Young Singaporeans' Perspectives of Compulsory Military Conscription:
How they manage the national service experience in relation to their education, development and careers

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other university

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to generate a substantive theory concerning how Singaporean conscripts manage their national service (NS) experience in relation to their development, education, and careers. It addresses three main research questions: What are conscripts' perspectives on NS in relation to their personal lives and careers and their education and development needs prior to enlistment? How do conscripts perceive and cope with the two-year conscription experience? In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?

A grounded theory methodology was adopted. Data were collected using face-to-face interviews with a group of 21 conscripts in the Army. Other data sources included participants' reflection journals and performance records. The major outcome of the study was the generation of the *Theory of Selective Commitment*, which posits that commitment (with its associated features) to NS is the key factor that determines how conscripts manage, appraise, and assimilate their NS experiences. Among the major findings are that - how the conscripts internalised the significance of service in NS was dependent on how the conscripts coped during training, how they appraised their NS experience and how they assimilated their roles as citizen soldiers. This in turn determined their level of commitment in terms of time and energy devoted to serving NS. Accordingly, a typology comprised of five types of conscripts was identified: advocates, adventurers, careerists, play-safes and challengers. Major implications for policy formulation, practice, and future research are drawn from the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 7 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

List of Tables

List of Figures

Contents   **Page**

CHAPTER ONE

THE ISSUE IN CONTEXT

Prologue

The aim of this research is to develop a substantive theory using grounded theory methods to explain how young Singaporeans manage compulsory military training in relation to their personal lives, careers, and education. Current studies, though limited, have provided evidence that national service (NS) is a traumatic experience for many. It involves separation from homes and an immersion in an authoritarian culture that enforces strict discipline and regimentation (Nair, 1991, 1994). While most national servicemen (or full-time national servicemen [NSFs]) adapt to these stressors, a small proportion face severe problems adjusting to military life and must seek specialist treatment (Cheok et al., 2000). Given that most soldiers will return to either their studies or work after their 2 years of NS, the impact of NS on conscripts' personal career and life plans is a salient concern.

Serving as a senior military officer in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), I have a deep interest in matters concerning conscripts, such as the ways in which they manage military training and NS's influence on them. My close interaction with young enlistees in the course of my work has also sensitised me to the issues and challenges confronting them. This interaction has underlined, more than anything else, the need for conscripts to be positively engaged during their time in NS: The cost of failure is conscripts' reduced level of commitment to NS – something Singapore cannot afford. This engagement must rest on the shoulders of not only conscripts but also the SAF. It must uphold its responsibility to prepare and nurture its young men while they are serving as citizen soldiers and in their future life path. Therefore, I believe the current NS training system must become more soldier-centric to enhance the overall NS experience for conscripts without compromising operational requirements. The above account explains and justifies my reasons for researching this topic.

I recall watching the live television broadcast of Singapore's 44th National Day Rally Speech, in which Singapore's prime minister discussed the importance of the SAF's role and the NSF's commitment in safeguarding Singapore's national interests. My

young cousin was also watching. He confided that he was extremely worried about his impending enlistment. He said, "I think I understand the need for national service…but…I am not sure if I can handle the training in the Army because I am not the sporting type; and what about my studies?...How am I supposed to remember what I have learnt in school after serving 2 years in NS?...Is it true that the instructors will make your life miserable if they think you are trying to be a smart Alec?"

To a large extent, my young cousin's concerns echoed the sentiments of many young Singaporeans waiting to serve in the Army. While institutionalised conscription serves Singaporean society and ensures its security, one must examine this practice at the micro level, namely that of the individual. None could deny that the impact this 2 years of NS has on conscripts is equally compelling. In the latter respect, gauging the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of conscripts themselves are instructive. This study, therefore, aims to investigate conscripts' perspectives of conscripted service in the Singapore context and its perceived effects on their life, education, and career.

