

Does Peer Influence play a part in the Decision-Making Process with regards to Retention and Turnover of Personnel in the Irish Naval Service?

David O'Flynn

People live in an environment whereby the influence of those around them shapes their outlook on life and has a direct impact on their decision making. As an enlisted person in the Naval Service, the sphere of influence changes with age and experience, ranging from the training staff and immediate colleagues on enlistment, through to charismatic peers and on to family, partners and offspring as private life begins to out influence professional life. This research examines these influences and examines how they have affected the decision-making processes of a specific focus group with respect to their careers. This ranged from the decision they made with regards to their initial branches, through to changing branches and ultimately into terminating their careers in the Naval Service.

A qualitative approach was undertaken in the form of semi-structured interviews. The choice of qualitative methodology was guided by the aim to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of individuals navigating their careers within the Naval Service. In total six interviews took place. The interviewees included two subject matter experts, two serving personnel and two former members of the Naval Service. The gender balance was maintained throughout the research with male and female respondents equally represented.

The research findings were split into deductive and inductive analysis and illuminated several key areas and opportunities for improvement regarding the management of personnel within the Naval Service. This includes training in critical thinking for personnel, better informing personnel of the options and opportunities available to them in a non-biased manner, and the utility of a civilian career guidance counsellor in the formation.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Irish Defence Forces are currently undergoing significant challenges with respect to the number of personnel joining and remaining in service, with the Naval Service being the organisation affected most acutely (O'Riordan, 2023). Efforts to date have largely focused on increasing the pay and bettering the conditions of the members in order to increase the rate of retention (Department of Defence, 2023). Considerable investment has been made in the marketing of the Defence Forces as an attractive career (Foxye, 2023), targeting both potential members and their gate keepers. While exit interviews have been conducted, the use of the information garnered from these interviews may be tarnished as, in general, people do not tend

to have a vested interest in an organisation from which they intend to leave. Therefore, an exploration as to the motivations and reasons for leaving the Naval Service is warranted.

Singh and Sharma (2015) propose two models that affect employee turnover and retention: content and process models. Content models relate to 'why' an employee leaves an organisation, whereas process models focus on how employees have arrived at their decision to leave. There have been a number of theses (O'Regan 2020; Courtney 2020; Smyth 2022), in recent years that have focused on the content model, but this article will focus more on the process model with a specific emphasis on peer influence during the decision-making process.

A significant body of literature (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Helms et al., 2014; Rosenberg, 2011) has studied social contagion, or peer influence, transmitting positive and negative behaviours. It could be implied that the behaviour of people preparing to depart the Irish Naval Service has a negative impact on the decision-making of personnel who have not yet decided to stay or leave. The following sections will first explore the various models of decision making that are prevalent in the literature followed by examining the phenomena of social contagion in group environments and the modalities in which people observe, learn, and imitate behaviours.

In order to provide a scope to understand the problem within clearly defined parameters, this research will be limited to enlisted personnel of the Naval Service with fewer than ten years' experience as the highest risk level for turnover (Hartnett et al., 2016). This will include personnel who have left the Naval Service having completed ten years or less service.

Aim

The overarching question to be answered by this paper is: what is the decision-making process that an individual works through in order to conclude that leaving the Naval Service is the correct decision for them and does peer influence play a significant role in this decision-making process? Logically this question will need to be examined from three separate perspectives, reflecting the three stages in the career of a service person.

Initially, what decision-making process was used by the civilian deciding to pursue a career in the Naval Service? This question will be examined primarily through existing literature and will be leveraged as a method of introducing peer influence during the semi-structured interviews. The balance of peer influence and personal autonomy is highly personal and therefore peer influence at this juncture may play a part due to a family history or due to friends already serving within the Defence Forces. Alternatively, peer influence may be irrelevant and is it from a more practical standpoint such as the socio-economic environment and inherent job security or, from an idealist perspective, due to a desire to serve one's country?

The second perspective concerns the factors that influence an individual's decision to stay in the Naval Service. Again, this could be due to reasons related to peer or social influence, such as the camaraderie or a sense of familiarity with, or loyalty to the organisation. Perhaps the motivation is simpler, such as being afraid to change, or that the stage of life within which an individual finds themselves requires a stable and reliable income, such as having mortgages or children.

In the third and final perspective of the research, the question of why personnel choose to leave the Naval Service will be answered. Is it to pursue greater or different opportunities, is it because they have reached a ceiling in their careers, is it because the pay does not meet their needs or is it because that is what they see everyone else doing? The crux of this article is to

examine whether the negative influence of others has a disproportionately influential effect on the decision-making process of personnel, who otherwise, having weighed up the positives and negatives in a methodical manner, would choose to stay in the Naval Service.

PART TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to De Smet et al. (2022) in their global survey of employees, forty percent of people are planning to leave their jobs pre-maturely; that is, within the following three to six months. Their quantitative survey numbered 13,382 employees across six countries and sixteen industries. Of the people who leave the workforce, almost three quarters believe that they will be able to find a job that has better pay and conditions when they decide to return to the workforce. De Smet et al. (2022) proposed five distinct personas of employee: the traditionalist, the 'do-it-yourselfer', the idealist, the caregivers, and the relaxers. The persona that most fits the profile targeting by military recruitment is that of the idealist. People in this group tend to fall within the new understanding of adolescence, up to 25 years old (Steinberg, 2015) and value flexibility, career development, advancement potential, meaningful work and, most apt for this research, supportive co-workers.

In their report on the geographic diversity of military recruiting in the United States, Goldberg et al. (2018) conducted research into the reasons why people joined the military. The results of their research suggest that a principal factor in the recruitment of military personnel was an influential veteran presence in the community. In their recent online article, Barno, D. and Bensahel, N. (2023) point to several factors that have significantly affected the propensity for military service in the US military. They point to the low involvement in American troops fighting an impending terrorist threat and the low levels of unemployment coupled with the resultant increased wages in the private sector. This mirrors the current state with the well-documented downturn in personnel joining the Irish Naval Service (O'Riordan, 2023).

The 2015 Defence Forces Climate Survey (Hartnett et al., 2016) was commissioned in response to the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG) III 2014 report which recommended that the 2008 Climate Survey be revisited. In the 2015 survey, the authors considered it necessary to include a section on peer support, which did not feature in the 2008 iteration. This reflects their reading of the literature indicating the importance of peer support in the context of stress, satisfaction, and commitment. The findings of this report showed that those with less than five years' service and more than 21 years of service were most satisfied with work while personnel with between six and ten years of service being the least satisfied (Hartnett et al., 2016). This six-to-ten-year grouping were the least satisfied with the Organisational Justice aspect of the Defence Forces. Organisational justice, first proposed by Thibaut and Walker (1975) includes informational justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and the overall organisational integrity. At the time of the survey, this service length grouping would have joined the Defence Forces between 2005 and 2009. The authors of the survey suggest that this groups general dissatisfaction may be due to the changes implemented for personnel enlisting after 17 February 2006, whereby they must reach the rank of Sergeant, or Petty Officer (PO) for the Naval Service, to continue past 21 years of service. It is unclear from their findings if this is purely due to the change in conditions or if it is a natural slump in enthusiasm for a career following five years of service. A new Climate Survey is currently overdue and the results of this should give a more definitive answer to this question. A key point to consider in this respect is if the recent government announcement on the increase to the mandatory retirement age for all Defence Forces personnel (Department of Defence, 2024) will have a positive influence on this same grouping in the forthcoming Climate Survey.

