when soldiers are competent but need motivation. Leaders focus on listening, encouragement and autonomy during garrison duties or welfare activities to maintain morale (Brighter Strategies, 2025<sup>118</sup>).

Delegating Leadership is appropriate for experienced, confident soldiers deployed in stable or specialised environments requiring minimal oversight, with leaders maximizing operational efficiency through strategic oversight rather than micro management (Resources Blanchard, 2022<sup>119</sup>).

## PRACTICAL INTEGRATION

**Counter-Insurgency Operations.** Company commanders utilize a blend of directive styles during critical phases, coaching as troops gain familiarity with terrain and supportive approaches to sustain morale during static deployments. Delegation is common for entrusted platoon leaders responsible for routine civil engagement or small patrols.

**High-Altitude and Mountain Warfare.** Initial acclimatisation and strict safety protocols necessitate high task orientation. As soldiers gain competence, leaders increase relational engagement

through peer support and morale-building initiatives, occasionally delegating routine decisions to experienced leaders due to communication challenges.

**Training Environments.** Institutions like the National Defence Academy transition cadets from directive learning in foundational phases to coaching and supportive leadership in advanced stages, culminating in delegated responsibility during field exercises simulating real combat scenarios.

**Multi-Domain Operations.** Leaders shift fluidly across the spectrum, delegating authority to technologically proficient teams and assuming directive roles when cyber or electronic warfare demands swift centralised action.

Applying the Leadership Continuum, Follower-Type Model and Task Matrix jointly prepares Indian Army leaders to foster initiative, cultivate effective followers and fine-tune leadership behaviours to operational contexts. This integrated approach addresses the diversity of soldier capabilities and mission complexities, enhancing agility, cohesion and mission success. Continuous leadership development accentuating adaptability, communication and empowerment is critical to sustain an effective, resilient and future-ready Indian Army.

## Implementation Strategy

As the Indian Army accepts the Leadership Continuum, Kelley's Follower-Type Model and the Hersey-Blanchard Task Matrix, it needs a strong strategy to entrench these behavioural frameworks across the force. The method must strengthen leadership development in institutions like the National Defence Academy, Indian Military Academy and Defence Services Staff College while also build strong mentorship cultures within units and use structured leadership audits and feedback systems.

The goal is to advance adaptive and empowered leaders who handle complex and volatile environments with skill which necessitates aligned curricula, consistent coaching and regular assessment of leader behaviour. It also calls for open communication across ranks, steady reinforcement of expectations and ongoing evaluation of leadership effectiveness. Together, these measures would support a leadership culture suited to modern operational requirements.

### **Train to embrace Behavioural Leadership Models**

Military leadership institutions serve as the core platforms where future officers acquire leadership behaviour, ethics and decision-making (Indian Military Academy, 2025<sup>120</sup>). To apply behavioural leadership models effectively, training programs should mandatorily introduce structured modules on the Leadership Continuum, Kelley's Follower-Type framework and the Task Matrix at every stage, from induction at the National Defence Academy to advanced courses at the Defence Services Staff College (National Defence Academy, 2025<sup>121</sup>). Case studies from Indian Army operations display how adaptive leadership works in real missions. Simulation exercises and war games strengthen situational judgement, follower engagement and emotional awareness (Indian Army Leadership Courses, 2024<sup>122</sup>).

Experiential learning tasks entail trainees to assess follower readiness, evaluate situational factors and select matching leadership styles (Officers Training Academy, 2025<sup>123</sup>). Peer assessments and guided reflection build interpersonal insight and honest self-evaluation (Indian Defence Institute, 2025<sup>124</sup>). Training in communication, conflict resolution, cultural understanding and mentorship supports emotional intelligence and complements tactical skills (Indian Army Psychological Training, 2025<sup>125</sup>). Workshops on resilience and mental wellness prepare leaders to

manage diverse motivations and stress in units (Indian Army Wellness Programs, 2024<sup>126</sup>). Faculty development programs guarantee instructors remain current in behavioural leadership theory and practice. Continuous professional development and cross-institutional exchanges help maintain consistent standards and spread effective teaching methods across training centres (Indian Army Faculty Development, 2025<sup>127</sup>).

### **Encourage Mentorship Culture Within Units**

Mentorship supports leadership growth by turning classroom philosophies into traditions in units (Indian Army Leadership, 2024<sup>128</sup>). Formal programs pair senior officers with JCOs, NCOs and young officers (Doon Defence Dreamers, 2025<sup>129</sup>). These pairings concentrate on leadership development, career guidance and ethical decision making. Strong goals tie mentorship to behavioural leadership outcomes, encouraging initiative and sound judgement (Indian Army Mentorship Program, 2025<sup>130</sup>).

