

# THE PATH TO JOB SATISFACTION. APPLYING THE THEORY OF PURPOSEFUL BEHAVIOR TO MILITARY CONDITIONS

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*The aim of this study was to examine the relationships between, on one hand, personality and performance orientation and, on the other, job satisfaction and turnover intentions, using Barrick's et al. theory of purposeful behavior. Using a questionnaire, data about job satisfaction, performance orientation and turnover intentions were collected from 300 newly recruited Swedish soldiers. A path analysis gave partial, but not full support to the assumptions behind the theory of purposeful behavior model. No relationships were found between the personality traits of emotional stability and conscientiousness, nor to either performance orientation or directly to job satisfaction. On the other hand, performance orientation showed a consistent relationship to perceived levels of the job characteristics, which mediated the path between the person-related variables and the outcome variables. Performance orientation also showed a strong direct relationship to general job satisfaction, which, in turn, was strongly related to turnover intentions.*

**Key words:** *job satisfaction, performance, turnover intentions, military, path analysis, personality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover is a major problem for organizations because recruiting, selecting, and training new employees is an expensive

and demanding task (Dick et.al.: 2004). Argote, Insko, Yovetich and Romero (1995) found turnover to be negatively related to productivity. There are different explanations for causes behind turnover or turnover

intentions. Several studies (e.g. Jaiswal, Dash & Mishra, 2016; Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw and Rich, 2010; Rynes, Gerhart & Minette, 2004) show the importance of pay in relation to turnover, as well as to job satisfaction and employee motivation. On the other hand, Ghosh, Satyawadi, Joshi and Sahdman (2013) suggest that commitment (normative and affective) and goal clarity are the best predictors of turnover intentions or intentions to stay in the organization. Tett and Meyer (1993) found that job satisfaction and organizational commitment predicted turnover intentions, but that job satisfaction was a stronger predictor. Turnover intentions can be explained as a psychological withdrawal, which eventually may lead to actual turnover (Jaiswal, Dash and Mishra, 2016). Lee and Mowday (1987) claim that turnover intentions are a robust indication of actual turnover, hence making turnover intentions a strong warning sign for actual turnover. Several studies have demonstrated a negative correlation between job satisfaction and staff turnover (e.g. Harrison, Newman & Roth, 2006; Saari and Judge, 2004). Yang and Bartlett (2004) demonstrated that turnover intentions were reduced by organizational learning culture and job satisfaction. The main conclusion is that satisfied workers are less likely to leave the organization. There is thus a relation between job

satisfaction, turnover intentions and actual turnover (Harrison, Newman & Roth, 2006; Kohler & Mathieu, 1993). Furthermore, Van Eetveldt et al (2013) showed that perceptions of career insecurity increased turnover intentions; the latter was also associated with lowered affective organizational commitment, which in turn increased turnover intentions. Younger workers seem more likely to change jobs than older, more experienced employees (Farber, 1999; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008). DelCampo (2006) argues that younger workers are less likely to have established a good person–job fit, meaning that they are keener to seek other jobs that match their skills, interests and values. New employees also tend to have lower salaries, implying that they may be able to find higher paying jobs with other employers (Ippolito, 1987).

## **2. TURNOVER IN THE MILITARY**

The armed forces highly rely on attracting young people. In 2010, the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) replaced general conscription with voluntary basic military training. Therefore, the SAF became reliant on a sufficient number of people applying to join the organization voluntarily. Until 2010 conscription guaranteed the supply of personnel to the organization. Since 2010, however, SAF have had to compete with civilian employers in the labor

market for qualified personnel. Since the end of the Cold War, the SAF have also had a long period of downsizing the organization. This new recruitment scenario has made SAF pay attention to the psychosocial working conditions of its peacetime organization (Österberg & Rydstedt, submitted manuscript). Retaining personnel is a major challenge for the SAF, as the attrition rates are too high to keep the personnel system in balance. Several studies (e.g. Rydstedt and Österberg, 2013, Eighmey, 2006 and Manigart, 2005) display the challenges for armed forces in recruiting and retaining personnel in an all-volunteer forces system. There are also studies of turnover in the military context. Harrington, Bean, Pintello and Mathews (2001) showed that people were more likely to intend to leave, if they had lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction, and Proyer *et al* (2012) found that a positive psychological functioning, e.g. meaningful life, correlated with work satisfaction. Lytell and Drasgow (2009) found that withdrawal intentions predicted voluntary turnover. Following the theoretical framework and the new situation for the SAF, the aim with this study was to examine, on one hand, the relationships between personality and performance orientation, and, on the other, job satisfaction and turnover intentions, departing from the Model of Purposeful Behavior - PBM (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2013).