With regards to peer support, the survey indicated that those of Private and Junior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) ranks felt the least supported by peers, but still maintained an overall positive experience. The survey showed that 89.6 percent of respondents felt obliged to help others and 88.4 percent felt 'obliged to promote a positive attitude around others' (Hartnett et al., 2016, p.97). The survey found a strong preference for personnel to raise issues with friends with a result of 4.0. The implication here is that if an individual is considering leaving their career, then they will be most likely to consult a friend or peer in their decision-making process.

It is clear from this literature that peer influence plays a significant role in an individual's decision to join and remain in the military. However, to understand how the role of peer influence in human decision making has originated, an examination of the evolutionary role of peer support is required.

Decision-Making Models

This section will examine several decision-making models and common biases in decision making, critiquing the existing literature, and examining which are most apt to the decision to stay or leave a career in the Naval Service. Decision-making models can be sorted into three distinct categories albeit with a degree of overlap: organisational, analytical, and individual.

Organisational or Group Decision Making

The 'Garbage Can' model of decision making, as posited by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) imagines a much messier model than some of the other models which will be discussed in the following paragraphs, where problems, solutions, and decision makers come together randomly. However, it relies on a mix of problems and a number of decision makers to be functioning as part of what they term organised anarchies and so is not relevant to individual decision making.

Similarly, De Bono's (1999) 'Six Thinking Hats' is essentially a tool to aid retaining focus during group decision making by suggesting that the group all address a problem from the same perspective, or while wearing the same-coloured hat, simultaneously. Clearly, decision making at a management level can have significant consequences to a business and therefore analytical methods of making decisions were examined and developed.

Analytical and Rational Decision Making

It could be argued that a purely analytical approach to a decision is likely to yield the most favourable result. Perrin (2008) describes several methods for arriving at a methodically analysed solution. The Decision Tree models are used in project management when there are multiple outcomes possible. Decision tree analysis involves creating a visual representation known as a decision tree. This graphical depiction showcases different viable solutions for addressing a specific problem, helping identify the most efficient courses of action. Nodes in the decision tree represent tests on attributes, while branches depict potential alternative outcomes.

The above-described methodology is very clinical and is not normally conducted by humans who are making decisions without the aid of a tabulated decision tree. The analytical decision maker would be more likely to adapt a rational decision-making model (Harren, 1979). Rational Decision making consist of the six steps of identifying a problem, identifying decision criteria, weighing the criteria, listing alternatives, evaluating the alternative and selecting the optimum option. This model assumes that decision makers are completely rational, have all the necessary information, and can objectively evaluate alternatives.

Tversky and Kahneman (1974) consider the rational decision-making model to be too axiomatic due to it not taking cognisance of the subjective probabilities in making a judgment.

Individual Decision Making

As an alternative to analytical decision making, the intuitive or recognitional model of decision making as proposed by Klein (1993) is a model that places an emphasis on the past experiences of the decision maker to recognise and classify a situation, which would then require a response comparable to previous similar situations. Klein (1993) terms this type of decision making as the Recognition-Primed Decision (RPD) model. In this type of model, the decision maker experiences a situation and compares it to a familiar situation. They then weigh the plausible goals, relevant cues, expectations, and possible courses of action. When this information is relatively clear to them, they will mentally simulate the courses of action in their heads to ascertain any weakness, making alterations as required before implementing the favoured action. As may seem clear, this type of decision-making model is generally employed in action scenarios where quick decisions are desirable and therefore is unlikely to be the decision-making model used to decide whether to continue in one's career. It is, however, appreciated that intuition and instincts play a role in an individual's decision to leave, but it is unlikely to play a primary role without some form of event taking place to warrant a quick decision to leave.

Tversky and Kahneman (1974) present three differing strategies of behavioural decision making and judgement. These are representativeness, availability and adjustment and anchoring.

Representativeness is simply an observer making a judgement of the probability of something being true based on its similarity to another item or event with which the observer is familiar. For example, the observer would likely consider it more plausible that a heavily muscled man who exhibits aggressive behaviour is more likely to enjoy contact sports than to enjoy practicing crochet. Interestingly Tversky and Kahneman (1974) point out that test subjects who were using this type of judgement model, ignored any mathematical probability that should bias their inference. They term this confidence of a result based on representativeness rather than any statistical probability the illusion of validity.

Availability refers to how a person may make a decision or judgement based on how easily they retrieve memories that are relevant to the task. The ease with which they retrieve these memories is affected by their familiarity with the subject matter and the salience or impact of previously observed occurrences.

Finally, adjustment and anchoring is a process whereby people will estimate a result based on an initial starting or anchoring point and make an adjustment from this to their estimation of a result. The initial starting point is the most significant factor in the accuracy of this assessment. For example, if an individual was to be asked if an occurrence was more or less likely to happen than a 70 percent chance and subsequently asked if an occurrence was more or less likely to happen than 30 percent, then the former answer would be more likely to be a much higher percentage estimate than the latter.

Bounded Rationality as proposed by Simon (1972) is a model that considers the limitations of the decision maker both in terms of knowledge and their cognitive ability. This approach is focused on decision making in terms of economics. Essentially it suggests that people do not have the time or ability to find all the pertinent information in relation to a choice they must make and therefore decide on what is a satisfactory conclusion as opposed to what may be the optimum conclusion. The time constraint is not usually a factor for someone who may be contemplating moving on from a career and so it would seem that this model of decision making has little to offer this paper.

However, Kahneman (2003) revisited this model and drew on his own extensive research and pointed to intuition as a key aspect of decision making. In this work he distinguishes between

reasoning (System 2), as used when calculating math problems, and intuition (System 1), which are thoughts that come to mind without any conscious effort to access them. He gives the example of a simple math problem: "A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?" The intuitive answer is ten cents, but the reasoned answer is five cents. Kahneman (2003) posits that System 2 thinking is involved in all judgments regardless of if they originate in impressions garnered or deliberate reasoning. Could it be that people are relying more on System 1 thinking when deciding to leave their careers, when Kahneman would suggest that System 2 thinking would be much more appropriate? Is System 1 thinking more prone to the influence of peers?

The influence of peers can be observed in various decision-making models, particularly in those that recognise the importance of social factors, group dynamics, and interpersonal relationships, even if a specific model does not explicitly highlight it. Social dynamics, group norms, and interpersonal relationships can play a role in shaping individual decisions, and these factors may interact with different decision-making models in practice.

Social and Biological Evolution

As discussed by Giphart and van Vught (2018), practically all primate species live in groups. Gorillas, who branched from present day humanity nine million years ago, live in groups of about ten individuals. Chimpanzees, who in turn branched from humanity approximately six million years ago, live in groups of 30 to 50 individuals. The ancestors of modern humanity roamed the savannahs in Africa for millions of years in groups of 100 to 150 individuals living a tribal hunter gatherer lifestyle. Homo-sapiens then appeared approximately 200,000 years ago and ultimately emerged as the dominant homo species (Marean, 2015).

