



RETENTION STRATEGIES: EXPLORING SHIP OFFICERS' PERSPECTIVES

Estratégias de Retenção: explorando as perspectivas dos oficiais dos navios

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors contributing to the long-term retention of maritime officers in the Philippines with a focus on management level and operational level officers. The maritime industry, a major contributor to the global economy, also exhibits high turnover rates and a challenging recruitment environment despite paying above average wages. The study explored the intrinsic and extrinsic factors career progression, job satisfaction, remuneration, work-life balance and family support. A mixed method research design, utilized both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data to examine the various factors associated with officers' decision to remain with their companies or disengage and consider options with other organizations. There were two hundred officers surveyed with an equal distribution of management and operational level officers. Results showed generally high job satisfaction driven by meaningful work and camaraderie with work colleagues, however, there remained significant gaps regarding officers' perceived financial security, ability to pursue career development opportunities, and subsequently, work-life balance. Respondents indicated the need for more distinct career pathways, financial rewards, stronger family support, and better emotional well-being initiatives. The research indicates that officers generally believed in the intrinsic values of a seafarer's life, but factors like family dislocation, job fatigue, and lack of sufficient career development opportunities were likely to be drivers for turnover. Recommendations included more comprehensive financial rewards, clear career pathways, and stronger mental health and family support systems. The research offers meaningful engagement for maritime companies to help develop retention strategies for improving turnover rates and job security in the industry.

Keywords: Seafarers. Recruitment. Retention. Shipping Industry. Career Progression. Work-life balance.

RESUMO

Este estudo investigou fatores que contribuem para a retenção de longo prazo de oficiais marítimos nas Filipinas, com foco em oficiais de nível gerencial e operacional. O setor marítimo, um dos principais contribuintes para a economia global, também apresenta altas taxas de rotatividade e um ambiente de recrutamento desafiador, apesar de pagar salários acima da média. O estudo explorou os fatores intrínsecos e extrínsecos: progressão na carreira, satisfação no trabalho, remuneração, equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional e apoio familiar. Um delineamento de pesquisa de método misto utilizou dados quantitativos de pesquisa e dados qualitativos de entrevista para examinar os vários fatores associados à decisão dos oficiais de permanecer em suas empresas ou se desligar e considerar opções com outras organizações. Duzentos oficiais foram entrevistados, com uma distribuição igualitária de oficiais de nível gerencial e operacional. Os resultados mostraram uma satisfação no trabalho geralmente alta, impulsionada por um trabalho significativo e camaradagem com os colegas de trabalho; no entanto, permaneceram lacunas significativas em relação à segurança financeira percebida pelos oficiais, à capacidade de buscar oportunidades de desenvolvimento de carreira e, consequentemente, ao equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional. Os entrevistados indicaram a necessidade de trajetórias de carreira mais distintas, recompensas financeiras, maior apoio familiar e melhores iniciativas de bem-estar emocional. A pesquisa indica que os oficiais, em geral, acreditavam nos valores intrínsecos da vida de um marítimo, mas fatores como deslocamento familiar, fadiga no trabalho e falta de oportunidades suficientes de desenvolvimento profissional provavelmente eram os impulsionadores da rotatividade. As recomendações incluíam recompensas financeiras mais abrangentes, planos de carreira mais claros e sistemas de saúde mental e apoio familiar mais fortes. A pesquisa oferece um engajamento significativo para as empresas marítimas, ajudando-as a desenvolver estratégias de retenção para melhorar as taxas de rotatividade e a segurança no emprego no setor.

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Palavras-chave: Marítimos. Recrutamento. Retenção. Indústria Naval. Progressão na Carreira. Equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Shipping is one of the key movers of the world economy; it enables global trade and the safe transport of goods across the oceans. Philippines being the top supplier of seafarers in the whole world is truly in the front line to address the surging need for qualified officer of the vessel. Yet, while seafaring brings enormous economic rewards, the shipping sector is constantly suffering a shortage of officers. Maritime officer attrition has been the primary focus to the detriment of recruitment and business operations. Separation from family, adverse work-life balance, job dissatisfaction, and lack of advancement in career paths are the key reasons for high attrition levels.

There is a growing need for skilled seafarers, driven by the growth of world trade, the size and sophistication of the expanding maritime fleet, and the technological changes happening in the ship operations. Though maritime firms offer competitive pay, training and area for growth, officers face a slew of challenges that drive them away from their jobs. Officers have a lot of turnover and for maritime companies this is very costly as they have to spend a lot of money in recruiting and training new officers (Galicia, 2021). Officer retention is very important in the Philippines where seafaring has become one of the largest industries in the country economy (Medallon, 2020).

Study aims to identify the factors on long term retention of seafarer officers in one company in the Philippines. In particular, it investigates a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors including career growth, remuneration, job security, family support, and job satisfaction that impact retention. This study, by attempting to investigate the retention factors for both management-level officers and operational-level officers, provides an overview which can serve as basis in the human resource procedure of maritime businesses. They will contribute to improved retention practices, reduced hiring costs and a more positive workplace culture throughout the maritime industry (Suprayitno & Wibowo, 2020).

Although studies had been made in maritime industries, no retention study was made from the viewpoint of Filipino maritime officers, especially within the Philippine setting. Previous research has explored employee engagement and organizational commitment (Rameshkumar, 2020). As well as factors shaping organizational loyalty across generations (Dui & Paredes, 2024). Many do not consider the unique cultural, operating and family challenges that Filipino seafarers encounter. Additionally, there have been studies that skimmed through the maritime industry, however, there is a gap in the literature on retention from the dual perspective of the management and operational-level officers in the Philippine maritime industry.

This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an insight into how different factors such as compensation, career progression, job security, and family concerns influence the Philippine maritime officer's decision to remain with his or her company. Maritime companies will, through this research, possess valuable information that can be utilized to develop better retention strategies as well as improve the general working environment, which will in turn stem the industry's growing demand for qualified and committed seafarers (Suprayitno & Wibowo, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review highlights studies and conceptual models on maritime officer retention, specifically dealing with employee engagement, compensation, career path, work-life balance and the particular challenges seafarers experience. The subsequent discussion outlines the results of the mentioned research and the implications they hold for the enhancement of retention strategies within the maritime context.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

According to Rameshkumar (2020), their study found a positive relationship between employee engagement with organizational commitment in Indian seafaring officers, indicating that employee engagement is directly proportional to affective and normative commitment, suggesting that more engaged employees are more likely to feel attached to the organization and feel the "need" to stay in the organization. It is about how we create an emotionally invested workforce, one which officers feel part of and proud of (Triharjanti & Tjahjono, 2023). On the other hand, continuance commitment which describes the perceived costs associated with leaving an organisation was not significantly related to engagement, according to the findings in Rameshkumar's (2020) paper which suggest that engagement is not sufficient for long term retention. These insights suggest that engagement is high-level and active attention alone may not be enough to retain employees.