### 3. SITUATIONAL AND PERSON-RELATED APPROACHES TO JOB SATISFACTION

According to Barrick *et al.* (2013), there have traditionally been two approaches to the analysis of work-related behavior or performance, either as situational factors at work or as a function of personal dispositions. The first approach mainly focuses on the meaning of work, and one prominent situational model is the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; 1976). The JCM identifies five critical dimensions of work content: autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, and feedback from the job. These situational factors are given primacy in the model, although their impact on wellbeing and motivation are understood to be mediated by the critical psychological states (*i.e.* perceived meaningfulness, responsibility and knowledge) of the workers. The validity of the JCM has received sound empirical support in several review and meta-analytical studies (e.g. Boonzaier, Ficker & Braam, 2001; Fried & Ferries, 1987; Humphrey, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007; Parker *et al.*, 2003).

The second cluster of theories concerns dispositional or person-situational approaches, like the person-job fit theory of Anderson, Flynn and Spataro (2008). Studies of job satisfaction over time

(Arvey et al., 1989; Brief et al., 1988; George, 1989) imply that job satisfaction relates to stable traits and inherent dispositions. Furnham and Zacherl (1986) found that extraversion correlated positively - and neuroticism correlated negatively with job satisfaction, as did Judge, Heller and Mount (2002). Furthermore, Staw and colleagues (1985; 1986) showed that individual job satisfaction was stable over prolonged periods of time, even if job changes occurred. In a meta-analysis Judge, Bono and Heller (2002) found consistent relationships over time between job satisfaction and the traits included in the Five-factor model of personality (FFM), particularly neuroticism (negative), conscientiousness and extroversion (positive). Zimmerman (2008) also shows how personality traits relate to turnover decisions.

#### 4. THEORY OF PURPOSEFUL BEHAVIOR – AN INTERACTIONAL APPROACH TO WORK- RELATED PERFORMANCE

The Theory of Purposeful Behavior, represents a recent development in the interactional approach to the analysis of work-related behavior. More specific than earlier theories, it suggests that personal dispositions and job characteristics interact in influencing work outcomes (Barrick et al., 2013). The main assumption is that

personality traits make the individual prone to striving for the types of purposeful goals that match his/her personality. When the personal motivations associated with striving for these goals are supported by the job characteristics, a psychological state of experienced meaningfulness is reached. In order to study the relationship between these two motivational dynamics, Barrick et al (2013) propose the concept of achievement striving motivation as a mediator. It is described as “...an employee’s desire to complete things in a timely, careful, efficient way and... characterized by a strong focus on getting things done” (Barrick et al., 2013:145).

The personality dimension of the theory consists of the traits from the FFM (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 1992). These traits are proposed as interacting with specific job dimensions. Striving for purposefulness and experienced meaningfulness are understood as important aspects of psychological well-being, and the PBM implies that individuals are motivated to pursue their higher-order goals. This pursuit, in turn, is affected by situational factors (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2013).

While the theory of purposeful behavior departs from a personality trait perspective, the model also integrates social-cognitive dispositional assumptions. The individual is assumed to be motivated and driven by “*superordinate implicit goals or personal agendas*”

(Barrick *et al.*, 2013:133), rather than by personality traits or situational conditions directly. These higher-order goals derive from a person’s situational interaction rather than being a direct reflection of either of them. “A central tenet of theory is that personality traits – through the pursuit of higher order implicit goal – and job characteristics jointly influence experienced meaningfulness of work” (Barrick, Mount and Li, 2013:138).

While personality traits are supposed to affect the direction of the

higher order goals, it is the impact of these higher order goals rather than the traits *per se* that is expected to interact with the proper type of job characteristics to bring about motivation and job performance. The theory is thus based on two sets of testable assumptions – that different personality traits drive specific types of higher order goals, and that these goals interact with job characteristics to determine positive attitudes. The Theory of purposeful behavior can be explained in the model below.

