

Innovations and Policy Reforms for Organisational Transformation of MES

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Abstract: The Military Engineer Services (MES) has grown from a small beginning in 1923, to the largest govt. construction agency in the country with current annual work load exceeding 12000 crores. However the organisation is facing problems of lack of synergy with users and being reactive rather than proactive to changing needs of stakeholders since long; struggling to take on the challenges imposed by rising users aspirations, fast changing construction technology and increasing complexity of defence projects. There are problems of time and cost overrun in projects apart from poor quality of maintenance services due to lack of required competencies in its work force, right kind of mind set, attitudes, systems and processes to deliver quality services as a service provider. The organisation has been held a prisoner of outdated systems and procedures of doing work despite of quantum jump in the construction and information technology, particularly IT. The organisation has been unable to promote a culture of creative thinking and nurturing of innovative ideas at all levels to introduce necessary policy interventions and changes in process flow, re-engineering of organisational structure to deliver quality services.

The paper analyses the reasons behind organisational inertia and lack of innovative ideas in the organisation and suggest systematic solution for promoting innovation in MES to make it a proactive and, adaptive organisation. The paper floats the idea of a think cell to nurture a culture of innovation and capturing best suggestions and ideas from all stakeholders of the MES organisation. The paper further suggests several innovative ideas and policy interventions, which can put the organisation on the path of transformation to a user focussed and proactive organisation in meeting the current and future needs of its users services and put the organisation on a trajectory of growth and excellence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Military Engineer Services is the largest govt. construction agency providing infrastructure creation and maintenance services to all armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard) under ministry of Defence, DRDO, DGQA and Ordnance Factories. The scope of services provided is vast and technologically challenging apart from being spread to around 400 stations across all corners of the country. Despite of its capabilities, there is a general perception among various stakeholders that MES has been unable to move with the times to deliver the kind of services expected from it in a time bound fashion. The execution of several projects e.g. naval project at Karwar cast a doubt on the capabilities and dynamism of MES's system of working and procedures to inspire confidence among the stake holders.

Against this backdrop, innovation and creativity to improve systems and processes to introduce radical/ incremental changes in the organisation has become pressing needs of the day. Innovation is defined as the introduction of new elements into a public service- in the form of new knowledge, a new organisation, and/ or new management or process skills. It represents *discontinuity* with the past (Osborne & Brown, 2005). An innovative programme of management reform is defined as "*deliberate change in the arrangements for the design and delivery of public services*" where such changes are "new to a specific agency or to the public sector as a whole" (Boyne, Williams, Law, & Walker, 2004).

Adopting innovations and tapping the ideas & suggestions of various stake holders of the organisation for improvement is of utmost importance if the organisation has to remain at the forefront to satisfy the needs of its clients. In the present day environment where change is the only constant, old strategies, processes procedures are bound to lose their relevance over time due to change in technology, users' perception and environmental context in which organisation exist. To thrive in the age of change, it is more important to invent new strategies, rather than improving the old one. (Hamel, 2002).

The organisation is presently lacking in culture for encouragement of innovative ideas and that of continuous improvements and there is no system to seek innovative ideas/suggestions from its stakeholders particularly the employees and further develop them into solutions in the form of improved processes and policies to weed out old practices and adopt new ones to improve its functioning in various areas. Though, there are annual conferences at different levels, their main focus is on monitoring existing system and parameters and maintaining the status quo. The general psychology of a person heading a conference and a person who handle suggestions is entirely different. The officer chairing a routine conference mostly works to maintain status quo and there is very low probability that he would examine a suggestion with open mind, as his focus is on

achieving targets and results based on existing systems and procedures, irrespective of the inbuilt drawbacks in the decades old systems/practices.