Accordingly, Dui and Paredes (2024) highlighted the centrality of engagement in developing organizational loyalty, in this instance among various generational cohorts. For instance, on the study they conducted showed that, despite being adults by general definition, Generation X were more loyal to their employers due to job security while Millennials were attracted more to career development, flexibility, and ability to use their strengths in the workplace (Widodo, Wening, Nakuloadi, Rustiana, & Saifuddiin, 2025). This indication, while still making engagement a primary focus, shows that the drivers of retention and loyalty can vary greatly, even amongst different generations within the same workplace (Ly, 2024; Khoa, Quang, Dung, Hoa, & Huyen, 2024). For shipping companies, it implies that engagement programs must be tailored to the specific preferences of younger staff and older officers, to increase retention across demographic groups (Malaeb, Dagher, & Canaan Messarra, 2023).

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Filipino seamen are burdened with emotional stress from the long separation from family (Garciano, Garciano, 2023). Homesickness, family issues and difficulties related to keeping up with relationships while at sea are the three main predictors of seafarers' intention to court quit their jobs. Work-life balance and family support for seafarers can also help reduce attrition, it suggests. More regular shore leaves and easier communication between the seafarer and his or her family can alleviate the burden of extended separation. This holds distinctive meaning for the Philippines, where family ties are strong and the cost of separation is often the main reason officers leave life at sea.

In another extensive analysis, Abad (2021) highlights the psychosocial aspects of seafaring, particularly on the family side implications, emphasizing that quite a number of times, ship members spend a long period onboard away from spouses and children. Families experience the emotional and economic consequences of seafaring, which often result in anxiety, depression and stress and loneliness, the study found (Yin, Guan, Zhang, Li, Jobe, & Ahmed, 2023). Abad's research suggests that improved financial planning support and communications systems for seafarers' families can reduce these burdens. By investing in more

stable communication devices and preparing their seafarers for a life after sea, companies can have the last laugh when it comes to retention rates, as it is the officers will presumably be staying with those companies that offer a family-cared for life.

CAREER PROGRESSION AND JOB SATISFACTION

According to a study by Rengamani (2018), career advancement and job satisfaction are two major factors for retaining marine engineers in Indian shipping companies. The greater the feeling of opportunities for career advancement within a company an officer has, the more likely they are to stay with that company, as long as they find their job, in general, satisfactory. The study found that the top three factors for retention were competitive salary, opportunity for advancement and job security. Officers with regular training reported being more engaged and fulfilled on the job, leading to less turnover. These findings are consistent with the general retention literature, and companies seem to need to use both monetary and non-monetary perks just to be able to keep skilled office holders.

Likewise, Yuen et al. (2018) also examined seafarers and concluded that rewards and recognition were significant factors in mediating the relationship of job satisfaction and performance. The research showed that having more job satisfaction yielded better job performance and fewer errors, as well as increasing the likelihood of employees staying with the sea employers in their jobs. This means that improving job satisfaction through rewards, recognition, and opportunities for career development not only helps with retention, it contributes to operational efficiency and safety too. For maritime officers, job satisfaction, chiefly by means of recognition, was among the top reasons they would remain with their employer in the long term.

RETENTION CHALLENGES IN THE GLOBAL MARITIME INDUSTRY

Gupta (2016) investigated the worldwide shortage of skilled manpower of ship board officers, in particular, officers who serve in specialized roles, serving on LNG and chemical carriers. The study revealed a significant demand-supply gap owing to: increasing demand for qualified seafarers, growing complexity of ship operation and regulatory changes. Seafarers go on shore-based jobs where work is not as difficult and pay is better (Nurfadhliah & Widiasih, 2024). Gupta's study indicates that the seafaring profession will need to react to these concerns and find ways of providing better salaries, conditions and opportunities for officers in order to retain them in the maritime sector. This is critical to closing the supply-demand gap and retaining quality maritime officers over the long term.

Further, Acharya (2022) explored the drivers of employee retention in shipping companies by applying both Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Job Embeddedness Theory (JET). The study found that an important determinant of retention is job embeddedness, the emotional and professional attachments officers form to their organization (Franco & Landini, 2022). The higher job security, scope for the career and a good workplace are some of the factors, which leads to high job embeddedness, therefore improving retention (Franco & Landini, 2022). Companies should work towards developing strong links of trust, gratitude, and friendship between employees and the organization, the study asserts.

THE IMPACT OF JOB STRESS AND RECOGNITION

According to Calinao, Tabla and Carlo (2020) in a study of employee retention, some of the factors that impact this dynamic are pay, rewards and recognition, working environment, and job security. The study also found that pay was the top reason to stay especially for those with

families. But they also stressed the importance of recognizing employees' contributions, to foster morale and job satisfaction. The other key factor when it came to retention has been a good work environment, where workers feel their work is valued and there are opportunities for advancement on the job (Adi, Nagata, Odagami, Nagata, & Mori, 2024). This is why it is crucial that maritime officers have a voice regarding those reasons to leave a role, including extrinsic motivators, such as pay, and intrinsic motivators such as recognition and career development (Awwad, Abuzaid, Al-Okaily, & Alqatamin, 2023).

Roth (2018) also brought attention to leadership approaches in mariner retention through competitive salaries, professional development, and recognition, as well as building transparency in an organization. The study showed job satisfaction and development is a motivator for mariners that can be delivered by effective leadership and good communication. When maritime organizations create recognition for performance programs, provide professional development opportunities, and build trust between leadership and officers, retention rates can soar (Bonaiuto, Fantinelli, Milani, Cortini, Vitiello, & Bonaiuto, 2022). Roth (2018) study supports other authors' opinions that imply integrated retention, to include financial and non-financial incentives for competent officers.

RETENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

A few studies also looked at how technological changes impacted employee retention. Gupta (2016) indicated that the technology development has led to more complex ships with consequent demand for highly skilled officers. However, the supply of skilled officers has not matched this demand, which is causing problems of retention for shipping companies. In the same vein, Rengamani (2018) noted that the arrival of new technologies demands for continuous training and development to allow the officers remain competitive and thus be competent. However, if technology continues to accelerate, companies will need to invest in training programs and provide opportunities for officers to learn new skills, which will benefit them in their work and help them stay relevant to the business (Muduli & Choudhury, 2024).

DEFINITION

Employee Retention: Employee retention refers to the ability of an organization to retain its employees for a period of time, more so those in critical positions. In the shipping industry, it is specifically the shipping companies' ability to keep their officers, preventing turnover and enabling long-term organizational commitment.