From a societal perspective, the discovery of agriculture, approximately 12,000 years ago (National Geographic Society, 2022), perpetrated a sea change in the societal norms. As farms became established, people began to settle, infant mortality rates dropped and birth rates increased, resulting in a rapid population increase, fuelled by the ability to store food. This then led to the creation of villages, followed by towns and cities.

Biologically, it could be said that we are still adapted to tribes of 100 to 150, with families of up to seven, whereas today, cities have populations of millions, meaning that people generally will, albeit subconsciously, identify with friend and colleague groups of a pre-historical scale (Hill and Dunbar, 2003) with peer groups of four to nine people being the most effective (Corr  g   and Michinov, 2021) (Amir et al., 2018), mirroring the pre-historical family albeit with the internet now providing for a rapid expansion of an individual's social network, with the resultant increase in the diameter of the sphere of peer influence (Jeon and Goodson 2015 as cited in Lee and Lee 2021). While the brain appears to have evolved at a relatively slow rate, other aspects of human evolution have taken an evolutionary leap in recent times.

Steinberg (2015) points out that adolescence lasts longer now than ever before, but society has not adjusted to react to this phenomenon in a way that would allow for the adolescent brain to mature within reasonable boundaries of freedom. There is an abundance of supporting literature (e.g. Sawyer et al., 2018 and Stetka, 2017) to his expansion of the chronological zone of adolescence theory. Steinberg (2015) stresses that the adolescent brain is malleable, but concurrently vulnerable and has a zone of "proximal development" (Steinberg, 2015 p35) where brain growth can occur when pushed just beyond its capacity. The methods by which Steinberg (2015) tracks the extension of adolescence is through the breaking of the male voice and the onset of menstruation in males and females, respectively. He traces these ages to now exist as young as six to seven years of age, although some other literature (Sawyer et al.,

2018) tends closer to ten years of age. On the other end of the spectrum, he proposes that the delay in exiting adolescence is demonstrated by the delay in changing roles, such as finishing education, getting married or having children. It is a short coming in his research that he has ignored that socio-economic factors that may play an even more significant factor in the aforementioned delays. Wiik (2009) proposed that there was an inversely proportional relationship between when individuals were likely to enter into their first marriage or cohabitation and the socio-economic conditions of their childhood home, i.e. people from poorer homes got married earlier.

How individuals think during adolescence is governed by the development of their brain. The pre-frontal cortex is responsible for self-regulation, and this has not fully developed in an adolescent brain, as it is one of the newer parts of the brain, evolutionarily speaking. Conversely, the limbic system is a much older part of the brain, and this generates the emotions that require the aforementioned regulation. Being an ancient part of the brain, this develops earlier, and so adolescents find themselves in a situation where they experience emotions more intensely, without the necessary biology to self-regulate the motions. A key section of his book, from the Naval Service's perspective, is Steinberg's (2015) point on the importance of social engagement and a sense of belongingness. Essentially, he posits that the social and peer influences during adolescence can contribute greatly to personal development.

Social Contagion and Peer Influence

Social contagion can be defined as "the spread of behaviours, attitudes, and affect through crowds and other types of social aggregates from one member to another" (Martínez, Jiménez-Molina and Gerber, 2023, p.1). In his seminal work, Le Bon (2012) speaks of the changes in how an individual will process reason after becoming part of a crowd. He posits that being part of a crowd will make an individual incapable of exercising reason, even regressing to a more primitive mindset. As the book was first published in France in 1895, Le Bon did not witness the extent to which this primitive behaviour was fully realised during the Holocaust of the Second World War. However, as discussed by Beedholm & Møller (2016), this is also true of his critic Allport (1924), who posits that an individual does not change their behaviour because they are part of a crowd; instead, they feel more liberated to be themselves without fear of judgment. Freud (1921) built upon the work of Le Bon, using the even more forceful term of the primal horde. Naturally, looking at the work of Le Bon through a twenty-first-century lens exposes a significant level of racism and misogyny in keeping with the prevalent zeitgeist. Thonhauser (2022), in particular, takes considerable exception to what he considered Le Bon's elitist and racist standpoints. However, he also takes exception to Le Bon's description of the spread of sentiment through a crowd as a contagion. Many scholars (Stein, 2016; Scheler, 1973) agree with the contagion description. The literature would suggest that Le Bon was perhaps an elitist, however, his work on the psychology of crowds and how an individual may adopt the actions of an observed individual remains relevant, perhaps even more so in the current environment with many forms of social interaction that Le Bon would not have been able to consider.

Gardner and Steinberg (2005) studied the maladaptive influence of peers, with a particular emphasis on their propensity to undertake risks. Their research was conducted amongst three different age categories to allow for the maturity of the cognitive functions to be considered. They found that individuals are likelier to take risks if they are amongst peers, and their appetite for taking risks reduces with age.

Naz et al. (2014) expanded on this and suggested that while parents may play the principle initial roles in establishing morals and values, it is peers and friends that play the principal role in

career and educational decision making, particularly during adolescence. Armsden et al. (1990) attempted to draw a correlation between positive parent and peer relationships in adolescents and general good mental health.

Alvord and Grados (2005) explored how resilience may be enhanced in children and adolescence as a protective factor. Protective factors may be sub-classified into internal personal factors and external family-related and perhaps even socio-environmental factors. Personal factors include intelligence, active coping strategies, the belief in their own ability to act in ways to achieve their goals, the ability to make friends and self-regulation. External factors include competent parenting, positive peer relationships and, supportive and effective schools. Helms et al. (2014) contributed to the research through expanding the scope of peer influence from the close family and friend relationships to the influence exerted, either consciously or subconsciously by high-status, or popular, peers. A key point in this research is the way peers are perceived versus their actual behaviours. Observing adolescents, in general were found to overestimate the degree to which popular adolescents partook in maladaptive practices, such as drinking, smoking, or avoiding study.

Choukas-Bradley et al. (2015) studied the effects of prosocial suggestions by virtual peers on a sample of 304 early adolescents. Using a virtual chat room, they observed the reactions of the group's members to "peers". The researchers acted as peers to the group's members in the chatroom. The made-up peers had their social status manipulated to determine if this influenced how their prosocial messages were received. Their study suggests that a peer's social status will determine the level to which their suggestions are received. This study provides the hope of social contagion being utilised positively.

Rosenberg (2011) suggests that a social cure may exist to counter the effects of negative group behaviour. She explores case studies where positive peer influence, or the social cure, is exercised to bring about positive change in a group. This paper is particularly interested in using the social cure to encourage social bonds in large communities. The Willow Creek Community Church was finding it difficult to attract new members or what they termed a "Seeker" or "Unchurched Harry". The church leaders found that it could not reach these individuals, so they began employing small group meetings. While the groups were initially based on shared ideas, geography was a barrier to regular attendance, so the groups were instead brought together based on neighbourhood. While not everyone in the vast organisation engaged in the process, those who did almost universally reported positive results. A crucial part of the effectiveness of these small groups, according to Rosenberg (2011), was the role of peer pressure in enforcing attendance. It should be noted that adopting behaviour while in a crowd and learning behaviour through observation can be considered situationally dependent.

