

Self-Worth and Growth Beyond the Uniform: An Appreciative Inquiry on Career Development in the Philippine Air Force

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on how Philippine Air Force (PAF) personnel perceive their careers, strengths, core values, the future of the PAF, and life after service through the use of a strengths based, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. The objectives were to determine what personnel love most about being in the PAF, the talents and skills they are grateful for and apply on a daily basis, the core values they most esteem and how they put them into daily practice, visions of best future they wish for the PAF, and the kind of life they desire when they retire. An AI framed open ended questionnaire was administered to 46 randomly selected officers and enlisted personnel and responses were analyzed thematically.

For what personnel love most about being in the PAF, themes of service to country and people, professional identity and pride, organizational values and culture, career growth, stability and material benefits, and the quality of the work environment and family related aspects were highlighted. Valued talents and skills acquired in the PAF were surfaced around leadership and decision making, discipline and self-management, communication and interpersonal competence, technical and professional skills, and critical, values-based application of abilities. Integrity is considered the most highly esteemed core value. Future visions of the PAF emphasized on modernization and improved air assets, professional and well-developed personnel, enhanced operational capability and credible defense, and a reliable, focused governance. While retirement desire among PAF personnel centered on simple, peaceful family-oriented lives supported by financial stability, modest entrepreneurship, faith and values centered living and, rural or nature-based settings.

Overall, the findings portray PAF service as a value driven, strengths building vocation that personnel hope to carry into post service life. The study illustrates the usefulness of integrating AI approach guided through theoretical framing such as strengths-based career development and Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) in a military context and points to practical directions for strengths focused career, leadership, modernization and transition programs that align institutional mandates with the long-term flourishing of those who serve.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry, Career Development, Growth, Philippine Air Force, Self-worth

INTRODUCTION

Career development is a critical aspect of human resource management, especially when dealing with mission driven organizations where personnel performance is a direct determinant of operational effectiveness (Park et al., 2021). In the case of military, robust career systems are important not only for enhanced individual competence but also for preserving organizational capacity, morale, and mission readiness over time.

Around the world, Air Force's career progression is characterized by a structured ranking system intricately linked to specific duties and leadership, ensuring personnel are aware of their career trajectory (Nolan & Overstreet, 2018). The leadership role of the supervisors play a crucial role in mentoring, guiding, and supporting subordinates through regular interactions which significantly impacts leadership development and operational effectiveness (Rennekamp, 1986). Promoting lifelong learning and adaptability through training pathways strengthen career development (Paiva, 2024). Equipping aircrew through continuous training programs not only equip them for operations but more importantly providing them with necessary technical proficiency and strategic thinking (Flores, 2024; Robbert et al., 2003).

Further, robust performance evaluation system defines the operations within the Air Force. It establishes standards crucial for assessing personnel performance, guiding decision-making, and optimizing resource allocations (Barnes, 2015; Keller et al., 2014). To cite performance evaluation methodologies, the Philippine Air Force uses a comprehensive performance evaluation system integrating the Performance Governance System (PGS), a Philippine-developed framework for public institutions, and Balanced Scorecard, (Philippine Air Force, 2018), Spanish Air Force uses an interdisciplinary performance evaluation model (Fernández-Villacañas Marín, 2019), and The U.S. Air Force employ feedback and documentation of performance using Officer Evaluation System (Wolfgeher, 2009). These systems are designed to improve and enhance effectiveness and efficiency of Air Force's human resource (Wolfgeher, 2009; Barnes, 2015; Keller et al., 2014).

As the air component of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the PAF relies on the sustained professional growth and participation of its officers and enlisted personnel to the changing demands of security and goals of modernization (Philippine Air Force, 2023).

The PAF has a well-organized career structure, in which officers and enlisted men are differentiated by their respective ranks, periods of service and training routes, and career progression is determined by strict promotion boards, competency evaluations and performance evaluations (AFP Career Development Handbook, 2016). Standardized military education, specialty courses, and course work for basic and advance schooling create staged pipelines of preparation to levels of increasing responsibility; while evaluation systems and time in grade regulation control the probable promotion. To cite an example, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Education and Training Management System (AFPTEMS) is a pivotal professional development mechanism among enlisted personnel emphasizing the importance of education in career advancement (Flores, 2024). Not to mention, the Philippine Air Force employs a clear hierarchy of ranks, thereby, facilitating a systematic approach towards career progression, advanced studies, promotions, and responsibilities.

At the same time, PAF members experience some challenges, including competition for limited promotion slots, frequent job reassignments, and the pressure to balance the demands of operations and requirements of schooling and performance ratings, which may have an effect on perceived fairness, motivation, and long-term career planning. Career development is therefore important not only from a personal perspective, but also in terms of job satisfaction and mission preparation as research has shown that supportive and developmental career climates is associated with greater levels of engagement, commitment, and adaptability in high stakes organizations (Kraimer et al., 2021).

However, little empirical work has been done examining career development in the PAF from a strengths-based perspective. Existing initiatives tend to rather focus on evaluation and promotion processes, with less emphasis and attention on how individual and collective strengths, values, and aspirations can be utilized for sustainable careers and effective transition from service (AFP Career Development Handbook, 2016). This gap is consequential for human resource development, modernization planning, and post service reintegration, as international research has established a link between strengths-oriented career practices, higher engagement, resilience, and proactive development behavior (Kraimer et al., 2021; Flores, 2024; Wolfgeher, 2009; Barnes, 2015; Keller et al., 2014).

With the preceding discussions outlining a clear gap in understanding career development among the Air Force, this paper adopts Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as its methodological approach. AI provides an appropriate approach, as it seeks to understand the strengths, successes, and potential as leverage for change, which is appropriate for efforts to nurture morale and cultural positive organization within military organizations (Lewis et al., 2016). AI

is a strengths-based, collaborative approach around the phases of 4-D Cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny), again where participants identify "what works," imagine desired futures, co-design pathways and commit to action (Lewis et al., 2016). These assumptions resonate with the PAF's emphasis on leadership, continuous improvement and values driven initiatives, where its core values such as integrity, service above self, teamwork, excellence, and professionalism (InSTEP), are expected to be used to guide behavior and development across ranks. Using AI thus enables career conversations to build upon the lived strengths and aspirations of PAF personnel and support organizational goals for professionalism, readiness and modernization.