2. CONCEPT OF THINK CELL

The idea of a think cell is to provide a platform for the officers and stakeholders with necessary competencies and mindset for innovative ideas and creative thinking for organisational improvement. The proposed think cell will be a network of volunteer officers working in various directorates of E-in-C's Branch or at any MES lower formation, who will be working in addition to their normal duties. The think Cell will be headed by an officer of SAG/ director level who has demonstrated capability for original thinking and innovative ideas. Think cell will have a core group of 5 officers selected on volunteer basis. However any stakeholder of MES with a bright idea including a mazdoor of MES will also have ability to interact with Think Cell through website. Think Cell will meet on monthly basis and also interact through mail group/ video conferencing/ brain storming sessions. It will deliberate upon new ideas recd from any source to explore its value and viability and then process for initiation by concerned office in a time bound manner. The basic difference between a Monitoring Conference discussed above and a Think Cell is that the conferences focus on existing rules & procedures while the Think Cell looks beyond it. So new innovative suggestions can only be pursued by a team of officers and staff who have a mindset and an aptitude of looking beyond conventional concepts.

The cell may deliberate on the suggestions received, record its preliminary observations with an open mind and seek opinion (not decision) of concerned directorates about the merits & demerits of idea. After receiving opinion, the cell must re-examine and make its final recommendations to head of the organisation for initiation and implementation. Success of Think Cell is dependent to a great extent on the ability of the Chief Executive of the Organisation (CEO) to encourage and motivate fresh ideas.

3. FUNCTIONING OF THINK CELL

Think cell will function in following modes:-

- (a) Generating original innovative ideas and further developing it either in the form of draft concept paper/ draft policy letter or amendment to Rules/ regulations/ standing orders/ SOPs/change in process flow/ organisational structure resulting in logical conclusion of implementation
- (b) Collecting innovating ideas from stakeholders –from all levels of MES formations/ employees Suppliers down to a mazdoor, Contractors and users through a web based platform. The stakeholder providing original innovative idea will be appropriately awarded and recognized.
- (c) Promoting Research Studies on various issues through collection of data from various MES Offices either by itself or by volunteer officers. The think cell will be authorized to call for any type of data from any of the MES formation for the purpose of conducting research or framing of concept paper/ policy. It will also be authorized to sanction research grant out of training funds to various MES offices to conduct research/ collect data on topic relevant to MES organisation. All research proposals will be submitted to Think Cell and will be either accepted or rejected in a time bound manner with in a time frame of one month. For example, Studies on annual saving of electricity in a garrison due to introduction on LED luminaries in the station.
- (d) Think Cell will function through a IT based web platform with minimum paperwork, entire work will be conducted through email and data will be maintained on servers. It will be a flat organisation with minimum hierarchy and Think Cell will directly report to Head of the Organisation through quarterly interactions.
- (e) Think Cell output will be in terms of mostly concept papers/ draft amendment to rules/ regulations. Annual target of 12 innovations per year is considered sufficient (one innovation/ Change per month). Think cell will also monitor, through head of the organization, the implementation of innovative ideas/ concept papers finally approved by head of the organization.
- (f) Impact Assessment Studies - Factual Data will be collected to access the impact of innovations finally implemented on organisation functioning by Think Cell and put up in the MES portal/ Think Cell Page for further dissemination of information to all stake holders.

4. MANNING OF THINK CELL

Think Cell responsibilities will be on volunteer basis and will be a kind of additional duties similar to that of CPIO. It will be in a form of network of volunteer officers. There will be a minimum service requirement of 10 years so that only officer with sufficient ground experience become part of think cell.

It will be headed by a SAG/ Dir level officer. Names of the volunteers will be asked from eligible pool of min service. Apart from min service requirement, other desirable qualities for think Cell will be having zeal & mindset for innovative improvements in the organization.

As selected officers will be working in think cell in addition to their existing assignments, there will be no dedicated posting to think cell. However there will be indirect career based incentives for any officer who has worked in think cell. Selection in Think Cell will be considered prestigious assignment and will be given due weightage in future assignments. Any officer considering himself misfit/found misfit to the job requirement of think cell may opt out himself / may be opted out by head of think cell, without any stigma on the concerned officer.

Considering the strategic importance of Think Cell, officers after doing a successful tenure in think cell will be given a posting of their choice (including executive posting to enable them to implement the new ideas first hand in the field.) These officers will also be preference for further prestigious assignments/ training programmes to enhance their knowledge and competencies and will be further groomed to be among potential organisational leaders.

5. INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR ORGANISATIONAL IMPROVEMENT- IMPLEMENTED IN THE PAST

Authors on their part, during their stint as Dir and Pr Dir/Jt DG had been able to achieve following innovation/ improvements in organisational functioning while working outside their normal duties, with active support from likeminded colleagues/ superiors :-

- (a) Discontinuation of Water Meters in JCOs/Ors/Equivalent Accn which were never metered and billed but were continuous source of water contamination, being immersed in water pits and causing infructuous expenditure on capital investment and maint.
- (b) Introduction of separate Geysers in two bath rooms of officers quarters instead of single one with extended connection to other bath room leading to infructuous expenditure on capital investment, maint, energy losses as well as functional difficulty.
- (c) Discontinuation of several reports/returns which though gradually re-surfaced after certain years.
- (d) Replacement of certain Obsolete Wooden Furniture designs with PVC.
- (e) Initiation of MES Officers Transit Accommodation at Delhi Cantt and subsequent sanction through staff authorities to mitigate the sufferings of civ officers coming on posting/TD to Delhi.
- (f) Improvements in MES Officers Transit Accn
 - (i) Implementation of Web based Computerisation of Reservations and E mail based reservations (zero paper work)
 - (iii) Improvement of service standards and amenities.
- (g) Finalisation of CRs Pt A and B of all works even of govt powers the level of Zonal CEs which otherwise used to linger on for years upto Command CEs and EinC.
- (h) Finalization of Machinery History Sheets of all E/M equipments at the level of Zonal CEs and CWEs which used to earlier shuttle upto command CEs

6. INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

Following are a few innovative ideas for consideration of all stakeholders and for further development to logical conclusion which will result in streamlining of processes, elimination of redundant practices and leveraging of IT for better organisational functioning and subsequent brand value enhancement of MES :-

Works Matters

(a) *Establishment of MES Call Centre and Toll Free No. for Maintenance Complaints* –We need to establish All India Toll Free Number and MES call Centre 24x7 for lodging maintenance complaints and prompt services supported by a comprehensive monitoring mechanism at higher level right up to top of hierarchy. CPWD model of e-sewa is already there, same may be adopted straightaway with modification as per organisation's requirements. It may be noted that the main source of poor image of MES is due to delay in maintenance Services. Establishment of Call Centre and Toll Free No. will make quality of MES Maintenance Services as a whole much better and will greatly enhance image of MES organisation. The project may be started as a pilot at a selected big station and then may be rolled out at all stations across the country. In

addition Mobile App be launched to lodge MES maintenance complaint with call centre along with Mobile/SMS based interaction with users.

(b) *Service Delivery Standards for Maintenance Services* –Service Delivery Standards for different types of maintenance services need to be enforced in the contract documents as well as while carrying out services through DEL. Online feedback after every maintenance complaint and project completion in the form of rating the MES services in terms of quality parameters like timely response, quality, behaviour of staff, turn out of staff, ease of lodging of complaints etc. (Omar, 2015)

(c) *E-governance/ERP implementation*- Implementation of e-governance and ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) is required to be done at the earliest. It will not only streamline all work and pers processes, but will drastically reduce internal correspondence. All reports and returns will be automatically generated. Whatever internal correspondence is there, that should be through nic e mail communication to max extent possible. Even communication with users units, contractors and suppliers and individual officers should be through email. All officers should compulsory hold digital signature certificate (DSC). Once E-governance / ERP is put in place, very large no. of officers as well as staff at all levels will be freed from work of compiling reports and returns or forwarding of mails as being done at present, and annual recurring establishment cost will be reduced to a great extent.