As pointed out by Sachs (2011) many of the examples put forth by Rosenberg (2011) were short terms successes but ultimately failures. Some of these failures were due to the strategies being government funded and failing when said funding was removed either through budget cuts or through lobbying from industry. He proceeds to make the key point that economic and political relationships can often outweigh the interpersonal relationships. While this criticism is warranted in response to Rosenberg's (2011) grandiose subtitle of "how peer pressure can transform the world" it does perhaps miss the main point of the work; specifically the power that peer influence in a social construct can impart on an individual, whether that be for good or ill. This is taken to the extreme in Rosenberg's (2011) example of how peer pressure is weaponised in order to convince young people to become terrorists. She notes that it is very unusual for a person to acquire the will to carry out a terror attack without the support of a group and that it is the loyalty to the group that creates the will to act, as per Sageman (2004). Sachs (2011) does

make an excellent point in relations to how the peer influence can create an oppressive atmosphere, regardless of the will or intention of the group. The idea of small teams is of particular interest to this research, as the constant rotation of personnel in Naval Service units makes the establishment of an esprit de corps difficult.

Social Learning Theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), examines the modes in which people learn behaviours. He proposes that people learn in two basic modes: direct and vicarious learning. Directly, people may learn by experiencing the consequences of their actions. Perhaps their action was deemed harmful, resulting in negative feedback, whether as a punishment or a correction. Alternatively, people may learn in the social environment by observing the behaviour and actions of others and noting the consequences of their behaviour, thereby vicariously learning the value of the behaviour. This was demonstrated through the now infamous bobo doll experiment¹, whereby children observed an adult physically and verbally abusing an inflatable toy resulting in the children emulating this behaviour. In the control group, where aggressive behaviours were not observed, the children did not attack the inflatable toy. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) proposes that the observer does not need to be in direct contact with the observed individual. This point becomes particularly important in the current environment, where the modes of interaction and observation have increased exponentially since the time of Bandura's thesis to include mass social media, online gaming, and exposure to a wide variety of information and entertainment both through television, and increasingly through computers and the internet.

The I/O Thesis

In his seminal work, Moskos (1977) postulates that the US Military is “moving from an institutional format to one more and more resembling that of an occupation” (p. 42). The Institutional/Organisational (I/O) Thesis, as it has become popularised, defines an institution as an almost religious movement whereby its members feel called to a higher purpose and therefore, the monetary remuneration is less of a motivational factor. Conversely, he defines an occupation as the rewarding of “prevailing monetary rewards for equivalent competencies” (p. 43). Moskos further argues that this movement towards the occupational model has had the effect of an increase in the civilianisation of the military, which has the resultant adverse effects on military morale and the regard with which the general public holds them. It is perhaps apt that the thesis has become known as the I/O thesis, given the implications of a binary nature.

The I/O thesis generated considerable interest in the military and social science community, with several pointing out the weakness in the theory as the institutional and occupational factors of an organisation do not constitute a “zero-sum relationship” (Stahl et al., 1980, p. 258). They concluded that eighty percent of the 10,687 personnel surveyed did not easily fall into an institutional or organisational bias and that there was room for “pragmatic professionalism among military members and that it can coexist with traditional values and norms associated with the military” (Stahl et al., 1980, p. 267). A key finding is that personnel with a small number of non-military friends were much more institutionally inclined than those with a high number of non-military friends, implying that there may be an element of the social contagion effect being experienced positively.

¹ As discussed by Lansford (2012), it is questionable if Bandura's experiment would have been approved by a 21st Century Institutional Review Board. In the experiment, children are exposed to aggressive behaviour which may have had a detrimental impact upon them. This runs counter to the modern ethical position of ensuring that research subjects are unharmed by their participation in the research.

Alpass et al. (1999) examined the institutional-occupational distinctions in the New Zealand Army. They found that the combat elements of the New Zealand Army fell more into the institutional model, whereas the support elements gravitated more towards the occupational model. They concluded that “the institutional model promotes group adhesion whereas the occupational model promotes individualism and self-interest” (Alpass et al., 1999, p. 73). Interestingly, they predict that in the future, military traditions and customs may become more entrenched to counteract the monetary centre of gravity associated with the occupational model.

Almost a decade from his original I/O thesis, Moskos (1986) refined his original concept and acknowledged that the institutional and occupational notion exists more accurately along a scale of organisational values. The timing of this update allows Moskos to reflect on his original thesis, which was written just in the wake of the movement of the US Military to an all-volunteer force following the Vietnam War, to a more modern military with significant technological advancements. He further expands on the idea that military compensation transcends the purely monetary reimbursement of labour, which is the premise of the occupational model, to include non-pay remuneration such as food, clothing, healthcare, and subsidised base consumer facilities. It can be deduced that providing these facilities on-base will invariably lead to military personnel and their families primarily socialising with other military families, further removing them from their civilian counterparts. However, Moskos acknowledges that as many more households have moved to a double-income model, the tendency for the partners of military personnel to attend traditional social events has declined. It can also be inferred that this will result in a decline in the societal structure amongst military families.

Conclusion

Social Influences play a part in every aspect of modern life. Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs states that we will take care of our basic needs first, such as food, shelter, and physical security, and then be able to move on to satisfying arguably lesser needs such as gaining esteem and respect. Rosenberg (2013) proposes that peer influence can actually reverse this hierarchy, citing examples of people throwing lavish parties they cannot afford in order to establish a level of esteem in their communities. The above literature review has demonstrated the powerful influence that peers can exert, both consciously and sub consciously. This influence is most felt during the period of adolescence, which has grown in duration (Sawyer et al., 2018). The period of greatest risk for ending a military career in the Naval Service is in the first ten years (Hartnett et al., 2016), where many of the personnel are still in the adolescent period of their life and therefore are more influenced by their peer relationships. This is also the period of one’s life where self-regulation may not have yet fully developed, with a resultant effect on personal autonomy, implying that peer influence may play an appreciable part in the decision-making process in younger members of the Naval Service deciding to leave their careers prematurely.

PART THREE: METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach, which is subjective and allows for the human experience within its scope, was deemed to be the most suitable strategy for this research. It is important to note that the researcher is a member of the same organisation of the cultural group being examined but exists in a vastly different career grounding, being a Senior Officer in the organisation with, in excess of, two decades of experience. Nevertheless, it is important that the author recognises that they may be subject to unconscious bias with respect to the subject matter and extra care is required in both the preparation of the interviews and the analysis of the data to ensure that the influence of this bias is minimised.

This research was concerned with the impact of peer influence on career decision making and therefore a deductive approach was required to design the questions to guide the interview. Following extraction of the deductively analysed data, a significant quantity of data remained that did not conform to this analytical process. Therefore, to complete the analysis of the collected data, an inductive approach to the examination of the original hypothesis was required, as suggested by Bryman (2012) in order to fully appreciate the collected data. This inductive analysis revealed a number of additional themes relevant to the subject matter and these will be discussed in further detail in Part Four.