1.1   Conscription in Singapore

Conscription was introduced in Singapore shortly after it achieved independence in 1967. Under the existing Singapore Enlistment Act, all male citizens and permanent residents are liable to be called up for NS upon reaching the age of 16 ½. In practice, however, young Singaporean males are generally enlisted at the age of 18 or 19, upon completion of their Advanced Level Cambridge Examinations or Diploma Course, respectively. In other words, most conscripts will start their tertiary education only after NS. Conscripts are officially known as full-time national servicemen (or NSFs), and are required to serve a period of 2 years, followed by up to 40 days of service annually until the age of 40 and 50 for non-commissioned and commissioned officers, respectively (Teo, 2004). Once enlisted in the NS, most will serve in the SAF, which takes about 95% of the cohort of about 20,000 enlistees each year. The remainder serves on the Police Force or Civil Defence Force.

The decision to adopt a conscription system was primarily taken in response to the hasty withdrawal of the British forces in Singapore (Huxley, 2000). For a small country with limited resources, conscription is a sensible choice that serves two vital roles: national defence and nation building (Chiang, 1997). Many authors have

extolled the claimed benefits to Singapore of having an NS. Conscription provides for the defence of Singapore by means of mobilising the bulk of its male population, that between the ages of 16 and 40, to generate a sizeable defence force to safeguard Singapore's sovereignty (Tan, 2000); it also provides the crucial 'political space' for a small city-state like Singapore in the regional and global arena (Teo, 2005). From a social viewpoint, NS also performs another important function: nation building in peacetime. Having undergone tough military training, NS proponents claim, male youth develop positive attributes, such as discipline and physical ruggedness, which equip them to face future challenges (Howe, 1979). Over time, proponents argue, this common military experience brings about a more cohesive, disciplined, and rugged society as well as a sense of Singaporean identity.

However, opponents argue that conscription and NS conflict with individual liberty (Kelly, 1982). In modern democracies, many view the obligation to serve as violating the notion of individual freedom, unless the need for the masses to bear arms is great, such as in the face of another world war. Consequently, many democratic nations, such as the United States, France, and Great Britain – all of whom relied heavily on conscripts to fight the Second World War, have abolished conscription in peacetime due to the lack of public support and youth's reluctance to sacrifice individual freedom to serve their nation. Conscription is also unattractive from an economic viewpoint, as the practice takes a large number of potentially productive workers out of the workforce at the taxpayers' expense. Still one can argue that during times of high unemployment, NS reduces the number of dropouts and unemployed persons.

For countries that have managed to sustain a conscription system in peacetime, one could claim that the practice reflects on their ability to cope with problems unique to their context. Most Asian countries with NS are those facing perceived and potentially hostile environments. But the degree of success in sustaining public support and motivation varies widely. Taiwan, for instance, in 2000, shortened the period of conscription from 2 years to 16 months and has institutionalised non-combat service options (GIO, 2006) largely to deal with increasing public pressure, domestic political pressure (Lin, 2004), and growing resistance from youth (MOI, 2005). However, the extent to which these measures can retain public support for conscription in the long run remains to be seen. Other countries that have

implemented similar measures to those of Taiwan seem to have fared better. For instance, the Scandinavian states have also incorporated alternate military service options into their system to deal with issues related to individual rights and still enjoy public support thus far (Sorenson, 2000). In Germany, conscription rates and people's support for NS are both high, partly because of the government's ability to build a good military-civilian relationship despite its dark military past (Denison, 1996).

In the case of Singapore, resistance to NS has always been an issue and has manifested itself in varying forms - ranging from violent protests to grudging compliance. In the 1950s, massive protests and riots were organised in response to Britain's implementation of conscription in Singapore. The ethnic Chinese students who, then, felt that conscription was a plot to exploit the locals to protect Britain's interests, instigated the violence. In the formative years of the Republic, many, especially Chinese Singaporeans, continued to resist NS because of the social stigma associated with it (Chiang, 1997). In 1983, a nationwide survey revealed that 4 in 10 respondents believed NS to be a "waste of time" (Goh, 1983) – which triggered the government's increasing effort to garner public support for its NS policies. It was not until the 1990s that public support for NS, somewhat paradoxically, started to improve (Singapore Bulletin, 1992).