(d) *Redesign of Liveries of MES Industrial / Contractor staff involved in Maintenance Services*- It should be done to make it attractive and professional looking and to make visible impact on users. It should be compulsory for all industrial and contractor's staff to wear prescribed dress while going for complaint, otherwise fine should be imposed on contractor and applicable action as per rules on DEL. (Omar, ibid)

(e) *Billing of Electricity in Pre –Paid mode*- The electric bills in MES are not regularly issued or those are charged at flat rates, much lower than actual consumption. For concessional consumers, the situation is further alarming where hardly any units/amount is charged from them. The above state is mainly due to conflict of interest of users and station authorities who are direct beneficiaries of inefficient MES system and concerned MES authorities turn a blind eye to it as a quid pro quo. As a result, the govt is losing lot of revenue. To avoid this loss, billing of electricity should be switched to prepaid mode for all type of consumers and same should be outsourced to fix accountability for faulty metering, non billing and etc with penal provisions. For service consumers, charges for 100 units of electricity may be credited once bill has been paid.

(f) *Discontinuing century old practice of free issue of consumable ie Bulbs/Tubes/CFLs and now LEDs to allottees of domestic accn in Defence causing huge avoidable loss to the nation*- The concept of free issue of bulbs and tubes to occupants of md and single accn in defence services was started in MES about a century back when the accn were located in remote areas and there were no civil facility near by to purchase these consumables. The practice is however continuing at a much larger scale now even when the ground situation has under gone a sea change. In view of huge handling cost and man power consumed in procurement, storage & issue by MES and subsequent accounting /audit as well as multi replacements w/o any quality and inherent guarantee from DGS&D, the practice needs to be abolished to avoid huge expenditure being borne by the state, where as no other govt dept issues consumable items to occupants, free of cost.

(g) *Station wise Energy Audit* - In accordance with Energy Conservation Act 2001, annual audit of electrical energy is mandatory but it is not being done in MES and consumption is increasing day by day, despite lot of scope to restrict wasteful usage. To avoid recurring loss to state, bulk electric meters be centrally installed in all major buildings and monthly limit of consumption fixed thro BOO. Station wise Energy Audit be conducted to identify wasteful practices. This may be done internally also to develop departmental expertise in developing energy saving.

(h) *Maintenance of Mandatory Infrastructure created due to Govt Notifications but w/o any direct benefit to users*- Certain assets costing hundreds of crores of rupees have been created in defence during last more than 10 years which do not impart any immediate direct benefit to the users, but definitely for future needs e.g. Rain Water Harvesting Infrastructure for ground water level and Solar Water Heating System for preventing use of fossil fuels. In absence of any monitoring mechanism at Apex level in MES, most of these assets are lying defunct on ground for want of lack of concern on part of users as well as MES executives. The absence of any pressure either internally (from Top management of MES) or externally (from users), it is defeating the very purpose for which these structures were created. The organization need to shed its lethargy and inertia and evolve a proper maintenance and monitoring mechanism to contribute our bit in this global movement.

(i) *Stopping the release of new PC and LC vehicles w/o proper matching strength of drivers to avoid huge wastage of money due to idling of vehicles or their driving by unauthorized persons*- There is an urgent need to look into this wasteful expenditure, otherwise Civil Hired Tpt (CHT) system be introduced which is much more economical and efficient in the present circumstances.

(j) *Reviewing the policy of accepting lowest tender*- Unworkable rates quoted by the contractors to somehow grab the contracts by quoting much below the prevalent market price are causing serious dent in the quality of work. Though a clause exists that such tender may be rejected but no one dares to reject it for fear of allegations of favours, audit objections and

facing enquiries. This practice is continuing since decades and leads to serious malpractices / functional problems during execution in govt depts. Suitable policy to straightaway reject such lowest tenders, quoted below/above a threshold percentage on the estimated price, needs to be introduced to cleanse the system.

(k) *Improvement of MES Website* – MES website requires drastic changes to make it user friendly. The website is not searchable and info is not being uploaded in proper category. All policy letters, gazette notifications, rules, standing orders, regulations/ compilations, forms in force in MES should be available on the website in a logical searchable and categorized manner. A proper website coupled with implementation of e-governance/ ERP will transform the entire organisation in a short time and will make all existing post office type work, being done from E-in-C's Br up to GE level, redundant. It should be compulsory for all officers and staff to go through Website on daily basis and acquit themselves with complete systems & procedures and policy letters.