This study addresses that gap by employing an AI-guided qualitative design to examine how PAF personnel understand what they love most about being in the service, the talents and skills they have developed, the core values they most esteem, the best future they wish for the organization, and the kind of life they desire after retirement. Through eliciting high point experiences and future aspirations from officers and enlisted personnel, the study seeks to surface the "positive core" of careers and to develop insights that can be used to feed into a more developmental, strengths aligned career and transition programs within the PAF

Objectives

Guided by an AI perspective, this study sought to understand how PAF personnel experience their careers during their years of service and into retirement. Specifically, it sought to:

1. determine what PAF personnel love most about being in the PAF;
2. describe the talents and skills they are grateful for and apply on a daily basis;
3. characterize which PAF core value they most esteem and how they apply them into daily practice;
4. determine the visions of best future they wish for the PAF; and
5. identify the kind of life they desire when they retire from the PAF.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Appreciative Inquiry Evidence and Gaps

AI is a generative approach to organizational change that involves shifting the focus from problems to strengths, values, and past successes as levers for development (Stavros & Torres, 2018). Through its 4-D cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny), AI invites participants to identify "what works" when they and their organizations are at their best, co-construct desired futures, and design structures to support those futures. Empirical applications in education, public service, and health care demonstrate that AI processes improve engagement, relational climate, and shared commitment to change by engaging a variety of stakeholders in an appreciative dialogue about successful practices and meaningful experiences (Godwin, 2024).

AI also has been modified to coaching and career conversations. Studies report of people systematically reflect on peak experiences, strengths and core values and then "dream" and "design" future pathways which in turn gain greater clarity, engagement and readiness to act on career goals (Godwin, 2024). However, most empirical work is still done in civilian sectors, with comparatively few studies focusing on AI based career and retirement conversations in the military or uniformed services. This study extends that literature by applying AI framed questions to delve into what PAF personnel love about service and their strengths, the organizational future they wish for and the retirement lives they desire.

Strengths-Based Career Development and Positive Organizational Scholarship

Research on strengths use at work provides consistent findings that centering employee strengths produces benefits to the individuals and organizations. Reviews conclude that strengths use is associated with higher engagement, job satisfaction, well-being, and performance, and daily strengths use predicts greater task performance and meaning at work by satisfying needs for competence and authenticity (Miglianico et al., 2020). In high stress professions, strengths use is positively related to thriving, and this relation is mediated by hope (Li et al., 2025). Strengths based appraisal and development conversations also result in greater perceived supervisor support and motivation for improved performance compared with deficit focused systems (Van Woerkom et al.,

2024). These findings are consistent with strengths-based career development theory, which describes sustainable careers as those in which individuals identify, deploy, and develop their strengths in congruence with values and opportunities, and directly inform this study's focus on talents and skills PAF personnel value and use and how core values are enacted in daily work. They also resonate with POS which emphasizes strengths, virtuous practices, and positive deviance as the drivers of flourishing and constructive citizenship in organizations (Positive Organizational Scholarship, 2020).

Military and Public-Service Careers

Contemporary career research has highlighted that employees benefit when organizations support proactive career self-management, through access to opportunities for development, meaningful feedback, and value alignment (Kraimer et al., 2021). Sustainable career perspectives extend this throughout the life course and argue that careers should be sustainable with respect to their health, happiness, and productivity over time, including transitions into retirement. Supportive, developmental climates have been linked to improvements in adaptability, reduced turnover intentions, and stronger organizational commitment, especially when employees feel their strengths and aspirations are being recognized and utilized (Godwin, 2024). Although much of this evidence derives from civilian settings, the principles have high relevance to uniformed and high-risk organizations such as the military, where career paths are formalized, core values are central to the organization, and transition to life after service is a major HR concern. Emerging applications of AI and strengths-based approaches in defense and public safety settings suggest that appreciative, narrative-based methods uncover deeper motivations, values, and plans for the future (than standard HR metrics), and that meaning in service, relationship quality, and perceived learning and growth opportunities contribute to retention, readiness, and post service adjustment. These insights map directly onto the objectives of this present study concerning loved aspects of PAF service, strengths and core values, visions for the organization's future, and desired retirement lives.

Study Gaps

Despite growing literatures on AI, strengths-based development, and POS, there is limited empirical work tying these frameworks within the context of military organizations, especially in connection with career development, personnel values, and life after service aspirations. Most AI studies have been conducted in education, healthcare, and civilian organizational change, and strengths-based appraisal and development research is mainly drawn from business and public-sector workplaces (Stavros & Torres, 2018). Recent work on AI based personal and career development planning reveals promising effects on engagement and actionable planning, but this line of inquiry has very rarely been extended to uniformed services with distinct hierarchies, value systems, and career structures. In the PAF, policy documents stresses out competence, professionalism, and values-based service, but there is very little empirical evidence on how personnel themselves narrate what they love about service, what the strengths and skills they have acquired, how they live out core values, the best future they can envision in the PAF, and the kind of life they desire when they are retired (Philippine Air Force, 2023). Through employing AI in a structured military setting and explicitly connecting it with strengths-based career development and POS, this study addresses these gaps and builds evidence to inform strengths-based career development interventions and HR policies based on what the PAF personnel value, the abilities and talents they have built, and the visions they have for the organizations and their own futures.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a strengths-based, positive organizational perspective of career development among members of the PAF. The framework takes three complementary lenses: (a) AI as a methodological and conceptual approach, (b) strengths-based career development theory, and (c) POS. Together, these lenses help guide the exploration of what personnel love about being in the service (Objective 1), the talents and skills they are grateful (Objective 2), the core value they most esteem (Objective 3), the best future they wish for the PAF (Objective 4), and the lives they desire upon retirement (Objective 5).

AI as a method and framework. AI was developed as a strengths-based alternative to deficit focused organizational change. Rather than diagnosing problems, AI focuses on the "positive core" of individuals and organizations such as their strengths, values, capabilities, and peak experiences, and uses these to start envisioning

a preferred future (Lewis et al., 2016). Asking generative questions about “what gives life” when people and systems are at their best, AI then calls out positive memories, aspirations, and possibilities that can serve as a guide for the development across the phases of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny.

In this study, AI provides the basis for both the research design and the interpretation of findings. The open-ended questions for Objectives 1 to 5 reflect the 4-D cycle: Discovery (what they love most about being in the service and what talents and skills they are most grateful), Dream (the best future that they wish for the PAF and for the life they desire after retirement), and Design/Destiny (how core values are applied and can guide careers across the life course). AI therefore provides the overarching logic of exploring PAF personnel’s experiences, values, and future visions in a way that foregrounds strengths more than deficits.

Strengths-Based Career Development Theory. Strengths-based career development approaches suggest that sustainable careers are created when individuals identify, use, and develop their strengths in sync with changing opportunities and personal values, rather than focusing primarily on correcting weaknesses. Empirical studies show that strengths-oriented HR practices such as feedback that highlights strengths, development planning around what people do well and strengths-based performance discussions are associated with higher engagement, motivation, and perceived supervisor support (Miglianico et al., 2020). A strengths-based lens is especially relevant for Objectives 1 and 2 (loved aspects of service; talents and skills), and also for Objective 5 (desired post-retirement life).

