Exploring turnover factors for military pilots

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the push and pull factors that affect a military pilot's decision to leave the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). Turnover in the military is costly. When service members leave, they must be replaced with suitably trained personnel from within the organisation. Therefore, when a pilot leaves the RNZAF, not only does the RNZAF lose valuable experience, but it is also expensive to retrain pilots to replace them.

This qualitative research was conducted using data from six semi-structured interviews with ex-RNZAF pilots. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the transcripts. Analysis revealed that participants valued both their military and pilot identities but could not maintain both. Where there were perceived challenges to remaining in the organisation, such as contract and job uncertainty, workplace culture, workload, stress, family, and lifestyle, participants had left the RNZAF to maintain their pilot identity by seeking flying roles elsewhere.

Psychological contract theory explained how mismatched expectations influenced the turnover decision. A lack of job security, career management, leadership, support, and clear role expectations could lead to turnover through perceived breaches of the psychological contract.

Job embeddedness theory explained how off-the-job factors such as family members' unwillingness to relocate, and seeing peers leave for the airlines, affected turnover. This theory explained how participants had to balance what they would sacrifice by remaining in the organisation (e.g., opportunities to keep flying) and what they would sacrifice by leaving the organisation (e.g., meaningful work, community). Work-life balance was also an important aspect that influenced the participants' decision to leave. Participants wanted more time at home to spend with their families.

In conclusion, this research found a complex interplay between factors that influenced the turnover decision. To help increase retention, conversations surrounding careers, expectations and future plans should be initiated proactively, before personnel are likely to begin seeking job alternatives.

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Contents

List of abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ATPL	Airline Transport Pilot Licence
CPL	Commercial Pilot Licence
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
NZA	New Zealand Army
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
PCB	Psychological Contract Breach
PCV	Psychological Contract Violation
QFI	Qualified Flying Instructor
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RNZN	Royal New Zealand Navy
ROSO	Return of Service Obligation (contractual commitment to remain in the NZDF for a specified time)
TCM	Three-component model
USAF	United States Air Force

Glossary

Captain	First in command of an aircraft and is responsible for aircraft safety
Deployment	A period of time spent overseas on a mission
Flight commander	Equivalent to a managerial position
Posting	A job position that typically lasts two to three years
Rank	A position in the hierarchy of the armed forces
Squadron	An operational unit in the RNZAF

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the push and pull factors that affect a military pilot's decision to leave the organisation to work elsewhere. The goal was to explore the factors that made pilots want to leave, made them consider staying, and explore what attracted them to a role outside of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). Understanding these three factors allows for a holistic approach to turnover, as opposed to just looking at one aspect such as why people want to leave.

There have been some studies done on military turnover, pilot turnover, and military pilot turnover. Other studies on turnover primarily look at one aspect, for example, why people leave. This research aimed to take a holistic approach and understand all the different aspects that can influence a person's decision to leave the RNZAF. Turnover is expensive, and by the time a military pilot has completed their Return of Service Obligation (ROSO), they have at least ten years of experience (Royal New Zealand Air Force, 2020). Not only does the RNZAF lose valuable experience when pilots leave, but it is also expensive to retrain pilots to replace them. The loss of skilled and experienced pilots impacts the RNZAF as it increases the training burden, especially if the departing pilots are qualified flying instructors (QFIs) themselves. Furthermore, if turnover is too high, and those who have left cannot be replaced in a timely manner, it may affect operational outcomes.

Military context

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) plays a key role in protecting New Zealand's people and interests by ensuring its personnel are highly trained and ready to move at any given time. There are three active parts of the NZDF: RNZAF, Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN), and New Zealand Army (NZA). The RNZAF works alongside the other services, using aircraft to provide surveillance, search and rescue, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, tactical airlift, strategic airlift, and support for deployments.

Specifically, aircraft support the RNZN in operations that guard against piracy, drugs, terror threats, and illegal fishing. Furthermore, the RNZAF also supports the NZA by helping them move personnel and equipment, and the New Zealand Police to help prevent criminal activities (New Zealand Defence Force, 2020a). The aforementioned operations are conducted both in New Zealand and overseas in places such as Sudan, South Korea, or Antarctica. For example, in early 2021, a tropical cyclone

travelled through the Pacific islands. A P3-K2 Orion was tasked to conduct imagery of the damage, and a C-130 Hercules was tasked to transport aid and personnel to assist with the recovery (Quilliam, 2021b).

RNZAF training

The RNZAF's taskings can be reactive, meaning they are not planned, and crews must be ready to move at short notice. As personnel must be competent in their role, 'exercises' are conducted to simulate a real mission for training purposes. An exercise aims to allow personnel to practice their skills in a safe environment so that they can use them when needed. For example, RNZAF helicopter crews practice counter-terrorism operations, working alongside the NZ Police and Special Forces, so they are prepared if a terrorism threat occurs (Quilliam, 2021a). Other exercises include working alongside the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to conduct anti-submarine warfare scenarios where the aim is to protect friendly warships from submarines (Quilliam, 2021c).

People

None of the above could occur without highly trained personnel willing to train to the required standard to conduct such missions. The Defence Capability Plan, which outlines the government's investment plan for defence, recognises that people are "New Zealand's single greatest defence asset in the South Pacific" (Ministry of Defence, 2019, p. 13). Due to the importance of people in the NZDF, the plan aims to grow the Defence Force by approximately 1500 personnel. The Defence White Paper (Ministry of Defence, 2016), which sets out the government's defence policy objectives, notes that one of the main challenges is attracting and retaining people, especially as many people will be in high demand elsewhere. This must be done in a manner that is affordable in the long term. These reports signal that people are vital to the NZDF, and there is value in retaining them.

When personnel decide to leave the RNZAF, they take with them their experience and are costly to replace. If turnover is high and personnel cannot be replaced, this may impact which operational missions can be conducted. As the RNZAF's primary purpose is to protect New Zealand's interests, it is imperative that there is the right number of people with the right skills to achieve this.

Selection and training of military pilots

Military pilot selection and training are different from civilian pilot training. This is due to the cost to the government of training a military pilot. Military pilots complete years of training before

performing their role, and training is a continuous process. This training ensures they have the physical and mental skills to perform as officers and pilots both in New Zealand and overseas.

Selection

Firstly, in the military, personnel can apply and be selected regardless of whether they have had previous flying experience. The military selects those who show the potential to pass pilot training and funds their training while paying personnel a salary. Due to the high training cost, the selection process is thorough, with candidates completing many aptitude tests and interviews prior to being selected. Initially, applicants will complete basic aptitude testing online. If they meet the required standard, they then complete in-person interviews at their local recruitment office. From there, successful candidates will complete a three-day assessment aimed to assess both officer and pilot attributes. This assessment consists of psychological, cognitive, fitness, and leadership testing. If the candidate passes the three-day assessment, they then go on to complete medical testing. The candidates who pass all these stages go to a review board and are selected amongst other applicants. If selected, candidates then receive an offer of service and begin their officer training.

Initial training

Personnel initially complete a training course that teaches them the essential skills to work in the military, including marching, weapons training, leadership, and problem-solving. This course usually takes around six months. On completion, graduates are now commissioned officers and are ready to begin their pilot training.

Pilot training is split into two sections: ground school and flying. Ground school teaches the fundamental aspects of flying, including aircraft technical knowledge, air law, and meteorology. Pilot trainees must pass all sections of this course prior to beginning flight training. Flight training is the next phase of pilot training. Pilot trainees learn how to operate the aircraft, manage emergencies, navigate, perform aerobatics, and fly in formation. Once personnel have completed this course, they are now qualified pilots and can move to other aircraft types.

Career progression

Once personnel graduate from pilot training, they convert to another aircraft type (fixed wing or rotary) (Royal New Zealand Air Force, 2021). This develops their skills further before they convert to an operational aircraft such as the C-130 Hercules. Once flying operational aircraft, personnel

continue training to gain enough experience and hours to upgrade to captain. For experienced pilots, there is also the option of training to become a QFI. QFIs train new pilots entering the organisation, as well as train and assess current pilots. They help ensure all pilots are operating safely and have opportunities to develop professionally. Professional development occurs by pilots learning to fly a new aircraft type or upgrading their current level of skill and knowledge. Since the RNZAF conducts its pilot training internally, instructors are essential in order to generate the pilot workforce.

Contracts and engagement periods

Due to the high cost of the initial training, personnel receive a ROSO once they have successfully completed pilot training. This requires personnel to remain within the military for a pre-determined amount of time to ensure the organisation protects its training investment and receives a fair return on the cost of training (New Zealand Defence Force, 2020b). Once personnel have completed their ROSO, they are allowed to leave the organisation. However, personnel also have an engagement period on their contract which determines how long they can work for the RNZAF. The engagement period is normally longer than the ROSO, and once this period has four or less years remaining, the individual is reviewed at an Extension of Service Board (New Zealand Defence Force, 2020b). The outcome of the board may result in an extension of varied length, or no extension to the contract.

Alternative career paths

The standard career path for an RNZAF pilot is to become a captain on an operational aircraft, then become a QFI. However, there are other career paths within the organisation. Throughout their career, some pilots may work in ground roles. These are roles that involve managing teams, conducting project work, or performing other tasks required for the RNZAF to operate. Other pilots may continue flying but will take up managerial roles as well.

The pathway for a military pilot is different compared to a civilian pilot. Civilian pilots usually pay to gain the required hours and experience to join the airlines. Pilots may be paid when operating on a Commercial Pilots Licence (CPL) and Air Transport Pilots Licence (ATPL). For a CPL, pilots must have 200 hours total flight time, and for an ATPL they must have 1500 hours total flight time. A CPL allows a pilot to fly commercially and be paid, but airlines prefer pilots who have attained their ATPL (Air New Zealand, 2020).

If a pilot decides to leave the RNZAF to work for the airlines, they must obtain the appropriate licences. Typically, the amount of experience and time a pilot has by the time they leave is sufficient

to join the airlines. However, pilots must convert their military experience into a civilian equivalent and sit exams to obtain the ATPL.

Once employed by an airline, pilots will typically initially operate on the regional network flying turboprop aircraft. Once the pilot has gained enough experience, they will then move to the jet fleet and operate both regionally and internationally (Air New Zealand, 2020).

Overall, becoming an airline pilot involves a lot of time and resources for the individual before applying for a job. It is unlikely that a pilot will leave the airlines to join the military and start their training from the beginning. This creates a one-way loss, where military pilots leave to join the airlines, but airline pilots do not leave to join the military.

Pilot work environment

Military and civilian pilots both operate aircraft, but in different environments. To understand the differences between the two work environments, we must first understand the general flying environment and its stressors. Only then can we understand the differences between military and civilian flying.

The work environment for a pilot is unique and has many physiological and psychological stressors. Pilots work in a confined space with reduced oxygen, and increased noise, vibration, and demanding situations such as poor weather or systems failure. Due to the nature of the work, the hours may be irregular, resulting in sleep disruption and not enough time to recover between shifts. Furthermore, if flying over time zones, jet lag may affect the crew, and fatigue can impair social and cognitive performance (The British Psychological Society, 2017). These stressors affect not only the pilots but their friends and family. Being absent from home can make relationships difficult to establish and maintain (Bor et al., 2017), and the difficulties this causes in relationships can impact concentration and decision-making at work (The British Psychological Society, 2017).

The above stressors are relevant for both military and civilian pilots. However, pilots in the military have a different role from pilots in the civilian world. Airline pilots operate on similar routes and have a flight schedule that they know in advance. Military pilots often react to disasters, or government requirements, which result in last-minute planning and operations. The difference in operating environments brings other challenges, such as personnel operating in difficult and dangerous environments for long periods of time. Also, changing aircraft type or job in the military may necessitate personnel changing location, which results in families also needing to move.

The differences between civilian and military pilot work environments need to be considered when reviewing the literature on staff turnover. Some turnover factors may be relevant for both roles; however, the additional stressors unique to the military environment requires the two populations to be studied separately.

Military pilot research

The literature on military pilots predominantly originates from combat-oriented militaries. Some studies showed that the main reasons pilots left the United States Air Force (USAF) was due to the wage difference and airline hiring (Roth, 1981; Stone et al., 1998). Other studies show that pilots left due to the USAF's high operations tempo, as opposed to leaving to work for the airlines (Headquarters Air Force Rated Force Policy Office, 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). Pilots who worked in 'ground roles' were 40% more likely to stay in the Air Force than those still actively flying (Fullerton, 2003). The authors suggest this reflects a selection bias as pilots willing to work in roles that do not require a pilot's expertise are probably less attracted to working in the airlines. This study also found that aircraft type had a significant impact on whether a pilot decided to leave the military. Helicopter pilots were the least likely to separate as the demand for rotary pilots is a lot lower than fixed-wing pilots. Pilots who flew tactical and mission-focused aircraft were also more likely to stay than those who flew training and transport aircraft. Again, these differences may be due to a selection bias – where pilots who have an a priori preference for airline careers may choose to fly training or transport aircraft, and those with an a priori preference for military careers may choose to fly more tactical or mission focused aircraft.