(l) *Every lower formation of MES viz. Comd CE, Zonal CE, CWE and GE should have its own website/webpage-*. MES main website should have permanent link to all these websites/ web pages, within a given template and with some flexibility in format and content as per local needs.

Personnel Matters

(m) *Centralization of salary payments through online pay billing software (to be developed through NISG/ NIC) and online submission of all types of claims etc for all Gps of Offrs/ Staff at the level of their appointing authority, instead of each unit-* Decades old system of individual bills by each office, when the salary used to be disbursed in cash, needs to be discarded. With the introduction of ECS system and computerization, this will eliminate lot of problems ie issue of LPC, discrepancy in pay of Sr/Jr, service verification, depositing of TDS with Income tax etc, besides savings in man power.

(n) *Issue of Permanent Identity Card to all Civ Personnel by their respective Appointing Authority-* The system of Pt Pass by the respective unit of the offr/staff needs to be scrapped and instead digital card be introduced valid throughout service of the employee in a particular rank. System of MES No. needs to be replaced with issue of Employee No. by Appointing Authority.

(o) *Simplification of Procedure of PPO and revised PPO by eliminating certain redundant references to offices, particularly of accounts to avoid delays in receipt of PPOs by the banks.* A detailed write up of suggestions to remove the obstacles in speedy settlement of pension cases have already been given up to CRO and Pers Dte by the MES Retired Officers Forum. Similar measures need to be taken up at Command and CWE level for subordinate and industrial staff.

(p) *E-Service Book implementation-* The CRO is dealing with 627 MES units all over the country and every affected officer directly approaches this office. To enable smooth and efficient functioning, concept of e-service book as per DOPT need to be implemented without any further delay and CRO must have a dedicated website where every officer should be able to log in to see his e-service book and leave account and other details. Similar is the case with other Pension Authorities ie Command and CWE offices. All employee should have an online account with concerned CRO where he will be able to check his entire service history including all Pt II orders, leave account, pay fixation details, IPRs/ Lokayukta Returns, GPF account, etc. and take any action through his office.

(q) *Online Nomination/ selection for Training Programme:-* This can be implemented every easily and it will drastically reduce cycle time for nomination of training programme and correspondence at all level.

(r) *Implementation of E-APAR-* Implementation of e-APAR will reduce process time for DPC and deputation cases apart from saving in valuable office space and ease of maintaining records. E-APAR may be implemented in a phased manner beginning with group 'A' officers and later on extended to all categories of employees gradually. Template of e-APAR is already available with DOPT and same be followed.

(s) *Publishing of Citizen Charter (Services Delivery Standards) for all sections of MES-* Laying down out compulsory fixing of accountability in accordance with Suo Motu clause under RTI Act for inaction/unnecessary prolongation on part of concerned officials and the organization to eliminate *Mera Kya, Mujhe kya* attitude by many of the employees needs to be speeded up to enhance the image of the MES.

Above is only a indicative list of innovative ideas and policy reforms. Once the system of think cell is in place hundreds of such innovative ideas will be put up by stake holders for organisational improvements.

7. CONCLUSION

In the words of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, we are not only to expect what our country/organization has given to us but also ponder as to what we have contributed back to it in our 30-35 yrs of service. (Kalam, 1999). Thus to tap the hidden potential of the employees to come forward, the present govt has asked all Ministries/Departments to set up *Idea Box* in all of their offices and also share their *Anubhav* on the eve of leaving the organization for the benefit of their predecessors as well as the organisation.

Let the good ideas and experiences not remain suppressed with the persons forever. Some time even a *wild idea happens to be the Best Idea!* Even if Think Team is able to process one worthwhile suggestion a month, the benefit would outweigh many times the cost of holding it.

Till the time the organization accepts this concept and methodology for implementation, any office headed by open minded officer, may introduce this concept in his office and see the results. The innovative ideas considered worthwhile by them may be progressed with details and pursued with higher offices for consideration and implementation. They may definitely find at least some worthwhile ideas which may get implemented in the long run and benefit the organization.

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