AI-informed career models explicitly link the traditional career cycle (assessment, exploration, planning, action) with the AI 4D cycle, which encourages individuals to discover high point experiences, dream preferred roles and futures, design pathways leveraging one’s positive core, and take concrete steps toward those futures (Miglianico et al., 2020). Applied to the PAF, this view of personnel as active agents in building their careers, whose stories of meaningful service, strengths, and aspirations can inform career development, leadership preparation, and transition planning in a highly structured military system.

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). POS offers the overarching paradigm in which AI and strengths-based careers are situated. POS focuses on generative dynamics such as thriving, resilience, virtuous practices, positive identities, and high-quality relationships, and how these are contributing to human flourishing and to the performance of the organization. POS research in recent years has demonstrated that environments emphasizing strengths, meaningful work, and supportive relationships contributes to well-being, commitment, and adaptive capacity even in high-pressure sectors (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

Bringing POS into the PAF context underscores the importance of core values (Objective 3), positive cultures, and shared images of the future (Objective 4) in upholding effective and ethical military practice. It also legitimizes attention to the post service aspirations of the personnel (Objective 5) as part of “sustainable careers” rather than a separate and peripheral concern. Strengths-based practices such as AI driven career conversations, recognition of best performances, and collective envisioning of the PAF’s future, are expected to build positive emotions, psychological resources, and identification with the service, supporting the cohesion, readiness, and constructive transition to civilian life.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design, guided by AI (Lewis et al., 2016). A qualitative approach was appropriate as it provided the opportunity for in-depth exploration of PAF personnel’s experiences, values, strengths, and aspirations, which cannot easily be captured using standardized quantitative measures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). AI, as a strengths-based methodology, concentrates on what works well in people and organizations- their “positive core”- and using these understandings to envision desired futures through the 4D cycle (Lewis et al., 2016). In this study, AI was used to inform both the wording of the questions as well as the interpretation of responses related to loved aspects of service, developed strengths, core values, organizational futures, and retirement aspirations.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model which integrates AI, strengths-based career development, and POS as the study's primary theoretical frameworks. The model describes how the five core domains of AI guided inquiry, structured in terms of the 4-D cycle and framed within a POS-oriented perspective of positive organizational culture, influence the vision of the PAF's future as well as the desired retirement life by personnel. These linkages, in turn, point to implications for career development programs, modernization-linked HRD, and strengths-based transition and retirement support.

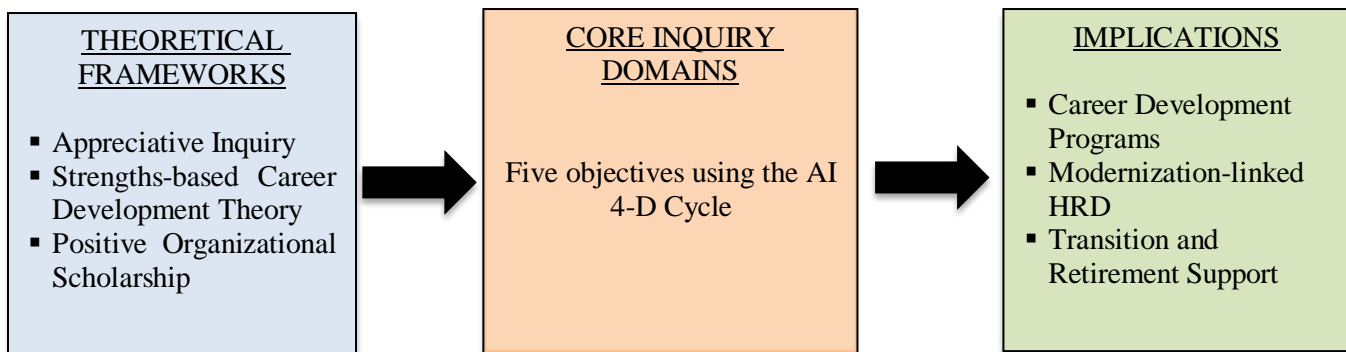


Figure 1. Conceptual framework in relation to the career development perspectives among Philippine Air Force employing Appreciative Inquiry and theories therein

Respondents of the Study

Participants were 46 PAF personnel, which consisted of 15 officers and 31 enlisted members, selected through simple random sampling from an eligibility list provided by the unit. This sampling method provided an equal opportunity for each qualified member to be included and helped in minimizing selection bias. Although a simple random sampling was used from the eligible list, participation was still based on willingness and availability to respond online, that may have favored those who were more comfortable with written reflection. Inclusion of both officers and enlisted personnel was deliberate to allow diversity in perspectives across ranks, responsibilities, and career stages, which is consistent with AI's focus on multiple voices. The sample size is within recommended ranges for qualitative studies that focus on depth and thematic saturation, rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Instrument

Data were collected using an open-ended online questionnaire based on the AI 4-D model (Lewis et al., 2016). The instrument consisted of five open-ended questions, that corresponded to one of the five research objectives, and framed in appreciative, strengths focused language (e.g., asking what participants love most about service, what strengths they have developed, and what best future do they wish for the PAF). Open ended AI based questions were chosen to enable respondents to tell and describe high-point experiences, values, and aspirations in their own words, in line with the strengths based and exploratory purpose of the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered through an online form (Google Form). A survey link was sent to the selected participants using official communication apps of the PAF. Prior to access of the items, participants read an informed consent statement which included information about the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and right to withdraw at any time. No names, ranks, serial numbers, or unit identifiers were requested- email collection was disabled to keep things anonymous. Responses were stored in a password protected drive only accessible to the researcher. Participants responded to the survey at their convenience within an agreed data collection window to minimize disruption to operational duties. Recruitment was continued until 46 complete responses had been collected. During analysis, the researchers were able to observe that new

responses were no longer adding substantively new codes or themes and thematic saturation was judged to have been reached at this point.

Treatment of Data

Qualitative responses were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven step method of thematic analysis, which provides a rigorous process for deriving themes from the narratives of lived experience (Nowell et al., 2017). First, all responses had been read several times to get an overall sense of experiences from the participants. Second, significant statements pertinent to the research objectives were extracted. Third, these statements were interpreted to formulate meanings while maintaining the intent of participants' words. Fourth, formulated meanings were grouped into theme groups for each objective. Fifth, these clusters were incorporated into rich, descriptive narratives about the strengths, values, career experiences, and aspirations of PAF personnel. Sixth, the descriptions were condensed into basic thematic structures for presentation in the Results and Discussions. Finally, preliminary themes were validated and checked with a few participants (member checking) to verify that interpretations were accurate and credible. This analytic process resulted in a structured thematic representation of PAF personnel's appreciative narratives based on the five research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussion are structured according to the study's statement of the problem, with each of the subsections presenting the key themes related to a specific question, illustrating the themes with the representative participant narratives, and linking these insights to the theoretical framework on AI, strengths-based career development, and POS.

