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Reducing the Number of Nonparticipants in the U.S. Army Reserve

Renata W. Hannah, PhD

Problem

There is a lack of understanding of what barriers drive Army Reserve (AR) soldiers not to attend monthly battle assembly. Despite the research showing high levels of unacceptable nonparticipation in the AR, a gap exists in the literature about the soldiers in understanding the potential root causes such as communications, implementation, and the chain of command.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to determine the themes concerning the potential root causes of nonparticipation in the United States Army Reserve Command (USARC).

Significance

I addressed an under-researched problem of profound importance to the United States Army Reserve Command. Lessons learned from this investigation could be relevant to other branches of the Armed Forces, (e.g., Air Force, Marines, and Navy), federal programs, and the corporate world in identifying strategies:

- reducing employee absenteeism
- increasing productivity within the organization
- improving employee retention
- safeguarding millions of dollars.

Social Change Implications

Training the leadership, staff, and first-line leaders in the AR will support a positive social change capitalizing on working as a team, while contributing to productivity in the organization, and safeguarding millions of dollars withheld from AR accounts.

Theory or Framework

The theoretical frameworks were **motivation-hygiene theory** (Herzberg, 1965) and the **hierarchy of needs theory** (Maslow, 1943):

- followed the classical and motivational theories of scientific management, administrative principles, and motivational theories of Taylor (1911), Maslow (1943), Fayol (1949), March and Simon (1958), and Herzberg (1965)
- these influential theorists have laid a solid foundation with their contribution to the body of knowledge in the school of management
- influential modern management theorists Drucker (1952), Senge (1990) and Mintzberg (1994) also contributed significantly to the body of knowledge in the school of management.

Relevant Scholarship

The U.S. Army is divided into three components:

- **Regular Army** (Component 1)
- **Army National Guard** (Component 2)
- **Army Reserve** (Component 3)

The Army National Guard (**State**) and the Army Reserve (**Federal**) are the two components in which soldiers are known as citizen-soldiers.

Research Question

What barriers drive soldiers not to attend battle assembly and extended combat training in the U.S. Army Reserve?

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to identify the 20 participants (17 soldiers: 12 officers, five non-commissioned officers and three Department of the Army civilians) from within the 3d Medical Command.

Procedures

I strategically posted *Volunteer Recruitment* fliers throughout the Command, and interested potential participants contacted me directly. I did not have my Army rank or position on the recruitment flyer.

I received Walden's IRB and approval letters by the Department of the Army Office of the Surgeon General's Army Human Research Protections Office.

I interviewed 20 participants using the semi-structured format and the Likert Scale questions. The interviews were conducted by telephone.

My survey instrument, the 14 questions were approved and licensed by the Pentagon's U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Analysis

Data was collected from telephone interviews that were conducted with 20 participants and then transcribed and analyzed using auto coding and query-based coding features.

Findings

10 themes emerged from the analysis of responses. Two key results were:

- a key result was the participants believed that family, work, and school conflicts were barriers for soldiers not attending battle assemblies and extended combat training
- further exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions resulted in the finding that communication was not effective between the leadership, staff, and first-line leaders and the nonparticipant soldiers.

6 participants agreed and 11 participant strongly agreed that new policy should be written to retain and recover the nonparticipant soldiers.

Interpretation

The results addressed the gap in the literature about soldiers understanding the potential root causes.

The study findings may enlighten the chain of command within the Army Reserve about barriers leading to nonparticipation among soldiers and how they may improve the participation rate.

Limitations

The participants of this study were restricted to soldiers and Department of the Army civilians within the 3d Medical Command (Deployment Support's) subordinate commands.

Because of the nature of this study, it had unique aspects that did not apply to the entire command.

Recommendations

I developed a great working relationship with the community partners, and this provides an opportunity to explore other research opportunities to create new and innovative strategies for the retention of soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and employees in a corporate setting.

A future study on reducing the number of nonparticipants personnel throughout the Armed Forces can be implemented within the Air Force Reserve, The Marine Reserve, and Navy Reserve with a larger participant pool so that the results can be based on qualitative and/or quantitative results

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