Studies have been conducted in the US military assessing retention and modelling the departure of pilots from the military to the airlines (Elliott et al., 2004; United States General Accounting Office, 1999). In 1999, the United States Department of Defence reported a pilot shortage that was expected to continue for several years. The report stated that all flying pilot roles remained full; however, non-flying positions designated for pilots were not. A suggestion was to assess whether the non-flying pilot roles need to be filled by pilots or whether other trades could fill them. This study revealed three key factors that contributed to pilot shortfalls. Firstly, they had reduced the number of pilots recruited during most of the 1990s. Secondly, there had been delays in the training pipeline. Thirdly, pilots left before retirement due to other career opportunities available. The main reasons for leaving were the high operational pace, inadequate resources and equipment to do their job, and dissatisfaction with

leadership. There were also two main concerns for career progression. Firstly, pilots were being asked to stay in cockpit positions, and therefore were concerned that they were not given any opportunities to enhance their career through other positions. Secondly, pilots would rather spend their time in the cockpit and were displeased when assigned tasks that took them away from flying. These results indicate two different approaches to career progression. The first group wanted to progress their career through other positions, and the second group wanted to remain in the pilot role.

Turnover variables that are not specifically linked to the role have been researched as well. Gultekin et al. (2012) studied military pilot turnover in the Turkish Air Force. They found the probability of separation was increased with an increase in age, being female, not married, lower levels of education (for example, pilots possessing a master's degree are more likely to stay in the military than a pilot with a bachelor's degree), and fewer dependents. Career dissatisfaction and pay were among the other reasons for pilots leaving. Dissatisfaction resulted from aspects such as separation from family and lack of career counselling. The antecedents of turnover intentions of Indian military officers have also been reviewed (Jaiswal et al., 2015). The authors provided a conceptual framework for turnover intentions that focused on job satisfaction and commitment. Finally, Prouse (2010) researched work engagement and turnover intention in a New Zealand airline. This research focused on pilots and cabin crew and showed that engagement, meaningfulness, and psychological safety were negatively related to intention to turnover. Job resources were also positively related to engagement through motivational pathways (through meaningfulness).

This literature suggests that military pilot turnover is an issue for other countries, as is military personnel and airline pilot turnover. However, the military studies were conducted with Air Forces that are much larger and more combat-orientated than the RNZAF. The current research literature suggests that pilot retention has been an ongoing issue since 1980. Elliott et al. (2004) assessed the effects of airline hiring on the military. The analysis was conducted between 1998 and 2000 and found that an increase in major airline hiring was associated with increased military pilot attrition. As airline hiring increases, so will attrition. The COVID-19 pandemic may have reduced military pilot turnover due to a lack of airline job opportunities; however, increasing demand is predicted for both airline and rotary pilots once the aviation industry recovers (Boeing, 2020). Due to these differences and the increasing demand for pilots, this research addresses the gap by focusing on turnover factors for New Zealand military pilots operating in a small military that largely focuses on non-combat missions.

Research questions

This research aims to find out the following:

1) What factors influence a pilot's decision to leave the military?

2) What factors influence a pilot's consideration to stay in the military?

3) What factors pull a pilot away from the military to a new role?

Significance of the study

The short-term benefits of this research include generating themes that the RNZAF can use to try to increase pilot retention. Increasing pilot retention will increase the overall levels of experience in the organisation, and with more qualified pilots in the RNZAF, reduce the time and cost to train new pilots. Some of the themes may also cross over into other areas of the military or aviation sector and may help increase retention.

This research will also contribute to the current literature, especially in areas such as retention and job transition, as these are not as widely researched as turnover.

Chapter 2: Psychological contracts and military pilot turnover

Turnover

Turnover in the military is costly compared to a civilian organisation. When service members leave, they must be replaced with suitably trained personnel from within the organisation. In contrast, a civilian organisation can find suitable replacements that have been trained and gained experience elsewhere. Specifically, all military pilots need to be trained from the beginning due to the military's hierarchical structure, regardless of their previous experience. For example, if a pilot already flies for an airline and wishes to join the RNZAF, they will still have to complete the same courses as someone who has never flown before. Therefore, the organisation needs to continuously recruit and train to ensure that a suitable replacement is available when personnel leave. Maintaining the balance between the number of people being recruited, promoted, and leaving the military is essential to ensure the NZDF can continue operations to protect New Zealand's interests (Ministry of Defence, 2016).

Turnover intentions and turnover are two different aspects that need to be considered. Turnover intentions refer to an individual's intention to leave, whereas turnover is the process of leaving an organisation. An employee's intention to leave is subjective by nature, while turnover can be objectively measured. An organisation can influence an individual's turnover intentions; however, the process of actually leaving is dependent on external factors such as job availability. Turnover intentions were positively correlated with actual turnover but may not be as closely related as some theories suggest (Cohen et al., 2016). Actual turnover is also strongly predicted by factors such as the availability of alternative job opportunities and economic conditions (Amankwaa & Anku-Tsede, 2015; Mano-Negrin & Tzafrir Shay, 2004). The majority of research focuses on turnover intentions; therefore, it is essential to consider that changes in variables, while they might affect turnover intentions, may not affect actual turnover.

Turnover is often viewed as dichotomous, with employee-initiated terminations viewed as voluntary and employer-initiated terminations viewed as involuntary (Hom et al., 2019). As this research is concerned with individuals who voluntarily leave the military, it is important to define what is meant by voluntary turnover. As the definition of voluntary can differ between scholars, this research will classify voluntary turnover as "instances wherein management agrees that the employee had the physical opportunity to continue employment with the company, at the time of termination" (Maertz & Campion, 1998, p. 50). This definition encompasses all reasons other than dismissals or retirement as voluntary turnover. For example, quitting due to pregnancy or relocation is voluntary as leaving is

still considered an "individual choice, even though the employee may feel as though the choice to stay is extremely costly" (Maertz & Campion, 1998, p. 51).

The literature on turnover encompasses many different workplaces, cultures, theories, and other variables. Due to the many influences on turnover, existing models have been unable to capture all aspects. However, plenty of antecedent variables have been researched, and models have explored specific aspects of turnover. The literature primarily focuses on service industries such as hospitality (Dwesini, 2019) and nursing (Marufu et al., 2021; Pedrosa et al., 2020). There is literature on military turnover (Brooks & Greenberg, 2018); however, there is limited research specifically on military pilots (Elliott et al., 2004). Due to this, literature has also been drawn from areas such as nursing and teaching. Although these roles are not the same, there are still some similarities. For example, nurses are highly skilled and work in a time-critical environment where a small mistake could be fatal. Pilots are also highly skilled and work in a time-critical environment, especially when dealing with in-flight emergencies or during operations. There are also fundamental differences in the roles. For example, nurses work with patients, whereas pilots work with a trained crew and rarely deal with passengers.

Studies on pilot retention have previously been conducted on combat-focused militaries. These studies illustrate that military pilot retention is an issue for the RNZAF and other countries as well. Although research from other countries is valuable, a few factors limit its generalisability to the RNZAF. Firstly, New Zealand has a small military, resulting in different issues compared to a large military such as the USAF. Secondly, although New Zealand has a combat capable military, the RNZAF does not have any strike aircraft and predominantly conducts non-combat roles such as peacekeeping and patrols. Due to this, the work environment stressors and other issues may differ from those reported by other countries. Thirdly, cultural differences may make other countries' military research less relevant for the RNZAF. Due to these differences, both military and general turnover literature will be discussed.

Psychological contracts

When pilots join the RNZAF, they enter two different contracts. The first is a physical contract (in the case of the RNZAF, the ROSO) which requires them to work for the organisation for ten years post-pilot training (Royal New Zealand Air Force, 2020). The employment relationship in the RNZAF is unique due to Section 45 (5) of the Defence Act 1990, which states, "Nothing in the Employment Relations Act 2000 applies to the conditions of service of members of the Armed Forces" (Ministry of Defence, 1990). For example, RNZAF service personnel cannot protest against senior management decisions or join a union. If a service person does show insubordinate behaviour or disobeys a lawful

command, they can be charged under the Armed Forces Discipline Act 1971 (Ministry of Defence, 1971).

The second relevant type of contract is the psychological contract. This is an implicit or explicit understanding between an employee and employer, based upon expressed and implied promises about what an employer owes their employee and vice versa. It is a framework that helps employees and employers understand their current and future relationships and employee attitudes and behaviours (Conway & Briner, 2009). However, Conway & Briner (2009) note that an issue with the psychological contract research is that surveys are predominantly used which only capture the current perceptions and attitudes, as opposed to implicit beliefs. This may mean the survey is an inappropriate tool to measure psychological contracts and that research to date may only be measuring explicit contracts.

A psychological contract has six key features (Rousseau, 1995):

- *Voluntary choice.* Psychological contracts are entered into voluntarily, motivating people to fulfil their commitment. There are both explicit and implicit voluntary commitments, with explicit commitments having a more powerful effect on behaviour.
- *Belief in mutual agreement.* The contract must have a mutual belief that each party has accepted the promise and will deliver on their commitments. However, there is no guarantee that each party has the same understanding as the other.
- *Incompleteness*. When a psychological contract is created, it tends to be incomplete and needs to be filled out over time by the employer and employee. This results in a contract that evolves and changes with the employee's and employer's changing circumstances. Due to the length of a psychological contract, they become elaborate and can start to include aspects that workers find satisfying, such as camaraderie (Lambert et al., 2003). If there is no effort to reinforce the mutuality of the contract, this can create issues as both parties may have a different understanding of the contract.
- *Multiple contract makers.* Another factor with psychological contracts is that they are formed through many different sources of information. For example, employees may shape their psychological contract through interactions with human resources, top management, and their immediate supervisor. If their immediate supervisor then leaves, many employees feel they are losing the shared understanding of the contract. When different sources of information convey different messages, this can erode the mutuality of the contract. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) note that in organisations, managers may feel constrained by the

organisation-wide policies and practices. This may reduce their autonomy regarding how they can fulfil employee obligations.

- *Managing losses when contracts fail.* When the employer does not fulfil their commitments in the contract, losses and strong negative reactions can occur, such as anger, termination, and withdrawal of support. Therefore, both parties must focus on fulfilling their commitments and managing losses when commitments are difficult to maintain.
- *Contract as a model of the employment relationship.* The mental model a psychological contract creates helps guide employees and provides an understanding of what they can expect in the future. This understanding helps the employee and employer function together, even without fully knowing the other party's intentions or expectations. As new information emerges, it gets interpreted within the pre-existing psychological contract. If the new information does not fit within the pre-existing psychological contract, the contract will need to be adapted to fit the new situation.

There are three types of psychological contracts: relational, transactional, and balanced (Rousseau, 2004). Relational psychological contracts focus on loyalty and stability. They are open-ended, long-lasting, flexible, and require ongoing emotional investment (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Those in a relational contract value what the employer offers, as well as the relationship (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). An employee in this type of contract will be more willing to work overtime, support organisational changes, and help others. If this contract is violated, the employee will be upset, but they will seek remedies to maintain the relationships with the employer. However, if the situation cannot be remediated, the employee may reduce their contributions or leave the organisation (Rousseau, 2004).

Relational psychological contracts are preferred compared to transactional psychological contracts. Transactional psychological contracts are short-term, specific, materialistic and require less emotional investment (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 2004). Employees will adhere to the terms and conditions but will seek employment elsewhere if the conditions change or the contract is breached. This type of contract is used when employees are easily replaced.

Lastly, balanced psychological contracts combine relational and transactional contracts. The employer is committed to developing their employees and anticipates that employees are flexible and willing to adjust if conditions change. Balanced contracts create the highest productivity, employee satisfaction, and career advancement (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004).

Threats to the psychological contract

There are two main threats to the psychological contract: a psychological contract breach (PCB) and a psychological contract violation (PCV). Initially, studies used breach and violation interchangeably. However, Morrison and Robinson (1997) argued that there is a difference between each which has now been widely accepted. A PCB occurs "when one party in a relationship perceives another to have failed to fulfil promised obligation(s)" (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 247). A PCB has less impact on employees and only covers the awareness that the employer has failed to meet the contract obligations (Cassar & Briner, 2011; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). PCBs lead to PCVs which are an affective state where employees develop strong emotional responses to the organisation's failure to meet promises (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Theory and empirical findings on psychological contracts suggest that the violation mediates the relationship between breach and outcomes (Cassar & Briner, 2011). For example, Dulac et al. (2008) found that violation fully mediated the relationship between breach and commitment, and breach and trust. Violation also partially mediated the relationship between breach and turnover intentions.