Maritime Officers: Maritime officers are skilled professionals occupying critical leadership positions on ships such as deck officers, engineers and other high-ranking officers. Maritime officers are responsible for safe and efficient operation of the vessel and the success of this component of maritime operations often depends on their expertise and experience.

Retention Factors: Retention factors are the various intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence an employee's decision to remain in an organization. They could be career prospects, salary, work environment, job security, work-life balance, and personal reasons, such as family.

Job Satisfaction: Job satisfaction is the degree to which an employee is satisfied, content, and positively engaged in his or her work. In the maritime industry, this can be influenced by salary, working conditions, career opportunities, recognition, and the nature of work itself.

Job Embeddedness: Job embeddedness is an indicator of the strength of the emotional and professional connection of employees to their organization. It considers the quality of relationships at work, personal connections to the community, and the perceived sacrifices of leaving the organization.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Philippines has emerged as a key contributor of maritime officers to the international community, with Filipinos comprising a significant proportion of the world's seafaring officers. Despite the strong demand for seafarers, retention of maritime officers is becoming an increasing issue. The maritime sector pays a cost through increased recruitment costs, plus labor shortages, initiated by extra frequent turnover rates and associated challenges in retaining qualified officers. The issue is present in the Philippine context, wherein separation from family, a lack of engagement, work-related fatigue, and no career advances are amongst the top problems behind the loss of the officers (Medallon, 2020).

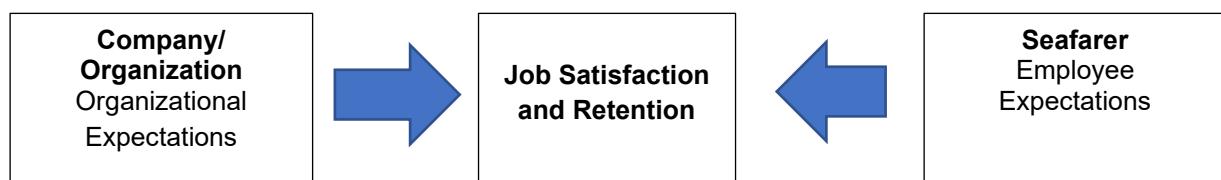
Although studies have been done specifically looking at employee retention in the maritime sector, not many have looked at the case of Filipino maritime officers, and also the interactions between all the factors that influence their retention with a company. Although prior studies have found salary, work-life balance, family support, career development opportunities, and job satisfaction to be significant factors to retention, these do not consider the specific cultural, economic, and operational interests of Filipino officers. Additionally, there has been no study yet that analyze retention as a dual perspective between management-level and operational-level officers in the Philippine maritime sector.

This study attempts to explore the factors affecting the retention of maritime officers in the Philippines with one company. This research study could help companies design strategies that would improve retention, reduce turnover, and increase workforce stability among the Philippine maritime sector by delving into management and operational levels to provide a holistic picture of the retention issue plaguing the maritime sector in the Philippines.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a basic theory for elucidating the reciprocal foundation of the employee and organization, especially, to illustrate employee retention. Blau (1964) states that the core of this theory is that people seek to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. The theory from the shipping field which describes, how, the job satisfaction and retention of maritime officers is influenced by the process of exchange between their expectations and the provision of the organization. Dui and Paredes (2024) added that employers who address the basic needs of the employees, such as career development, job security, and a platform to practice their skills are most likely to retain their employees. When organizations meet these expectations officers feel satisfied and emotionally attached, which leads to higher commitment and lower turnover (Suryantari & Satriawan, 2023).

Figure 1- The Conceptual Framework



In term to Filipino maritime officers, Garciano and Garciano (2023) identified that unmet personal and professional expectations including the emotional toll of family separation and the high-stress days spent living and working aboard a ship can disrupt this exchange and prompt attrition. Moreover, career development, competitive pay and better work environment are critical for satisfying the officers' expectations, thus contributing toward retention (Rengamani, 2018). Organizations can offer an ideal balance that meets both the professional requirements

and the personal requirements of the maritime officers leading to job satisfaction, creating a higher organizational engagement with the potential for decreasing officer attrition (Tan & Yeap, 2022). This phenomenon is also popular and well known in the literature, that if the employees feel that the organization is not going to back rip from the deals that have been made, it is in their nature to commit themselves to the organization, for the long run.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

To develop a holistic understanding of the factors affecting retention of maritime officers in the Philippines, this study will use a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods type, making it possible to gain an in-depth perspective on both numeric data and insights into perspectives. In the quantitative part, surveys will be utilized in order to obtain numerical data concerning the aspects of retention, which include but are not limited to career development, compensation, job satisfaction and work-life balance. The survey will be sent to management level and operational level maritime officers to see if there are any significant differences in their responses.

The qualitative component will involve semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of the survey respondents, enabling in-depth exploration of personal experiences, motivations and perceptions regarding retention. This way, the study will get more in-depth, substantial data regarding the underlying emotional and personal factors of retention like family support, homesickness and stress. With quantitative and qualitative data, a full picture of the trends affecting retention in the Philippine maritime sector will be provided and this will also guarantee that the study will be able to consider both the statistics as well as the individual mindsets that affect retention.

PRIMARY SOURCE OF DATA

Philippine maritime officers will serve as the main source for the data and will be concentrated on the operational level officers and the management level officers. A minimum of 200 maritime officers with 100 respondents from each level will be the sample size to equally represent both levels. The officers will then be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure there is variety in the sample based on experience, age and sex. This will enable the study to obtain a cross-section of the opinions from people in various positions, backgrounds, and stages of their maritime careers.

The data will be gathered by online surveys and personal interviews, depending on the accessibility of the participants. The survey will contain closed-ended and open-ended questions to measure quantitative data and qualitative data. Interviews are to be performed with a second stage purposive sampling of survey participants who express willingness to discuss their life narratives and their emerging thoughts on retention. These sources will underpin an exploration of the components which determine whether maritime officers will be with a company long-term, and inform the design of retention initiatives for maritime companies.

SAMPLING METHOD

The study will employ the stratified random sampling method in selecting the participants. Stratification of the officers will help the study in selecting the appropriate number of samples from both maritime officer levels. The officers will be stratified into two categories that are, the management-level officers and the operational-level officers, with 100 participants selected from

each of the two categories. The essence of using stratified sampling is to ensure that officers at both levels are adequately represented to allow the clear comparison of the discussed retention factors in different hierarchical levels (Ahmad, Alias, & Abdul Razak, 2023). Random selection of the officers' population in each stratum will help the study in achieving a sample that is bias-free and representative of the larger population of the Philippine maritime officers.

