

Meaning in Life on Work Engagement of Defence Officers

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ABSTRACT--Victor.E. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy based on the triad of principles i.e. the freedom of will, the will to meaning and the meaning of life. According to Frankl will to meaning can be defined as the basic striving of man to find and fulfil meaning and purpose in life. Pleasure rather than being an end of man's striving is the effect of meaning fulfilment. Both happiness and success are the substitutes for fulfilment and that proves why the pleasure principle and the will to power are mere derivatives of the will to meaning.

Keywords-- Meaning in Life on Work Engagement Of Defence Officers

I. MEANING IN LIFE

One can find meaning in life by creating a work or doing a deed or by experiencing goodness, truth and beauty, by experiencing nature and culture or last but not the least by encountering another unique being in the very uniqueness of this human being that is by loving him. However the noblest appreciation of meaning is reserved to those people who are deprived of opportunity to find meaning in a deed in work or in love by their attitude in the situation yet they rise above it and grow beyond themselves. The decision they take in this difficult situation is the most important because it allows transformation from their fall into achievement, triumph and heroism.

According to the research and theory by people like Crumbaugh, 1977; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006. Meaning in Life has two components Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. Presence means the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as significant and meaningful. Presence of meaning in life is the degree to which people experience their lives as logical and significant, and feel a sense of purpose or mission in their lives that transcends the simple concerns of daily life (Steger, in press). Search concerns the degree to which people are engaged in a search for meaning in life. It pertains to the dynamic, active effort by people in trying to establish and/or augment their comprehension of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives (Steger, in press; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, in press). The search for meaning is related to low presence of meaning, and lower well-being overall (e.g., Crumbaugh, 1977; Steger et al., 2006; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, in press). Thus, whereas presence of meaning is concerned with a valued outcome (my life is meaningful), search for meaning is concerned with an important process (how can I make my life more meaningful?). Some have theorized that searching for meaning is a basic human motivation (e.g., Frankl, 1963; Maddi, 1970), which probably leads to increased presence of meaning in life as the desired outcome. Theorists and researchers agree that having a meaningful life is critical for human beings (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 1998). With the emergence of positive psychology, the construct of meaning in life (MIL) has received renewed attention and has been the subject of scientific inquiries (Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Over the last two

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decades the construct of meaning in life got attention from scientists of different discipline. Meaning in life has been more descriptively than empirically investigated, e. g., psychogerontology (e.g., Nies, Munnichs, Stevens & Buysen, 1983; Dittmann-Kohli, 1994), psy - chotherapy (Debats, 1990), religion (van der Lans, 1990), person-centred the - ory (van Kalmthout, 1994), and valuation theory (Hermans, 1988).

II. WORK ENGAGEMENT

Work engagement in general means employees relation with the work. As the competition among the modern organisations increased, the need for physical and emotional involvement of employees increased which in turn made it important for them to invest psychologically in their work. Engagement at work has emerged as an important aspect of employee performance. A large number of research studies supports the relationship between engagement of the employee at work and the organizational outcomes, including those which are performance based (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Schaufeli and his co-researchers (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. It has similarity with Rothbard's (2001) conceptualization of role engagement, which has two main components – attention and absorption in a role-that are both motivational phenomena. Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002) have emphasised that work engagement is likely to remain relatively stable over time.

Absorption refers specifically to the total concentration on and immersion in work characterized by quick passage of time and difficulty in detaching oneself from one's work. Recent researches have drawn a similarity between the experience of absorption and flow (Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006). Flow is defined as the state of mind in which people are so involved in an activity and nothing else matters; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it just for the sake of doing it. The main difference between the concepts of flow and absorption is that absorption is presumed to be a more persistent state of mind which takes place specifically in the work domain whereas flow resembles short-term peak experience which may occur in any domain of life (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006).

Vigor indicates high levels of energy and mental resilience while working and his willingness to make appreciable efforts in his or her job and persistence in difficult situations (Schaufeli, Bakker & Demerouti, 2002).

Thus an employee who is vigorous at work is highly motivated by his or her job and remains very persistent while facing difficulties or obstacles at work. Vigor dimension can be considered as a motivational concept and also consistent with Atkinson's general definition of motivation, "Motivation is the contemporary or immediate influence on direction, vigor and persistence of action". Vigor and persistence are the main characteristics of the dimension of work engagement and thus the concept has similarity with the global definition of motivation.

The third dimension of work engagement is 'Dedication' and it is characterized by a strong psychological involvement in one's work, combined with a sense of significance enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli, Bakker. & Demerouti, 2002).