There are three main causes to why a psychological breach occurs (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). The first is reneging, where employers deliberately fail to fulfil their promise. For example, an employer says they will promote the employee within a set time frame but they do not fulfil the promise. The second is incongruence, where the employee and employer have a misunderstanding. The third is vigilance, where the employee looks out for contract breaches. Vigilance may increase if the psychological contract has been breached in the past.

Many researchers have studied events that lead to psychological contract fulfilment, a PCB, or PCV, including the variables that can impact this relationship. Psychological contract fulfilment has been found to be positively associated with formal and informal career management practices (Sturges et al., 2005). Formal practices include training to help develop the career, whereas informal practices include being given career advice when needed. Furthermore, if the organisation engages in socialisation practices, which aim to teach new employees the organisation's norms and expectations, the psychological contract is more likely to be fulfilled (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Finally, the perception that the psychological contract has been breached can occur when employees feel like their organisation is performing poorly, or they are performing poorly (Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

The perception that a breach has occurred can be affected by an employee's employment alternatives. Robinson and Morrison (2000) found that the perception of a PCB was less likely when employees had few employment alternatives. Therefore, employees with more employment

alternatives were more likely to perceive a PCB. Several studies have also found a negative relationship between breach and perceived organisational support and leader-member exchange (Dulac et al., 2008; Tekleab et al., 2005). If the relationship is supportive, the parties trust that the other will deliver in the long run, and employees are less likely to monitor and detect breaches (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Also, supportive relationships result in employees viewing discrepancies as small and not a violation (Rousseau, 1995).

The strength of the response to breach is related to the social exchange relationship and the cause of the breach. Social exchange refers to a relationship based on reciprocity where a cycle emerges of obligation to reciprocate between individuals (Gouldner, 1960). For example, an individual works overtime and in return, the manager allows them to leave work early one day. Individuals with lower-quality social exchange relationships respond more strongly to violations following a perceived breach compared to individuals who have higher-quality relationships (Dulac et al., 2008). Also, employees experience violations at a greater intensity when the breach is due to the employer reneging, and the employee feels they have been treated unfairly in the process (Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

Consequences of psychological contract breach

When a psychological contract is breached, it can negatively affect both the employee and the employer. When a breach or violation occurs, it can impact employees' turnover intentions. For example, Zhao et al. (2007) found that threats to the psychological contract can negatively impact employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment, leading to an increase in mistrust and intention to quit. However, the correlation with actual turnover was just 0.05 (Zhao et al., 2007). Breaches and violations can also lead to withdrawal intentions and leaving the organisation (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Turnley and Feldman (2000) found that PCVs were more strongly related to intentions to quit than to employees' neglect of their in-role job responsibilities and duties. One possible explanation is that employees are less likely to experience negative repercussions when looking for another job, compared to if they neglected their required job duties.

PCBs have a stronger association with attitudes than behaviour, meaning breach may not be a good predictor of workplace behaviour (Conway & Briner, 2009). Although some studies examine the antecedents of a breach, the area is not well researched, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions (Conway & Briner, 2009).

There have been many explanations as to why PCBs cause negative effects. Some reasons suggested include if there is a discrepancy between what is promised and received, it is likely to lead to

dissatisfaction (Zhao et al., 2007). Robinson and Rousseau (1994) suggest that breach causes mistrust or deprives employees of rewards, and Zhao et al. (2007) suggest breaches lead to retaliation. Morrison and Robinson (1997) suggest that the social contract, which defines what behaviour is appropriate within a social setting, is a point of reference for evaluating a potential breach.

Job satisfaction and the psychological contract

Job satisfaction is strongly related to turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000) and has been found to partially (Turnley & Feldman, 2000) and fully mediate (Tekleab et al., 2005) the relationship between breach and intentions to quit. Bal et al. (2008) also found that PCB is negatively related to job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction can be broken into three antecedents: dispositional, contextual, and event-based (Fudge et al., 2020). Dispositional factors include individual factors such as personality. In the military, these factors are considered when selecting personnel. Contextual factors include job design, social environment characteristics, organisational justice, human resource management practices and perceptions, and leadership. Event-based antecedents focus on how events can produce emotional reactions, leading to work attitudes such as job satisfaction. Although all three antecedents are important, contextual factors will only be discussed as these are what can be influenced by the organisation. The two factors that will be discussed are workload and organisational environment.

A key component of job satisfaction is satisfaction with workload (Hermon & Chahla, 2018), which is associated with burnout (McFadden et al., 2018). Studies on nurses have shown job satisfaction decreases with high workloads, contributing to turnover intention (Lu et al., 2012). In one US study, the primary sources of job stress were work overload and long work hours (Pflanz & Ogle, 2006). UK Navy studies found that the higher the workload, the higher the strain (Bridger et al., 2011).

Satisfaction with the environment refers to satisfaction with workplace culture, climate, support, recognition, and employee self-efficacy. Satisfaction with the organisational environment has been negatively associated with work-related burnout (Hamama, 2012). Support can encompass support from leadership, social support, and team cohesion. Leadership support was positively related to organisational commitment and job satisfaction for nurses, even with inadequate staffing (Heinen et al., 2013). Unit cohesion was positively associated with job satisfaction and negatively associated with stress in the US Army (Walsh et al., 2010). High levels of support within the Canadian military were associated with better job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Dupré & Day, 2007).

Breaches and violations can lead to job dissatisfaction (Dupré & Day, 2007; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003) and turnover intentions (Zhao et al., 2007). Job satisfaction is affected differently depending on what type of breach has occurred. A breach of a transactional nature (e.g., specific, monetizable exchanges) had a statistically smaller effect size on job satisfaction compared to a relational breach (e.g., exchanges aimed to maintain the long-term relationship) (Zhao et al., 2007). Job dissatisfaction and work engagement mediate the relationship between PCV and turnover intention sequentially (Azeem et al., 2020). Employees are initially dissatisfied with their role, which results from unmet expectations and broken promises. If dissatisfied, employees disengage and develop their intention to leave the organisation (Thanacoody et al., 2014). Turnley and Feldman (2000) also found that the PCVs impact on employee contributions was partially mediated by job dissatisfaction or unmet expectations.

Organisational commitment and the psychological contract

A relational psychological contract is similar to organisational commitment, and studies have shown a correlation between PCBs and lower organisational commitment (Lester et al., 2002). Organisational commitment is also a moderately strong predictor of turnover; therefore, it is important to understand the impact it can have (Meyer et al., 2002).

Organisational commitment indicates an employee's emotional connection with an organisation's values, goals, and mission (Jaskyte & Lee, 2009). The three-component model (TCM) of organisational commitment was proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The model considers three components of organisational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to the employees' emotional attachment to the organisation, including identity and involvement. Continuance commitment refers to the cost that employees associate with leaving the organisation. Finally, normative commitment refers to the employees' perceived obligation to remain in the organisation. These three commitment components indicate that "employees with strong affective commitment remain because they want to, those with strong continuance commitment because they need to, and those with strong normative commitment because they feel they ought to do so" (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 3). If employees experience a PCB, they are less likely to maintain their commitment and identify with the organisation (Zhao et al., 2007).

However, studies completed on the TCM have suggested that it fails to qualify as a general model of organisational commitment. Instead, it should be used as a specific model for turnover prediction (Solinger et al., 2008). Meta-analyses on organisational commitment have shown that the global construct, affective, continuance, and normative commitment to be consistent and moderately strong

predictors of turnover (Meyer et al., 2002). Although there is debate on whether TCM accurately predicts organisational commitment, several studies have shown the link between organisational commitment and turnover, making it a prominent attitude in turnover theory and research (Holtom et al., 2008).

When obligations are unmet, employees may feel that the organisation does not value them, which erodes perceived organisational support (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). This may, over time, cumulatively and negatively affect the commitment the organisation has to the employee.

The type of breach can also impact organisational commitment. Zhao et al. (2007) found that the effect of a transactional contract breach had a statistically larger effect size than a relational breach on organisational commitment. When employee obligations are breached, they are likely to report lower scores on affective commitment (Bal et al., 2008; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Cassar and Briner (2011) found that violation mediated the relationship between breach and commitment. They also found that low exchange imbalance increases the mediating role of violation on affective commitment. However, this effect was not found for continuance commitment.

Job insecurity and the psychological contract

Job insecurity refers to an employees' concern regarding changes to their job and whether it will exist in the future (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). The concern is based on the individual's perception of their work environment and whether their role is perceived to be at risk. When an employer signals to their employees that are not focused on maintaining a long-term relationship, it can be perceived as a PCB (Costa & Neves, 2017). More specifically, for permanent workers, job insecurity can be perceived as a relational PCB and can reduce job satisfaction and organisational commitment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007).

Job insecurity can affect the well-being of the employees and the organisation itself (De Witte, 2005). When considering job insecurity in the military, it is important to note that military pilots are employed as military officers and pilots. If individuals wish to stay in the military, they usually must progress and be promoted. For pilots, this generally requires taking a command position and no longer flying. If pilots do not progress into these positions, they may not have their contract extended and will have to leave to work elsewhere. This is due to the 'up or out' approach where employees are expected to leave the organisation if they do not progress. The idea behind this system is that it motivates employees to improve themselves and allows for a constant influx of recruits (Van der Knaap, 2003, as cited in Van Eetveldt et al., 2013). If the primary aim is to fly in the military, being

unable to progress without taking a command position could be perceived as job insecurity. As research has found a relationship between job insecurity and turnover intentions (Staufenbiel & Könog, 2010), it could be expected that pilots might consider leaving before their contract comes up for renewal. Also, it is often the most qualified employees who leave if they experience job insecurity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). If qualified pilots leave the military, the negative effect is two-fold: the experience and knowledge will be lost, and the cost and time required to replace them is high.

There are two aspects to job security: quantitative and qualitative (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Quantitative job insecurity pertains to the threat of losing the current job itself. Qualitative job insecurity refers to losing valued job features such as salary, work conditions, or lack of career opportunities. Quantitative job insecurity may arise when pilots feel their flying career is at risk and they need to move into a new ground role to progress. However, this will predominantly occur if the individual only wants to be a pilot. If the individual is also interested in the military officer role, job insecurity may not occur if other career development opportunities are available.

Career development opportunities are a qualitative aspect of job insecurity that can be considered part of the psychological contract between the employer and employee (Rousseau, 2004). If an employee perceives career uncertainty, this can feel like a violation of the psychological contract, lowering affective commitment and increasing turnover intentions (Meyer et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2004). However, if employees perceive they have career opportunities, this is positively related to affective commitment and may reduce turnover intention (Meyer et al., 2002; Weng et al., 2010). Perceived promotion chances are also negatively related to turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). In an organisation as large as the military, it is important to note that internal career opportunities can be considered an alternative to leaving a job (Hulin et al., 1985). However, if the employee is considering leaving the organisation instead of their job within it, this would not be an option.

Van Eetveldt et al. (2013) explored career insecurity in the Dutch military during downsizing. They showed that stronger feelings of job loss and career insecurity, and lower organisational commitment, were related to higher turnover intentions. Career insecurity had a larger effect than job loss insecurity on turnover intentions. Job loss insecurity did not affect organisational commitment, unlike career insecurity, which was negatively related to organisational commitment, which in turn was negatively related to turnover intentions. Therefore, there was a direct effect of career insecurity on turnover intentions and an indirect effect through organisational commitment. Although this study was done during downsizing, similar results may be found in the NZDF since the organisation tries to

balance the numbers of recruits and more senior personnel to ensure there is space for the new employees to progress.

Psychological contracts over time

A psychological contract constantly changes and grows throughout an employee's career. This is important to consider for pilots in the military as the time frame they are in the organisation is over ten years. Two main factors vary the psychological contract and its consequences throughout this time. The first is that environmental and personal factors will change over time; therefore, so will the psychological contract (De Vos et al., 2003). For example, an individual may not have a young family when they join the military; therefore, they may be willing to go overseas for a long time. Eventually, this individual may start a family, and going overseas is no longer the preferred option. If the organisation recognises this but still sends the individual overseas, this may be considered a breach of the psychological contract. Expectations of the job may also change over time. Younger people tend to have higher expectations when they enter the workforce, but these adapt over time according to reality (De Vos et al., 2003).

The second is that the effect a PCB will have on an employee will change over time. PCBs impact younger and older workers differently. Bal et al. (2008) found that after a PCB, older workers are less affected regarding trust and organisational commitment. However, older workers' job satisfaction was more affected following a PCB compared to younger workers. Psychological contracts for older and more experienced workers are more stable and resistant to change compared to younger workers. Changes to the psychological contract will have a larger impact on younger workers than older workers (Rousseau, 2001). Finally, older workers value job security more than younger workers (Kooij et al., 2011). This indicates that older workers will be more focused on factors that influence their continuance commitment (Bal et al., 2013).