PARTICIPANTS

This study will involve a sample of 200 maritime officers, including 100 management-level officers and 100 operational-level officers. The sample will come from the various maritime companies in the Philippines in order to capture a diverse background and experience of the participants. Participants will be sampled based on their current work in the maritime industry so they would have direct awareness of factors that affect job satisfaction and retention. The officers invited to participate in the survey and/or interviews will have to satisfy the following conditions: (1) he/she must have a minimum of 1-year working experience in maritime industry, (2) he/she must be currently employed in the Philippines and (3) he/she must be willing to take part in the survey and/or interview. This sampling method will ensure the study reflects the views of officers currently working in the industry.

DATA COLLECTION TOOL

The study will utilize online surveys and semi-structured interviews, for data collection tool. The survey questionnaire will be designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The survey questionnaire will include closed-ended questions to gather numerical data on various factors of retention, including salary, career development, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. The survey will also include Likert scale questions to find out the degree to which maritime officers agree or disagree with statements regarding their job satisfaction and the factors that will influence whether they will continue to work with their current company.

To supplement the survey, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 40-50 officers (participants to the survey) will be conducted to provide a more complete investigation of personal and emotional influences on retention. Interviews will allow free-form questioning and enable participants to characterize their own perspectives on the influences on their retention (for example, family support, stress, work-life balance). Using these data collection methods in concert will provide a comprehensive view of the influences on retention, capturing both quantifiable trends and qualitative experience. Surveys will be completed electronically, interviews will be done in person or via video call, depending on participant availability.

DATA ANALYSIS

Survey data from the 200 marine officers will be entered into SPSS (or some equivalent package), checked for missing data, and screened for obvious outliers; if one or two small random gaps in a questionnaire are present, they will be replaced with mean or median substitution; questionnaires with large segments missing will be deleted. Descriptive analytics (frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations) will summarize demographic information and the five key retention factors: pay, career development opportunities, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and family support, after which the internal consistency of each factor with identified scale will be validated using Cronbach's α (target ≥ 0.70). To see if there are differences between management-level and operational-level officers, independent-sample t-tests (or Mann-Whitney U-tests if normality cannot be assumed) will be used to compare their average score on each factor. Finally, a standard multiple regression enter method will be used

to compile a complete view of the retention factors entered as predictors to the self-reported "intention to stay" of each officer; the analysis will report beta weights, adjusted R², and p-values, which relates to the practical utility of each predictive factor.

The Interview recordings of the purposive subsample of the 40–50 officers will be transcribed, word-for-word, and then analyzed in NVivo using a basic thematic analysis. Two researchers will provide independent notes of meaningful phrases, cluster similar codes into broader themes, for example, "Family Anchors" or "Career Plateau," then they will reach agreement on meaning and develop an audit trail for the analytic journey through member checking with the participants. Once the two strands are completed, a basic side-by-side comparison table will show a side-by-side format of quantitative findings (e.g., high average family support) mapped to the respective qualitative themes (officers describing not making milestones in their lives). Convergences and divergences will be flagged at this stage to articulate a clear, evidence-based response to the question of why Filipino maritime officers, either through agency or a single company, choose to persist with employment with a single company, or to exit and work for another entity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, meticulously analyzed according to the mixed-methods research design outlined in the Methodology. The quantitative data, obtained from surveys completed by 200 Filipino maritime officers (equally distributed between management-level and operational-level), are presented first. Subsequently, a comprehensive thematic analysis of the qualitative data, derived from semi-structured interviews with a purposive subsample of 40-50 officers, is detailed. This integrated approach allows for a robust and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing long-term retention among Filipino maritime officers within a single company, directly addressing the study's aim.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1- Respondents Profile (N = 200)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Gender	Male	186	93.0
	Female	14	7.0
Age (years)	20–30	33	16.5
	31–40	65	32.5
	41–50	73	36.5
	51 +	29	14.5
Position	Management-level officer	100	50.0
	Operational-level officer	100	50.0
Years in industry	1–5	50	25.0
	6–10	50	25.0
	11–15	50	25.0
	16 +	50	25.0
Highest education	Bachelor's degree	141	70.5
	Graduate degree	59	29.5

The demographic analysis of the 200 maritime officers provides a comprehensive overview of the study participants, ensuring the sample's representativeness for understanding retention dynamics:

- **Gender:** The vast majority of respondents were male (186, or 93%), with a smaller proportion of female officers (14, or 7%). This accurately reflects the predominantly male workforce characteristic of the global and Philippine maritime industry.

- **Age Group:** The largest age cohort was 41-50 years (73 respondents, or 36.5%), followed by 31-40 years (65 respondents, or 32.5%). Officers aged 20-30 years comprised 33 respondents (16.5%), and those 51 and above totaled 29 respondents (14.5%). This distribution indicates a significant presence of experienced officers, providing valuable insights from diverse career stages.
- **Position Level:** The study successfully achieved its sampling objective with an equal distribution of management-level officers (100 respondents, or 50%) and operational-level officers (100 respondents, or 50%). This stratification is crucial for allowing direct comparative analysis of retention factors across these two critical hierarchical levels within the Philippine maritime sector.
- **Years of Service in the Maritime Industry:** The respondents were evenly distributed across categories of years of service, with 50 respondents (25%) in each of the 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16+ years of service groups. This balanced distribution ensures that perspectives from officers at various points in their maritime careers are adequately captured, from those relatively new to the industry to highly seasoned professionals.
- **Years with Current Company (Manning Agency):** A notable number of officers reported significant tenure with their current company, which is crucial for understanding factors contributing to long-term retention within a single organization, a primary focus of this study. Specifically, 56 officers (28%) had 11-15 years, 55 officers (27.5%) had 6-10 years, 46 officers (23%) had 1-5 years, and 43 officers (21.5%) had 16+ years with their current employer.
- **Highest Level of Education:** The majority of officers held an Undergraduate Degree (Bachelor Degree), accounting for 141 respondents (70.5%). A substantial minority, 59 respondents (29.5%), possessed a Graduate Degree (Masteral, Doctorate/PhD). This indicates a highly educated professional workforce within the sample.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS ON RETENTION FACTORS

The quantitative data, collected using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), provided numerical insights into officers' perceptions across five key retention factors identified in the conceptual framework: job satisfaction, remuneration, career progression, work-life balance, and emotional/psychological well-being.

JOB SATISFACTION

The quantitative data consistently reveals a high level of overall job satisfaction among the maritime officers surveyed, suggesting these intrinsic factors contribute positively to their intent to stay:

- **Satisfaction with Current Role:** 178 (89%) "Agree" and 15 (7.5%) "Strongly Agree" that they are satisfied with their current role as a maritime officer, indicating strong overall contentment (Total 96.5% agreement). Only 7 (3.5%) respondents remained neutral.
- **Opportunities for Personal Growth and Career Development:** 174 (87%) "Agree" and 19 (9.5%) "Strongly Agree" that their work provides opportunities for personal growth and career development (Total 96.5% agreement).