Uncovering Aspects of the Philippine Air Force being Loved among the Personnel

Five themes emerged about what PAF personnel love most about being in the service: service to country and people, professional identity and pride, organizational values and opportunities, career stability and benefits, and the relational quality of the work environment (Table 1). These themes illustrate that respondents construct the meaning of their PAF careers in terms of contribution, identity, culture, security, and relationships when invited to speak from a strengths-based, AI perspective rather than a deficit frame.

Table 1. Aspects of what PAF personnel love most about being in the service

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Service to country and people	Serving the nation, helping Filipinos, contributing to public welfare and security	17	37.0
Professional identity, pride, and fulfillment	Pride and fulfillment in being PAF personnel/pilot, doing dream job, successful missions	9	19.6
Organizational values, culture, and opportunities	PAF culture, discipline, principles, mission accomplishment, organizational opportunities	8	17.4
Career growth, stability, and material benefits	Career progression, financial stability, salary, benefits, insurance, schooling	7	15.2
Work environment, camaraderie, and family-related aspects	Good work environment, teamwork, "second family," proximity to family, learning experiences	5	10.9

Service to country and people

The most prominent theme, mentioned in 17 of 46 responses (37.0%), was service to country and people. Personnel often described the sense of fulfillment in serving the country, serving fellow Filipinos in disasters or crises, and "serving the people" as the primary reason they value their PAF career. At the same time, several

narratives suggested that this strong service orientation can bring into sharper focus the felt tension between family commitment and duty, especially during long deployments and high tempo operations, although tensions were not the explicit focus of the appreciative questions. Analytically, this means that they view their work more as public service and national defense rather than ordinary employment. In line with the strengths-based career perspective, this suggests that PAF personnel's career identities are deeply value driven and that career development initiatives should leverage this service orientation- for example by framing promotion, training, and even transition planning as ways of continuing one's contribution in changing roles. Consistent with the AI and positive organizational lens outlined in the framework, such service narratives serve as Discovery phase accounts of "high-point" contribution experiences and resonate with broader evidence that prosocial, meaningful work is linked to greater engagement, resilience, and long-term development effort in demanding occupations (Miglianico et al., 2020).

Professional identity, pride, and fulfillment in role

The second major theme, professional identity, pride, and fulfillment, appeared in 9 of 46 responses (19.6%). Respondents spoke of the joy and honor of belonging to the PAF, fulfilling childhood dreams- especially of flying- and of the "incomparable fulfillment" following safe and successful missions. These accounts reveal how personnel perceive their roles as a vocation that gives them a sense of identity and achievement, rather than simply a job. From a strengths-based career standpoint, this has implications that they are intrinsically satisfied through their ability to master complex tasks, to exercise their expertise, and representing the professional role of an airman or airwoman; thus, career interventions should emphasize strengths identification, mastery experiences, and role crafting opportunities at various stages of career. This theme is in line with the AI notion of "positive core," where stories about excellence and pride highlight what makes life meaningful for individuals and the organization, and is consistent with research on the use of strengths and meaningful work which indicates that identity affirming roles are associated with thriving, engagement, and sustained motivation under high pressure contexts (Miglianico et al., 2020).

Organizational values, culture, and opportunities

The third theme was about organizational values, culture, discipline, and opportunities, and was captured in 8 of 46 responses (17.4%). Participants emphasized the PAF's "different culture and set of principles," the discipline and professionalism of "well-disciplined men/women in uniform," and the opportunities for career progression and training offered in the service. These accounts indicate that attachment to the PAF is strongly influenced by value congruence and developmental support; personnel value being a member of an institution with clearly held principles that allows for structured opportunities to grow and contribute. Interpreted through the study's theoretical lens, this theme posits PAF culture and systems as part of the positive core of the organization that can be amplified in the context of AI informed Dream and Design work, and is consistent with POS findings of the value of consistent, developmental climates which foster commitment, resilience, and proactive career behaviors. Existing strengths-based HR literature similarly suggests that when employees perceive their organization as principled and growth oriented, they are more likely to seek feedback, take on stretch roles, and plan for long term development, and thus the importance of safeguarding and refining these cultural and structural assets (Van Woerkom et al., 2024).

Career growth, stability, and material benefits

Personnel cited financial stability, salary and benefits, insurance, and a "progressive military career" as important reasons they value their PAF service, as mentioned in 7 of 46 responses (15.2%). These responses point to how the members see the PAF as a provider of reliable livelihood and structured advancement; economic security and predictable benefits act as guarantee of family welfare as well as signals that the institution returns their commitment. From a strengths-based career development view, it can be interpreted that these structural features enable conditions to follow service oriented and skills-based aspirations safely from constant financial anxiety- material support and personal strengths are mutually reinforcing rather than competing motives. This interpretation is aligned with broader career and HR research pointing that strengths-based environments are most effective when in conjunction with fair, supportive HR systems, and implies that fair and stable compensation

and career structures are an essential part of the positive core of the PAF ought to be preserved within any AI informed reforms (Kraimer et al., 2021).

Work environment, camaraderie, and family-related aspects

The final theme, which was mentioned in 5 of 46 responses (10.9%), described the work environment, camaraderie, and family related aspects of PAF life. Respondents described treating office mates as a “team/one family” and appreciated interaction in everyday life at work, valuing proximity to one’s own families, and cherishing the “valuable lessons” and growth gained through service. These accounts describe the PAF as a relational community where sense of belonging, mutual support, and shared learning are key to the way that careers are experienced. Analytically, this means that the quality of day-to-day relationships- camaraderie, informal support, feeling known and valued- is a key source of satisfaction and resilience, and that relationships are also seen as being a context for development, in which character and wisdom are formed alongside technical skills. Consistent with the AI and POS perspectives introduced earlier, this theme reflects the importance of high-quality connections and appreciative conversations as a driver of positive climate and learning. It also has practical implications for strengths based career development and transition planning: given that loss of camaraderie is a well-documented challenge in military to civilian transitions, PAF initiatives should address the way in which social ties and identity can be maintained or recreated after service- through mentoring roles, reserve or auxiliary arrangements, alumni networks, or community groups that will allow former airmen and airwomen to continue contributing together (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

Skills Acquired in the Philippine Air Force: Contributing to the Enactment of the PAF’s Mandate

Six themes emerged in terms of the talents and skills the PAF personnel most grateful for and apply on a daily basis: leadership, management and decision making; discipline, integrity and self-management; communication and interpersonal skills; technical and professional competencies; and critical/analytical skills with values-based application (Table 2). Together, these themes describe PAF service as a powerful developmental context to enhance both the capability and character of the personnel, who is equipped and prepared to undertake demanding missions as well as contribute within the family and community environment. Viewed through the strengths based and AI lenses drawn of the framework, these narratives put the emphasis of growth, mastery and contribution rather than deficits.