Psychological contracts and the military

Research conducted on military pilots regarding the psychological contract is limited. However, studies examining the effect of the psychological contract on military personnel have been completed in Australia and Europe. Naweed et al. (2021) conducted a study examining the psychological contracts of ex-ADF military personnel. Although the participants were not pilots, it still provides a perspective of the psychological contract for the military. This study found that explicit and implicit promises made by the military are important and influence PCB perceptions and the decision to leave.

Participants' understanding of their role was different from what it entailed, they experienced tipping points that made them want to leave, and the psychological contracts formed were ambiguous.

Kraak et al. (2020) studied reactions to PCBs in European military pilots. They found that the passion for the job and professional commitment played important roles in PCB reactions. Interestingly, those who were considered dreamers (a childhood dream of being a pilot and passionate about the job) described breaches as feelings of being cheated, betrayed, and deceived by the military. They reported stronger negative feelings, more negative feelings overall, and a tendency to get angry easily after perceiving PCBs compared to realists (opposite to dreamers). This may be due to dreamers idealising the profession more than realists, resulting in unrealistic expectations and, subsequently, increased PCB frequency and intensity. They also found that the high managerial turnover (due to a two to three-year posting cycle) triggers perceptions of PCB because commanding officers cannot deliver the obligations when they are posted elsewhere.

Other studies include Clinton and Guest (2013) who studied the relationship between PCBs and voluntary turnover among British Royal Air Force personnel. They found a positive relationship between breach and voluntary turnover, which was fully mediated by exchange fairness and trust. Finally, Pohl et al. (2016) studied Belgium soldiers in training. They found a positive relationship between psychological contract fulfilment, affective and normative organisational commitment, and job satisfaction.

Although these studies are not specific to RNZAF pilots, they do show that a psychological contract is an important tool for retention. If there is a mismatch of promises and expectations, personnel are likely to leave. They also examine other aspects that have been linked to retention, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Interestingly, the findings by Naweed et al. (2021) and Kraak et al. (2020) are similar as they both detail examples of unrealistic expectations when joining the military, which then leads to PCB.

From these studies, it is hypothesised that similar PCBs may occur in the RNZAF. Participants in Naweed et al.'s (2021) study left due to not being able to perform the envisioned job, experiences which led to distrust and resistance to teamwork, lack of recognition, being blocked from reaching desired goals, and the inability to transition into another role. The decision to leave was often made after a 'tipping point.' Kraak et al. (2020) found that participants who anticipated leaving the military did not experience PCBs. However, dreamers wanted to leave as they experienced insufficient flying, poor career development, or undesired future steps in their military career. In contrast, realists chose to stay, although they knew that the number of flying hours would decrease as they moved to a

higher rank. Overall, pilots tolerated PCBs until they were able to attain their career goals and leave the organisation.

Psychological contract theory covers many aspects of the workplace that can lead to turnover. However, due to the nature of the military, it is important to look at unique aspects which can influence the decision to stay or go. The next chapter will review job embeddedness theory and how it relates to military turnover.

Chapter 3: Job embeddedness, work-life balance, and military pilot turnover

Job embeddedness

Job embeddedness was proposed by Mitchell et al. (2001) to clarify why people stay in their roles. Although this current study involves individuals who have already left the organisation, it is important to understand aspects that would have made them stay so turnover can try to be reduced. Hom et al. (2012) define embeddedness as the combined influence of perceived fit, connections to the environment (links), and the avoidance of turnover-related sacrifices. Fit, links, and sacrifice are three components that attach an employee to their organisation and community.

Fit

Fit is the perceived comfort or compatibility with an organisation and the working environment. Personal values, career goals, and plans must fit with the immediate job demands and the organisation's culture. Fit also refers to how well the individual fits into the community and environment. As this definition suggests, there are many areas in an employee's life where they may or may not fit. For example, an employee may like the job they are doing and the work environment, but they may leave to relocate if they do not enjoy the general location. This definition of fit differs from others, such as person-job fit, as it is broader and looks at fit from a holistic perspective.

Although job-embeddedness considers fit in its broadest sense, specific fit relationships and their relationship to turnover will still be discussed. Although turnover is associated with low levels of fit, the relationship is often weak, and often misfit does not result in turnover (Arthur et al., 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Often employees remain in their current poorly fit position due to a lack of alternative options (Wheeler et al., 2007).

There are many types of fit; however, only person-environment, person-organisation, and person-job fit will be discussed. Person-environment fit focuses on the interactions between the individual and the environment, and how they affect each other. It assumes individuals constantly shape their work environment to get a better fit (Wille et al., 2012). Person-environment fit was assessed with soldiers in the US Army, and it was found that a higher level of environmental fit (using vocational interests and work values) reduced turnover (Knapp et al., 2005).

More specifically, person-organisation fit has been defined as the fit that occurs when either the organisation provides what the person needs, or vice versa; or they both share fundamental characteristics; or a combination of both (Kristof, 1996). Person-organisation fit, which encompasses values and goals, is linked to job satisfaction, organisational commitment and is an important antecedent of turnover (Arthur et al., 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Another specific fit model is person-job fit. This refers to the fit between the individual's characteristics and the demands of the job. There are two main elements of person-job fit: demand-ability and need-supplies (Edwards, 1991). Demand-ability refers to how well an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities are compatible with the requirements and demands of their job. Alternatively, need-supplies fit occurs when the desires, needs, or preferences are met by the employee's job. Person-job fit can increase job satisfaction, organisation commitment and decrease turnover intentions (Chhabra, 2015; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This study also found that the relationship between person-job fit and turnover intentions is partially mediated by job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Job embeddedness theory considers both on-the-job and off-the-job fit. On-the-job fit encompasses person-organisation, and person-job fit. Off-the-job fit is determined by how connected the individual feels to the community that they live in (Clinton et al., 2012). Examples include the location, weather, schools, and community activities available to them (Holtom et al., 2006).

Military pilots remain in the military for a long time and will often change location, aircraft type, and even role. This may result in the individual having a good fit during some parts of their career; however, moving into an undesired role or location could result in a misfit. For example, a misfit would occur if a pilot who only wants to fly moves from a flying role into a managerial role.

Links

The second component is a connection to the environment, otherwise known as links. Links are informal or formal connections between an employee and other people or institutions. Links are strands that connect an employee and their family to social, psychological, and financial aspects of their lives, including friends, the community, and the environment. Mitchell et al. (2001) note that being embedded does not cause a person to go out and increase links. Instead, activities that generate links cause a person to become embedded. Some links are stronger than others, and the higher the number of links an employee has, the more they are bound to their job and organisation

(Mitchell et al., 2001). Links are also strengthened with time, and research has shown that the longer an individual is at an organisation, the stronger their links are, and they will be less likely to leave

On-the-job links are the informal or formal connections within the workplace. Off-the-job links are the informal or formal relationships formed outside of the workplace e.g., in the community, with non-work friends. One of the NZDF's core values is comradeship, emphasising strong social bonds (New Zealand Defence Force, 2020c). This is achieved through working with colleagues during challenging courses, exercises, and deployments. Also, there are many work-based clubs and activities that can further strengthen these links, e.g., Christmas functions, sports teams.

It is important to note that links can also be to the family. A study completed with data from the United States Navy found that the negative relationship between organisational commitment and intention to leave was weakened if officers had a partner and children at home (Lee & Maurer, 1999). Additionally, the predictive effect of intention to leave on subsequent leaving was positively related to the number of children at home.

Sacrifice

The third component is the avoidance of turnover-related sacrifices. The perceived cost of psychological or material benefits that an employee may have to forfeit when they leave a job is termed sacrifice. In job embeddedness terms, sacrifice is the cost versus benefit of the lost links to the organisation, community, and the personal benefits if they leave. For individuals who have to relocate if they leave the organisation, community sacrifices are likely to play a significant role in the decision to leave (Mitchell et al., 2001).

The more an employee must sacrifice when leaving, the more difficult it will be for them to leave the organisation (Shaw et al., 1998). When individuals leave an organisation, they may no longer be able to work with their colleagues and may have to give up financial and non-financial benefits. Research has found that having to sacrifice financial benefits reduces the intention to leave and turnover (Shaw et al., 1998). Some examples of sacrifice that are not as obvious include job stability and advancement opportunities (Shaw et al., 1998).

On-the-job sacrifice is the real or perceived cost of leaving the organisation, whereas off-the-job sacrifice is the real or perceived cost of leaving the community (Mitchell et al., 2001). Leaving the military implies losses such as giving up colleagues, medical and dental benefits, meaningful military

work, interesting deployments, or perks. It may also result in relocation, resulting in financial and emotional costs.

Job embeddedness and turnover

Job embeddedness has been found to predict turnover in the military (Smith et al., 2011), retention (Allen, 2006), turnover intentions (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008), and voluntary turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001). A study by Crossley et al. (2007) found that job embeddedness is useful to predict intention to search for alternative jobs, intention to quit, and voluntary turnover. Job embeddedness predicted voluntary turnover beyond variables such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, continuance commitment, and affective commitment (Crossley et al., 2007). Their findings also suggested that those with low embeddedness had higher search intentions regardless of satisfaction levels. Furthermore, job embeddedness does not prevent dissatisfied employees, even if highly embedded, from searching for job alternatives. Swider et al. (2011) also found that job embeddedness, job satisfaction, and employment alternatives individually moderated the job-search turnover relationship. When employees had lower levels of job embeddedness and job satisfaction, and higher levels of job alternative, the job search-turnover relationship was stronger.

Mitchell et al. (2001) note that job embeddedness is a multi-dimensional aggregate of forces both on- and off-the-job that keep someone in their job. For example, if someone has been in an organisation for an extended time, has developed many connections in the workplace, and has reached a high-status position, they would most likely have strong on-the-job embeddedness. Alternatively, if individuals are highly involved in their community and are actively involved in their children's school, they would likely have strong off-the-job embeddedness. If the organisational fit is strong, the connections or links are strong, and the sacrifice to leave is high, an employee is more likely to stay.

However, there is variability in whether on-the-job or off-the-job embeddedness predicts voluntary turnover. On-the-job embeddedness has been found to predict intention to quit and voluntary turnover (Allen, 2006). Alternatively, off-the-job embeddedness has been found to predict voluntary turnover (Lee et al., 2004). Finally, Holtom et al. (2006) found both on and off-the-job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover.

DiRenzo et al. (2017) studied embeddedness and turnover in the US Marine Corps Reserve. Three main themes that drive turnover cognitions in extra roles were identified: relationships, meaning, and role conflict. Relationships with fellow reservists played an important role. They served as a support network, providing career-related and psychosocial support. These relationships created an obligation

to their peers, which created normative commitment. These connections increase the links with the organisations and further embedded individuals. Reservists strongly identified with the Marine Role and were committed to the organisation. There was a strong sense of pride in serving, and it was considered a fulfilling and meaningful job. Leaving the service would entail great sacrifice as Reservists would have to leave these aspects behind. This sense of pride created affective commitment. They would have to leave behind meaningful and unique opportunities that they would not be able to experience elsewhere. Role conflict was expressed; however, it was due to a lack of off-the-job fit. There were difficulties balancing the reserve role with civilian job and family responsibilities. These difficulties contributed to turnover.

Although this study examined job embeddedness for extra roles, as opposed to the primary role, it provides some valuable insights. The military often requires individuals to perform multiple roles. For example, in the RNZAF, pilots need to perform the role of an officer as well. DiRenzo et al. (2017) mention it is important that organisations should take steps to minimise conflict between these roles. Organisations should also acknowledge the impact of these roles on other roles, such as the home role, and help the individual manage their role boundaries.

Job embeddedness and other work-related aspects

At the start of an employee's career, socialisation tactics help organisations embed new employees into the organisation (Allen, 2006). This refers to the methods used to help new employees adapt to their new role and organisation, and to acquire attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge required for the organisation (Bauer et al., 1998).

Once embedded, many other work-related constructs are affected. For example, Mitchell et al. (2001) found that embeddedness positively related to job satisfaction and organisational commitment. When researching control over work hours, Chan et al. (2019) found that the higher the level of control over work hours, the higher the level of job embeddedness.

Job embeddedness has also been found to impact life and family aspects. Job embeddedness has been found to mediate the relationship between work-life balance practices and turnover intention (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017). However, Ng and Feldman (2012) showed that higher organisational embeddedness can have a detrimental effect as it was associated with higher levels of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict.

Finally, Porter et al. (2019) found that on-the-job embeddedness reduced the likelihood that informal job search would lead to turnover decisions. However, off-the-job embeddedness increased the likelihood. This suggests that employees with lower levels of on-the-job embeddedness are more inclined to consider and act upon alternative employment opportunities.

Work-life balance

The balance between work and personal life is an important factor when deciding to remain within an organisation (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1999). Although work-life balance is not a specific aspect of job embeddedness theory, work-life balance practices are able to give individuals an opportunity to synchronise on-the-job and off-the-job activities, generating a better fit (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017). Also, work-life balance predicts turnover intentions, even after controlling for aspects such as job satisfaction (Dupré & Day, 2007).