- **Meaningful Work and Positive Contribution:** 175 (87.5%) "Agree" and 20 (10%) "Strongly Agree" that their work is meaningful and contributes positively to the company (Total 97.5% agreement).
- **Satisfaction with Recognition Received:** A significant majority, 177 (88.5%) "Agree" and 20 (10%) "Strongly Agree," are satisfied with the recognition they receive for their work (Total 98.5% agreement).
- **Satisfaction with Communication between Management and Employees:** Most officers, 180 (90%) "Agree" and 19 (9.5%) "Strongly Agree," express satisfaction with communication between management and employees within their company (Total 99.5% agreement).
- **Feeling Valued by Employer:** A substantial number of officers, 177 (88.5%) "Agree" and 18 (9%) "Strongly Agree," feel that their employer values them (Total 97.5% agreement).

These robust findings align with existing literature, such as Rameshkumar (2020), suggesting a strong positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational commitment, where highly engaged employees are more likely to feel attached to the organization. The consistently high levels of reported satisfaction indicate that intrinsic factors such as meaningful work, personal growth, effective communication, and feeling valued are significant contributors to officers' contentment and, potentially, their intent to stay.

REMUNERATION AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

The data on remuneration and financial security presents a more nuanced picture, with a notable proportion of officers expressing neutrality or a lack of strong conviction regarding these extrinsic factors:

- **Salary Competitiveness:** While 113 (56.5%) respondents "Agree" that their salary is competitive with similar positions in the industry, a substantial 86 (43%) remained "Neutral." Only 1 (0.5%) disagreed, and none "Strongly Agreed" or "Strongly Disagreed." This indicates that while a slight majority agrees, a significant segment does not strongly perceive their salary as unequivocally competitive.
- **Fringe Benefits:** Fringe benefits offered by the company are viewed more favorably, with 137 (68.5%) officers "Agreeing" that they are satisfactory. 63 (31.5%) remained "Neutral," and none disagreed.
- **Financial Security:** 123 (61.5%) officers "Agree" that they feel financially secure in their current role within the company, with 1 (0.5%) "Strongly Agreeing." However, 76 (38%) are "Neutral," highlighting a considerable degree of uncertainty or less definitive financial security for a significant portion of the respondents.
- **Opportunities for Salary Increases and Promotions:** 128 (64%) officers "Agree" that their company provides fair opportunities for salary increases and promotions, with 1 (0.5%) "Strongly Agreeing." 71 (35.5%) are "Neutral."

These results suggest that while a majority perceives their salary as competitive and benefits as satisfactory, the considerable number of "Neutral" responses points to an area where perceived financial value and opportunities might not be consistently strong across the board. This resonates with Rengamani's (2018) identification of competitive salary as a top retention factor, highlighting a potential area for companies to solidify their offering and reduce uncertainty.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FAMILY SUPPORT

This category reveals significant challenges and a high degree of uncertainty regarding work-life balance and family support, which are critical considerations for Filipino seafarers and a known driver of attrition:

- **Enough Time with Family:** A large number of officers, 149 (74.5%), are "Neutral" about having enough time with their family while working. Only 34 (17%) "Agree," and 17 (8.5%) "Disagree." This indicates a substantial struggle in balancing demanding professional duties with personal and family life.
- **Adequate Shore Vacation:** Similarly, 149 (74.5%) officers are "Neutral" regarding adequate shore vacation. Only 38 (19%) "Agree," and 13 (6.5%) "Disagree." The high neutrality suggests a lack of sufficient or predictable leave.
- **Convenient and Affordable Family Communication at Sea:** Communication with family at sea is considered "Neutral" by 151 (75.5%) officers. Only 33 (16.5%) "Agree" that it is convenient and affordable, while 16 (8%) "Disagree." This points to ongoing difficulties in maintaining familial connections while on deployment.
- **Emotional and Psychological Support from Company for Family Challenges:** 150 (75%) officers are "Neutral" on receiving adequate emotional and psychological support from the company for personal/family challenges. Only 32 (16%) "Agree," and 18 (9%) "Disagree." This indicates a perceived gap in company support for the significant emotional burdens faced by officers and their families.
- **Work-Related Fatigue:** Most officers, 144 (72%), are "Neutral" about frequently experiencing work-related fatigue. While 38 (19%) "Agree" that they do, 18 (9%) "Disagree," with 1 (0.5%) "Strongly Disagreeing." The high neutrality implies fatigue is a common, though not universally admitted, challenge.

These findings strongly align with Garciano and Garciano (2023), who emphasize the emotional stress and difficulties of family separation for Filipino seafarers, identifying homesickness and relationship issues as key predictors of attrition. The high prevalence of "Neutral" responses indicates that while officers may not strongly disagree, they also do not feel adequately supported or satisfied in these crucial personal and family-oriented aspects, pointing to a significant and pervasive area for intervention to improve long-term retention.

CAREER PROGRESSION AND JOB SECURITY

The data indicates that officers perceive some uncertainty regarding clear career progression opportunities and job security within their companies, suggesting a potential area for increased transparency and investment:

- **Clear Career Progression Opportunities:** A substantial number of officers, 145 (72.5%), are "Neutral" on having clear career progression opportunities within their company. 46 (23%) "Agree," and 9 (4.5%) "Disagree."
- **Sufficient Training and Development Programs:** Similarly, 151 (75.5%) officers are "Neutral" regarding sufficient training and development programs provided by their company. 42 (21%) "Agree," and 7 (3.5%) "Disagree."
- **Feeling Secure in Job:** While 51 (25.5%) officers "Agree" that they feel secure in their job, a dominant 138 (69%) are "Neutral," and 11 (5.5%) "Disagree." This high neutrality for job security is a significant concern for retention.

- **Company Valuing Contributions and Investing in Professional Growth:** 152 (76%) officers are "Neutral" on the company valuing their contributions and investing in their professional growth. 40 (20%) "Agree," and 8 (4%) "Disagree."
- **Awareness of Career Progression Programs:** Awareness of career progression programs also sees 145 (72.5%) officers as "Neutral," with 48 (24%) "Agreeing" and 7 (3.5%) "Disagreeing."

