Trainee engagement in the Portuguese Navy
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Introduction

Student engagement is beneficial to individuals and organizations alike (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). It is thereby important to understand the differences in engagement regarding the self-concept and the relevant sociodemographic variables, so that one may stimulate motivation and engagement among the military personnel in training.

Methods

Sample: 149 trainees attending the Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class. Ages ranging from 25 to 38. 53.7% had to leave the residence area to join the Portuguese Navy. 20.8% live on-base, in the barracks.

Scales:
- Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002) - dedication and vigor and absorption;
- Assessment Scale for Trainee Engagement in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, 2014) - cognitive engagement, affective engagement and behavioral engagement;
- Assessment Scale for Trainee Self-concept in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, in press) - interpersonal relationships, competence, satisfaction, self-acceptance and initiative and risk acceptance.

Results

Engagement differences considering satisfaction and age

The interaction effect of satisfaction and age in dedication and vigor (F = 9.183; p = .003) may be explained considering a further result differentiation between the older subjects, with low satisfaction and presenting less dedication and vigor when compared to the younger subjects, with low satisfaction but with higher dedication and vigor averages (T = 2.172; g.l. = 53; p = .034).

Regarding the older subjects with low satisfaction, they significantly differ from the highly satisfied subjects, these latter showing more dedication and vigor (T = -5.627; g.l. = 72; p = .000). The interaction of satisfaction and age in absorption (F = 5.270; p = .023) may be due to a further result differentiation according to the satisfaction of the older subjects – older subjects, with less satisfaction, reach lower levels of absorption. On the other hand, older subjects with higher satisfaction reach significantly higher averages in absorption (T = -3.914; g.l. = 74; p = .000).

Engagement differences considering self-acceptance and age

The interaction of self-acceptance and age in behavioral engagement (F = 4.617; p = .033) may be explained considering a further result differentiation between the older subjects, with high self-acceptance and presenting less behavioral engagement when compared to the younger subjects, with high self-acceptance but with higher behavioral engagement averages (T = -2.925; g.l. = 65; p = .005). Regarding the younger group, those presenting low self-acceptance differ from those with high self-acceptance, since the latter reach higher levels of behavioral engagement (T = -3.837; g.l. = 64; p = .000). Likewise, within the older group, those with low self-acceptance differ significantly from those with high self-acceptance, the latter reaching higher levels of behavioral engagement (T = -7.419; g.l. = 71; p = .000).

Engagement differences considering satisfaction and place of residence

The interaction between satisfaction and the place of residence in absorption (F = 4.499; p = 0.036) relates to a further result differentiation regarding the individuals living off-base: those presenting high satisfaction reach higher absorption levels when compared to those with low satisfaction (T = -4.295; g.l. = 108; p = .000). In what concerns the effect of the interaction of satisfaction and place of residence with behavioral engagement, that effect is statistically significant (F = 4.077; p = .045), and this result is due to a further result differentiation within the group of individuals with low satisfaction: those living on-base reach higher levels of affective engagement when compared to the ones living off-base (T = -2.029; g.l. = 50; p = .048).

We also verified a further result differentiation within the individuals who live off-base: subjects with higher satisfaction show higher affective engagement levels (T = -6.207; g.l. = 107; p = .000). The significant effect of the interaction of satisfaction and place of residence with the behavioral engagement (F = 4.882; p = .029) may be due to a further result differentiation among individuals with high satisfaction: those who live off-base reach higher levels of behavioral engagement when compared to those living on-base (T = 2.159; g.l. = 83; p = .034). There is also a further result differentiation within the group of individuals living off-base: the subjects presenting higher satisfaction show higher levels of behavioral engagement (T = -7.134; g.l. = 106; p = .000).

Conclusion

The self-concept works as a behavior regulator (Simões, 2001), acting in order to promote or restrict engagement (Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). Hence, it is important to promote a positive self-concept in trainees, so that higher engagement levels may be obtained in training and toward the institution. This would significantly benefit both the people and the institution they work for.

References