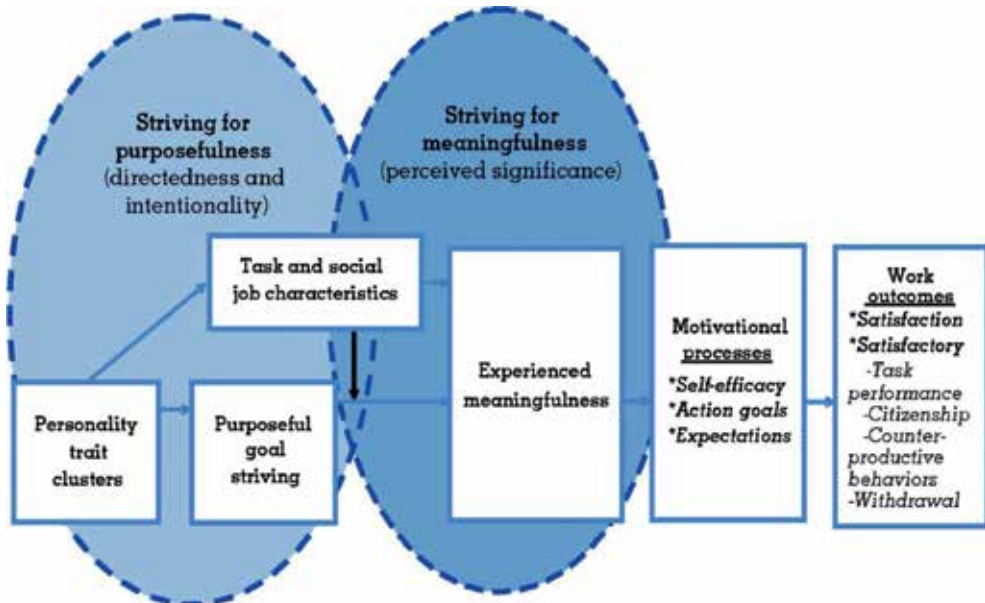


Fig. no. 1. Striving for purposefulness and meaningfulness  
Source: Barrick, Mount and Li. 2013:134

According to the theory, for the two personality traits on which the present study focuses, namely conscientiousness and emotional stability, it is suggested that they relate

to motivation for achievement striving (Barrick et al 2013). The following two hypotheses in accordance with Barrick, Mount and Li (2013) propositions were analyzed:

**H1.** Conscientiousness and emotional stability are positively related to higher order achievement striving motivation.

**H2.** The relationship between the higher achievement striving motivation job satisfaction are interactively related to three job characteristics: task identity, feedback from the job, and feedback from others.

## 5. RESEARCH METHOD DESCRIPTION

### 5.1. Participants and questionnaire administration

Questionnaire responses were obtained from 300 soldiers employed during 2012 and 2013. They represented all three fighting services. Six units (two from each fighting service) were invited to participate in the study and five of them responded positively. Due to the low response rates (less than 15 responses per unit), two of the units were excluded from the study. The response rate for the three remaining units (one from each fighting service) was 42 %. There were only private soldiers included in this study as they constituted a new group on the labor market, contracted soldiers, thus no officers were included in this study.

The sample mainly included men (91%) and the mean age was 24 years; 40% had completed basic military training and 60 % conscription. 60 % was employed in the Army, 25 % in the Air Force and 15 % in the Navy. A

description of the sample is shown in **Table 1**. The number of personnel in total in the SAF divided into branch in 2013 was as follows: Army 13 078, Navy 3 254 and Air Force, 3 741.

The data was collected with assistance from points of contacts at the different units. Each soldier/sailor was handed a questionnaire and an addressed envelope. To guarantee that the participants responded anonymously, the participants sealed and posted their own questionnaire. The questionnaire contained written information about the study. All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical principles of human research formulated by the Swedish Research Council (2002).

### 5.2. Ethics

Informed consent was obtained in advance, and participants were able to opt out at any time. Data collection was carried out by officers at the military units. The authors had neither access to personally identifying information nor points of contact. The study underwent an ethical examination at the Swedish Defense University institutional review board.