Table 2. Talents and skills that PAF personnel are grateful for and apply on a daily basis

Theme	Codes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Leadership, management, and decision-making skills	Leadership, time/people management, initiative, making sound decisions	11	23.9
Technical and professional/occupational skills	Flying, maintenance, computer, budgeting, specialist/technical skills	10	21.7
Discipline, integrity, and self-management	Discipline, self-control, integrity, resilience, stress tolerance	9	19.6
Communication and interpersonal skills	Communication, coordination, teamwork, getting along well with others	8	17.4
Critical thinking, analytical and problem-solving skills	Critical/analytical thinking, problem solving, planning	5	10.9
Values based and service-oriented application	Applying skills to serve others, nation, family, being sociable/helpful	3	6.5

Leadership, management, and decision-making skills

Leadership, management, and decision-making skills were the most commonly cited category, with 23.9% of the responses. Personnel described themselves as becoming better leaders, learning to manage time and tasks, learning to take initiative and making critical decisions in high pressure situations. These accounts suggest that they view PAF as a training ground for leading people and missions, rather than for doing technical tasks, and that they have sense of pride in the ability to shift from being task doers to stewards of people and resources.

Consistent with strengths-based career development and POS, these self-identified leadership strengths can be intentionally developed further through appreciative leadership coaching, peer mentoring and leadership focused career pathways, and carried into post service roles in communities and civilian organizations (Van Woerkom et al., 2024).

Technical and professional/occupational skills

Technical and professional skills such as flying, aircraft maintenance, computer literacy, budgeting, and other specialist competencies were mentioned within 21.7% of responses. These accounts suggest that personnel see the PAF as a place where they acquire extensive, transferable expertise and learn to apply it in cognitively challenging and morally grounded ways. Analytically, this highlights that mastering complex tasks and exercising good judgment under pressure are fundamental to the way they make sense of their careers. Consistent with strengths-based career and sustainable career theories, these types of technical and cognitive strengths represent portable assets that can serve as the basis for in service specialization and post-retirement opportunities in the fields of aviation, engineering, logistics, IT, finance, training and community leadership particularly when career conversations explicitly link strengths with concrete future pathways (Kraimer et al., 2021).

Discipline, integrity, and self-management

Discipline, integrity, and self-management came through in 19.6% of responses, with personnel stating doing what is right even when no one is watching, maintaining composure under stress, and being resilient and independent. Respondents spoke of doing what is right even when no one is watching, maintaining their composure under stress and becoming more resilient and independent. This suggests that central elements of military professionalism have come to be internalized as personal strengths that provide basis for both performance and identity. These strengths were often characterized as hard won, developed under circumstances of high workload and limited resources, implying that building strengths in the PAF is experienced with an analysis of systemic constraints as opposed to ideal conditions. From a strengths-based career viewpoint, such self-management capacities are foundational for sustainable careers because they help personnel cope with demanding conditions, to navigate role transitions and to pursue long term goals. In line with the theoretical framework, these accounts parallel work on virtues and character strengths, and suggest the importance of assisting personnel with recognizing and naming these assets so they can deliberately bring disciplined, values driven behavior into post service roles (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

Communication and interpersonal skills

Communication and interpersonal skills came in 17.4% of responses, with personnel noting effective coordination with other units, clearly communicating under pressure, and connecting with diverse colleagues and superiors. These narratives demonstrate that relational competence is considered central to professional identity and mission success, and that a climate is created for information to flow, misunderstandings are minimized and people feel supported. Within the strengths based and AI perspectives, these interpersonal strengths are both a key content area as well as a process enabler: appreciative, relational conversations themselves strengthen trust and a sense of community. For career development and HR practice, this means that the importance in designing roles and systems that value relational excellence- for example, in mentoring, stakeholder engagement and team leadership- as a legitimate basis for advancement (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

Critical thinking, analytical skills, and values-based application

A smaller but significant percentage of responses focused on critical thinking, analytical problem solving, and planning (10.9%), while another 6.5% explicitly expressed their skills in values based and service-oriented terms (e.g. using their skills to protect others, serve the Filipino people, or support their families). These accounts represent PAF work as being both cognitively demanding and morally grounded: being able to think clearly under pressure can be expected to be exercised in the service of something personally and socially important. This theme implies that members view their intellectual skills and values as closely intertwined, treating analysis and judgment as tools for responsible decision making and protecting lives. Within the strengths based and AI perspectives, having seen cognitive strengths in addition to relational and technical skills, and the explicit link to

valued outcomes, assists personnel to identify analytical skills as component of their positive core. Organizational research shows that if people see that their strengths contribute to valued outcomes, they tend to experience work as more meaningful and to be more motivated to upgrade and employ their strengths supporting the integration of appreciative, strengths focused conversations in PAF career development and transition planning (Miglianico et al., 2020).

Embarking the Foundation and Realization of the Philippine Air Force's Core Values

Six value focused themes emerged among personnel when they were asked which PAF core value they most esteem and how they put it in daily life: Integrity, Service above Self, Professionalism, Teamwork, Excellence, and the integrated practice of “all core values together (Table 3).” These themes demonstrate that members do not all take the core values to be abstract slogans but rather lived moral anchors around which decisions, relationships, and performance of the mission are conducted. Viewed through a strengths-based AI lens, the findings illustrate how personnel engage these values in their positive core, as a way of making sense their roles, how they evaluate their actions, and the kind of airman or airwoman they want to be, rather than concentrate on value lapses or deficiencies.

Table 3. PAF core values that the personnel most esteem and how they put into daily practice

PAF Core Values (in order)	Codes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Integrity	Honesty, doing what is right even when no one is looking, living by principles	18	39.1
Service above self	Prioritizing duty over self, sacrifice for country and others	10	21.7
Professionalism	Being disciplined, competent, proper conduct in all tasks	7	15.2
Teamwork	Working as a team, accomplishing tasks together, supporting colleagues	6	13.0
Excellence	Doing one's best, high standards in everything	3	6.5
All core values integrated	Valuing all five core values equally or a set	2	4.3

Integrity

Integrity received the highest number of responses when respondents were asked the most important core value (18 out of 46 respondents or 39.1%). Respondents defined it as doing the right thing even when no one is watching, keeping one's morals “in check,” and upholding principles learned through training and experience; several respondents commented that without integrity the other values have no credibility. These accounts demonstrate that integrity serves as a personal conviction and also a professional standard for daily conduct in and out of the uniform, implying that moral consistency is viewed as one of the rocks of trustworthy service. Consistent with the earlier theoretical framing, this emphasis aligns with POS emphasis on virtues and character strengths and the way AI surfaces high point stories of honorable action as part of an organization's positive core. Empirical work on ethical leadership and military professionalism likewise also connects integrity with trust, commitment and mission legitimacy, which argues for an effort to embed explicit integrity reflection, mentoring and recognition into strengths-based career and leadership development (Den Hartog, 2015).