These findings suggest that while a segment of officers perceives opportunities, a larger group remains uncertain or unconfirmed about their career trajectory and job security. This contrasts with Rengamani's (2018) findings, which highlight career advancement and job security as major retention factors. It also underscores a potential gap in fulfilling the conditions for "job embeddedness" (Acharya, 2022), where clear career scope and a supportive work environment are crucial for stronger emotional and professional attachments to the organization.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The survey on emotional and psychological well-being reveals significant areas requiring focused attention from companies, as evidenced by a substantial number of "Neutral" and "Disagree" responses, indicating a perceived lack of adequate support:

- **Emotional Connection to Company:** 130 (65%) officers are "Neutral" about feeling emotionally connected to their company. While 39 (19.5%) "Agree," a notable 31 (15.5%) "Disagree." This suggests a considerable portion lacks a strong emotional bond.
- **Experiencing High Levels of Stress and Fatigue:** 138 (69%) officers are "Neutral" about frequently experiencing high levels of stress and fatigue. 34 (17%) "Agree" that they do, while 27 (13.5%) "Disagree," and 1 (0.5%) "Strongly Disagrees."
- **Company Support for Mental and Physical Well-being:** 129 (64.5%) officers are "Neutral" on the company supporting their mental and physical well-being. Significantly, 38 (19%) "Disagree," while only 33 (16.5%) "Agree." This is a critical finding, indicating a perceived deficit in company well-being initiatives.
- **Satisfaction with Handling of Stressful Situations:** 148 (74%) officers are "Neutral" on their satisfaction with how the company handles stressful situations. Only 27 (13.5%) "Agree," and 25 (12.5%) "Disagree."

The prevalence of "Neutral" and substantial "Disagree" responses in this category indicates that officers do not strongly perceive their companies as actively and effectively supporting their emotional and psychological well-being. This is a critical area, as job stress and lack of support have been identified as factors impacting retention (Calinao, Tabla & Carlo, 2020), and the general literature on employee well-being links it directly to long-term commitment.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON RETENTION FACTORS

The thematic analysis of the qualitative data, derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposive subsample of 40-50 officers, provided rich, granular insights into their experiences, motivations, and perceived challenges. This qualitative data directly complements and contextualizes the quantitative findings, particularly explaining the reasons behind the "neutral" or less affirmative responses in the survey. Five key themes emerged, illuminating the officers' detailed perspectives on intrinsic job satisfaction, the desire for enhanced financial and welfare benefits, the paramount importance of improved work-life balance and family

connection, the critical need for clearer career development pathways, and comprehensive well-being support.

INTRINSIC JOB SATISFACTION AND ENJOYMENT

Officers frequently articulated deep personal and professional satisfaction derived from the unique aspects of their seafaring career, which serves as a powerful intrinsic motivator for retention and contextualizes the high quantitative job satisfaction:

- **Connection with the Environment and Self-Reflection:** Many officers expressed enjoyment in "breathing the fresh air while sailing the open seas," finding "calmness during long voyages allows reflection," and that "sailing reminds me of my deep connection to nature." Some also valued "being away gives me time to reset mentally" and "the peacefulness of being far from the city chaos."
- **Professional Accomplishment and Skill Development:** A significant source of enjoyment stemmed from mastering complex maritime tasks such as "charting routes and interpreting weather patterns," experiencing the "pride of navigating large vessels," and noting that "each docking operation hones my precision skills." Officers also found satisfaction in continuous learning and adapting to new challenges, with comments like "solving technical issues onboard keeps my skills sharp" and "adjusting to new equipment helps me grow technically."
- **Camaraderie and Social Environment:** The "sense of brotherhood among officers" and the strong bonds formed through shared experiences were repeatedly emphasized as a positive aspect: "Bonding with the crew over shared experiences sometimes makes me feel that I am in the right industry."
- **Cultural Exposure and Learning:** Opportunities to "visit different countries and get to see their arts, culture, and locales are enriching" and "experiencing international culture through port visits is inspiring" were highly valued, broadening their worldviews. "Working in a multicultural environment builds my perspective in life" was also noted as a valuable aspect.
- **Sense of Purpose and Discipline:** Many found a sense of purpose in their role, with comments such as "training new crew members brings a sense of purpose." The "unique routine and discipline" inherent in ship life were also appreciated by some, providing structure and focus.

These qualitative insights strongly corroborate the high levels of job satisfaction reported in the quantitative data, highlighting that beyond monetary compensation, the unique professional, personal, and social aspects of seafaring are crucial intrinsic motivators. This aligns with Yuen et al. (2018), who found that greater job satisfaction mediates better job performance and a higher likelihood of employee retention.

DESIRED FINANCIAL AND WELFARE BENEFITS

Officers articulated specific, actionable improvements in financial incentives and welfare provisions that would significantly enhance their perceived benefits and contribute to long-term retention, directly addressing the "neutrality" seen in the quantitative data regarding remuneration and financial security:

- **Financial Incentives and Fair Compensation:** There was a strong desire for "financial incentives for staying full contract" and a "loyalty bonus for long-term service." Officers also frequently mentioned the need for a "salary structure that includes pay during off-

contract periods" and a "fair bonus system based on seniority" to ensure equitable reward for their commitment.

- **Insurance and Medical Support:** "Crew dependents' insurance coverage" and "reimbursement for crew medical expenses post-contract" were identified as high priorities, reflecting a deep concern for family well-being and security. "Clearer information about medical coverage," "regular dental care provided onboard," and "more accessible medical check-ups during contract" (e.g., via telehealth) were also requested to improve healthcare access and clarity.
- **Allowances and Reimbursements:** Higher "transport allowance" and "increased provincial flight reimbursements" were sought, especially for provincial crew members facing higher travel costs and logistical challenges. A "housing allowance for seafarers based in provinces" was also suggested to ease housing burdens ashore.
- **Long-Term Financial Security:** Crucial for future planning were "company contributions to a retirement fund" and "financial-education workshops," indicating a desire for companies to support their long-term financial stability and planning beyond immediate contract earnings.
- **Job Security and Support:** "Permanent employment status for greater job security" was a significant request, along with "allowing salary advances in emergencies," highlighting a desire for stability and practical support during unforeseen personal circumstances.
- **Improved Onboard Conditions:** "Better food budget allocations to improve living conditions" was a tangible request for daily life at sea, directly impacting their immediate physical well-being and morale.

These detailed qualitative responses directly address the quantitative "Neutral" sentiment regarding competitive salary and financial security. They provide specific, actionable insights that, if implemented, could transform perceived benefits into stronger motivators for retention, supporting Calinao, Tabla and Carlo (2020) who identified pay as a top reason to stay, particularly for officers with families.