Informal mentorship nurtures through open-door policies, buddy systems and small group forums (Centurion Defence Academy, 2024<sup>131</sup>). Unit meetings, shared tasks and social events build trust, which helps mentorship grow without force (Indian Army Wellness Programs, 2024<sup>132</sup>). Recognition programs reward strong mentors through commendations and career advantages, which indicate that mentoring is part of professional duty (Indian Army Leadership Guidebook, 2025<sup>133</sup>). Mentors receive training in coaching skills, communication, psychological support and cultural awareness. Confidential feedback channels help mentees report their experience, which allows leaders to refine the program. Commanders assess mentorship outcomes by tracking follower maturity, initiative levels and morale trends, reinforcing a sturdy cycle of development (Indian Army Leadership, 2024<sup>134</sup>).

## Periodic Leadership Audits and Feedback Loops

We shape sustainable leadership by measuring behaviour, gathering honest feedback and adjusting training (Indian Army Leadership, 2025<sup>135</sup>). Regular audits track how leaders apply behavioural models which would include units review survey data, performance records, attrition patterns and incident trends through Administrative Inspections. This gives a clear picture of leader impact on morale and discipline (Defence Research and Development Organisation, 2023<sup>136</sup>). A 360 system adds anonymous input from subordinates, peers and seniors. Leaders see how others rate their communication, adaptability, fairness and motivation skills which supposedly helps shape personal development plans (Centurion Defence Academy, 2024<sup>137</sup>). However, it is unsuitable for Indian Army where leaders must accomplish unfavourable and risky tasks with followers who are not mature enough and motivated enough to appreciate the concern for task.

After Action Reviews highlight leadership decisions and follower behaviour after every mission or exercise. Units feed lessons into doctrine updates, course revisions and digital libraries (Indian Army Doctrine and Training, 2024<sup>138</sup>). This keeps training aligned with field realities. Officers who display strong behavioural leadership receive roles with higher responsibility (Times of India, 2024<sup>139</sup>). Leaders with gaps enter focused coaching and remedial programs. This closes performance issues early and supports long term improvement (Indian Army Leadership Programs, 2025<sup>140</sup>).

## Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Resistance habitually comes from rigid hierarchies that oppose sharing authority. We reduce this through senior leader support, clear communication about benefits and slow rollout of new practices (CENJOWS, 2023). Limited staff, time and funding affect

curriculum expansion and mentorship efforts which addresses this by setting priorities, staging reforms and tracking progress to keep programs sustainable (Indian Defence Review, 2024<sup>141</sup>). Behavioural outcomes are hard to measure with numbers alone. You combine surveys, performance data and incident trends with interviews, narratives and open feedback. This gives a balanced picture of leadership impact (Indian Army Leadership Challenges Report, 2023<sup>142</sup>).

## Conclusion

The paper highlights how the Indian Army's historical strengths in discipline, cohesion and adaptability can be amplified by flexible, context-sensitive leadership approaches responsive to diverse follower maturity and complex operational demands (VIF India, 2023<sup>143</sup>). The Leadership Continuum's sliding scale enables leaders to balance authoritative command with delegated freedom, catalysing initiative and resilience during high-stakes operations and routine management alike (Centurion Defence Academy, 2024). Kelley's follower typology strains the inevitability of developing effective followers, engaged, accountable and critical thinkers, particularly among JCOs and NCOs essential to tactical success (CENJOWS, 2023). The Task Matrix guides leaders in synchronizing directive and supportive behaviours with follower readiness, ensuring optimal motivation and performance (Indian Defence Review, 2024). Implementation strategies focusing on curriculum enrichment at premier training institutes (NDA, IMA, DSSC), fostering unit-level mentorship and deploying multi-source feedback and leadership audits are essential to institutionalize behavioural leadership (Economic Times, 2024<sup>144</sup>). Such actions transform theoretical insights into habitual practices that promote adaptive, inclusive and mission-driven leadership (Bharat Shakti, 2024<sup>145</sup>). In real-world operations, these models manifest as a blend of directive control during combat, coaching in skill acquisition,

supportive engagement to sustain morale and delegation to empower seasoned soldiers (VIF India, 2023). This dynamic application resonates with the Indian Army's evolving operational doctrines emphasising mission command, technological integration and cultural agility (Centurion Defence Academy, 2024).