### 5.3. Instrument description

The questionnaire included some initial demographic variables and the other contents are presented in the following. For testing our hypotheses, we used The Job descriptive Survey (JDS) for measuring job

characteristics, where a 7-grade Likert scale is used, ranging from not agree at all, to totally agree is used. Performance orientation comprise of an own created index with two questions from the JDS, and two questions from Fors-Brandebo et al (2012). The Single Item Measure of Personality were used for measuring personality

### **5.3.1. The Job descriptive Survey**

The (JDS) was developed by Hackman and Oldham in 1974,1975 and was modified in 1980. The JDS is based on a theory of how job design affects work motivation, and offers measures of (a) job dimensions, (b) individual psychological states, (c) affective reactions of employees to the job and work setting, and (d) individual growth need strength (Hackman, 1974). The core job characteristics are: Skill Variety: The degree to which a job requires various activities. Task Identity: The degree to which the job requires the workers to identify and complete a work piece with a visible outcome. Task Significance: The degree to which the job impacts other people's lives. Autonomy: The degree to which the job provides the employee with freedom, independence, and the option to plan out the work and regulate the procedures in the job. Feedback from job itself: The degree to which the worker is provided with clear, specific, detailed, information about the effectiveness of his/her job performance.

The three basic psychological critical states theoretically promote high performance, motivation, and satisfaction at work. The critical states are that a person must experience the work as meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile, and feel responsibility for the result of the work and finally that a person should have knowledge of the results of the work.

### **5.3.2. Job characteristics**

These were measured by JDS Hackman and Oldham's (1974, 1980). Feedback from job itself: from Hackman and Oldham (1976), refers to the degree to which people learn how effective they are at work. Feedback at work may come from other people such as supervisors, peers, and customers, or it may come from the job itself. (Chronbach alpha. 57) Task identity: from Hackman and Oldham (1976), refers to the degree to which a person is in charge of completing an identifiable piece of work from start to finish.

### **5.3.3. Personality**

It was measured using the Single Item Measure of Personality (SIMP), (Woods and Hampson, 2005), which is a short form of the Big Five or the FFM. The SIMP showed a mean convergence of  $r=0.61$  with longer scales of Big Five measures, as well as acceptable reliability compared to longer scales. For emotional stability, the median value was 7.0 (SD 1.65) and for conscientiousness 4.17 (SD

1.70) respectively, on a nine-point Likert scale. The SIMP is constructed as follows:

*“How much does each description sound like you?”*

*“Generally, I come across as:”*

Emotional stability ranges from *“someone who is sensitive and excitable, and can be tense,”* to *“someone who is relaxed, unemotional rarely gets irritated and seldom feels blue.”*

Conscientiousness ranges from *“someone who likes to plan things, likes to tidy up, pays attention to details, but can be rigid or inflexible”* to *“someone who does not necessarily work to a schedule, tends to be flexible, but disorganized and often forgets to put things back in their proper place.”*

### 5.3.4. Performance orientation

We used performance orientation as a proxy for achievement striving (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2013). Our index for achievement striving comprised

*do”*. The second two questions were derived from a qualitative interview study, by Fors-Brandebo et al (2012): *“I feel that my work contributes to accomplishing the unit’s task”* and *“I feel that I am able to put my skills to good use”*.

### 5.3.5. Turnover intentions

An index of four questions was used for turnover intentions (Cronbach’s alpha .84). *“I look around for civilian employment”*, *“I want to be trained and then leave the SAF”*, *“I will not stay long in the SAF because of the low salary”* and *“I have decided to leave the SAF”*.

## 5.4. Results

In an initial analysis, there was no significant relationship between the two personality measures and the measure of Performance orientation. The correlation between performance orientation and Emotional stability was .07 (n.s.),

Scale	Cronbach’s alpha	Mean	SD	Range
Task identity (3 items)	.58	4.39	1.13	5.33
Feedback from agent (3 items)	.70	4.40	1.18	6.0
General job satisfaction (5 items)	.80	4.26	1.24	6.0
Turnover intentions (4 items)	.84	4.52	1.72	6.0
Feedback from job (3 items)	.57	4.65	0.99	6.0

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the scales in the Job Description Survey (7-graded response scale) and for turnover intentions.

of four questions (Cronbach’s alpha .74). The first two are recovered from Hackman and Oldham’s JDS: *“In this job it is difficult for me to be concerned about whether or not it is done properly”*, and *“I feel a very big personal responsibility for the work I*

*and with Conscientiousness .02 (n.s.). This clearly disproves Proposal A and Hypothesis 1. Naturally, the two personality variables also had no effect on Performance orientation in a tentative path model and, consequently, were not included in the final model.*