Service above Self

Service above Self or service to people was the second most valued core value, chosen by 10 respondents (21.7%). Participants spoke of putting the country and the Filipino people first “ahead of personal comfort” and “serving first before self” and willingness to accept risk and hardship in humanitarian and disaster response missions. These narratives suggest personnel think of their job as a vocation revolving around sacrifice and contribution rather than individual gain, which morally and emotionally justifies long deployments, demanding schedules and operational danger. In line with the AI and strengths-based perspectives, such service-oriented stories are a key element of the positive core of the organization and can inform Dream and Design discussions around service

aligned career paths. Research on prosocial and calling oriented careers similarly finds that service motivation is a predictor of engagement, perseverance and willingness to invest in development, which supports making Service Above Self explicit in coaching, mentoring and transition planning as “different ways of continuing to serve” beyond active duty (Allan et al., 2019).

Professionalism

Professionalism was the most important core value in the 7 respondents (15.2%). Respondents described it as consistently meeting standards, completing duties competently and behaving appropriately in all interactions, and several said that one could not be truly professional without living integrity, service, teamwork and excellence. This suggests that personnel see professionalism as a holistic construct that integrates skill, demeanor and ethics and serves as a composite lens for judging themselves and others. The theme resonates with the interest of POS in excellence and virtuous practice and the tendency of AI to produce stories in which high standards were maintained under pressure, supporting the PAF’s identity as a disciplined, competent force. Empirical studies on professional identity indicate that strong professional norms provide support for ethical behavior, mentoring and responsibility taking, implying that strengthening professional identity through codes, mentoring and reflective, appreciative conversations can contribute to enhanced performance and well-being (Den Hartog, 2015).

Teamwork

Teamwork was mentioned by 6 respondents (13.0%) as their most valued core value. They emphasized that “you cannot do your job on your own,” that teamwork creates an easier and faster, and that working as a team creates a sense of shared responsibility and support. These accounts highlight the fact that personnel perceive their work to be deeply interdependent and view mutual trust and shared responsibility as critical to mission success and morale. This theme fits in with the relational emphasis in the theoretical framework, where AI and POS emphasized high-quality connections and collective efficacy as the basis of thriving organizations. Empirical research on teams and relational coordination in aviation and military settings associates high levels of teamwork with higher performance, safety and satisfaction, supporting the consideration of explicit teamwork development and recognition in strengths-based HR and AI informed change efforts (Gittell et al., 2020).

Excellence

Excellence was chosen by 3 of 46 respondents (6.5%) as the core value they valued most. Respondents defined excellence as a personal standard and “way of life” that motivates them to go beyond minimum requirements and portray the PAF as a world class organization, with consistent effort toward high standards as their primary contribution to unit success. Analytically, this implies that a mastery-oriented pursuit of high performance is a central source of motivation and identity for this group. As noted in the framework, this is consistent with POS interest in positive deviance and extraordinary performance, and with AI’s focus on “best of” stories which identify excellence as part of the positive core. Empirical work on strengths uses and mastery orientations indicates that such an approach is associated with increased engagement, learning and resilience, suggesting the value of reinforcing constructive high standards behavior through recognition, coaching and leadership development (Miglianico et al., 2020).

Valuing all core values as an integrated set

A smaller group of respondents (2 of 46, or 4.3%) emphasized that all core values (Integrity, Service above Self, Teamwork, Excellence, and Professionalism) must be upheld together rather than one value being given more importance than the others. They characterized the core values as an integrated package that defines the role of being a PAF officer or enlisted personnel. This holistic view implies that some personnel think systemically about the value framework: it emphasizes coherence between moral, relational and performance dimensions rather than ranking individual values. Although respondents stressed the importance of consistently living of all the core values, their responses also implied that doing so can be challenging among operational pressures and competing demands, suggesting potential tensions between ideals as opposed to everyday realities. This perspective is consistent with the theoretical stance that AI and POS take toward virtues- as interconnected elements of a positive system rather than an isolated trait- and underscores, from a strengths-based career standpoint, the

importance of broad and balanced development rather than narrow focus on any particular trait. Literature on professional military ethics and organizational values likewise make the point that successful value systems function as coherent frameworks; that PAF personnel themselves emphasize such integration supports the treatment of the core values as an interlocking system in training, reflection and recognition activities (Robinson et al., 2016).

Visions and Foresight of Personnel toward Philippine Air Force

Seven themes emerged as to what the “best future” that PAF personnel wish for their organization: full modernization and technological advancement; increased air assets, equipment, and infrastructure; highly professional and well-developed personnel; increased operational capability and credible defense posture; reliable, focused, and well-governed systems; increased safety and contribution to national development; and futures facilitating dignified retirement and family well-being (Table 4). Together, these themes represent a forward-looking vision of a modern, mission ready PAF that is supported by capable people, strong resources, and sound leadership, while also supporting the long-term lives of its members. Framed in a strengths-based AI lens, the findings underscore the importance of personnel building on their positive core- existing strengths, values, and achievements- in the process of imagining an even more effective and humane PAF, rather than focusing on deficits or failures.

Table 4. The visions of best future that the personnel wish for the PAF

Theme	Codes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Improved air assets, equipment, and infrastructure	More / better aircraft, equipment, facilities, and related training	11	23.9
Modernization and technological advancement	Becoming a more advanced, fully modern, technology driven Air Force	9	19.6
Professional, competent, and well-developed personnel	Highly professional, disciplined, agile workforce; strong HR development	8	17.4
Stronger operational capability, defense posture, and mission success	Credible defense posture, regional air power, achieving missions/flight plan	9	19.6
Organizational reliability, focus, and good governance	Reliable, dependable, focused organization with good leadership and fewer unnecessary burdens	5	10.9
Safety, security, and national development contribution	Safer operations, continued service to country, broader nation building role	3	6.5
Personal family linked futures tied to PAF success	Being able to retire properly, support and educate family, linked to PAF’s good future	1	2.2

Modernization, air assets, and infrastructure

Modernization and improved air assets combined as the strongest cluster in personnel’s visions for the PAF’s future, with 9 of 46 responses (19.6%) for broader technological advancement and 11 of 46 responses (23.9%) for more and better aircraft, equipment, and infrastructure. Respondents dreamed of a “completely modernized” Air Force that employs the full capabilities of modern technology, operates multi role fighter aircraft, and has improved maintenance capabilities, airfields, and training facilities. They specifically drew connection between such advances with safer operations, increased mission flexibility and a more credible air defense posture. These aspirations also reflect perceived gaps in current resources and governance; however, personnel appear deeply aware that modernization and good leadership are not yet fully realized and may be potentially constrained by structural or political factors beyond their control. Analytically, this is a perception of gap between the professionalism already possessed by personnel and the limitations of existing hardware and systems; with modernization being an enabler necessary to exploit existing human strengths to their full operational potential,

and there are repeated references to infrastructure and logistics which demonstrate a systems view of capability. In consonance with the theoretical framing, these aspirations can be seen to be part of the Dream phase of AI and emphasize how shared images of a technologically empowered future can inform Design discussions on matching training, leadership preparation and career paths with new capability requirements. Research on defense transformation and military HRD similarly suggests that modernization is most effective when investments in platforms are accompanied by training, doctrine and learning, and when personnel are able to perceive definite development opportunities attached to new technologies (Kraimer et al., 2021).