Moreover, expected positive outcomes include improved decision-making agility, enhanced soldier morale and resilience, heightened operational readiness and stronger leader-follower relationships founded in trust and mutual respect (Indian Defence Review, 2024). These outcomes warrant that leadership remains a force multiplier amid growing challenges such as multi-domain threats, generational diversity and high operational tempo (Economic Times, 2024). Recommendations for doctrine and leadership policy updates include revising doctrine to incorporate unambiguous guidance on behavioural leadership models, emphasising Mission Command complemented by transformational and situational leadership principles (Bharat Shakti, 2024). Training modernization should integrate behavioural theory with practical application, scenario-based learning, emotional intelligence development and follower maturity assessment modules, ensuring faculty expertise (VIF India, 2023). Mentorship institutionalisation should develop formal programs with measurable objectives and periodic evaluations, recognizing and incentivizing effective mentors linked to career progression (CENJOWS, 2023).

Culture and communication developments should foster open feedback cultures to diminish hierarchical barriers, encourage subordinate initiative and innovation within command frameworks and promote ethical leadership alongside psychological support integration (Economic Times, 2024). Technology integration should leverage digital command and

communication tools facilitating decentralized decision-making and situational awareness, training leaders to use technology judiciously in behavioural leadership contexts (Bharat Shakti, 2024).

Addressing challenges proactively mandates managing bureaucratic inertia and generational gaps through change management initiatives focused on leadership renewal and institutional agility (CENJOWS, 2023). Embedding these recommendations will empower the Indian Army to sustain its legacy while advancing towards a leadership paradigm that is disciplined, empathetic, flexible and forward-looking (VIF India, 2023). This leadership evolution is vital to operational excellence, personnel development and institutional resilience in the contemporary and future strategic milieu, reinforcing the vital role of behavioural leadership models in shaping the Indian Army into a modern, adaptive and cohesive fighting force (Centurion Defence Academy, 2024).

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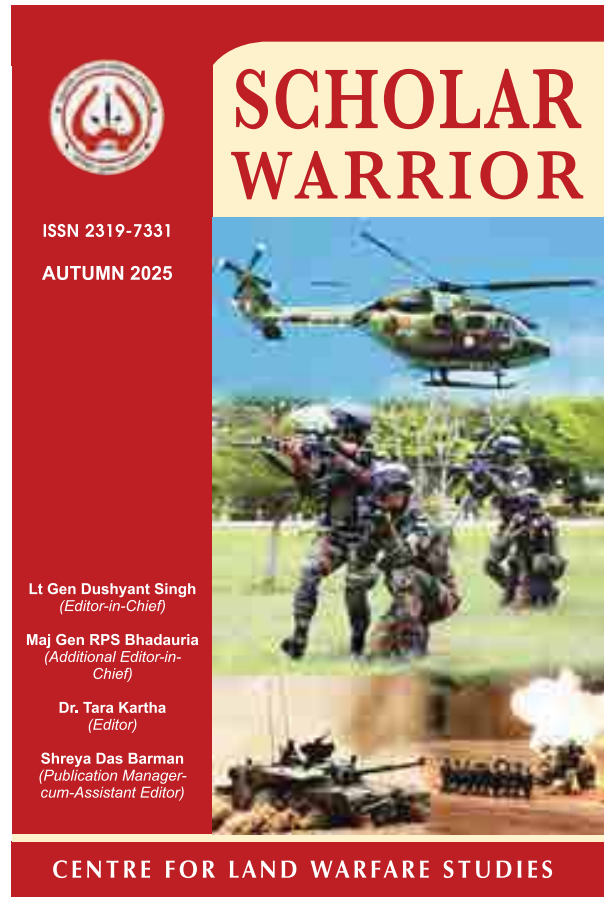
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The Army's decisive resource, viz. the soldier, has evolved from a medieval instrument motivated by 'fear' of losing one's ground to an educated, assertive professional in the 21st century. Socio-economic progress, mass education, and information access have narrowed the gap between the leader and the led, fostering a "one among equals" approach. In today's VUCA environment, shortened OODA loops and complex threats demand adaptability, initiative, and rapid decision-making at lower levels. Modern military leadership emphasises flexibility, technological fluency, and ethical conduct. This paper examines how tactical leadership in the Indian Army enhances operational effectiveness, morale, cohesion, and civil-military responsiveness in complex environments.

• • •



**Brigadier Navneet Bakshi**, commissioned into the MARATHA Light Infantry, has served for over 30 years. An Infantry officer with extensive operational experience, he has spent more than two decades in Counter-Terrorist operations in Jammu & Kashmir and the North East. He has commanded and served in critical appointments along both the Northern and Western borders.

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