POLICIES FOR IMPROVED WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The interviews revealed a critical and unmet need for policies that genuinely improve work-life balance, directly explaining the high "Neutral" responses in the quantitative data for this factor. Officers emphasized the emotional toll of separation and the importance of predictable schedules and adequate rest:

- **Predictability and Communication:** "Clear communication about ship schedules, deployments, and medical updates" was crucial for effective family planning and reducing uncertainty and anxiety for both officers and their families. Officers desired a "consistent deployment system to prevent burnout" and "streamlined cabin, sanitary, and internal inspections to lower unnecessary stress."
- **Time Off and Rest:** Frequently mentioned requests included "mandate standard breaks during long voyages," "allocate days off during port stays," and "introduce a grace period between contracts to promote family time" and prevent immediate re-deployment. "Shorter contract lengths" were also consistently proposed as a way to manage extended periods away from home more effectively.
- **Family Connection:** "Scheduled dedicated digital communication windows for families" was identified as a key need to mitigate the emotional toll of separation and maintain vital connections, recognizing the importance of consistent contact.

- **Efficient Operations:** Suggestions like "minimize onboard paperwork to let crew focus on operational duties and rest" and "optimize crew-change schedules" aimed to reduce operational stress and maximize personal time ashore, leading to more restorative breaks.

These insights strongly reinforce and explain the quantitative findings indicating dissatisfaction or neutrality regarding work-life balance. They deeply echo Garciano and Garciano's (2023) research on the burden of family separation and the critical need for more regular shore leaves and easier, more consistent communication. The desire for clearer schedules and reduced standby time also reflects the need to mitigate work-related fatigue, a pervasive challenge for seafarers.

CLEARER CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Officers highlighted the necessity of transparent and structured pathways for professional development as critical for their long-term commitment, directly addressing the "neutrality" in the quantitative data on career progression and job security:

- **Training and Skill Enhancement:** "Training for emerging maritime technologies" was highly valued to keep skills current and competitive in a rapidly evolving industry. "Additional training benefits and opportunities while ashore" and "company-sponsored language courses" were also requested to broaden their professional capabilities and open new career avenues.
- **Transparent Promotion and Development:** Officers expressed a need for "clear timelines for promotion" and "more transparent evaluation criteria, with constructive feedback," to understand their progression path and how to achieve it. "Job rotation options to promote multi-skilling" and "land-based temporary roles during breaks" were suggested for broader skill development and flexibility in their careers.
- **Leadership and Mentorship:** "Participation in leadership development workshops" and "mentorship programs pairing junior and senior crew" were desired to foster leadership skills, ensure knowledge transfer, and address issues like onboard bullying or lack of guidance.
- **Educational Support:** "Educational leave options for long-serving officers" and "support for pursuing master's degrees part-time" were proposed to facilitate higher education and long-term career growth, demonstrating a desire for continuous learning and professional upward mobility beyond the immediate job requirements.

These qualitative data significantly elaborate on the quantitative "Neutral" responses regarding career progression opportunities. They underscore the need for structured, transparent, and responsive career paths, regular and relevant training, and a clear investment in officers' professional growth, consistent with Rengamani's (2018) findings on career advancement as a major retention factor.

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Respondents consistently articulated a strong need for their companies to actively support their emotional and psychological well-being, providing specific recommendations that contextualize the "neutral" and "disagree" quantitative responses in this area:

- **Recreational Activities and Social Support:** "Onboard movie nights or karaoke, with a dedicated recreational officer, to reduce homesickness" and "peer support groups onboard for stress management" were frequently suggested. "Regular team-building

events to boost morale and unity among crew" were also desired to foster a supportive social environment and mitigate isolation.

- **Mental Health Services:** A "24/7 mental-health support line accessible onboard and ashore" and "remote access to a psychologist via telehealth" were identified as critical needs for timely, confidential, and professional support. "Grief support available for family loss while at sea" was also mentioned, acknowledging the profound personal sacrifices made.
- **Respect for Rest and Personal Space:** "Enforced quiet hours in living quarters to ensure restful sleep" and "respect for rest hours during port activities to safeguard personal time and boundaries" were deemed essential for physical and mental recovery. "Designated rest days for deck officers to avoid burnout" were specifically requested to manage demanding work schedules.
- **Leadership and Communication:** A "monthly 'captain's listening hour' plus leadership workshops to improve management skills and morale" was suggested, highlighting the crucial role of leadership in fostering a supportive and open environment.
- **Wellness Programs:** "Stress-management workshops to prepare new crew for challenges," "company-sponsored wellness programs," and "structured wellness activities integrated into voyage plans" were desired to proactively address well-being. "A quiet meditation/prayer room or dedicated mental-health space onboard" was also suggested as a dedicated space for personal reflection and peace. "Quarterly emotional check-ins standardized by the company" and "rotating port-duty assignments to prevent monotony and overload" further emphasize the desire for proactive well-being management.

These detailed suggestions provide crucial qualitative context for the quantitative findings on emotional and psychological well-being. They demonstrate the critical need for comprehensive mental health support, accessible recreational opportunities, and a work environment that genuinely prioritizes rest, personal well-being, and provides proactive support, directly addressing the psychosocial aspects of seafaring highlighted by Abad (2021).

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS AND QUALITATIVE THEMES

The integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data reveals both significant areas of convergence and valuable nuanced insights (minor divergences), offering a comprehensive and robust understanding of the factors influencing retention among Filipino maritime officers. This comparison highlights how qualitative insights provide crucial context and explanation for the quantitative trends, particularly in areas where officers expressed neutrality or less affirmative agreement.

Quantitative Findings (Summary of Perceived Satisfaction/Agreement)	Corresponding Qualitative Themes (Detailed Needs/Suggestions from Officers)
High Job Satisfaction (Strong agreement on role, growth, meaningful work, recognition, communication, feeling valued).	Intrinsic Job Satisfaction & Enjoyment: Officers detailed enjoyment from environmental connection, professional accomplishment/skill development, camaraderie, cultural exposure, and sense of purpose. This deepens <i>why</i> they are satisfied.
Mixed to Neutral on Remuneration & Financial Security (Majority Agree salary competitive, benefits satisfactory, but significant Neutrality on financial security and fair opportunities for increases/promotions).	Desired Financial & Welfare Benefits: Officers specifically requested loyalty/performance bonuses, salary during off-contract periods, dependents' insurance, medical expense reimbursement, increased allowances (transport/housing), retirement fund contributions, and