Professional and well-developed personnel

Professional, competent, and well-developed personnel constituted another major theme, with 8 of 46 responses (17.4%). Respondents hoped for a PAF in which human resources are continually developed, where recruitment and training standards are raised and where both officers and enlisted personnel are technically proficient and morally oriented. These aspirations illustrate that personnel recognize people, not hardware, to be the key component in future success; sophisticated platforms are seen as only as good as the people who design, maintain and use them. This echoes the strengths based and POS perspectives that thriving organizations cultivate in their human strengths and developmental climates and suggests that members view themselves and their colleagues to be of value worthy of sustained investment. Empirical work on military human resource development and “learning organizations” in defense is consistent with this, demonstrating that systematic investment in training, leadership development and career management improves readiness, retention and adaptability- which strengthen the case in favor of strong HRD strategies tied into the PAF’s modernization and strategic plans (Griffith & Bryan, 2016).

Strong operational capability and credible defense posture

Stronger operational capability and credible defense posture was a prominent theme in the future visions of PAF personnel, appearing in 9 of 46 responses (19.6%). Personnel expressed strong desire for a PAF with more operational capability and a credible defense posture, of a force that is more competent and powerful, able to meet flight plan milestones, defend Philippine airspace and stand alongside regional counterparts. These accounts make members see their current efforts as part of a long trajectory towards institutional maturity and strategic effectiveness and interpretation of operational strength are in systemic terms that combine people, doctrine and integrated capabilities. This theme is an extension of AI Dream from inner strengths to outer impact: pride of service is accompanied by a desire to see the PAF decisively carrying out its national defense mandate. It is compatible with POS notions of shared purpose and collective efficacy and, from a strengths-based career standpoint, implies expanded roles and pathways for expert practitioners and leaders whose development is clearly tied to mission critical capabilities. Studies on military effectiveness and high reliability organizations also indicate that credible deterrence and operational confidence is dependent on both materiel and professional cultures, fostering initiatives that explicitly link individual development with strategic defense outcomes (Griffith & Bryan, 2016).

Organizational reliability, focus, and good governance

Roughly 10.9% (5 of 46 respondents) indicate a desire for a more reliable, focused, and well governed PAF: a “most reliable and dependable organization,” leadership “openly aggressive to dynamism and accepting change,” and a structure that focuses on core missions and reduces unnecessary administrative burdens. Respondents identified the costs of misaligned directives and redundant requirements, and defined good governance in terms of clarity of purpose, fairness and responsiveness to unit realities. Analytically, this underlines the understanding that personnel do not care about what the PAF does but how it is led and managed, with streamlined, supportive systems being seen as important in enabling professionalism, service and teamwork to flourish. Consistent with the theoretical framework, this resonates with POS research on positive leadership, organizational justice and enabling structures and suggests that AI can be used to surface and scale up existing examples of effective governance. Empirical studies in military and public sector organizations show that perceptions of fairness, clarity and supportive leadership predict commitment and openness to change and strengthens the importance of integrating governance reforms into any strengths-based, AI informed transformation efforts (Griffith & Bryan, 2016).

Safety, national service, and family-linked aspirations

Safety, national service, and family linked aspirations were a smaller but meaningful cluster with 3 of 46 responses (6.5%) that stressed safer operations and continuing the service to the country, and 1 response (2.2%) that explicitly connected the PAF's good future to dignified retirement and helping to support one's family. Respondents wished for "more success and safety in all aspects," for a PAF that continues to serve the country effectively and for conditions that allow them to retire properly and educate their children. These accounts demonstrate that personnel interpret institutional success at both macro and micro levels: they desire an Air Force that defends the nation and also makes possible a stable, dignified life for its members and their families. Within the theoretical framing of the study, this relates to the AI's Destiny dimension and strengths-based career development by highlighting futures that are honorable to both the organizational mission and personal life objectives, and it relates to the POS contention that truly positive institutions enable flourishing across life domains. Empirical literature on military to civilian transition and sustainable careers finds that veterans are faring better in cases where their service leads to tangible family benefits, safe working conditions and opportunities for continued contribution, it thus underscores the importance of including strengths-based transition support, financial planning and family-oriented programs into PAF career and organizational planning (Kraimer et al., 2021).

Hopes and Aspirations of Personnel toward Retirement in the Philippine Air Force

Seven interrelated themes emerged regarding the kind of life PAF personnel would desire to have when they retire: a simple, happy, and peaceful life; quality time and stronger relationships with family; financial stability and freedom; business or entrepreneurial pursuits; faith and value centered living; life in the province or close to nature; and opportunities for travel, hobbies, and personal enjoyment (Table 5). Together, these themes portray retirement not as withdrawal from contribution, but rather as a rebalancing of priorities towards the family, well-being, and purposeful yet less pressured activity. Viewed through a strengths-based AI perspective, the findings reveal the extent to which personnel are drawing upon their positive core- service orientation, discipline, and resilience- to envision post-service lives that are value driven and contributory, rather than to focus on the fears or deficits associated with leaving the uniform.

Table 5. The kind of life the PAF personnel desire when they retire

Theme	Codes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Simple, happy, and peaceful life	Desire for a simple, relaxed, contented, and peaceful lifestyle	13	28.3
Quality time and strong relationships with family	Emphasis on spending more time and sharing life with family/loved ones	11	23.9
Financial stability and freedom	Stable income, financial freedom, secure pension/benefits	8	17.4
Business or entrepreneurial pursuits	Starting, continuing, or expanding a business	6	13.0
Faith and value centered life	Life focused on God, church, or value-based service	3	6.5
Life close to nature / province or farm living	Living in the province or owning/working a farm	3	6.5
Travel, hobbies, and personal enjoyment	Travel, hobbies, learning new skills, adventure	2	4.3

Simple, peaceful life and strong family relationships

The most common aspirations are for a simple, happy, and peaceful life (13 of 46 responses, or 28.3%) and quality time with family (11 of 46 responses, or 23.9%). Participants envisioned being "happy, contented and stable," living a "simple but fulfilling" life and finally being physically present with their spouse and children after years of deployments and irregular schedules. Analytically, retirement is described as readjustment of priorities, not an escape: members view their military years as a time of high sacrifice in which family time was

often deferred, so their desired future focuses on re-embracing ordinary routines- sharing meals, accompanying children, being at home instead of on mission. In line with the theoretical framework, these narratives elaborate strengths-based career development and Destiny phase of AI into the life course, demonstrating how strengths developed in service (responsibility, care for others) are re-directed toward family and community instead of being abandoned. Empirical work on military to civilian transition and sustainable careers also finds that successful transitions are likewise strongly linked with increased family time, calmer daily routines and the ability to build stable, supportive family life after service (Griffith & Bryan, 2016).

