

The Role of Meaningfulness at Work and its Impact on Turnover Intention: The Case of the Royal Malaysian Navy

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Abstract: The Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) utilizes core principles to ensure organizational engagement. The Core Values of Honour, Loyalty, Courage, and Pride must be regarded with a sense of honesty and significance in order to build a sense of meaning to navy people. The major concern of the study is that navy people prefer to leave the service earlier than retirement age. This concept paper proposes how well professional experience, such as work meaningfulness affects turnover intention among navy personnel. This paper focuses on the Navy enlisted, the military personnel in the Malaysian Armed Forces. The study proposed that by fostering work meaningfulness, the employee would be more loyal and thus reducing their intention to leave.

Key words: *Meaningfulness, Turnover Intention, Core Values, Royal Malaysian Navy*

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) is the military force and has been given the responsibility to safeguard the country's sovereignty and national security. Therefore, the mandate given to the RMN must be carried out with the highest sense of professionalism, which is important to ensure that the sovereignty of the country is preserved. The position of this duty is promoted only when everyone adopts a core value of identity from the beginning of their employment with the RMN.

As an organization, the RMN is just like other organizations in a sense that it tries to look after its administrative, logistics, and properties as well as performing its function of defending the country. Because of the singularity of its service, the human capital is one of the essentials in developing human resources for future planning [1] besides the conventional function and retaining its assets in the highest of readiness toward the world-class navy. The RMN comprises of three principal branches; executive, supply, and engineering for the officer and men. The executives are the RMN sailors who are responsible for the activities of the RMN, including safety navigation of ships, gunnery

operations, and communication. The supply covers the financial, logistical, and procurement aspects such as rations while the engineering division is responsible for managing the RMN asset maintenance plan.

The military service is distinct from that of other civil servants in Malaysia. While public servants are expected to serve until retirement age, military officers and others rank have the option of leaving the service after 10 years of service (without a pension and a short-term service) or before the age of 60. The employee would opt for mandatory retirement of 60. However, these regulars have the option of filing for early retirement after they have clocked up for 21 years of service to which they are eligible to earn a pension (50 percent from their last pay). As part of the career progression, the people of the Navy are using a merit system that carefully weighs every personal capacity [2]. As a result, the RMN Human Resource relatively knows which navy people are going to be promoted to senior rank. However, there have been occasions where their plight has not materialized because some of the navy people have opted to retire sooner than initially expected. It will therefore reflect the enhanced operational capability due to a shortage of military experts.

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In addition to this, maintaining human talent is important since the loss of talent will result to negative effects for the organization. Previous studies indicate that workers have chosen to leave an organization due to different reasons such as continuous career development, better chances of advancement, job dissatisfaction, work/family disparity, compensation and salaries, promotion of reward, lack of good management, work suitability, and personality [3] [4].

In the context of the Royal Malaysian Navy, high attrition rates have significantly affected the entire organization. The Royal Malaysian Navy has spent considerable time and resources to train their new staff and replace those who have been terminated or have opted early retirement. According to the most recent statistics, a large number of people in the Royal Malaysian Navy have opted to leave earlier than their retirement term. Therefore, several navy people who lack meaningful work experience will demonstrate a lower job satisfaction and enthusiasm due to the additional responsibilities given to them [4]. Since there is lack of empirical evidence to prove this, this study provides a conceptual framework that might be helpful in conducting future research. This concept paper will discuss the significance of meaningfulness in the working environment and turnover intention and how it is correlated with important outcomes for the organization and personal benefit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TURNOVER INTENTION

Several study discussions on voluntary employee turnover rate (changing workers voluntarily) have been deliberated in more than 2,000 articles [5]. In 1958, James March and Herbert Simon were the first scholars to place their voluntary turnover intentions on the map as a significant topic [5]. Mobley [6] sets out a strong work satisfaction model that is close to Simon's previously mentioned job satisfaction model [5]. The retention of workers in the human resource management field has become a very important issue [7]. It has become the standard for companies or organizations to make their turnover plans known to prospects [8]. The working term 'turnover intention' is addressed based on fundamentals, for example, the intention to look for a new or different job [9].

Early retirement refers to the decision to make a full exit from a long period of organizational work

before the compulsory retirement age [10]. According to Dorn and Sousa-Poza [11], the early retirement decision is due to a relative preference for leisure versus a feasible alternative or continue to work which indicates the end of a full-time career. The decision involves a series of considerations and concerns timing [12].