The Singapore conscription system continues to sustain public support and very high compliance rates primarily due to the Ministry of Defence's (MINDEF) ability to garner public support and enforce the Enlistment Act, aided by an uncertain regional security climate. For instance, as part of its efforts to strengthen military-public relations, MINDEF has set up a special audit committee called RECORD (Recognising Contribution of Operationally Ready National Servicemen) to audit the NS management system for the purpose of recognising NSFs and employers' contributions and recommending ways to improve the overall NS experience. Thus far, RECORD has been very successful in bringing about a wide range of tangible benefits, such as more monetary bonuses, streamlined NS administration, and a better training environment for NSFs (MINDEF, 2006). MINDEF has also become more apt at fostering military-parental relations through a series of initiatives, such as the Direct Enlistment Scheme implemented in 1997, which aims to reduce parents'

apprehension about NS. This initiative allows parents to accompany their sons to their assigned units to gain first-hand experience of the soldiers' living conditions (MINDEF, 1997).

Regarding compliance, MINDEF has unequivocally demonstrated its preparedness to take strong measures against NS defaulters so as to deter the practice (Teo, 2006). Guided by the principles of equity and universality, MINDEF does not regard propositions such as conscientious objections as valid reasons for defaulting. Every year, small numbers of conscientious objectors, belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses, are tried and sent to prison (Amnesty International Report, 2005).

To some extent, the prevailing security concerns about terrorism and regional flash points have heightened the need for security and protection and added impetus to the rationale and support for NS (NSCC, 2004). Singapore – a small island nation – is surrounded by large, predominantly Muslim, populations. The capture of Jemaah Islamiah (JI) members in Singapore in 2000 surprised many Singaporeans. More significantly, the JI incident changed the people's mental model that Singapore would never be a target for terrorists. The use of conscripts to conduct patrols in iconic places like the Changi International Airport has also demonstrated MINDEF's willingness to use conscripts for operational tasks and, in turn, enhances the credibility of SAF in the eyes of the public (Siew, 2004).

1.2   Research Problem

Notwithstanding the apparent benefits of NS to Singaporean society outlined above, the requirement for compliance and unquestioning service is not necessarily indicative of conscripts' own personal levels of commitment. As a commander of a training school, my engagement with conscripts during training has increased my awareness of the complex issues confronting conscripts and weighing heavily on their minds. Their concerns focus on the impact of their NS experience on them personally and the subsequent impact it may have on their studies and career plans.

Today, although NS is largely accepted as a necessary rite of passage among young Singaporean males, the fact that NS is compulsory invariably evokes a multitude of reactions among Singaporean youth. Some view NS positively as a time for

adventure, growth, and self-discovery, while others do not (Cheok et al., 2000). Notably, many are concerned about service's disruption to their studies, careers, and personal lives (ST, 1981; Nair, 1991). As a developed society, Singapore is somewhat out of kilter with its Western allies in maintaining compulsory NS. This is especially the case, given that the youth of Singapore – like their Western counterparts – are geared towards pursuing higher education. In 2010, about 98.4% of students in Singapore had completed at least 10 years of education, and 93.0% had progressed to higher levels of education, such as the General Cambridge Examinations (Advanced Level), Diploma Course, and tertiary education (CNA, 2008). Given this trend, many opine that NS disrupts their study plans. With the current system of call-up, most young Singaporean males can only embark on their tertiary education after NS.

Not surprisingly, young Singaporean males are concerned that their study habits will decline during their 2 years of NS or that they will lose out (in terms of educational or occupational opportunities) to their female counterparts and foreigners, who need not serve. More than before, young Singaporeans see education as a top priority and a means of ensuring a good job, a steady income, and a comfortable life (Ho & Chia, 2006). This has somewhat exacerbated a very stressful and competitive climate in Singaporean schools, as students strive to achieve academic excellence either in the hope of securing a scholarship or enrolment to prestigious higher institutions (Ho & Chia, 2006). Pressure is also generated from within the educational system. Schools' curriculum is more compact than before, and competition among schools in the pursuit of academic excellence means that students are also pushed to achieve more (Tan, 1998).

Those who are in the labour force prior to enlistment must make their own arrangements regarding returning to their jobs after NS or quit their jobs altogether. On top of concerns regarding job security, this group will typically also suffer significant monetary loss given that they will earn only a small NS allowance during their service. This situation is even more problematic for conscripts who are the main breadwinners or who come from needy families. Although the SAF does provide

financial assistance in such situations, these conscripts face the added challenge of dealing with problems at home while serving. For them, the issue is not how they can contribute to NS but how they perceive NS and its relevance to their lives and their careers given their predicament.