Work-life balance can be difficult for service members, and the transition from military life to civilian life may be driven by wanting a better work-life balance. Work-life balance focuses on being satisfied at both home and work (Campbell Clark, 2000). The line separating professional and personal life has become increasingly blurred over the last two decades due to changes in family structures, increased numbers of women in the workforce, and technological changes (Kinnunen et al., 2014; Peeters et al., 2005). Work from home practices have also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as military pilots both fly and complete officer duties, working from home is only possible when they are not flying. Furthermore, working from home would not be an option for airline pilots as their primary role is flying.

Although there is limited research on the work-life balance of military personnel conducting their day-to-day duties, studies have shown that an employee's personal life can influence their level of work engagement, and vice versa (Halbesleben, 2010; Timms et al., 2015). Halbesleben (2010) also found that work engagement is positively related to organisational commitment, performance, and well-being and is negatively related to turnover intention. Therefore, work-life balance is an important aspect of turnover.

Unlike some other aspects of turnover, work-life balance affects both the service person and their family. Most families face challenges that cause stress, including child-related matters, chores, financial difficulties, and work-related difficulties (Nesteruk & Garrison, 2005). However, being in the military involves additional stressors such as deployments and relocation, often with little notice. Partners must deal with the constant changes of being part of the military, including being separated

from their military partner, moving their family to new locations, and coping with stressors and ambiguity when their military partners are on missions (Drummet et al., 2003).

Due to being the primary source of support, partners impact their family and service members' stress, health, and well-being (Norwood et al., 1996). Dimiceli et al. (2010) looked at stressful experiences within the last five years among wives of deployed military servicemen. Deployment was considered the most stressful situation due to issues with children, worry or uncertainty about the future, lack of support, death/injury, and length. Relocation was the second most stressful due to general stressors, lack of support, and giving up a career. When deployed, the partner is left to look after children, pets, and family. Deployments can lead to changed daily routines, which may result in anxiety, depression, loneliness, and physical symptoms such as headaches and sleep disturbances (Wood et al., 1995). A study by Orthner (2002) found that more than half of military partners did not handle loneliness well if their husbands were gone for seventeen or more weeks. However, if the deployment length was short, partners felt more equipped to cope with deployment stress. Also, relocation stress is worsened when the military partner is suddenly deployed. Additionally, partners with children must then take on the role of a single parent, which significantly increases their responsibilities (Burrell et al., 2006).

Relocations and deployments may also make it difficult for spouses to have a career. Due to the full-time nature of childcare, when military partners are away for long periods, civilian women did not have jobs outside the home (Angrist & Johnson, 2000). Some women are content looking after their families or finding temporary jobs; however, the lack of employment can significantly stress others. Lack of employment can create feelings of stress and worthlessness associated with being unable to develop their career (Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Jervis, 2009).

Work-life balance is a factor that needs to be considered for both the service person and their family. A poor work-life balance can significantly impact an individual, which flows to their spouse and children. Due to this, it could be possible that the decision to change roles is not purely the individuals but is influenced by the family.

The current study aims to explore the factors that influence military pilot turnover. Although theory provides guidance for potential findings, the qualitative nature of the study will allow for an exploration of the push and pull factors. However, it is expected that these psychological theories will help provide a framework to understand the turnover decision.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methods used to recruit participants, collect and analyse data, and create themes. It will also discuss the qualitative methodology used.

Participants

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), the qualitative method used in this research, is concerned with individual experiences and requires an in-depth analysis of a small, purposively selected sample (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggest that having a smaller sample is better than a larger sample, and three to six participants is a suitable number of participants to acquire enough data to develop meaningful points and themes. Therefore, the researcher recruited six participants as this number was realistic and can provide enough data to generate themes and the required information for this research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mason, 2010).

The six participants were all ex-military male pilots who had left the organisation within the last five years. The average length of time in the RNZAF upon leaving was 15.5 years, and all had held captain positions. Due to the organisation's size, other demographic information was not collected to reduce the chance of participants being identified.

Design

The study was conducted with past employees of the RNZAF. Therefore, the researcher consulted the NZDF regarding research and cultural considerations, and feedback was used to construct the research design.

Ethics approval was granted from the NZDF Ethics Committee and Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/24 (Appendix A). The thesis was also presented to the NZDF prior to publication.

Once ethics was approved, purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The benefit of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to find a suitable group of participants to help answer the research questions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It also helps maintain confidentiality, especially as the number of pilots who have left the NZDF in the previous five years is limited. Snowball sampling also maintains confidentiality and allows access to participants that the researcher may not have otherwise been able to reach.

Initial contact gave the potential participants essential information about the study and offered to email them more information if they were interested. Interested participants were then emailed the information sheet (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C). The information sheet contained information regarding what the study was about, who was conducting it, what the study consisted of, how the information would be used and kept private, the confidentiality of others mentioned in the interview, and that the interview could be paused or stopped at any time. As the researcher is an NZDF employee, information about the Armed Forces Discipline Act 1971 was included. There was also the option of using a pseudonym, although many participants did not choose this. Therefore, the naming convention used was 'Participant' followed by a letter, for example, 'Participant A.'

Once participants had read the information sheet, and if they consented, an interview was arranged. All interviews were conducted via Zoom; however, there was the option of a face-to-face interview. Interviews took place over a two-month period.

Throughout this process, it was made clear that there was no requirement to participate, and there was an opportunity to withdraw up until one week after the transcript had been received. However, none of the participants withdrew.

Interview process

The research was qualitative in design and used semi-structured interviews. The questions were designed to understand the push and pull factors between the participants' previous and new roles. This approach was chosen as it allows participants to talk about their experiences instead of being limited to what the researcher wants to measure. All interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately one hour, with the longest being two hours. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent being confirmed at the beginning of each interview.

A semi-structured interview format was used, and the questions were developed using guidelines from Smith and Osborn (2003), who recommended using open and broadly framed questions. This allowed the researcher to explore the area of interest flexibly. The questions were split into two parts: demographics/context/rapport building, and the research questions. The first five questions allowed the researcher to understand the participants' demographics and background. This allowed for context to be developed as well as rapport. The main questions then focused on the push and pull factors that made the participant decide to leave the organisation to work elsewhere. Finally, the last question was an opportunity for the participant to share any advice that may help the NZDF retain pilots.

Firstly, the following questions were asked to build rapport and understand the participant's history:

1. How long were you in the NZDF?

2. What was your initial trade?

3. Tell me about your career path whilst in the NZDF?

4. What role were you in when you decided to leave?

5. What's your new role?

Then the following research questions were asked:

1. Tell me about your decision to leave the NZDF, starting from when you first thought about leaving?

2. Tell me about the factors that made you want to leave? *(Identify main factor)*

3. Were there any factors that made you consider staying? *(Identify main factor)*

4. How did you decide on your new role? How is it going so far? *(Look for differences and similarities between old role and new role)*

5. Were there any other roles that you considered? *(Is there a common theme between new roles?)*

6. Do you have any advice for the NZDF to help retain pilots?

The researcher did not use these questions specifically but instead used them to guide her questions, so a natural conversational flow was achieved.

Once the interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the interview word for word, except for filler words if deemed irrelevant. The transcript was then de-identified, which involved removing all identifying information (e.g., names) and specifying information (e.g., deployments and workplaces) from the transcript. Once de-identification was complete, transcripts were then returned to participants to view. Participants were able to add, remove, or amend parts of their transcript prior to sending it back. Overall, no changes were made to the transcripts; however, some information was removed due to concern of being identified. Once the participant was satisfied with the transcript, a transcript release authority form was completed (Appendix D). This form confirmed that the

participant had an opportunity to read and amend their transcript and that extracts may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Once the participant had approved the de-identified transcript, the recording was deleted to help ensure confidentiality. Also, participants could withdraw up to one week following receiving their transcript, which none did.

The consent form asked participants whether they would like a copy of the thesis once complete, and all participants said they would like a copy.

Post-interview, the researcher also reflected on her interview technique and areas which could be improved. This was done to ensure the questions were getting the correct information, and she was asking the questions in an open-ended manner.

Analysis

The process used to develop themes was inductive as specific data was taken from the participants' interviews and developed into larger themes. This process was achieved by following the guidelines by Smith and Osborn (2003). The first step conducted was transcribing the interview and noting down significant points. Once the interview was transcribed and approved, it was imported into NVivo. Initially, coding was completed using individual words such as career, progression, and leaving. The aim was that the researcher could then use the software to bring up data related to a combination of these short codes and look at relationships using methods such as Matrix Coding. The researcher generated an initial set of themes using this method, and the transcript extracts generated within these themes were then recoded using more in-depth codes. These new codes were used to redevelop more accurate themes.

Once the researcher had her main themes, the data related to leaving, staying, and new roles were then compared to her themes to ensure it was related. Analysing the data from both perspectives allowed the researcher to look at the themes participants talked about and any underlying themes. As data was put into themes, more themes evolved, and an overall structure started to emerge. These ideas were constantly shaped until a clear structure was achieved.

Reflexive statement

It was important to consider my position as both a military pilot in the RNZAF and a student. I have worked as a military pilot in the RNZAF and have always had a strong interest in psychology. I was aware that the RNZAF was having challenges retaining experienced pilots, so I wanted to combine my experience and interest to investigate this further.

I have less military experience than those I interviewed. However, I was an 'insider' because I am in the military and have worked in the same environment. I am also an 'outsider' as I was acting as a student conducting research. However, participants were open and honest with me about aspects of the military and their career.

My end goal is to improve the working environment for pilots in the RNZAF to help increase retention. Talking to ex-RNZAF members has given me an appreciation of both the positives and negatives of the organisation, and the potential it has. I feel grateful that participants were willing to share their experiences with me and hope I can use this information to make a positive change.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis

The foundations of IPA lie in hermeneutics and phenomenology. The link between hermeneutics and phenomenology is important as phenomenology aims to find meaning. However, this meaning may be hidden and require interpretation (Heidegger, 1988).

Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting the world we live in. A double hermeneutic is formed where both the participant is trying to make sense of their lived experienced, and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant's understanding of their lived experience. Once the interview is completed, this understanding is deepened each time the transcript is reviewed through the hermeneutic circle process. Finding themes and then understanding them within the whole transcript and context allows for a deeper understanding each time it is reviewed.

Phenomenology is the process of exploring a phenomenon. It attempts to understand a person's perception of an event or object through a detailed examination instead of an objective statement (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Through this process, the researcher aims to get as close to the participant's world as possible to gain an 'insider's perspective' (Conrad, 1987).

IPA is dynamic, as the researcher has an active role in the process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The researcher cannot completely understand the participant's view of the world due to their previous experiences, assumptions, and preconceptions. Therefore, the researcher needs to acknowledge these factors and understand that their interpretation of the participant's experiences will be influenced by this (Smith et al., 2009).

Bracketing

Bracketing is a method used to mitigate the effects of the researcher's preconceptions on their research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Scholars recommend using bracketing from the start of the research process until the end (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Rolls and Relf (2006) suggest bracketing can increase clarity and engagement during interviews and help the researcher understand the phenomena being discussed. Another suggestion for bracketing includes a reflexive journal that is begun prior to defining the research question (Ahern, 1999). Heidegger (1988) rejected the notion of bracketing as he believed that there was no way to separate yourself from the participant's experience as we are all in this world. To understand participants, the researcher must have pre-existing knowledge of the world, and therefore any form of interpretation is never neutral.

Recognising that it is difficult for the researcher to separate themself from the research, bracketing was used to ensure that the research was conducted as close to the data as possible. Multiple methods used included a reflexive journal during the interview period, clarification of the researcher's role, and in-depth discussions with the thesis supervisor.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher made it clear that she was acting as a student who had some knowledge of the RNZAF, instead of a pilot conducting research. This ensured participants explained their experiences instead of expecting her to know what they meant. If participants wanted to ask her questions or hear her story, this was left until the end of the interviews, so it did not influence their answers.

After each interview, the researcher wrote down her reflections of the interview. This was a chance for her to reflect on how the interview went, including how she asked questions to ensure they were not leading and she was not influencing the answers.

The researcher's 'insider' status allowed her to build rapport through a shared understanding of the organisation. However, the researcher had to ensure she built rapport but did not use this shared understanding to influence the interviews. This is where the interview guide was useful – it provided a

framework for the questions and guidance on elaboration and the focus of the question. This helped her stay on track and not let her experiences influence the questions.

If participants provided examples of push or pull factors, the researcher asked for examples or asked more questions about these factors to get as close to the participant's experience as possible.

During the later interviews, when themes had started to emerge, the researcher had to be careful not to ask leading questions. There were times when she could relate to the participant's experiences or had heard similar experiences prior. She was consciously aware of this, so she had to ensure that the question profile was followed and only investigated sections of the participant's interview that she thought were relevant to them.