Hulin & Hanisch, [13] suggested that a pre-retirement or work-retirement group with less occupational control and dissatisfaction should be described as more likely to retire early because work is unsatisfactory, and retirement is presumed to be satisfactory. There is clear evidence that employees tend to opt for early retirement if they are dissatisfied with the working environment [14]. It is therefore assumed that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and early retirement intent among navy people. Studies by Jaiswal [14] reported that work stress had a serious impact on early retirement intentions. This may be true in the context of the Royal Malaysian Navy where the nature of their work requires a high level of concentration, quality, standards, and disciplines that create a stressful environment for their personnel. Thus, it is assumed that there is a significant relationship between the stress of employment and the intention to make early retirement decisions. Meyer [15] argued that the early retirement decision is being pursued as an alternative to provide the opportunity to search for another employment in other organizations. This is true if an employee already has a better job offer so that he/she can opt for early retirement from the current position so that he/she can move on to a new job [16]. As far as the retirement of the RMN system concerns, staff may request for early retirement once they have completed 21 years of service. Therefore, if he/she gets better job offers, he/she can apply for early retirement from the service. It is therefore assumed that there is a significant relationship between the alternatives to work and the intention to make early retirement decisions between the RMN personal of the RMN.

The aforementioned issues concern the matter of loyalty to the organization. Smith, Holtom, and Michell [17] have reported that organizational commitment influences the decision to stay. The nature of the RMN requires its personnel to take the oath of their loyalty to the country [18]. This is true for employees who have been in service for 21 years.

TURNOVER INTENTION IN MILITARY PERSPECTIVE

Turnover is defined as when individuals depart an organization on their own volition or are expelled involuntarily [19], while turnover intentions and intent to leave are ways of thinking where the individual has the intention to quit from their current job for personal development opportunities [20]. In the military context, the turnover intention is a transitional relationship between thought processes and behavioural action may be observed [21]. Within this context, the connection between turnover intention (i.e., thought processes) and voluntary turnover (i.e., behavioural action) are rather evident. A study from the Department of Defence in Australia demonstrated that one of the reasons for this is the emotional burnout experienced by the military people. According to the authors, individuals can deal with the problem by either participating in coping strategies or to engage in withdrawal, which included the desire to leave [22]. This problem is heightened if military personnel do not feel connected to their job or organization [23]. Thus, in the military context, this increases the probability of a turnover of qualified military personnel or their decision to leave before retirement. Considering the high cost of recruiting and training, it is a worthwhile attempt to investigate factors that lead to the decisions of individuals to leave the Navy.

In this paper, the turnover intention among the navy personnel in the Royal Malaysian Navy is of critical importance and there is a need to understand the issue and establish targeted policies aimed at promoting the preservation of current general practice.

MEANINGFUL WORK PRACTISE

A sense of meaning is known to be a central component of human well-being and has been related to other psychological and physical health variables [24]. Meaningfulness of work or in other terms, meaningful work practice is to address the relations between the nature of work and significance at work, illustrated by the principles of employee dedication and commitment as organizational and contextual variables [25]. This approach is important because, when individual's motivation and personal mechanism are connected, the desire to achieve the organizational objectives will be formed. Therefore, when looking at the motivational factors, it is important to consider both the

individual and the organizational factors that affect their development process. Researchers have also consistently connected meaning at work to career variables that represent a commitment to one's career and willingness to make extra efforts [26]. Meaningfulness at work, for example, is positively associated with career and organizational commitment, as well as with an underlying motivation for work. Individuals who experience having meaningful work are more likely to sacrifice time and pay for their careers and hold their organizations to higher expectations. They also have lower withdrawal intentions, absenteeism rates, disciplinary problems, and higher levels of cognitive and affective work efficiency [27]. In short, meaningful work tends to be important both to personal well-being and to variables linked to job efficiency for the employee.

The element of meaningfulness also has a positive effect on other components of our life. Intellectual levels, social skills, mental wellbeing, physical health, and inspiration are just some of the many facets of our lives that are enhanced when we live with meaningfulness [28]. Meaningfulness is the value around intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and individual predicts the fulfilment and consequences of the desired conduct before he or she performs the desirable acts [25]. It is clear that both structured intent at work, the need for connectedness, and relationship values contribute to our meaningfulness at work. Therefore, it is probably true that individuals who find meaning in their work experience have a greater sense of meaningfulness in their work than the person who does not. So, employees who spend time on expected events and feel a greater degree of fit with their positions will appreciate the significance of their tasks better, which will lead to higher levels of engagement [29] [30].