It was deemed that a semi-structured interview approach would best suit the purposes of the research, allowing for both the required consistency and flexibility to ensure the quality of data. This lends itself to external ecological validity (Bhattacharjee, 2012) of the collected data, with conclusions drawn from the data being generalised both in terms of the ecological pool of the Naval Service and in terms of the three stages of career progression being examined.

Purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was utilised to identify a list of interviewees both from an elite and general perspective. From the elite perspective, purposive sampling allowed for serving members in the psychological and human resources roles to be interviewed, gaining key insights from those on the front line of personnel leaving the Naval Service. More generally, purposive sampling was used to focus the remaining interviews on personnel who have left the Naval Service or who have made key career changes while within the Naval Service.

Thematic coding was used to analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews. This allowed the author to categorise and sort the emerging themes in order to compare the findings with the original hypothesis, leveraging this analytical method to mitigate the influence of the author's own biases.

PART FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of Part Four is to present the findings and analysis based on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The interview participants included the Officer in Charge of Personnel Management Section (OiC PMS), The Defence Forces Psychologist, two serving members of the Naval Service and two ex-members of the Naval Service. The latter four participants were selected based on criteria identified through the findings of Hartnett et al. (2016) in that they each had between five- and ten-years' service. They were also spread equally between male and female participants. All six interviewees contributed not only through their individual experiences but also through anecdotal evidence of what they have observed during their time in the Naval Service.

The thematic analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was approached through a synthesis of both deductive and inductive methods, reflecting a nuanced combination of established theoretical frameworks and emergent insights gleaned directly from the data. Clarity of thought concerning the subject matter dictates the initial engagement in deductive analysis, prioritising the identification of themes such as "peer influence" and "decision making". However, upon extracting these themes from the transcripts, it became apparent that a substantial amount of data defied straightforward categorisation within these predetermined themes. Consequently, an inductive approach was employed to meticulously scrutinise the remaining data and uncover additional themes that had not been previously considered.

The above deductive analysis of the transcripts, generated through the semi-structured interviews, sheds light on decision-making processes within the Naval Service, underscoring the multifaceted nature of peer influence and the imperative of informed decision making. However,

it should be noted that the entirety of the transcripts did not easily fall into the above two general themes. In the subsequent section, the remaining data has been examined using an inductive approach to establish a further framework to better understand the various push and pull factors effecting retention in the Naval Service.

Deductive Analysis

As described by Bingham (2022), deductive analysis is characterised as a top-down methodological approach to data analysis, wherein a pre-existing theory is employed to scrutinise the data and evaluate its applicability. The title of this article notably underscores the significance of peer influence in the context of career decision making. The interview questions were carefully crafted with this deductive rationale in mind, aiming to elicit responses that align with the theoretical framework. Consequently, the ensuing analysis was anticipated to be interpreted through a semantic lens, focusing on the explicit meanings conveyed within the data.

Peer Influence

In various social contexts, peer influence stands as a potent force in shaping individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and decisions. As highlighted in Part Two, peer influence is characterised by its dual potential for both positive and negative impacts on individuals. The work of Martínez, Jiménez-Molina, and Gerber (2023) illuminates this dynamic process, wherein attitudes and behaviours can spread contagiously through social networks. Positive peer influence often manifests as encouragement, support, and inspiration, fostering personal growth, self-esteem, and resilience (Alvord and Grados, 2005). Conversely, negative peer influence can lead to detrimental outcomes, including increased propensity for risk, conformity to unhealthy norms, and, most aptly, compromised decision making (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005). The intricate interplay between individuals and their peer groups underscores the complex nature of peer influence, characterised by factors such as social identity, group dynamics, and interpersonal relationships.

Throughout the series of semi-structured interviews, several instances of negative peer influence leading to premature career terminations were observed. One notable example highlighted by OiC PMS involved a situation where five individuals from the same unit departed simultaneously to join the same private company. This case exemplifies the potential ramifications of negative peer influence within organisational contexts, wherein group dynamics have the potential to significantly impact individuals' career decisions and trajectories. As pointed out by one of the respondents:

They certainly did not do that independently, you know, they obviously spoke to each other and decided this was a good thing.
(OiC PMS)

Another compelling example was shared by Interviewee Two, underscoring the subtle yet impactful nature of negative peer influence. In this instance, it appeared that formal discussions among the individuals did not occur; instead, individuals seemed to be influenced through observation and a quasi-osmotic process, leading them to pursue careers in a private company based on discussions circulating within the mess environment. This phenomenon bears resemblance to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, wherein individuals acquire behaviours and attitudes through observation and imitation of others. Unfortunately, this decision proved to be ill-suited for them, culminating in them deciding to terminate their careers at the private company and their subsequent return to the military. While ultimately a positive outcome for the Defence Forces, this narrative underscores the potential pitfalls of succumbing to peer

influence without critical evaluation, highlighting the importance of individual autonomy and informed decision making in relation to their career trajectories.

A fair amount of them I bumped into, and they were not that happy, that the grass was not greener. And there was definitely three or four who either came back to us or to the army, and they admitted to me that it was that peer pressure talking, talking crap down the mess that drove them out. (Interviewee Two)

The absence of clear decision making can also manifest in suboptimal inter-branch and inter-service transfers. Interviewee Two shared an illustrative anecdote concerning individuals within the enlisted ranks who sought cadetships, largely swayed by the actions of their peers rather than thoughtful personal deliberation. This anecdote underscores the potential ramifications of indecisiveness in career transitions, as the misaligned career move within the service ultimately resulted in the termination of these individuals' military careers. Such instances emphasise the importance of informed decision making and individual agency in navigating career trajectories.

I think because they were easily led or because they were young, as you said that peer pressure, pressures isn't the word, influence is the word, kind of soaked in, whereas they probably didn't make the clinical decision: "Do I actually want to do this?" Then lo and behold they came back...they might have got a bit sour with the place then, and ended up leaving. (Interviewee Two)

However, this also appears to reveal a failing in the Naval Service, whereby perhaps the individuals involved were not made fully cognisant in what may be involved in the cadetship process, and it would be reasonable to assume that this anecdote is repeated in other instances whereby career decisions were based on incomplete or inaccurate information. Indeed, this point was further expanded upon by Interviewee Three who commented on the information vacuum with regards to the availability of career options in the initial stages of a Naval career.

And there was not a lot of information to go on. I think we all just went with the crowd or went with whoever we looked up to the most. I suppose we just went that way in the Navy... Especially in recruits, I did not have a clue about what any of the trades did. So then, if you knew what a trade did and it sounded like something you would like to do, then it would definitely help to go into an appropriate core branch. (Interviewee Three)

Currently, in the Naval Service, there is no clear identifiable point of contact with whom an individual could speak to obtain career advice. This responsibility predominantly falls upon the Divisional Officer, the Divisional NCO, and the Branch Warrant Officers, along with their respective staff members. Naturally, each of these individuals retain their own agendas and biases when delivering career advice, anchored in their own loyalty to their respective branches. The Branch and Division system is prone to bias as the common interests of the Division and Branch to maintain their own healthy manning levels may not align with the career desires and suitability of the individual. Interviewee Three pointed out that the peer influence begins at the earliest point of an individual's career.