Similarity occurs between dedication and a similar but much older concept called as Job Involvement, which has been defined as the degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and to the work performed therein. Dedication is a broader phenomenon, at least with respect to its functioning because Job

involvement solely focuses on the psychological importance of the job in an employee's life. Recently researchers have suggested that vigor and dedication are the basic dimensions of work engagement whereas absorption is similar to the concept flow.

III. METHOD

Participants

Participants of the study consist of 171 Indian defence officers in which 160 were Army officers and 11 were Navy officers. The demographic variables of the participants has been derived from the personal data sheet and discussed in detail. 80 officers were posted in field and 91 officers were posted at peace stations. Rank distribution was 22 Lieutenant, 14 Captains, 17 Majors, 11 Lt Colonels, 5 Colonels.

Instruments used

The instruments used were:

- Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2006).
- Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The work engagement scale developed by Bakker, Schaufeli, Salanova and Gonzalez- Roma (2002) was used to measure work engagement of participants. This scale is the most often used instrument to measure work engagement of employees; it includes three subscales: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigor was assessed with six items (e.g., At my work, I feel bursting with energy). Dedication was assessed with five items (e.g., I find the work that I do full of purpose and meaning). Absorption was assessed with six items (e.g., It is difficult to detach myself from my job). Altogether the scale consists 17 items which are rated on a 7 point frequency based scale (0=never, 6=Always). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) demonstrated high inter-item reliability as an overall measure (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.94$) and as its dimensions ($\alpha = 0.84-0.87$).

Meaning in Life Questionnaire

This scale was developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler in 2006. It assesses two dimensions of meaning in life using 10 items rated on a 7 point scale from "Absolutely True" to "Absolutely Untrue". The two subscales are *presence of meaning* subscale which measures how full of meaning the respondent feel's their life is and the *search for meaning* subscale which measures how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives. time perspective, close mindedness and well being. The MLQ has good test retest reliability.

Procedure

Request letters were sent to various army brigades, Kochi Naval base Response was received from the army and the navy. For the data collection, the officers were invited to the army officer's mess and the investigator gave them an insight into the purpose of this study and assured about the confidentiality. The instruments were

distributed to the officers with all the necessary instructions. After completion the filled research instruments were collected and checked for omissions, scored and fed into the spreadsheet for further statistical analysis. The investigator also sent a letter of gratitude to the senior officials for their support and co-operation amidst their very busy schedule which helped to make the study successful.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To find out how the variables work engagement and meaning in life of defence officers was related, the investigator calculated the product moment correlation of these variables and the results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Correlations of variables under study

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| Search (1) | - | | | | | | |
| Presence (2) | -.243** | - | | | | | |
| Meaning in life (3) | .830** | .340** | - | | | | |
| Vigor (4) | -.074 | .275** | .087 | - | | | |
| Dedication (5) | .100 | .375** | .312** | .535** | - | | |
| Absorption (6) | -.018 | .056 | .015 | .572** | .395** | - | |
| Work engagement (7) | -.004 | .254** | .143 | .842** | .733** | .861** | - |

**p< .01

From table 1, it is evident that the search for meaning has significant negative correlation with presence for meaning ($r = -.243$, $p < .01$). This result is supported by the study which shows that search for meaning is related to low presence of meaning, and lower well-being overall (Crumbaugh, 1977; Steger et al., 2006; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008). Search concerns the degree to which people are engaged in a search for meaning in life. It pertains to the dynamic, active effort by people in trying to establish and/or augment their comprehension of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2013). Positive correlation exists between Search for meaning and total meaning in life ($r = .830$, $p < .01$). Some investigations suggest that the search for meaning is a basic human motivation (Frankl, 1963; Maddi, 1970), which can lead to increased meaning in life as the desired outcome. Thus it can be said that when the officers are making efforts to establish their life as meaningful, their overall meaning in life increases.

The presence for meaning has significant positive correlation with meaning in life ($r = .340$, $p < .01$), vigor ($r = .275$, $p < .01$), dedication ($r = .375$, $p < .01$), work engagement ($r = .254$, $p < .01$). When people perceive their lives as significant and purposeful there exists presence of meaning in life. From the results, it can be observed that when the officers serving in the defence identify their lives as meaningful the total meaning in life increases and they work with more dedication and vigor. Similar results have been obtained in the study by Arya and Manikandan (2013) which was conducted on employees and significant positive correlation was found between presence of meaning and total meaning in life, vigor and dedication.