Throughout most of our developmental years and life expectancy, a sense of meaning has also had a profound effect on many other aspects of our lives. Having meaning in life enhances many aspects of life in the future for motivation and satisfaction [28]. A sense of meaning also can be described as an acceptance and support how one feels from different groups. Failure to have meaningful relationships can trigger feelings of loneliness, job dissatisfaction, social isolation, and depression. Spirituality and a sense of meaning have arisen as a response to the lack of job security, as well as other factors [25]. Thus, a sense of feeling of meaningfulness will precede the need for social connectedness and the

satisfaction derived from positive and enjoyable social experiences within the working environment. Their needs for emotional support and a sense of security are met by idealistic relationships that often continue into the predictable future [31]. Contact with other people is necessary in order to fulfil the social need of meaningfulness. When we feel wanted and accepted by a group, then we can consider it as meaningful relationship [32]. The scholars suggest that individuals are more sociable than those who are unsociable, and those who are more socially adept are better able to develop new bonds. Kelly [33] believes that people who are low in meaningfulness may have reflected low job satisfaction. According to Mahmood [34], meaningful experience or job satisfaction is described as the positive emotional reaction people have when they are performing their jobs. Motivation and meaningfulness are necessary because it is essential to keep a person energetic. Therefore, the concept of meaningful work practice does have similarity to the RMN Core Value which is a tool for RMN Human Resources in developing the character of navy people and become a code of conduct for producing good human capital.

RMN CORE VALUE

The RMN Core Value acts as a defining structure for instilling RMN culture [35]. The core principles are practiced by the Navy in performing their job while serving the nation. All navy members should have the core principle of justice present in their minds irrespective of where they are. The navy's core values should be incorporated into officer and sailor to be an indication of personal and professional behavior. The Navy should internalize the following core values: *Honour*, *Loyalty*, *Courage*, and *Pride*. The *Honour* is to perform the duty entrusted with sincerity, honesty, responsibility, trusted, and professionalism for the betterment of the organization, *Loyalty* is comradeship and unwavering allegiance to the organization, service and country, *Courage* is the heroic spirit to face adversity or temptation, upholding the truth and being responsible for the action and *Pride* is to serve Navy proudly with commitment and dedication [36].

The Core Value is a source of spiritual power to form the mindset, style, and living environment in support of the Mission and Vision of the RMN. These values should be used at all times and in all forms while performing the task regardless of

whether they execute their job onboard ship or shore establishment. This value deals with behavior, attitude, and emotion in molding an individual to become a good sailor. The real importance of this core value will direct Navy personnel to regulate their self-image in order to perform well in their tasks and not to interfere with others. Producing good quality soldiers is difficult without the core values.

The Core Value affects the navy people in the sense that they are experiencing high levels of meaningfulness at work and morale. Getting these values is able to make the sailors feel more appreciated and pleased while doing their job. Following the implementation of the principles, there should be the internalization of the element of honesty, courage, loyalty, and pride within the RMN itself. With the adoption of the four core principles, this will be carried out as early as joining the service and will be continuous throughout service. By gaining awareness about this core value, it will have a cultural influence on navy people's life. The core values of the navy are shown in Figure 1 [36]:

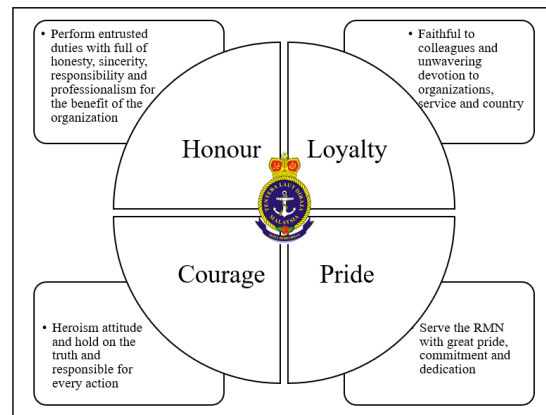


Figure 1. Royal Malaysian Navy Core Values.

According to the previous Chief of the Navy, Admiral Tan Sri Ahmad Kamarulzaman bin Hj Ahmad Badaruddin, the four core values are the standards for success in the organization. This is because these four core principles are used as a precautionary measure in situations that break the law, such as the disciplinary case. These four core values are also making anti-graft initiatives much more effective [37]. This sense of life is the foundation of navy people in structuring their culture and traditions. It can be shown that the way the RMN has been performing is exemplified if only one person respects all four core principles of this RMN. Furthermore, the use of the RMN

core values to improve patriotism and the dignity of RMN people should be continued to prevent disciplinary cases and unnecessary accidents [38].