Depending on who your instructors were and what branch they were in, I think, really influenced what branch you are going to do... There was not representation from all branches in the recruit class instructors. (Interviewee Three)

It could be argued that OiC PMS and his staff are the closest that the Naval Service has to a non-bias point of contact, but each member of his staff belongs to their own branch. Regardless, he ensures that his staff gets involved when it comes to personnel making the decision to leave the Naval Service,

I have seen all of us in action in this area. Actually making sure that people are comfortable with their decision, spelling out to them the advantages and asking if can we do anything to hold on to you? Is there another appointment we can move you to? (OiC PMS)

The mentoring approach, aimed at encouraging individuals to persist in their careers within the Naval Service, has demonstrated some degree of success. Engaging in discussions with individuals to understand their reasons for considering the termination of their careers and exploring alternative solutions to address these concerns is likely to facilitate their decision-making process and impact their future trajectory positively. Regrettably, this level of dedication has not been consistently observed across the broader Defence Forces. Referring to exit interviews and exit surveys, the Defence Forces Psychologist highlighted several instances whereby minimal effort was invested in retaining personnel who had opted to depart.

Another one here mentioned that they did not get any contact once they put in their discharge papers. Again, I think certain cohorts in the Defence Forces just become a bit bitter when people want to leave- "You made your mind up, thanks very much!" (Defence Forces Psychologist)

This disparity underscores the need for a more concerted and proactive approach within the Defence Forces to support personnel in navigating career transitions, ensuring that adequate resources and support mechanisms are in place to address their concerns and foster retention.

Career Decision-Making Processes

Part Two delved into various decision-making processes, encompassing a wide spectrum from the highly analytical approaches, exemplified by the works of De Bono (1999) and Perrin (2008), to the more human-centred methods, as articulated by Tversky & Kahneman (1974) or Klein (1993). The decision-making method employed by individuals tends to be contextually contingent, however as elucidated by Kahneman (2003), the optimal thinking system may not always be chosen to aid in decision-making processes. This holds particularly true in the realm of career decision making, where the analytical process may offer advantages, but the emotional and social influences and attachments associated with departing an organisation could potentially obscure one's judgment. This juxtaposition underscores the intricate interplay between rationality and emotionality in the career decision-making process.

Individual's decision-making processes exhibit considerable variability, often tied to their degree of frustration or their sense of being valued within their work environment. Leveraging the extensive experience of OiC PMS and his interactions with personnel expressing a desire to leave the Naval Service, a spectrum of responses emerges. Some individuals display a very high level of frustration, to the extent of declining to participate in an exit interview, while others exhibit a proactive approach, conducting thorough research into the long-term financial implications of their decisions. This spectrum underscores the diverse range of factors influencing personnel's decision-making processes, from emotional disengagement to meticulous planning and consideration of future consequences.

Some people are very calculated in leaving. They have worked out their pension and worked out exactly the difference to what it is in staying. (OiC PMS)

The career decision-making process extends beyond individuals' entry into the Naval Service and sometimes even begins well before they embark on their naval career. Certain personnel, such as Interviewee One, exemplify this proactive approach, entering the Navy with a carefully crafted plan and clearly defined goals already in place, even before commencing their training. This preparedness underscores the significance of thoughtful deliberation and strategic planning in shaping one's career trajectory within the organisation. By considering their objectives and aspirations beforehand, individuals like Interviewee One demonstrate a commitment to their professional development and a proactive stance towards achieving their desired outcomes within the Naval Service. This deliberate approach not only sets the stage for success but also highlights the importance of aligning personal goals with organisational objectives from the outset, meaning that the role of negative peer influence can be mitigated against.

I've had such a plan for so long. It was: Join the Navy, go to my first branch, move to my current branch, and go on a trip overseas. I've been so set on that for so many years, that I think it is harder for someone to influence a change to that plan. (Interviewee One)

Similarly, Interviewee Four entered their career in the Naval Service with a clear plan as to the branch within which they intended to serve. They went so far as to take the power into their own hands by swapping their branch allocation with a recruit classmate and refused to let others influence their decision to serve in that branch.

My decision was made. People told me that I should not and could not do my branch of choice and so I was going to be a member of that branch. It did not matter what else you told me, I was going to be in that branch because I am just that stubborn. (Interviewee Four)

Alternatively, Interviewee Two employed a similarly effective analytical decision-making strategy. In this instance, they utilised a physical drawing on a page to visually represent their options and identified relevant qualifying criteria to evaluate the optimal choice. The use of a visual aid in decision making proved highly effective, enabling Interviewee Two to engage in an iterative process until an obvious choice that aligned with their professional and personal objectives emerged.

When I was an Able Rate, I had an A4 page and it would have pretty much anything that would have sparked my interest: firefighter, diver, guard etc. An offshoot from those clouds would have: were they attainable, whether they were worth putting in the effort or the academics to get them? And then it would be, "I do not really want that for what I would have to do". It only gets narrower and narrower. (Interviewee Two)

This methodical approach, reminiscent of the Decision Tree Model outlined by Perrin (2008), highlights the importance of structured decision-making processes in navigating complex choices. Interviewee Two suggested that they may have acquired this technique during their Potential NCOs course. It may prove beneficial to introduce this module at an earlier stage in the training process, such as during recruits' training, to effectively educate personnel on employing systematic decision-making strategies. This underscores the potential value of integrating

practical decision-making tools and techniques into training programs to equip personnel with the necessary skills to make informed and strategic decisions throughout their naval careers.

Inductive Analysis

In contrast to deductive analysis, Bingham (2022) describes inductive analysis as representing a more emergent approach, whereby the researcher systematically reviews the data, allowing codes and concepts to surface organically. This method is characterized by a "bottom-up" analytical strategy, wherein the researcher remains open to the emergence of themes and patterns from the data itself.

The inductive analysis unveiled a myriad of themes that delve into the underlying factors contributing to the negative sentiments and encounters among personnel within the scope group. These emergent themes, such as "financial reward," "time away from family," "frustration" and a "lack of career planning or guidance," serve as critical touchstones in illustrating the spectrum of concerns and challenges faced by individuals within the Naval Service, which may in turn have a negative influence on their retention.

Financial Reward

Defence Forces pay was a common theme throughout the interviews. While all agreed that the increase in Patrol Duty Allowance (PDA) should see an improvement in retention, the level of core pay when individuals are not at sea remains a problem. OIC PMS noted that, in particular, the core pay of technicians was far below the industry standard and a targeted retention pay scheme may be required to retain their services. In general, time at sea for the personnel who have yet to have children does not appear to be a significant factor. In fact, Interviewee One looked to extend their time at sea, although they do state that a large part of the extension was financially motivated.

