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Context to the nugget

Become privy to one of the army's most efficient framework approaches: the Z-KITBAG! Raghu elaborates on this acronym and talks about how this structured approach can be used in any scenario- whether you are preparing for a talk or mobilizing your team for a launch.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I am particularly curious about the acronym Z-KITBAG. In McKinsey, we used to use a term MECE, Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive. So, it felt like a holistic framework. If you could expand on that for a couple of minutes.

Capt. Raghu Raman (RR): Like the MECE framework, this is a framework that's got a great flexibility, in that, it can be used by a section commander of 10 men and he does use it, right up to an army commander who commands millions. So, the framework also makes sure that every aspect of your briefing is covered in a sub-heading. It also makes sure that your subordinates or your peers, who are listening to your briefing, or even in your own thinking, know exactly at what point they have to pay attention. Because if I am a logistics person, I know that after this, am my turn, and after this have been covered, it will come. The Z-KITBAG is an acronym that we use very often in the army to teach people how to think, how to give orders, how to plan, how to build strategy. And like the most things in the army most things that really, really work well the fundamental structure is very simple, and it has to be, because it has to be taught to a 12th class pass jawan; he has to understand it. How do you create a framework within an organization where the last trooper on ground is aware of the strategic intent of his overall commander? How may he assume orders in the absence of orders?

DJ: Which is equivalent to the sales guy on the street knowing what the CEO is thinking, right?

RR: Not just what the CEO is thinking, but if my CEO is not here and I need a direction, what would my CEO give me as a direction? So, how to assume orders in the absence of orders. That is the fundamental reason for a framework like this. So, it's a very simple framework. Its origin lies in the orders and the briefing of the Indian armed forces and as you probably are aware, the Indian armed forces' heritage is largely from the erstwhile British Indian Army. So, the use of the lingo is peppered with Urdu and erstwhile Hindustani and, of course, some elements of English, because it was British officers and Hindi-speaking, Urdu-speaking troops.

So, Z stands for *Zameeni Nishsan*. The loose translation of that in the civilian street would be environmental scan. So, before you begin an operation, you've got to give the troops an orientation: you are fighting in a desert, what does that mean, the day time temperature goes up to this much, in

the night time it plummets to this much, these are the canals which describe our boundary so if you cross this canal it means basically you've gone past your target. So, you're orienting them to the environmental scan. That has an application in the civil street as well. If you are trying to decide the strategy for, let's say, the Pharma sector, then your environmental scan will talk about what are the regulations in that space, who are the regulators, what are the boundary conditions, what are the patent laws, you need to understand all of that kind of stuff.

The KITBAG as an acronym is also chosen so that soldiers remember. KITBAG is simple to remember; you'll never forget KITBAG. And Z, of course, if you just prefix it, you will remember Z-KITBAG. K stands for *Khabar* and *khabar* is information. It always starts with your competitor's information first, so you will always brief your team on the org structure of the enemy, the enemy commanders, what are their strong points, what are their weak points, which are their hot buttons. So, you could mess with some of your, say, competitors in all over India, but if you mess with them in their home town, the response will be disproportionately hard. So, understanding your competitors' *khabar*, information. Then, it's followed by your own *khabar*: who are you, what are your strengths, what are your sister organizations, what are the boundary conditions between your sister organizations, so that two of the sister organizations are not pitching for the same account, so you understand whom can you call for support in case you require assistance in, say, digital, there is an arm which can provide us with that support. So, it's *khabar apni*.

'I' stands for *Iraada*. What is the strategic intent, what are you trying to achieve out of this entire exercise? So, it's not just the transactional steps; it is what is the overall intent of the commander, how that intent is sort of checked back. So, you actually give out an *iraada* and then check back with your troops that repeat the strategic intent, so that verbatim they are able to repeat it. Then, it becomes ingrained in every person as a north star that this is the strategic intent of my commander, not the interim steps; those are only ways to achieve the strategic intent.