	financial education. This explains the <i>neutrality</i> by pointing to desired concrete financial security beyond basic pay.
High Neutrality/Lower Agreement on Work-Life Balance & Family Support (Majority Neutral on time with family, shore vacation, communication at sea, and company emotional support for family; Neutral to Agree on work fatigue).	Policies for Improved Work-Life Balance: Officers called for clear communication of schedules, consistent deployment, streamlined onboard duties, <i>shorter contract lengths</i> , adequate grace periods between contracts, and <i>scheduled digital communication windows for families</i> . This directly addresses the <i>challenges</i> leading to neutrality, emphasizing family connection and predictable time off.
High Neutrality/Lower Agreement on Career Progression & Job Security (Majority Neutral on clear career paths, training, job security, company investment in growth, and awareness of programs).	Clearer Career Advancement Opportunities: Officers desired training for emerging technologies, ashore training benefits, <i>transparent promotion timelines</i> , clear evaluation criteria with feedback, job rotation, temporary land-based roles, leadership workshops, mentorship programs, and educational leave/support. This outlines the <i>specific elements missing</i> that lead to uncertainty in career development.
High Neutrality/Lower Agreement on Emotional & Psychological Well-being (Majority Neutral on emotional connection, stress/fatigue levels, company support for well-being, and handling of stressful situations; notable Disagreement on company support for well-being).	Comprehensive Support for Emotional & Psychological Well-being: Officers specifically asked for onboard recreational activities (movie nights, karaoke), peer support groups, <i>24/7 mental-health hotlines</i> , remote psychologist access, grief support, enforced quiet hours for rest, designated rest days, regular emotional check-ins, and dedicated meditation/prayer spaces. This highlights the <i>lack of proactive and accessible support</i> contributing to the observed neutrality and dissatisfaction.

CONVERGENCES

The study's quantitative results significantly converge with the qualitative findings in several crucial areas. For instance, the high reported job satisfaction in the quantitative data is strongly supported by officers' qualitative descriptions of enjoyment derived from the unique intrinsic aspects of their work, such as the sense of accomplishment, connection to nature, and camaraderie. This convergence solidifies the understanding that meaningful work experience is a strong motivator. More critically, the quantitative ambivalence and neutrality observed regarding work-life balance, career progression, remuneration, and emotional well-being are directly and richly explained by the qualitative data. The detailed qualitative requests for more predictable schedules, shorter contracts, transparent promotion criteria, targeted training, specific financial incentives (e.g., loyalty bonuses, paid off-contract time), and comprehensive mental health support (e.g., 24/7 hotlines, recreational activities) provide concrete, actionable insights into *why* officers are not fully satisfied in these areas despite generally high job satisfaction. These convergences strengthen the validity and depth of the findings, demonstrating that the statistical trends are deeply rooted in the lived experiences and articulated needs of the maritime officers.

DIVERGENCES

While strong convergences exist, some subtle divergences or nuances in the data warrant attention. For example, while the quantitative data shows a generally high level of satisfaction with recognition received for work, the qualitative data, while not explicitly contradicting this, emphasizes the *types* of recognition desired, such as formalized loyalty bonuses and a fair bonus system based on seniority. This implies a need for more tangible and formalized recognition rather than just general acknowledgement, suggesting that while officers feel recognized, their expectations for *how* they are recognized might not be fully met. Another

subtle divergence is that while the quantitative data shows a majority agree their employer values them, the qualitative data reveals specific desires for company investment in their future through retirement fund contributions, permanent employment status, and emergency salary advances. This suggests that while officers feel generally valued, there's a strong underlying desire for more concrete demonstrations of that value in terms of long-term commitment, financial security, and support for their overall well-being, which extends beyond their active contract periods.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing retention among Filipino maritime officers, critically interpreted through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET). Blau (1964) posits that the core of SET is that individuals seek to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs in relationships. In the employment context, this translates to officers' expectations regarding career, compensation, work-life, and well-being being met by the organization's provisions. When organizations effectively meet these expectations, officers perceive a positive exchange, leading to higher satisfaction, emotional attachment, commitment, and, consequently, lower turnover.

The consistently high levels of job satisfaction reported quantitatively, strongly supported by qualitative insights into the intrinsic enjoyment of seafaring (e.g., connection to environment, professional accomplishment, camaraderie), suggest that many officers perceive a positive exchange in terms of meaningful work and skill utilization. This aligns with the SET premise that when employees' professional and personal needs are sufficiently met, they are more likely to remain with the organization. The unique nature of seafaring, providing opportunities for personal growth and cultural exposure, contributes significantly to this intrinsic satisfaction, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging.

However, the study's strength lies in its ability to highlight areas where this social exchange is perceived as less balanced, as evidenced by the significant "neutral" and, at times, "disagree" responses in the quantitative data, which are then deeply contextualized by the qualitative findings. The high neutrality regarding work-life balance, career progression, remuneration, and emotional well-being directly points to areas where the perceived "costs" of seafaring (e.g., prolonged family separation, lack of predictable schedules, perceived stagnation, inadequate support systems) appear to outweigh the "benefits" for a significant portion of officers. This directly supports Garciano and Garciano's (2023) findings that emotional stress, homesickness, and relationship difficulties are significant predictors of seafarer attrition. The qualitative data explicitly details these unmet expectations, emphasizing the need for more humane scheduling, enhanced communication channels with families, and concrete support systems to mitigate the psychosocial burdens of the profession (Abad, 2021).

Specifically, the qualitative requests for a "salary structure that includes pay during off-contract periods," "shorter contract lengths," and "clear timelines for promotion" are clear indications of officers seeking a more equitable social exchange. They desire compensation that extends beyond active deployment, more manageable contract durations to reduce family separation, and transparent pathways for career advancement that recognize their loyalty and experience (Rengamani, 2018). The strong emphasis on improved benefits (e.g., dependents' insurance, retirement funds) and comprehensive mental health support (e.g., 24/7 hotlines, wellness programs) in the qualitative data suggests that while current provisions may be "satisfactory" for some, there is a clear and pressing demand for more holistic and proactive support from companies to truly foster long-term commitment and address the overall well-being of their officers. This aligns with Calinao, Tabla & Carlo (2020), who underscore the importance of both

extrinsic (pay, recognition) and intrinsic (work environment, growth) motivators for retention. Furthermore, the perceived lack of clear career progression and job security (quantitatively neutral) and the officers' desire for transparent development pathways (qualitatively articulated) directly impact job embeddedness, a crucial determinant of retention as highlighted by Acharya (2022).

Ultimately, the study suggests that to enhance retention and foster a more robust and positive social exchange, maritime companies in the Philippines must move beyond competitive pay and basic training to actively address and improve work-life balance, provide clearer and more transparent career progression pathways with tangible opportunities, invest in officers' financial security beyond immediate contract earnings, and implement robust emotional and psychological well-being support systems. By acknowledging and actively responding to these specific needs and perceived deficits, companies can build stronger emotional and professional attachments, thereby increasing job embeddedness and reducing turnover, consistent with the principles of Social Exchange Theory and fostering a more sustainable maritime workforce. This integrated approach, sensitive to the unique cultural and operational context of Filipino maritime officers, is crucial for closing the supply-demand gap in the industry (Gupta, 2016) and retaining quality maritime officers long-term.

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