Financial stability, entrepreneurship, and continued contribution

Financial stability and freedom account for 17.4% (8 of 46 responses), with personnel expressing the desire to be “relaxing but still with salary,” “to be able to relax and financially stable,” and to secure “retirement funds, benefits, and a pension” adequately to support family needs. A further 13.0% (6 of 46 responses) mention business or entrepreneurial pursuits- starting or continuing with small enterprises, often as “boss of my own business” or continuing existing side businesses. These aspirations suggest that personnel do not envision retirement as inactivity, but rather as a transition to different forms of work that are less demanding but still contributory and more self-directed. Financial security is viewed as the basis for enjoying a simple, family centered life, whereas entrepreneurship provides autonomy, ongoing usefulness and a means to put to use skills and networks developed in the PAF. The focus on financial stability and small business also implies an underlying anxiety about whether pensions and benefits will be sufficient, and are pointing to systemic concerns about economic security after service. Consistent with the strengths based and AI perspectives, this cluster highlights how leadership, discipline, technical know-how and budgeting skills are being mapped mentally onto second career or self-employment possibilities. Research on veterans’ transitions and strengths-based career counseling supports this pattern: those who are successful in transitioning service acquired strengths into stable employment or business activity are reported to have better adjustment, less financial stress and greater life satisfaction, especially if they have had help in explicitly linking their strengths to concrete livelihood options (Kraimer et al., 2021).

Faith, values, and place-based aspirations

Smaller but meaningful clusters reference faith and value centered lives (6.5%), rural or farm living (6.5%), and/or travel/hobbies (4.3%). Participants spoke of wanting a “simple life with a God-fearing heart,” “a better time for my family and serve our God,” living on or tending a farm in the province, and learning new skills, hobbies, or travelling to different places. These narratives indicate that many personnel consider retirement as an opportunity to realign on a day-to-day routine with long held values and aspirations restricted during active duty: faith represents a central lens for making sense of both past service and future plans, rural or farm living represents quiet, self-sufficiency and closeness to nature, and hobbies and travel represent exploration and self-development within a responsible life. Within the study’s theoretical framing, this is an extension of AI’s Destiny phase and strengths-based career concepts in showing how the positive core- service, commitment, perseverance-can be carried into church work, community work, stewardship of land and meaningful leisure. Empirical literature on retirement well-being and veterans’ adjustment echoes this, finding that continued involvement in valued roles (faith communities, local associations, nature-based activities and structured hobbies) is related to higher life satisfaction and psychological health once they leave full time service, and may aid in the reconstruction of identity once the military role recedes (Kraimer et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The study shows that PAF personnel experience their careers as a value-driven, strengths building vocation that extends into life after service. Across the five objectives, a consistent picture becomes evident: members have greatest appreciation for having opportunities to serve the country and people, of embodying a proud professional identity as part of a disciplined and principled culture, the development of leadership, discipline, interpersonal and technical strengths, and to live out PAF core values led by integrity. They envision a PAF that is modern, well equipped, professionally manned and well governed, and they aspire to retire into simple, peaceful, family centered lives supported by financial stability, modest entrepreneurship, faith and community engagement. Taken together, these findings portray PAF service as a powerful context for the development of both capability and

character, and that personnel interpret reforms, HR systems and post service prospects through lenses of service, dignity and long-term family and life goals.

Theoretically, the study demonstrates the value of integrating AI, strengths-based career development and POS in a military setting, using a strengths orientation to illuminate the positive core of an armed service- its service ethos, values, developmental practices and aspirational visions- while still acknowledging structural and modernization needs. Practically, the results suggest that the PAF and similar organizations can improve readiness, retention and transition outcomes by designing development, modernization and retirement programs in ways that strategically leverage personnel identified strengths and values, and that place career support within the context of a life course project that links both in service roles and post service futures. Overall, when an institution is willing to listen to its members by using appreciative, strengths focused inquiry, it does not only get a clearer picture of what is already working or effective but also a grounding for its co-created agenda for evolving in ways that honor its mission and the long-term flourishing of the people serving in that institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Career development, performance management and leadership programs should be clearly grounded in a strengths-based, appreciative orientation. Given that personnel highly value service to country, integrity, teamwork, professionalism and leadership strengths, promotion counselling, mentoring and appraisal can incorporate structured appreciative conversations that help members name where they have best lived these values and how their leadership, technical and relational strengths can be further deployed in future roles. Promotion boards and leadership courses can include short reflection modules which begin with high point service and values stories and explicitly recognize relational excellence (teamwork, communication, mentoring) as well as technical and operational performance.

Modernization and capability development plans should be designed to explicitly link new technologies and structures with the current personnel's strengths and aspirations. Since many respondents envision a modern, credible and well governed PAF, training, specialist assignments and leadership pipelines can be designed to ensure that those members with established leadership, technical or interpersonal strengths are channeled into roles where these capabilities are most needed within a more modern, networked force. Organizational development initiatives to improve governance, streamline unnecessary administrative burdens and clarify priorities can model on internally generated examples of effective leadership and fair systems identified through appreciative processes, and use these as templates for broader policy and process reforms.

Transition and retirement planning should be considered as fundamental part of HR strategy instead of an end of career add on. In light of the strong desire for simple, peaceful and family focused post service lives that are supported by financial stability and modest entrepreneurship, strengths based transition programs can combine (a) mapping of service developed strengths (leadership, discipline, technical, relational), (b) financial literacy and pension planning, and (c) exposure to livelihood options- small business, self-employment, public service and community roles- that align with personnel's values and preferred lifestyles, including rural, faith based or nature oriented futures. Partnerships with government, business and civil society organizations can help to create concrete pathways into such roles for retiring PAF personnel.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations which should be noted. The findings are based on one service branch in one country, the Philippine Air Force, limiting transferability to other branches, militaries, or nations with different cultures, structures, and career systems. The data come from self-reported, appreciative narratives elicited through an AI and strengths-based lens which illuminates positive experiences and aspirations, but that does not systematically capture problems, grievances, or structural deficits which may also be instrumental in careers. In addition, the use of an online open-ended survey rather than in-depth interviews meant there were more limited opportunities for probing, clarification, and observing group dynamics, and the sample may be biased towards individual more willing or able to participate in such a format.

Future research could address these limitations by including more than one service or branch, cross-national or comparative designs, and mixed method approaches that include combination of appreciative, strengths-based inquiry with more critical or diagnostic perspectives. Longitudinal and intervention studies of the career trajectories of personnel over time, and studies that combine interviews and focus groups, with quantitative indicators of well-being, career outcomes, and organizational performance, would test and refine the patterns found here and give a bigger picture of military careers and transitions.

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