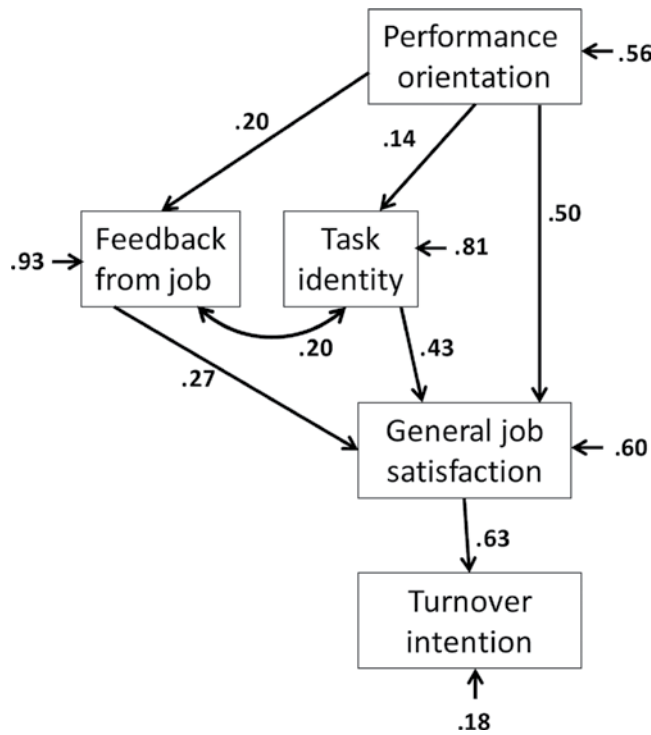


Fig. no. 2. Path model of relationships between *Performance orientation*, *Feedback from job*, *Task identity*, *General Job satisfaction* and *Turnover intentions* (XY standardized estimates)

**5.5. Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine, on one hand, the relationships between personality and performance orientation, and, on the other, job satisfaction and turnover intentions, departing from Barrick’s *et al.*’s (2013) Theory of purposeful behavior. The empirical analysis gave partial, but not full support to the assumptions behind the theory. No relationships were found between the personality traits of emotional stability and conscientiousness, either directly to performance orientation, or to job satisfaction. On the other hand, performance orientation showed a consistent

relationship to perceived levels of the job characteristics, which mediated the path between the person-related variables and the outcome variables. Performance orientation also showed a strong direct relationship to General Job Satisfaction, which, in turn, was strongly related to turnover intentions.

In contrast to the suggestions of the Theory of purposeful behavior, the personality traits analyzed (emotional stability, conscientiousness) were not related to performance orientation, nor to perceived job characteristics, or to job satisfaction. One possible reason for this may be the skewed distribution for neuroticism in our

sample, due to the psychological screening that precedes basic military training. Individuals that score high on neuroticism are excluded from employment in the SAF. Apart from the use of SIMP for the personality assessment, a possible explanation for the lack of a relationship between the personality traits analyzed – and performance orientation, job satisfaction and turnover intentions – the impact of homogeneity, and the low variance for emotional stability due to the selection criteria, could also explain the non-significant relationship. Our sample had undergone psychological screening before entering the SAF, hence there was a restricted range in our sample, mainly regarding neuroticism, because the psychological screening discriminates against those who score low (reversed score) on neuroticism.

On the other hand, our construct of performance orientation showed a significant relationship to job satisfaction, as well as an effect on the outcome, mediated by the job characteristics feedback from job and task identity. Thus, the findings in this study favor a process view rather than a trait view on the relationship between personal disposition and work-related behavior and attitudes. The low correlation between task identity and feedback from job, with the outcome variables, may possibly be explained due to that high performance orientation may overrun job content. The transition to an all-volunteer force in Sweden

also implied a new mindset among those already in the military system. Officers raised in a conscript system, suddenly needed to see recruits as future colleagues instead of conscripts that would eventually leave the military. This different view may have been hard to accept among some of the officer corps, leading to issues of job satisfaction not being considered of great importance. The new system based on voluntary participation could inflict other demands on the organization not present during conscription. Our data suggests that performance orientation is of great importance, and one reason could be that those joining the SAF are more performance oriented and motivated to use and develop their skills, compared to mandatory conscribed soldiers. The new system also entails recruits being employed and contracted for short or long terms, instead of doing conscription for some months and then leaving the organization. At the soldier level, this could suggest that individuals are more inclined to do their best and perform well at work compared to conscripts.

