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Trainee engagement in the Portuguese Navy

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Abstract

It is assumed that promoting engagement in training may shape the effects of organizational resources over performance, well-being and quality of life in general, thus benefitting not only the individuals, but organizations as well. The present study aims to analyze the differences in engagement regarding personal and context factors of trainees attending the Training Courses for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS). The study methodology made use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002), the Assessment Scale for Trainee Engagement in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, 2014), as well as the Assessment Scale for Trainee Self-concept in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, in press). The sample was comprised of 149 trainees from the CFS of the Portuguese Navy. The result analysis allowed the finding of relationships between trainee engagement and context and personal variables. There was an intention of getting directions to support the action of the Portuguese Navy in creating a compromise between the individual and the organization by promoting motivation, as well as by engaging its human resources in learning situations and work realization.

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1. Introduction

Student engagement is beneficial to individuals and organizations alike (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). To individuals, it plays a fundamental role in promoting student's health, leads to positive emotions and attitudes regarding work, increases intrinsic motivation, generates greater identification of the subject to their activities, is

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related to positive proactive behaviors and performance excellence, encourages learning new resources, fostering self-efficacy. According to Appleton, Christenson and Furlong (2008) “the importance of student engagement with school is recognized by educators, as is the observation that far too many students are bored, unmotivated, and uninvolved, that is, disengaged from the academic and social aspects of school life” (p. 369). To organizations, engagement makes it possible to increase positive organizational behaviors, guides towards the prosecution of human resources management policies (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007), and contributes to organization success since it is related to positive results at work such as organizational commitment, high performance quality, productivity, low absenteeism, satisfaction and loyalty, lack of desire to change profession and safety (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Engagement is seen as a type of motivated action, that is, energized, directed, sustained and highly related to the trainee’s beliefs (Frade & Veiga, 2013). It is thereby important to understand the differences in engagement regarding those beliefs, more specifically self-concept and the relevant sociodemographic variables, so that one may stimulate motivation and engagement among the military personnel in training.

2. Method

The study is presented below, starting with sample subjects, followed procedures and presentation of the instruments applied to assess the engagement and self-concept of the trainees from the Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS).

2.1. Sample

This study considered a representative heterogeneous and non-probability sample of the 149 trainees attending the Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS) which started in 2011 and 2012. This population consists of young adults, ages ranging from 25 to 38 (average age of 30,87 and standard deviation of 2,98), of both genders (92,6% male and 7,4% female). Joining the Portuguese Navy meant leaving the residence area to 53,7% of the trainees, having 45% maintained the same residence area. 20,8% of the trainees live on-base, in the barracks, since their residence area is located over 120 km, and they may therefore make use of navy facilities. The Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class is composed of several classes with seventeen specialties (artilleryman, radar operator, torpedo man’s mate, machinist’s mate, mechanical automobile driver, electrician’s mate, ship’s serviceman, mess management specialist, marine, gunner’s mate, clerk, electromechanical technician, operations specialist, driver and services).

2.2. Procedure

After research approval by the Chief of Staff of the Portuguese Navy the course directors were asked for permission to conduct the survey. Once the survey was authorized, the data were collected outside working hours, immediately after classes or inside the classrooms, according to the availability of the trainers accompanying the process and without prejudice to the training. The students were told that cooperation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured. Before completing the questionnaires, the survey’s objectives were explained and some particularities of the questionnaire clarified.

2.3. Instruments

To develop the present study three scales were used: two of them to assess engagement and one to assess self-concept. One of the engagement scales considered was the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The results from the UWES psychometric analysis, adapted to the Portuguese military context, verify that this instrument presents factorial validity, with the extraction of two significant dimensions (identified considering the original scale – dedication and vigor (DeVi)): sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride

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