I ended up doing nearly three years on my first sea rotation because it was just brilliant. It was everything you wanted, it was the perfect ship, perfect crew, the perfect job. So, I ended up doing that maybe a bit longer than I had originally planned just because I was enjoying it so much...all my friends were only coming up to their two years, so I just pushed it out to meet the end of their two years and ended up doing the three years at sea. (Interviewee One)

As time progresses, the allure of the financial rewards and the thrill of adventure associated with sea deployments diminishes for personnel within the Naval Service. This transition appears to coincide with significant life milestones, notably the arrival of children, typically occurring towards the latter part of their initial decade of service, when personnel tend to be in or around their early thirties (Murray, 2023). This turning point marks a shift in priorities, with personnel increasingly prioritising stability and family commitments over the transient excitement of sea deployments.

Time Away from Family

Time away from family is an unavoidable feature of a career in the Naval Service. When personnel are young, it is time away from parents and friends that affects them most significantly. As an individual grows in independence and confidence, this home sickness tends to lessen its impact. That is until the time for their own children arrives. Every group member who had children, the author included, expressed that the birth of their children marked a significant turning point. It was this moment that heightened the challenges of prolonged separations from home, making

it considerably more difficult to endure. This sentiment was articulated best by one of the respondents:

Then when I started having kids it just caused a whole other layer of difficulty from the home point of view and it put a lot of strain on everything. So that for me, that was the critical time in my career when I would have been looking around the most or certainly considering things. (OiC PMS)

The advent of children seems to signal a shift in an individual's sphere of influence—from peers in the workplace to family members at home. Personnel become increasingly cognisant of the repercussions of their career choices on their families, attributing greater significance to the opinions and concerns of their loved ones over those of their colleagues in the Naval Service. As stated by Interviewee Two when asked where they place the greatest significance with respect to career decisions:

I would start with the peers of outside work at this stage. Maybe see how this job change would fit into my personal life a lot more... you have a girlfriend and a kid...how would you find this career's suiting that family life? (Interviewee Two)

The eroding sense of adventure, the lowering of importance placed on peer influence and the desire to spend more time with one's children can then combine to induce a sense of frustration in the individual, where alternative options will be explored. These options may originate within the organisation or through transition to civilian life.

Sense of Frustration

Commonly, it seems that the positive elements of a career in the Naval Service are no longer being effectively promoted. Interviewee Two, when contemplating an inter-branch transfer, resorted to talking to professionals in the field outside of the military, as well as personnel in the Army, as opposed to their Naval equivalent, to appreciate the benefits of the career he was considering, due to a lack of positive promotion within the organisation.

So, it was those people who were able to voice the benefits to their specialty more so than other people in the Navy were. That was probably why I did not jump into it sooner. (Interviewee Two)

It could be implied that the sense of frustration and general negative attitudes within the organisation has led to a point where personnel are either unwilling or unable to see the positives within their own units and branches. The Defence Forces Psychologist verbalised this phenomenon when she stated that:

When you are institutionalised like we are in the Defence Forces, when you are here for 15 to 20 years, I suppose you do not weigh up the good side of this organisation before you jump ship. And a lot of them did feel like that they had probably made the wrong choice and made it too quickly. (Defence Forces Psychologist)

Paradoxically, as can be seen from the above, it would seem that personnel only seem to fully appreciate the benefits, freedoms, and other positives available to them during their Naval career after they have made the transition to civilian life.

Lack of Career Planning or Guidance

Career planning for enlisted ranks in the Naval Service is principally managed by the Branch Warrant Officers with their inherent biases as discussed earlier. However, the Warrant Officers are not limited in their job descriptions to purely personnel management, and the effective management of the careers of a considerable number of personnel across, in some cases, a spectrum of specialities is beyond the abilities of a single individual. Divisional NCOs and Divisional Officers also play a part in the career guidance, but the nature of the rotational system in the Navy means that they will only likely have an influence on an individual's career for approximately two years before either the individual or the divisional leader moves to a new appointment.

All interviewed personnel were asked if they saw a value in an independent, civilian career guidance counsellor who would be able to guide individuals through a career decision-making process without the inherent bias and personnel agendas, which all personnel who have a personal stake in the organisation retain. The response from interviewees was universally positive. The Defence Forces Psychologist went as far as to say:

If we had somebody outside of the chain of command, that you could have an open and honest conversation with about your own career progression without them having an alternative agenda to try and push you in somewhere. That would be brilliant...Honest, non-biased opinion of what suits you and your career and your career development. (Defence Forces Psychologist)

Interviewee One echoed the above sentiment of positivity towards the provision of an independent career counsellor, expressing that their decision to change branches lacked impartial input from peers, necessitating a significant personal strength to navigate the life-altering decision independently. This underscores the resilience and determination required to make pivotal career choices amidst a potentially biased or unsupportive environment.

Even in the likes of when I was making the inter branch transfer decision, having someone like that weigh up the pros and cons, rather than me lying in bed wide awake at two o'clock in the morning trying to do it myself. (Interviewee One)

It is reasonable to theorise that the significant recruitment crisis in the Naval Service (O'Riordan, 2024) has further eroded the ability of those in roles of responsibility to fully guide and manage the careers of those under their influence. However, as pointed out earlier in this part, perhaps the inherent agendas and bias renders their advice and guidance of limited value regardless. A potential opportunity exists here for the Naval Service, and indeed the wider Defence Forces, to introduce a new system of non-biased career management, provided by expert civilians in the field.

Geographical Limitations

It is interesting to recall from Part Two, Goldberg et al. (2018) postulating about the influence of a veteran presence in the community. Initially, neither of the serving members who were interviewed considered that they were influenced by individuals in the community, but when probed further, the presence of a Reserve Defence Forces Member and social interactions with serving members turned up in their respective initial introductions to the military. This demonstrates the importance of a national geographic footprint when attracting people to the military. The Naval Service is at a particular disadvantage in this respect as it has only one location, at the extreme end of the country. As pointed out by the Defence Forces Psychologist:

Obviously, the Naval Service is in one location, and it can be quite challenging for people who do not live that side of the country and who are constantly commuting. (Defence Forces Psychologist)

Interviewee Three doubled down on this as a critical weakness in the current national presence of the Naval Service, stating that they would likely not have joined the Naval Service if the base had been in a less convenient location, while anecdotally noting that it had been a significant factor in the decision of others to end their careers.

I think that's a big downfall with the Navy, that there is one base. The army have so many bases around the country that eventually you will end up close enough to home. It is very hard for people of the country coming down. (Interviewee Three)

While plans exist to expand the Naval shore presence beyond the confines of Cork Harbour, the geography of the current footprint remains a barrier to recruitment and retention. It is an unfortunate coincidence that the historical home of the Naval Service in Haulbowline in Cork appears to be a limiting factor in its expansion, both in terms of the physical limitations on the size of ships that may be accommodated there and in term of attracting a larger number of personnel to a career serving their country at sea.

Key Findings

The research findings encapsulate a spectrum of insights ranging from the unexpected to the foreseeable, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of peer influence and career decision making within the Naval Service. One notable revelation is the pervasive impact of peer interactions on personnel throughout their careers, both positively and negatively. Early exposure to positive peer influences often shapes individuals' career trajectories, leading them to emulate the decisions of influential peers. Moreover, the geographic constraint of the Navy's singular location emerges as a significant factor influencing career decisions, presenting challenges for recruitment and retention efforts. Additionally, the research highlights a notable gap in knowledge among recruits regarding the breadth of career options available to them within the Naval Service.