During analysis, and due to the researcher's own experiences within the RNZAF, she tried to stay as close to the data to ensure her ideas were not being reflected and discussed the data with her supervisor.

Chapter 5: Results

Thematic analysis of the transcripts identified a primary theme: the tensions that participants reported experiencing between maintaining the identity of a military officer and that of a pilot. All participants reported valuing both identities strongly but could not maintain their commitment to both. At the time of the study, all participants had left the RNZAF, but not all had continued in a flying role. This chapter will report the findings in line with four main themes: valuing the military identity, challenges to remaining, valuing the pilot identity, and leaving to keep flying. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and sub-themes of interview data

Main theme	Sub-themes
Valuing the military identity	Military pilot Collegiality Variety
Challenges to remaining	Contract and job uncertainty Leadership, communication, and support Workload and stress Family and lifestyle
Valuing the pilot identity	
Leaving to keep flying	Time pressure and external aspects Normalising the departure

Valuing the military identity

In discussing the value that they placed on their identity as a military officer, participants identified several highly valued aspects of this role: being a military pilot, collegiality, and the variety that the work offered. Being a military pilot is included in this section as it is the military aspect that was valued.

Military pilot

Participants mentioned that when they are in the military, their primary job is to be an officer, and being a pilot is secondary.

> In the Air Force you are an officer first, right. That's what they always say and that's what you are (Participant F).

Most participants enjoyed their military flying role and would have continued it. They enjoyed the crew environment, instructing, being challenged, and the missions.

> I just got a real kick out of everything. You know, the flying, the plane, the crew, everything, the missions … If there was [an aircraft] flying, and I wasn't on it, I would feel like I was missing out (Participant B).

Collegiality

Participants talked about valuing close working relationships and working in a strong and supportive community.

> It's a good community. There's also good people in there (Participant D).

> Every single day I go to work, I'm working with people that I would choose to spend time with outside of work (Participant E).

However, participants noted that the military is not "that good at removing individuals that shouldn't be there" (Participant A). Participant F experienced this where a workplace changed from "being a really happy productive place to work to being quite difficult." This change in the workplace environment was "not the straw that broke the camel's back, but it's a contributing factor" to why they left.

Variety

Participants also reported enjoying the variety of work that their military roles offered. Participants enjoyed roles that involved instruction, leadership, and problem-solving.

> I really like flight instruction, I really like seeing people learn how to fly and try and help them do what they want to do (Participant A).

> I loved being a flight commander on [squadron] because it was in the leadership space and the problem-solving space (Participant E).

Participants enjoyed being challenged. If they were not challenged, they would look elsewhere. Although participants loved flying, they also knew that they would not stay in the military forever. However, they would have stayed longer if they were still progressing.

> I wouldn't have stayed in the military forever, but like I said, I always knew eventually I'd leave one day but you know, as long as I was still flying, and I was still being challenged, learning new skills and doing more interesting flying, instruction, and that sort of stuff, and I saw that there was, you know, a path towards promotion, and what have you, then absolutely, yea why would I leave (Participant C).

Participants reported that they did not want to leave the Air Force. They stated that the Air Force was a large part of who they were, and if the circumstances were different, they would come back.

> I really loved the aircraft, and I loved the people, and on my last day of work I walked around base and I was saying goodbye to everybody and I just couldn't hold the tears in ae it was just, it felt like I was having an amputation of something, it was really rough. It felt like my innards were just getting pulled out leaving behind the biggest part of me, you know (Participant B).

> Would I come back? You better believe it. If I could live in [current place] and work for the Air Force, and not have to fly all the time, I'd do it in a heartbeat. It just doesn't work (Participant E).

Participants reported that they still were loyal to the military and believed in the organisation after they had left.

> I'm still very loyal to the military and still really believe in the organisation and think it is full of amazing people, and I believe in what it does (Participant A).

Challenges to remaining

Despite the high value placed on the military role, participants reported that several factors were relevant to their decision to leave. These included feelings of job insecurity, concerns that the workplace culture had changed in ways that no longer suited them, high workloads and associated stress, and the impacts of the work role on their family and lifestyle.

Contract and job uncertainty

Participants reported that when they were considering whether to stay or leave, one key factor was uncertainty around whether their contract would be extended.

> When you first join up it's like cool you can work for 20 years, but then there is no guarantee that you'll get your contract extended (Participant A).

> I'm pretty sure I'll get an extension if I keep myself qualified and useful, but there's no guarantees (Participant F).

In the context of this uncertainty, participants reported that they felt they would need to leave the military at some point. Leaving earlier was considered better for their new career than waiting until they knew whether or not they would be able to continue their military employment.

> I know that the minute I leave the Air Force to go to [airline], I'm essentially going to get a pay rise every year for the rest of my life, that's how it works … So the longer you stay at that position, you know, you're saying good bye to, you know, your progression at [airline]. But, that's kind of what you've got to weigh it up against (Participant C).

There were also concerns about limited opportunities for career advancement. Participants who wanted to stay in the military felt like they would only be promoted to a certain rank before being told to leave. Again, it was considered better to leave earlier rather than later. Other participants who did not have a strong desire to stay in the military or as a pilot only thought they would get promoted to a certain point, but this was not a concern as they were going to leave anyway.

> I need to go earlier rather than continue to stick around in this organisation where I'm never going to get to the top anyway (Participant A).

> That was always where I thought I was ever going to get, as far as I was going to go in the Air Force anyway (Participant D).

Some reported having considered non-flying roles in order to remain in the military. Those interested in ground roles looked internally for opportunities. However, they reported that either there were few suitable options, or that if options existed, they could not get support for their applications for a new role. This led participants to look externally for other opportunities.

> [I was] trying to put my name out there and say hey, I'm interested in doing this, and nothing really sort of eventuated from it and so it's probably that career management type thing that wasn't really happening for me. That's probably the big one that sort of started me to look into other areas elsewhere, to try and generate other options for me (Participant F).

Concerns that their contracts might not be renewed, and that other jobs might not be available, prompted participants to seek job alternatives while they were still on a contract with the RNZAF. Job uncertainty was associated with worries that they might not be able to find a job in the airlines or elsewhere, and they reported having been worried that by waiting until the end of their contract, they could end up with no job at all.

> If I have a good opportunity, I kind of need to take it because the job I'm currently in, they could just wait the clock out and I'd no longer have a position which is a sad reality of having to think about things like that (Participant F).

Looking back on their concerns about potential joblessness, participants talked about the impacts that unemployment would have had on their families.

> I didn't want to be [age] with no job security, and where was I gonna go, you know, I probably could go to airlines, but what if I couldn't, what was I going to do? (Participant A).

> Yea so [my contract] it has been extended by a few years which was great … but in [a few] years from then I would have had [older children], potentially with no job, if I hadn't managed to get a further extension, which the overwhelming odds are is that that would happen, but why not put it in paper, why not write that down (Participant F).

Participants reported that they would have risked promotions or other job opportunities if they told their command they planned to leave. This led to participants not telling their command that they were planning to leave until they had a new role offer.

> I didn't want to burn any bridges in case it didn't work out … you hear the stories, they always try say that taking jobs doesn't affect your career at the time but you also still hear of people who get out and get told one thing and then told another (Participant D).

Participants said they would have stayed if they had a clear career plan that would have kept them flying. They also would have stayed if there was more certainty around their contract.

> The thing that would have made me stay would have been someone saying … here's what you can do, and here's how you can keep flying, and you can keep going to 55, or 60, or something like that (Participant A).

Possible solutions suggested by participants included better career management and finding out what participants' plans were earlier on in their career to help shape "their career path early, rather than waiting until the end of their ROSO and people have made decisions" (Participant D).

Leadership, communication, and support

Some participants reported that negative experiences within the organisation had prompted them to consider leaving. These experiences were not, in themselves, the main or only reason for leaving but contributed to an increased willingness to consider finding employment elsewhere. In particular, negative experiences of leadership and support from supervisors were recalled as problematic.

Several participants reported having attended a meeting about pilot retention and that communication in this meeting had been unsatisfactory and frustrating. This stopped participants from offering their solutions as they thought that the information would not get passed up the command chain.

> People were coming up with these ideas … but [leaders] would stand up after pretty much each solution and they'd shoot that down, again. So nothing got passed up the chain, all the problem solving solutions got shot down immediately, they never went any further, and people stopped offering solutions … I was just so furious that they weren't listening. We were trying to fix it for

> you, and you're not helping, you're making it worse, you're not listening, just listen, all you need to do is listen (Participant B).

There were also other experiences where participants reported that they felt their leaders were managing upwards, so important information did not reach key decision-makers. The decisions made then were not clearly communicated to the participants, which made them feel confused about their purpose at work, as the priorities were different from what they expected.

> And to be honest, I did become very cynical towards how the command chain was dealing with those sort of things and you know, when you've got [someone] wanting to hear an answer he wants to hear, he gets told that answer as opposed to getting told the ground truth (Participant D).

There was also a perceived lack of support from superiors. For participant C, this feeling arose after they thought they had made the right decision using their skills and knowledge and the information they had. However, later they were told that their decision was wrong. This resulted in a loss of confidence and trust and led the participant to search for jobs elsewhere.

> You've got to the point where you're constantly second-guessing yourself whether if I do this, am I going to get in trouble … because there is that general feeling that they've got to protect themselves as much as they've got to protect the rest of the squadron. So I just lost a little bit of confidence and we just didn't have that level of trust anymore … That was the straw the broke the camel's back in terms of, you know, a combination of things and why I just punched out (Participant C).

Workload and stress

Even though participants said they enjoyed flying, they also said that flying for the RNZAF had been stressful, especially check flights.

> There are a lot of pressures and stressors associated with flying with tests and exams, and constant study that you don't have to worry about when you're not flying … the Air Force seems to have a tendency to try and pile the pressure on you, and they make those check flights quite stressful (Participant C).

Time pressures could limit preparation and study time, potentially leading to a feeling of inefficacy, stress, and loss of job enjoyment.

> I barely had any time to sit down and read my flight manual or do any study like that, I just never had the time to put the study in that I wanted to, because I had just so many other jobs to do (Participant C).

> You sort of wonder is all the stress and that really worth what I'm getting out of it (Participant D).

Participants compared their new roles to their former roles in the RNZAF and considered them to have a better work-life balance and be less stressful.

> Way better work-life balance, yea, and you know you had a schedule so you knew exactly when you were going, and when you were going to back, yea, that was one of the main benefits of [airline], the schedule and the work-life balance … it was less stressful, just you know, 100% less stressful (Participant C).

High workloads were considered to be due to under-manning with no associated reduction in output. When talking about manning, participant E said they "think 70% is the new 100%". Participants commonly referred to double or triple-hatting. This related to concerns about the workloads associated with performing their primary (flying) role and other military roles, such as being a flight commander and carrying out administrative duties.

> I was double-hatting, if not triple-hatting. So I had a lot of work on, and I found that flying was almost getting in the way of a lot of the jobs I had to do (Participant C).

> What do you want out of people? Trying to do everything equals nothing. You know, everything is nothing (Participant F).

Participants wanted other workload pressures to reduce to allow them to focus on their primary role.

> The time spent wasted, trawling around HR documents and publications trying to figure something out, you know, you've got the admin centre, but it's not as useful as actually having someone to actually go and talk to and just reducing some of those other workload pressures

> that can come with being a pilot so you can focus on just actually being good at your job (Participant D).

Workloads were increased when work requirements and tasks were frequently changed, often with little warning. It also seemed that there was little feedback about the relevance of work or required performance levels, leading to frustration and feelings of inefficacy.

> Another factor as well that I haven't talked about is, there's a lot of bureaucratic conflict … you think finally you get to [rank] and you're going to have the ability to make some positive change, you go to make that change, and then someone above you skyfalls it … so by the time I was submitting my 717 I was like I can't wait to leave and not be doing all this work where no one really cares because they keep changing it on me (Participant A).

Family and lifestyle

Participants noted that working in the military is "hard on family life" (Participant D). Participants felt the high workload was unsustainable as it prevented them from spending time with their families.

> I couldn't sustain the work that I was doing in the Air Force if I wanted to have a wife and a family and kids who actually knew who I was … I just was never home. Never ever home … So for me personally, it was 100% just getting some work-life balance. It was literally just being able to spend time with the kids (Participant E).

High workloads resulted in participants not switching off or relaxing when they were at home. They also took work home or felt they could not take annual leave without being called back to work or having too much to do when they returned.

> I was also looking for the fact for when I was at home, I was at home, because often in that role I had I was at home and I was still working, either in my head or on emails on the phone, or I didn't really have the time off (Participant A).

> I found I was always constantly thinking about how much work I had on the next day, you know, I've got this to do, and this to do, and this to do, and this to do, so, you could never let go of it (Participant C).