### **5.6. Practical implications**

These findings have practical implications for the SAF. Firstly, dropouts from basic training and secondly, the large proportion of recruits who leave the SAF after a short period, produce an unsatisfactorily high attrition rate. The problems for

the SAF in retaining personnel are costly and alarming and highlight the importance of job satisfaction. As our results show, general job satisfaction correlates negatively with turnover intentions. For the SAF this means that providing their employees with meaningful work tasks, giving soldiers responsibility and, most of all, facilitating performance orientation must be prioritized. Those joining the Swedish military have done so on a voluntary basis and our results suggest that providing these, mostly young, people with a work environment that generates performance orientation is significant in order to retain personnel. Much money is spent on attracting recruits, but if the SAF do not provide sufficient job satisfaction, the swing door effect will continue to generate many vacancies. Performance orientation has a strong relationship with general job satisfaction. This can be related to the fact that during the first years of voluntary service in Sweden, the psychological qualities of recruits were better than the last years of conscription (Jonsson, 2013). This suggests that individuals at soldier level generally had a desire for greater self-esteem and higher order needs. The apparent importance of performance orientation highlights important issues for the SAF. It is of great importance to provide motivated individuals, who have joined voluntarily, with duties that match their desire for

high performance. Cutting down on training and opportunities for soldiers to train as they fight seems to have a significantly negative impact on this group. If the SAF provides opportunities for contracted soldiers to perform at work, a greater proportion of them will stay in the organization.

### **5.7. Strengths and limitations of the study**

To our knowledge, this is the first study that empirically tests Barrick, Mount and Li's (2013) Purposeful Behavior Model (PBM), deriving from the Theory of purposeful behavior. Though we do not test the model in full, we make partial use of the model to study job satisfaction and turnover intentions with this new theoretical approach. The importance of performance orientation adds another dimension to job satisfaction in general and the theory of purposeful behavior model in particular. Furthermore, our findings have implications for the current labor market, as the demographic distribution of many Western countries populations looks quite similar; an aging population and significant competition for good quality, skilled youth.

There are though some limitations in this study that need to be addressed. We had no independent measure of turnover and we do not know how many people actually left the SAF.

However, Lee and Mowday, (1987) argue that turnover intention is a strong mental precursor for turnover, and therefore we argue that turnover intention is equally harmful to the organization. We created our own index called performance orientation, which is not exactly Barrick, Mount and Li's (2013) original measure achievement striving. We argue that the input components of our index resemble these of Barrick, Mount and Li's (2013). However, this fact might have biased the results. The alfa values for two of the subscales deriving from Hackman and Oldham's JDS (1974) were low, thus the reliability can be arguable and lowers the information given by our path analysis. However the JDS is a standardized scale, leaving no space for altering the scale.

As far as we know, there have been no studies of job satisfaction within the Swedish military, which narrows generalization of the findings. However, this topic needs to be studied further. As for the nonexistent findings for the personality variables, a study using different facets of personality, e.g. derived from the FFM instead of broader instruments such as the SIMP, should be conducted. The fact that the data is cross sectional also means that we cannot draw any causal conclusions from this study.

All the data in our study is self-reported and it is limited by the fact that it cannot be independently verified. Self-reported data could

contain several potential sources of bias that should be noted as limitations; selective memory and exaggeration could be possible sources of bias.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Many organizations struggle to attract, recruit and retain their personnel, and the recruitment pool in many Western countries is getting smaller. This study provides a new way of looking at the ability to retain personnel. The outcomes obtained may help organizations in general and the Swedish armed forces in particular, to attain a lower degree of attrition. To establish the working conditions to meet the demands of those voluntary applying for the SAF in line with their performance orientation is crucial to retain personnel.

There are several studies indicating a relationship between personality and job satisfaction (e.g. Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002; Judge & Bono, 2001). In our study, personality does not have a relationship with job satisfaction. Future studies should address personality in relation to broader samples where there has been an initial screening and hence a lack of normal distribution scores within the sample. Our sample consisted of young, newly recruited soldiers. For this reason it would be interesting to study the relationship between job satisfaction,

turnover intentions and performance orientation at higher organizational levels. Even though the PBM departs from a trait perspective, Barrick, Mount and Li (2013) assume that the impact of behavior from traits is mediated by cognitive constructs (in this case performance orientation). While this study cannot confirm this assumption, it is an important task for future research to further elaborate the role of traits, as well as cognitive processes in the analysis of work motivation and performance. Future research should also address the element of performance orientation at different levels because this seems to be of importance in reducing turnover intentions. Furthermore, there is a need for longitudinally designed studies to gain a better understanding of the factors behind turnover intentions and performance orientation.

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