'T' stands for *Tareeka*. *Tareeka* is methodology. How are you going to achieve this strategic intent, what are the various phases in which you will do that, how will you hand over from one phase to the next phase, who will be the phase two commander, what will be the sign that phase one has ended and phase two has begun, what will be the milestones and how will you communicate with various different teams, if there is overlap who will be responsible for the overlap? And the *tareeka* goes into those details.

Bandobast is resourcing, troops to tasks, as we call it. To achieve this objective, how many troops to task do you need? Do you have sufficient troops? Is there a backup if the first piece doesn't work? Do you have enough resilience in, say, your cashflow, to take care of, say, six months of your sales plan not actually fructifying? What we call troops to task means for this task, how many troops do you need, what are the resources?

'A' stands for Administration. Again, many companies fail because they don't look at that part. They do the hiring, but they haven't got the laptops and PCs in place. That's in a dissonance. So, you suddenly have 40 employees whom you have given employment letters to, but you have seating space for only 13, so 27 of them are supposedly working from home or not working at all, or are drawing pay and waiting for... Administration basically talks about all the administrative requirements which need to be done.

'G' stands for one of the most important aspects, which are unfortunately ignored several times in organizations and that are *Ghadi Milao*. What that implies is... If I am an infantry commander who is going to launch an attack at my target, let's say, at first light, which is 6 o'clock in the morning. Before I launch my attack, I want that complete area to be softened, as we say, by artillery fire, and I want the firing to start from 5:50 to 6 o'clock. For 10 minutes, I want intense firing on that target. As soon as the firing lifts, when the troops there are badly damaged and dazed, then I launch the attack. Now, you can imagine what could go wrong if my watch and my artillery commander's watch is off by just one minute. In that one minute, I will launch the attack and they will be firing, still firing. So, it's extremely important to synchronize our timelines. Time lining, I think, is extremely important but often ignored, especially when you are looking at large enterprises which have many moving parts.

So, once again Z: *Zameeni Nishan*, K: *Khabar*, I: *Iraada*, T: *Tareeka*, B: *Bandobast*, A: Administration, G: *Ghadi Milao*. Now, if you just remember this acronym in the back of your head, then whether it's a talk that you are going to do, whether it's a strategy paper you are going to write, whether it's just collecting your thoughts together, whether you want to do an exercise of this nature that you are doing, you would have a fair point-by-point thinking in your head. More importantly, your team will know, so your admin guy will know that my turn will start after *Bandobast* is over. After B is over, my turn will start and I, therefore, need to pay attention from this point onwards or I need to factor in for these troops to task. So, it's a very ordered mechanism. This framework can be used, as I mentioned, from a section of 10 men right up to an army of half a million men.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: For me the biggest takeaway from this piece was the point around Intent. In several organizations, processes flow down but the "Why behind the what" is lost in the communication. Ensuring that we don't lose track of communicating the intent in the rush to driving outcomes is critical in establishing a resilient culture. I remember reading an HBS case study about how the staff of the Taj Hotels took charge and did the right thing when 26/11 happened. That can only happen if leaders over-invest in communicating the intent across the organization.

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End of nugget transcription

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- 03.00 Capt. Raghu Raman - The Full Conversation
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- 03.02 Capt. Raghu Raman - How the army looks for potential
- 03.03 Capt. Raghu Raman - Transitioning across cultures
- 03.04 Capt. Raghu Raman - Transitioning from the army to the corporate world
- 03.05 Capt. Raghu Raman - Establishing a common language in the army
- 03.06 Capt. Raghu Raman - Z-KITBAG: Communication lessons from the army
- 03.07 Capt. Raghu Raman - Transmitting intent down the chain
- 03.08 Capt. Raghu Raman - Building culture — Lessons from the army
- 03.09 Capt. Raghu Raman - Building grit
- 03.10 Capt. Raghu Raman - Driving mindfulness and deep work
- 03.11 Capt. Raghu Raman - In summary — Playing to potential

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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