Frequent absences and uncertain schedules impacted participants and their partners. The lack of scheduling made it difficult for families to plan activities.

> I got into this bad habit in the Air Force where I knew my leave was going to get cancelled so I wouldn't make any plans and I'd just [be in the neighbourhood] and then they'd call me and then I'd be at work and I'd have to move my leave to some other time and then the same thing kept happening. So we never made any plans, we never went anywhere (Participant B).

> So every time you know, the plans change and we had to cancel this and we had to shift that, it would affect her a lot more than it would affect me (Participant C).

Partners looked at job alternatives for the participants as well.

> [My wife] had been sick of me being away and was looking at the jet pilot thing on [airline] again (Participant B).

Money was discussed during the interviews but was not the primary motivator for leaving. Participants mentioned that they never left because of money but because they were looking for a better work-life balance.

> I think the thing is it's not about the money, it's never been about the money, and I know some people up the chain seem to think it is about the money, and that we're all going to chase the big dollar at [airline], but it's not the case, it's just a better work-life balance I think is what's going to attract more pilots (Participant C).

However, participants' new roles had to pay well enough to support their families.

> For me, it was just I needed to get out and I needed a job that had some security and wasn't going to mean we were back eating mince and toast every night of the week, so, if the job had been for $80,000 or $90,000 a year I wouldn't have left. It wouldn't have been enough to support my family through the move, the house purchase, all that kind of stuff. So, it definitely played into it, but it wasn't a motivator for me (Participant E).

Participants wanted location stability for themselves and their partners. Partners had established careers in the current location, and the participant and partner did not want to move. The inability to progress in an Air Force career without relocating was a driver for participants to leave.

> I mean the reality is that people want stability, their partners want stability, and having to shift around every three or four years is just going to drive people away and seek more stability for the airlines (Participant C).

While some participants looked at internal opportunities before leaving, the requirement to work in another city or commute meant they decided to leave rather than move their family.

> I didn't want to do that same sort of thing by having to commute backwards and forwards to [place], you know, at that point, we had [more] kids, and [my wife] having to deal with them by herself (Participant D).

Valuing the pilot identity

The second major theme within the data was the high value participants placed on their identity as a pilot. Alongside factors that prompted the decision to leave the military were factors that increased the appeal of a non-military role that enabled them to retain their identity as pilots.

Participants reported that they joined the RNZAF to fly, but if they had stayed in the organisation, they reported that they would have had to stop flying to move into leadership positions. Participants did not want to be in the organisation with pilot qualifications and not fly.

> I didn't want to commit to stay for another five years of flying and then turn into [a person] behind a desk … that would have just been professionally very unsatisfying (Participant A).

> I love flying so much that I don't want to have a desk job, I would hate to think I was in the Air Force, with wings, and be stuck at a desk (Participant B).

With perceived limitations to continuing flying as RNZAF pilots, participants felt they had to leave to work elsewhere.

> I always knew I was going to leave the Air Force. I wasn't there to be a career officer; I knew that my time as a pilot is finite in the Air Force … I'd rather fly aeroplanes, and the only way you can do that is if you go off to the airlines … the rigmarole of being in the military and flying in the military, nah, that's something that I'll put behind me (Participant C).

When looking at new roles, participants looked for roles that had less workload and focused on flying. The airlines provided an opportunity for participants to fly without secondary duties. When talking about searching for a new role, participant A noted that he "was looking for less workload, so you know I go to work to fly and then I go home."

Most participants were more attracted to being a pilot than a military officer. These participants would have been content staying in the military as pilots but would have found moving into a ground role unsatisfying. Other participants wanted to stay in the military and would have taken a ground position, such as participant F: "I would have preferred a flying role but yea, I wouldn't have minded a ground position."

Leaving to keep flying

Time pressure and external aspects

Participants reported having felt time pressure when they were deciding whether or not to leave. They mentioned a combination of factors, including the need to start at the bottom of another organisation's seniority list, age, and hiring changes.

Participants who planned to go to the airlines considered leaving earlier rather than later to get on the seniority list.

> It is one of those things where you have to weigh up the longer you leave it, the longer you leave leaving, because, you know, everyone sort of compares it to [airline]. [Airline] is a seniority based airline so it just depends on how long you've been in. The longer you leave it, the longer it is going to take you to eventually get to first officer, or captain on an aircraft at [airline] (Participant C).

The understanding that participants needed to be flying if they wanted to join the airlines also worked against considering ground roles.

> I was worried that if I wasn't continuing to fly that [the airlines] wouldn't take me (Participant A).

Changes in airline hiring practices also created a sense of time pressure.

> I thought I really don't actually want to leave the Air Force, I'm loving what I'm doing, but if I ever want to leave, I actually have to go now, I don't actually have a choice because I don't want to fly turboprobs for ten years to get to the jets (Participant B).

There was also perceived time pressure due to participants' age, which was perceived as an increasing barrier to starting a new career in another organisation.

> Perhaps I'd glass ceiling out at WGCDR or GPCPT and then I'd have to leave at the age of you know 45 or 50 and then that's too late to start an airline career so it was either make the call early … at the end of the day you have to think about your life, because you get to a point and you realise the military is a big machine and you're just a small cog, so the main motivation for me leaving was around my age and a future career (Participant A).

Normalising the departure

Participants considered the 'normal' career path to fly in the RNZAF and then join the airlines or fly helicopters outside the organisation.

> My perception at the time was that most pilots left the Air Force to go to Air NZ or they would go to fly helicopters somewhere (Participant A).

Participants thought about their career path when they saw their peers leave for the airlines. They talked to former peers who had left for airline roles about the new roles, and these discussions identified advantages of being a civilian pilot, such as less stress, a better lifestyle and better pay.

> Certainly, when you start seeing a lot of your seniors start moving off to the airlines…You suddenly realise that that's probably the career path that you're most likely to go down…and then you start talking to these guys and they come back every now and then and they talk about how great life is post Air Force, you know. So about then was when you sort of start thinking about it (Participant C).

Chapter 6: Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the push and pull factors that impact military pilot retention. This was explored by interviewing military pilots from the RNZAF to understand their experiences when leaving the military. Although the interviews reflect six unique lived experiences, it is hoped the findings can translate to others in the military or aviation industry.

Overall, the results indicate that participants had experienced conflict between their military and pilot identities. Participants wanted to stay in the RNZAF but felt they could not for several reasons. Further examination of the data showed aspects of the psychological contract, job embeddedness, and a desire for work-life balance as suitable theories to explain turnover for military pilots.

Psychological contracts

Psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995) provides an explanation for push and pull factors that can lead to turnover. There were examples of breaches, which are known to lead to job dissatisfaction (Bal et al., 2008; Dupré & Day, 2007; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), reduced organisational commitment (Lester et al., 2002), and turnover (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Zhao et al., 2007). The military offered a relational psychological contract, focusing on loyalty and stability (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Participants had dedicated a lot of their time and effort to the RNZAF, including working extra hours and spending time away from their families. They also had spent a long time in the military, so their family and life requirements had changed throughout their careers. These changes would have affected the psychological contract as pilots' expectations of the work role changed, as proposed by De Vos et al. (2003). Once participants had left the RNZAF, they still had a strong attachment to the organisation, which was shown by participants saying they were still loyal to the military and would come back if they could.

Job security versus career security

The interviews revealed concerns about job security. Job insecurity can be perceived as a violation of the psychological contract, lowering affective commitment and increasing turnover intentions (Meyer et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2004). Although the military provided job security for the ROSO and engagement period, it only provided short-term security afterward, with no guarantee that the contract would be extended. Participants did not want to wait until the end of their contract to find out whether they still had a job. The concern that this caused is aligned with the idea that for

permanent workers, job insecurity can be perceived as a relational psychological contract breach and can reduce job satisfaction and organisational commitment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007).

Job insecurity stemmed from contract uncertainty, where participants were uncertain about whether their contracts would be extended. The short-term nature of contract extensions could signal to the participants that the organisation was not focused on maintaining a long-term relationship, which according to Costa and Neves (2017), could be perceived as a breach. The relational contract potentially explains why participants tried to maintain the relationship with the RNZAF by looking for other internal opportunities. However, due to being unable to find suitable internal job alternatives, participants took proactive steps to find work elsewhere in the event their contracts were not extended. Once participants had secured a job outside the military, they left the RNZAF.

There were two different types of job security participants sought. The first was pilot job security, where participants wanted to stay in the military as pilots. The second was military career security, where participants were willing to remain in the RNZAF in flying or non-flying roles. Participants who had only wanted to be pilots experienced job insecurity due to the perception that if they wanted to remain employed with the RNZAF, they would have had to move into a non-flying role. To continue flying, they had felt they must leave to work elsewhere. Other participants would have stayed if they could have found suitable internal opportunities; however, a lack of career management and experiences of career uncertainty had made this option unrealistic. These findings are similar to Kraak et al. (2020) where individuals who dreamed of being pilots and were passionate about their role wanted to leave the military due to poor career development or undesired future steps in their military career.

Van Eetveldt et al. (2013) found that in the Dutch military, career insecurity had a larger effect on turnover intention compared to job insecurity. They noted that "perceptions of potential job loss and low career opportunities are likely to be seen as a breach in the psychological contract" (p. 498) due to the perception that the organisation has failed to take care of its employee. In this current study, both job and career security impacted participants. However, it may be that those with a strong pilot identity were impacted by job security, whereas those with a stronger military identity were impacted by career security.

This current study shows individuals who left the military value their job security which is in line with findings by Kooij et al. (2011) who found that older workers value job security more than younger workers. In this current study, the difference between good job security when individuals are younger and poor job security when they are older is the opposite requirement to the findings by Kooij et al.

(2011). When talking about job insecurity, participants also mentioned that waiting until the end of their contract to find out they would no longer have a job would have also impacted their family. This indicates that there may be a larger emphasis on job security for those with families and other financial responsibilities.

Career management

Psychological contract fulfilment was found to be positively associated with career management practices (Sturges et al., 2005). However, military career management was perceived to be lacking. Participants had looked for alternative options prior to their contract renewal period, but they had not wanted to tell their commanders. Therefore, the decision to leave was made prior to contract extension renewal and without commanders knowing. This gave the organisation limited opportunity to help individuals find alternative roles if required, and by the time contract extensions were announced, participants may have already decided to leave.

Participants had also felt as if they were only going to get so far in the military and then would have to leave. Consequently, leaving earlier to start their career elsewhere was considered better than leaving later. In line with Sturges et al. (2005), participants stated they may have stayed if they had had a clear career plan and more certainty around their contract.

The approach to career progression, where pilots wanted to fly and not have to do non-flying related roles, is similar to the United States Department of Defence report (United States General Accounting Office, 1999). However, this report also found some pilots wanted to enhance their careers through working in different roles. This was not found in the current study, possibly because those who would want this type of career path were still employed by the RNZAF.

Leadership and support

Participants reported having experienced poor leadership and support. There were reports of a mismatch between command and participant expectations and breaches of trust and support, which had prompted thoughts of leaving. This is similar to Dulac et al.'s (2008) finding where psychological contract violation fully mediated the relationship between breach and commitment and trust. In these instances, it appears that participants had experienced a violation of the psychological contract, combined with a poor social exchange relationship, which had led to mistrust and a loss of commitment to the organisation, eventually leading to turnover.

Participants reported that they had felt that commanders were protecting themselves more than their staff, reducing levels of trust and support. This lack of support could result in participants viewing psychological contract discrepancies as violations and being more likely to monitor and detect other breaches, in line with Morrison and Robinson (1997) and Rousseau's (1995) findings. This also supports Zhao et al.'s (2007) findings where breach was strongly positively related to perceptions of psychological contract violation and mistrust towards management.

Role expectations

There were two types of RNZAF role expectations revealed during the analysis. The first was the participants' role in the RNZAF prior to leaving, and the second was the perceived future role they would have had to do to remain in the organisation. Participants' understanding of their RNZAF role was that they had been an officer first, and then a pilot. However, there were differences in what the participants thought their role would have been versus the reality they had experienced.

Firstly, participants had felt they needed to be good at their flying role but that they had not had the time needed to study, due to the numerous other roles they had to complete. They had also felt that flying was getting in the way of their other roles, even though flying was the primary reason they were in the RNZAF. This conflict between primary role and other roles, and the shift in priorities about which was more important, prompted individuals to leave and join an organisation where flying became their primary role.

Secondly, participants discussed that they had not liked certain aspects of their role in the RNZAF. They had wanted to be pilots and not do administrative or desk work. Therefore, the discrepancy between the desired flying role and the requirements of the actual role may have caused a breach. When looking for alternative roles, participants had searched for roles where they could go to work and fly, then come home.

Thirdly, the high workload induced by having too many roles had prevented participants from spending time with their families. As secondary and tertiary roles created this workload, individuals may have felt the only way to fly, and reduce the extra workload, was to leave for another organisation.