The meaning in life has positive correlation with dedication ($r = .312$, $p < .01$) (a component of work engagement). 'Dedication' is characterized by a strong psychological involvement in one's work, combined with a sense of significance enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli et al., 2002). From the results, it can be concluded that as the officers perceive their lives as meaningful they tend to develop strong psychological attachment to their work and carry forward with enthusiasm and pride. They also are always ready to face the risk that they might encounter in their duty irrespective of the price they may have to pay for seeking risk.

The results of inter-correlation among work engagement and its components revealed that work engagement has significant positive correlation with its three components vigor ($r = .842$, $p < .01$), dedication ($r = .733$, $p < .01$) and absorption ($r = .861$, $p < .01$) thus verifying the three component model proposed by Bakker and Schaufeli (2002).

To know the influence of meaning in life of defence officers on their work engagement, the total participants were categorised into three groups as low, average and high group. This categorization was done for meaning in life using the principle $\text{Mean} \pm \frac{1}{2} \text{SD}$. The details of classification and number of participants in each group for the meaning in life are given in table 2.

Table 2: Number of participants in each category for Meaning in life

| Group | Meaning in life |
|---------|-----------------|
| Low | 62 |
| Average | 51 |
| High | 58 |
| Total | 171 |

From Table 2 it can be seen that in the case of variable meaning in life there were 62 participants in low group, 51 in average group and 58 participants belong to high meaning in life group.

To study the influence of meaning in life on work engagement, one-way ANOVA was carried out for work engagement and its three components vigor, dedication and absorption and it was found that Meaning in Life only has significant influence on the Dedication component of work engagement ($F = 4.75$, $p < .01$). According to Baumeister (1991) in our life we do face many complexities, adversity and unexpected and unpredictable situations yet many people find this experience as enriching and maintain that they have achieved their meaning in life. The officers while on duty are exposed to many unexpected and unpredictable situations every day. Those officers who are able to experience this situation as enriching are the ones having high meaning in life. Meaning in life has an important correlation with mental health and well-being. Significant relation was established between sense of meaning in life, positive work orientations, career commitment and work motivation (Bostioff & Vanwyk, 2010). Decades of research have provided empirical evidence that meaning in life plays an important role in human positive functioning. It is positively associated with psychological and subjective well-being, and quality of life (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010), self-esteem (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011), hope (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005), self-efficacy (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009) etc. As far as defence officers are considered well-being is inevitable because they are expected to perform even in extremely unfavourable conditions. Thus officers with high meaning in life have higher well-being and positive work attitudes. As a result they would have a strong psychological involvement in their work, combined with a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and

challenge or in other words will have high dedication towards their work. Arya and Manikandan (2013) also reported that workers who were having high meaning in life significantly influence their dedication-one of the component of work engagement.

To find out which group of Meaning in life makes difference on dedication, the mean, s.d and n of the dedication by meaning in life was calculated and compared using Scheffe's test. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Mean, SD, N and Scheffe's F of Dedication by Meaning in life

| Variable | Mean | S. D | N | Low MIL | Average MIL | High MIL |
|-------------|-------|------|----|---------|-------------|----------|
| Low MIL | 22.94 | 3.82 | 62 | — | | |
| Average MIL | 23.80 | 4.24 | 51 | 1.38 | — | |
| High MIL | 25.86 | 2.84 | 58 | 17.09** | 7.78* | — |

*p<.05. **p<.01 (Note: MIL= Meaning in life)

The officers with high meaning in life have the highest dedication in their work (Mean=25.86). The follow up analysis revealed that the significant difference was between low and high meaning in life group ($F=17.09$, $p<.01$) and between average and high ($F=7.78$, $p<.05$). Meaning in life is considered as an important correlate of mental health and well-being. Significant relation was established between sense of meaning in life, positive work orientations, career commitment and work motivation. Commitment and motivation can also be expressions of a sense of meaning in one's life (Bostioff & Vanwyk, 2010). When the mental well-being is high, the officers would have a psychological attachment with their work, as accomplishment of their goals and duties is adding significance to their lives.

V. CONCLUSION

The meaning in life- presence of meaning as well as search for meaning is high for army officers. For the navy officers the extent of meaning in life and presence of meaning is high whereas the search for meaning is low. The army as well as navy officers have high vigor, dedication and absorption. Thus their total work engagement is high. There was significant difference of dedication between high meaning in life group and low meaning in life group as well as between high meaning in life and average meaning in life group. From the present study it can be seen that the variable meaning in life was associated with the work engagement and its dimensions vigor, dedication and absorption. The role of meaning in life in modulating the work engagement and its dimensions has to be given high importance as changes in these would affect work performance and the problem of early turnover, suicide, interpersonal conflict etc can also be dealt with.

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