A critical inflection point in personnel's career trajectories is identified upon the arrival of children, wherein their primary influences and priorities undergo a discernible shift. Interestingly, all interviewees reported either having direct interactions with, or being influenced by, individuals already in the Naval Service prior to joining, underscoring the importance of social networks in career decision-making processes. Furthermore, there is a unanimous recognition among interviewees of the invaluable role an independent career guidance counsellor could play in assisting personnel navigate the complexities of career decision making. This collective endorsement underscores the potential benefits of introducing impartial guidance mechanisms to support personnel in making informed and strategic career choices within the Naval Service.

Conclusion

The purpose of this part was to present the findings of the analysis of the semi-structured interviews carried out with serving and former members of the Naval Service with between five- and ten-years' experience. Further interviews were conducted with key elite participants in the form of OIC PMS and the Defence Forces Psychologist.

Initially a deductive approach was utilised to establish if the central research question of "Does Peer Influence play a part in the decision-making process with regards to the turnover of

personnel in the Irish Naval Service?” could be deemed as probable. The interview transcripts were examined for evidence to support or contradict the research question. Having reviewed the data, it would seem reasonable to conclude that peer influence does have an effect on career related decision making. It would appear that different people emerge as the most influential peer at different stages in an individual’s career and, anecdotally, the peer influence has been observed to be more significant in younger members.

Having concluded the deductive process, a substantial data set remained from the semi-structured interviews. This data was then analysed with an inductive approach and revealed some of the key push and pull factors for personnel debating a career change.

The next part will outline the conclusions to the research, including the implications for the Naval Service, to present a satisfactory answer to the research question. Part Five will also make recommendations based on the research, while acknowledging the limitations of this current paper. Finally, the following Part will point to possible areas for future study.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding four parts have sought to answer the question of “Does peer influence play a part in the decision-making process with regards to retention and turnover of personnel in the Irish Naval Service?” It was appreciated from the outset, that there are a spectrum of both push and pull factors with regards to all career decision making, and that any answer to the research question must be taken as a nuanced and qualified representation of a complicated and subjective personal experience.

Through a deductive and inductive approach to the semi-structured interviews, clear patterns of thematic grouping emerged, which allowed several actionable influences to be highlighted. Part Five will examine the implications of these research findings, outline some of the limitations of the research, make recommendations for both future research and for actions that may be taken to mitigate some of the research implications, before finally presenting the concluding thoughts of the article.

Implications of Research Findings

The previous part presented the research findings following the semi-structured interviews. While these findings have presented an interesting insight into the variety of factors that influence career decision making, without an appreciation of the implications of the factors, they may remain merely an academic indulgence.

The research findings implied a discernible correlation between the exposure of recruits to service personnel from specific branches during their initial training and their subsequent preferences with respect to branch training. Consequently, this would imply that during the formative stages of individuals’ careers, exposure to serving personnel across the full spectrum of Naval career paths could facilitate a holistic appreciation of the myriad of career opportunities that may be potentially available to them, including a knowledge of the associated roles and responsibilities. This would then serve to contribute to more informed decision making on the part of the recruit, where their initial career choices could align more synergically with their professional aspirations.

Historically, the Naval Service has been a Cork based institution with personnel serving outside of this area for only short periods of time. Expansion of the Naval Service into a national presence should contribute positively to recruitment and retention, improving the catchment area and attracting a more diverse pool of potential recruits. An additional benefit of broadening

the Naval Service's geographical footprint would likely be an expanded national level presence of veterans in the community, a factor which has been demonstrated in Part Two by Goldberg et al. (2018) to positively contribute to recruitment and increase community engagement with the Naval Service.

Following on from recruits, personnel who decide to alter their career trajectories are faced with a dilemma. Typically, seeking career advice entails consulting individuals within both their current branch and the prospective branch they intend to transition into. However, this process is fraught with challenges, as personnel in each branch are inherently influenced by their own biases, shaped by their unique experiences and allegiances. Consequently, the guidance provided is often tinged with subjective perspectives and loyalties, rather than objective assessment. The lack of an independent career guidance professional exacerbates this issue and may lead to personnel seeking input and being subject to influence from a wide range of inputs. This underscores the need for a more structured and objective approach to career counselling, aimed at providing personnel with unbiased guidance tailored to their individual aspirations and circumstances.

Research Limitations

The time available to undertake this research, along with the methodology chosen, limited the size of the group that was interviewed. If time had allowed, this research would have benefited from expanding the interviewee pool to include personnel who had re-joined the Naval Service having previously left to pursue a civilian career. This would have provided a holistic overview of the entire cycle of Naval Service career decision making. The research was also limited in that the scope group only involved personnel who entered the Navy through General Service Recruitment at a young age and did not include personnel who entered through the direct entry route, the apprentice route or personnel who joined at a later age.

The scope of the interview group was based on the "Your Say" Climate Survey (Hartnett et al., 2016) which was conducted in 2015. This survey took place at a time of great upheaval across the Defence Forces, with several changes to the terms and conditions for personnel entering the Defence Forces. It was acknowledged in that body of work, that these terms and conditions may have skewed the results of that survey. The availability of the 2008 survey or the inclusion of the upcoming survey results would have been very helpful to fully understand if the results of the 2015 survey remain valid.

Finally, the research was limited to people who are either still serving in the Naval Service or those who left the Naval Service on terms whereby they are still willing to participate in research. It may be argued that this may limit the variability of responses to the detriment of the result, in that personnel who have left on bitter or very negative terms are not represented in the research.

Recommendations and Avenues for Further Research

Throughout the research journey, opportunities for further research through multiple avenues revealed themselves. This particularly became evident during the inductive analysis of the semi-structured interviews, whereby the remaining data following the deductive analysis was examined in further detail.

A common theme illuminated through this method was the transition from sea life to shore life for the first time in the Naval Service appears to affect an individual's propensity to serve beyond five years, suggesting this aspect requires a degree of further research. The Naval

Service needs to look at how the branch system is managed from a perspective of transparency and inherent bias. It appears that all interviewed view the introduction of career guidance counsellors to the Defence Forces to only be a positive step. It is recommended that this should be explored further, to include the costing and staffing levels required, perhaps starting in a pilot scheme in a small formation such as the Naval Service.

Concluding Thoughts

The literature suggested that the modalities of influence with respect to career decision making would be wide and varied and indeed the research confirmed the truth of the matter. Furthermore, the sphere of influence appears to both tighten and morph to reflect the personal growth of an individual as they progress through life, reaching milestones such as having children. The Naval Service has a role in ensuring that the influences early in an individual's career are as free from bias as possible and to ensure that personnel are made aware of the myriad of opportunities that exist within the organisation. In addition to this the Naval Service should consider formal training in critical thinking and decision making at all levels to ensure that decisions are made with appropriate consideration and appreciation of all the relevant information. The journey through this research has been illuminating in many respects and shall play a part in the future decision making of the author, given a new appreciation for the thought processes and experiences of those who may be within his sphere of influence in the future.

Please note that the views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and should not be taken to represent the views of the Irish Defence Forces or of any other group or organisation.

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