Participants had perceived that if they stayed in the RNZAF, they would eventually transition to a non-flying role. Although they understood that they had held dual roles, as both officer, and pilot, participants had not wanted to abandon their pilot identity to remain in the organisation. These

findings are similar to Naweed et al. (2021) who found that when participants' understanding of their role was different from their actual roles, they would want to leave.

Psychological contracts and large organisations

Overall, maintaining the psychological contract within the military is difficult. The RNZAF is a large organisation and has multiple contract makers. Personnel form psychological contracts with their immediate supervisors, career managers, and others within the RNZAF. Due to this, different messages will be received from each party, eventually eroding the contract's mutuality. Although not explicitly mentioned, the three-year posting cycle may trigger perceptions of psychological contract breach if commanders do not have enough time to deliver their obligations before being posted elsewhere, in line with Kraak et al.'s (2020) findings.

Job embeddedness

Job embeddedness theory (Hom et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001) helps understand the push and pull factors that may have impacted the decision to turnover in a military context. It also provides a framework to assess off-the-job factors that may have influenced the decision.

Fit

Participants reported that they had experienced good fit in the military. They had enjoyed their military flying roles, instruction, and non-flying aspects such as leadership and problem-solving. However, they had not enjoyed all aspects of their role. For example, participants had enjoyed flight instruction but not the administration aspect.

Although participants had enjoyed their military flying role, they perceived they would have had to stop flying to stay in the military. Participants who had enjoyed flying looked at external opportunities that would allow them to keep flying. This approach maintained the person-job fit, and allowed the pilots to continue using the skills, knowledge and abilities they have learned as a pilot. Airlines provided an opportunity for pilots to fly without secondary duties. It was considered less workload, and participants were able to focus on their primary role.

Moving into a managerial role was considered undesirable for those who only enjoyed the flying aspect. However, participants who had enjoyed flying and other aspects of the work had looked for internal opportunities before leaving. Participants who had not enjoyed flying also looked internally

for opportunities. In this situation, it seems likely that those with a strong pilot identity left to pursue flying elsewhere, and those with a strong military identity attempted to find alternative internal opportunities and remain within the organisation.

Participants had had difficulty with balancing work and home life due to workload and location. Some participants had enjoyed their current location and had not wanted to move to progress their career. Others had wanted to live in a different location way from a military base, and therefore, could not continue working in the organisation.

Overall, participants reported that they valued both their military and pilot identities and had achieved a good fit with their role, the organisation, and the environment. However, they had experienced challenges in maintaining their military identity, and the majority had left to pursue their pilot identity and continue flying.

Links

Participants reported feeling part of a strong and supportive community and valuing close working relationships. They had enjoyed working with their crew members and the type of missions conducted. When these links had broken down, for example, when other individuals made the workplace difficult, this contributed to the decision to leave. Participants also mentioned that seeing their peers leave for the airlines, which reduced the number of close colleagues in the military, influenced the decision to leave.

Participants had been in the organisation for a long time and appeared to have strong links. This supports Holtom et al.'s (2006) finding that the longer an individual is in an organisation, the stronger their links are. However, Holtom et al. (2006) suggest that the stronger the links, the less likely employees are to leave. This may explain why the decision to leave was conflicted.

Participants had partners and children, were committed to the organisation, but still left. The family was frequently mentioned in the interviews, which indicated that family was important to the participants. This is similar to Lee and Maurer's (1999) finding that the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to leave was weakened by having partners and children at home.

Even after leaving, participants mentioned how attached they still were to the organisation and its people. This indicates that even though they still had strong links to the military, the reasons to leave were stronger such as wanting only to fly or a better work-life balance.

Sacrifice

Participants reported that they had felt a need to balance what they would sacrifice by leaving the military and what they would sacrifice in their future careers by staying in the military. This had created time pressure, as participants knew they would leave at some point and had to decide when. Factors that had created this time pressure included age and hiring changes.

Leaving the military had entailed sacrificing military flying, the community, the crew environment, and their military identity. However, participants had gained a less stressful job and more work-life balance by leaving. If participants had stayed, they would have sacrificed time in their future career, getting on a seniority list, and opportunities to fly the aircraft type they wanted to fly. They would also have had to sacrifice their location. This was a conflicting process for some participants who said they had not wanted to leave but felt they had to. However, participants had thought they would have needed to leave at some point, so they had decided to go sooner rather than later.

Overall job embeddedness

Participants' embeddedness had changed over time. When they had neared the end of their engagement period, they saw their peers leaving for the airlines or other roles, created more off-the-job links with their families, and anticipated that they would have had to work in a non-flying role.

The balance between fit, links, and sacrifice slowly moved towards participants deciding to sacrifice their military identity to pursue their pilot identity. Although they would have had to sacrifice military flying, the community, and meaningful work, they would have gained better work-life balance, work schedules, the ability to plan activities with their families, a focus on flying.

This lower level of embeddedness, combined with a completed ROSO and no further military obligations, had allowed participants to search for job alternatives. Once they had found a better fit, they were able to leave. This aligns with Swider et al.'s (2011) findings where if employees had low levels of job embeddedness and higher levels of job alternatives, the job search-turnover relationship was stronger.

DiRenzo et al. (2017) found that where individuals had strong relationships with others in the military, they were committed to the organisation. However, they had difficulties balancing the reserve role with their civilian job and family responsibilities. Although slightly different, participants in this study had struggled to balance their military role with family responsibilities. There was also internal role conflict where participants had felt that their extra roles were getting in the way of flying.

As participants' on-the-job embeddedness reduced, and their off-the-job embeddedness increased, participants left the organisation. This is aligned with Porter et al.'s (2019) study which found on-the-job embeddedness reduced the likelihood that job search would lead to turnover, but off-the-job embeddedness increased the likelihood.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance influenced job embeddedness and is known to predict turnover intentions (Dupré & Day, 2007). If the employee cannot maintain a work-life balance, it impacts their fit and links to the organisation. Overall, participants reported that they had been willing to sacrifice their military identity to enjoy a better work-life balance.

Participants said they had wanted to spend more time at home, aligning with work-life balance theories which focus on being satisfied with both work and home life (Campbell Clark, 2000). For example, participants talked about no longer wanting to commute, which had been difficult for their wives and children. Participants had also wanted more stability for their families. This indicates a perception that the organisation had been unable to provide suitable options for participants to achieve the work-life balance they needed. Also, participants reported that a high workload had prevented them from being present at home. This led to participants looking at other flying roles that were less stressful and provided a better work-life balance. Once participants had left the RNZAF and were in their new role, they experienced better work-life balance and less stress compared to their RNZAF role.

The influence partners had had on the turnover decision was evident with participants reporting that family commitments meant they had not wanted to commute or relocate. For example, partners had been looking online for job alternatives, and wanted stability for their families and careers. Relocation was found to be a stressor in both Drummet at al.'s (2003) and Dimiceli et al.'s (2010) studies. Dimiceli et al. (2010) found that for partners, relocation was especially stressful when they had to give up their careers. This is similar to this study's results, where participants decided to leave the organisation to increase location stability.

Practical and theoretical implications

This study shows that there is a complex interplay between factors that can influence the turnover decision. If the RNZAF wants to retain pilots, job security, career management, leadership, support and role expectations need to be considered. A starting point could be engaging in conversations with pilots regarding future career plans and pilots' expectations of the organisation and vice versa. However, this will require a high level of trust and follow-through of promises. Alongside these conversations, contract processes could be examined to find a better way for employees to manage their future and gain a clearer understanding about job security. Discussions need to be had prior to individuals proactively searching for job alternatives rather than waiting to see whether their contract will be extended. Additionally, career paths and flying opportunities may need to be considered for pilots who wish to keep flying rather than moving to a ground role.

This study has demonstrated that theories involving psychological contracts, job embeddedness, and work-life balance apply to turnover among military pilots in the RNZAF, a unique group compared to those in the current literature.

Limitations

The main limitation to this research is the small sample size. Although the findings provide an insight into the complex process of leaving the military, they cannot be generalised. However, they provide the foundations for future research examining military pilot turnover. In addition, the sample was all male, which did not allow for a female perspective on turnover. Furthermore, COVID-19 drastically impacted the aviation industry during the research period. Although participants had left prior to this, the aviation industry is now substantially different compared to before COVID-19 which may impact current RNZAF employee turnover decisions.

Directions for future research

Future research could apply these qualitative results to the military pilot workforce to assess generalisability and include a more diverse sample. Furthermore, at the time of this study, all participants had already left their military roles. However, it is likely that pilots who joined with a strong military identity are still employed with the RNZAF. Future research could parallel the current research and explore why pilots remain in the RNZAF. Finally, future research could investigate the differences between job and career security and investigate whether it relates to pilot and military identity.

Conclusion

This research showed a complex relationship between the push and pull factors influencing turnover decisions. This research found that being a military pilot entails two different roles and identities: military officer and pilot. The findings suggest that the psychological contract, job embeddedness, and work-life balance are important aspects of the turnover decision. These aspects are fluid and change over time, and may influence whether pilots will leave the RNZAF.

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Appendix A

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪRIHŪROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Date: 21 June 2021

Dear Annalise O'Callaghan

Re: Ethics Notification - **SOB 21/24 - Exploring turnover factors for military pilots**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Southern B Committee** at their meeting held on **Monday, 21 June, 2021**.
On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973
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Appendix B

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Exploring turnover factors for military pilots

Participant information sheet

What is this study about?

The aim of this study is to explore turnover factors for military pilots. The researcher is looking to interview six pilots who have left the NZDF in the last five years. This interview aims to identify the push and pull factors for both the NZDF and your new role.

Who is conducting the study?

FLTLT Annalise O'Callaghan, a post-graduate student completing her Master of Science (Psychology) at Massey University. Dr. Dianne Gardner is the supervisor from Massey University.

What will I be asked to do?

I would like to invite you to talk about your decision to leave the NZDF to work elsewhere. Interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or via Zoom (depending on location and COVID-19 restrictions). This interview should take around 60 minutes and you may bring a support person/whanau to the interview if you wish. I would like your permission to record our discussion for the purposes of transcription and analysis. You can ask me to stop recording at any time. You will get a chance to amend and approve your transcript. You have the opportunity to withdraw your contribution until one week after you have received the transcript.

How will my information be used?

The findings of this research will be used towards a thesis and to make recommendations about how to create a better workplace for pilots in the NZDF. This will be published publicly. The NZDF will be provided with a copy of the thesis, and a summary report. No information will be released that will identify participants or link them to the data. Information will be generated into themes and all identifying information will be removed.

How will my information be kept private?

Confidentiality is important given the limited number of pilots in the NZDF. Your name, identifying information (e.g. rank, unit, position), and other personal information will not be used, and your responses will be grouped and summarized amongst other participants. If you were to be quoted, identifying details would be removed and a pseudonym assigned to you. Interview recordings will be deleted post-transcription, and the typed transcripts will be kept securely on the researcher's laptop. Any printed data will be stored securely at the researcher's home, and shredded once no longer needed.

All information collected will be kept confidential except in the following situations:

- If there is a threat to the safety of yourself or others.
- If there is a legal requirement to disclose information. This includes anything that may form an offence under the Armed Forces Discipline Act (AFDA) 1971. If you tell me something that may indicate an offence has occurred then I may be obliged to report this via the appropriate NZDF channels. If this occurs, we will discuss the requirements and obligations of the AFDA with Head of Psychology (Air) prior to moving forward.

Confidentiality of others

During the interview, I will ask you not to disclose the name or other identifying information about other individuals, whether or not they are current serving members. However, as per the above, if you tell me something that indicates a breach of the AFDA has occurred then I may be obliged to report it.

What happens if I feel distressed during the interview?

If you should find the interviews distressing in any way, we can stop the recording and the interview and discuss your preferred way forward. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to, and you can ask to end the interview at any time. I can also suggest some resources that you might find helpful for further support.

If you would like to participate, or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Principal researcher: FLTLT Annalise O'Callaghan *(email removed)*

Supervisor: Dr. Dianne Gardner *(email removed)*

Head of Psychology (Air): *(name and email removed)*

NZDF Research Ethics Committee Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the NZDF Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact (name and email removed).

Massey University Research Ethics Committee Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Appendix C

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Exploring turnover factors for military pilots

Consent Form

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and discuss my participation with the researcher. These have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I am able to withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this research up until one week after receiving my transcript, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I have concerns about this research, I may contact Dr. Dianne Gardner (supervisor) or *(name removed)* (Head of Psychology, Air).
- I agree to participate in this research.
- I agree to be recorded during the interview.

- I wish to receive a copy of the thesis once completed Yes/No (circle one)
- I would like to use the following pseudonym: _____

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Exploring turnover factors for military pilots

Authority for the release of transcripts

- I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

- I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____