UNDERPINNING THEORIES

JOB DEMAND RESOURCES (JD-R) THEORY

JD-R Theory incorporates the ideas of four influential models, namely two-factor theory [39], the work characteristics model [40], the demand-control model [41], and the effort-reward imbalance model [42]. The JD-R theory has been developed, which represents an extension of the labour demand – resource model [43] and is influenced by job design and work stress theories. While work design theories have often ignored the position of job stressors or demands, job stress models have generally ignored the motivational capacity of job resources. JD-R Theory incorporates the two study patterns and discusses how the demands of work and resources have a special and multiplicative impact on job stress and motivation. Furthermore, JD-R theory postulates the existence of inverse causality: in which burned-out employees result in more job demands, while engaged workers use their job tools to remain engaged [44].

The number of studies using the job demands-resources (JD-R) model [43] has risen significantly over the last decade. Job burnout, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, connectedness, and work engagement have all been predicted by the model [44]. Therefore, the JD-R theory is able to comprehend, explain, and make predictions about employee well-being (e.g., burnout, wellness, motivation, engagement) and work effectively in the organization. In the context of RMN, the demand at work such as long working hours, dangerous conditions, pressure, among others, is very challenging for the employee to absorb. Meanwhile, the resources, in this case, meaningfulness at work, indicate that how a person feels at work act as a resource to energize a person to feel more dedicated to work. Thus, meaning as a resource have an effect on the core values.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This concept paper aims to explain how meaningfulness can alter the result of the relationship within factor influences of navy people to the turnover intention. Figure 2 below indicates a conceptual model of the profound

effect of work meaningfulness on RMN core values and turnover intention.

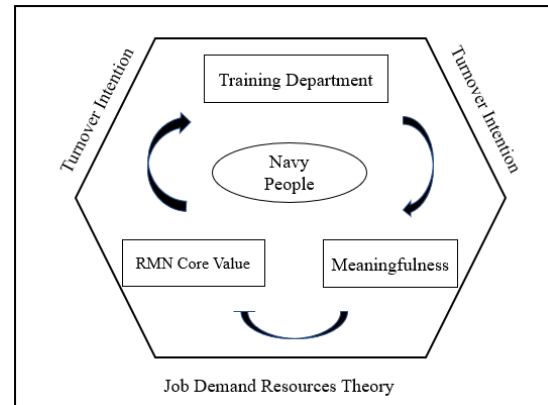


Figure 2. Conceptual Model

Job Demand Resources Theory weighs the income and costs of Navy people remaining with the Navy. On the one hand, long working hours, being away from family, and high-pressure act as the demand required at work. This in turn would cause employee to think about leaving the organization. However, the presence of work meaningfulness provides a resource that could heightened positive experience at work, and subsequently causes employee to stay. Thus, by stressing the importance of meaningfulness in the workplace, the expense of employees will be minimized and the incentive for employees to retain themselves within the company will be improved. Additionally, this will cause employee to internalize RMN core values and reduce the number of navy people involving with unethical behavior as military personal and increase the determination to become a good sailor.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The presence of RMN core value and a sense of meaningful work practice would hope to increase the level of commitment and reduce the number of turnover intentions for the navy people. This concept focuses on the behaviour, attitude, and culture of the navy in producing the right man for the right job. The full internalization of the RMN Core Value has observed that navy people might change their mindset to become a better employee with the opportunity given. They will be looking at the positive side while understanding the rule and regulations that are inculcated to them since they join the navy in the early stages.

Generally, this concept of paper is important to the RMN Training Center by providing further

hypotheses development by considering the JD-R model. The implication is that, with the results of future research, effective training can be given to the navy people at the early stages of their careers. Training could include of the improvement of assessment and evaluation management in the training system. This conceptual paper also could benefits the trainers in the way that it helps them to understand the intended procedures and practices for training achievement. One of which, to instil meaningful work practice in their sailors. Thus, it is hoped that this approach can mitigate the problem solving among navy people throughout their career in order to make them feel motivated about the organization. Additionally, the RMN core value can be indeed fully internalized. The findings of this concept paper will assist the Training Management Department to improve the implementation of the training approach and improve the motivation among the military personnel. Furthermore, the success in the assessment of measuring the level of meaningfulness will assist the RMN in managing human resource and training effectively in line with the Naval Transformation 15 to 5 to be a credible Navy. In addition, it will enhance the training institution's operational capability and benefit the RMN as a whole.

Meanwhile, this concept of paper brings an effort to prevent and improve discipline that has always taken place and intensified from time to time as to ensure that the level of discipline of its military personnel is at its highest level. Therefore, due to this concern, the importance of meaningfulness is emphasized to achieve high job satisfaction among RMN personnel. Future research is recommended to further analyse based on the concept given for RMN personal or other military wings and the other security workforces in Malaysia. The effectiveness and productivity of an organization very much depended on its staff. It is not possible to develop an organization without considering improving their employee's experience. Organizations made up of highly motivated employees who experience meaningful work practice are most likely to be more successful and effective than any other organizations.

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