A further issue relates to how conscripts deal with their transition into NS. Singaporean society's increasing affluence has had a negative impact on its youth's health and fitness. The prevalence of obesity among students and other young people is on the rise, as more youth are leading passive and sedentary lifestyles, preferring entertainment and self-improvement activities over more physically orientated ones (Ho & Chia, 2006). These trends are likely to become more acute in the future. The concern is that young Singaporeans may also become less inclined and committed to serve, which would likely diminish their sense of belongingness to Singapore and their sense of identity as Singaporeans. This calls into question their willingness to defend the country and affects their ability to cope with the transition to military life (Soh, Tan, & Ong, 2002).

For the majority of conscripts, the 2 years of socialisation in NS is likely to have a significant impact on their personal development (Guimond, 1995, Soh et al., 2000). Depending on with whom they come into contact and socialise, what they do and how they make sense of the experiences gained in NS, the outcome of this socialisation process varies widely. One can argue that many will emerge as better people, growing more disciplined and mature. Unfortunately, some may become less confident or disillusioned due to injuries sustained in NS, and a small percentage may acquire less than desirable habits, such as smoking (Lim et al., 1997). Based on my observations, conscripts have different experiences in NS, although, in general, most are positive. Yet conscripts' decisions or disposition with regard to their original course of study or career plans may vary considerably at the end of their NS stint. Some maintain their original educational or career plans, while others may make adjustments, and some may change their initial plans entirely. Clearly, these phenomena underscore the complexity associated with conscripts' 2 years of socialisation in NS and the effects of the NS experience on them. Individual conscripts react differently. More important is the issue of how conscripts perceive

NS and how they manage their NS experience in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans.

To summarise, the research problem, based on issues highlighted above, can be conceptualised in two parts. First is the issue of how conscripts cope with military training. Having spent most of their life in schools, their perspectives towards NS prior to enlistment and their actual transition from a school or work environment into the military represents a significant change. For some, this transition can be a very tumultuous experience, as it means adjusting to a completely different set of cultures and routines (Cheok et al., 2000). The second part refers to the impact of NS on conscripts and ways in which they perceive their education, careers, and development plans being influenced as a result of having to complete NS.

1.3   Research Aim and Purposes

The aim of this research is to develop a substantive theory using grounded theory methods to explain how young Singaporeans males manage compulsory military training in relation to their personal lives, careers, and education.

More specifically, the purposes of this study are:

- to determine conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans prior to their enlistment;

- to identify how conscripts cope with the diverse challenges of NS during their 2 years of service; and

- to identify the factors, circumstances, and social interactions during NS period that, according to conscripts, influence their personal development, studies, and career plans.

1.4   Research Questions

This study's main research question is as follows: How do young Singaporeans' perceive their management of compulsory military service in relation to their personal lives, studies and career development?

From the main research question, three specific research questions (SRQs) can be derived:

1. What are conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal lives, careers, and educational and development needs prior to enlistment?

2. How do conscripts perceive their coping with the challenges and experiences of the 2-year conscription experience?

3. In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives, education and careers?

1.5   Significance and Outcomes of the Study

Literature on the effects of military service on education and success in life suggests that the availability of systemic support and the actual experience of serving in the military are important determinants of whether a soldier will continue to pursue his education and do well in life (Baskit & Strauss, 1978; Maclean, 2005; Teachman & Call, 1996).   This is a pertinent point because in the Singaporean context, all conscripts have to compete on an equal footing with the females of their cohort and foreigners – both of whom need not serve – for a place in local universities or for scholarships. Under these circumstances, conscripts' experiences of NS become even more salient with respect to how NS may influence their education, development, and career plans. Although some evidence indicates that, in general, soldiers attribute a positive influence to NS in terms of their sense of self, which is of value to them in the civilian market (Nair 1991, 1994; Soh et el., 2000), this issue is under researched. Hence, this thesis aims to add to the current knowledge base in this regard.

To remain relevant, the NS system must evolve in tandem with the changes in larger social, geo-political, and security landscapes. Today, the SAF is transforming into a 3rd Generation organisation.   In effect, this means a network-centric setup that

leverages technology and the latest training pedagogy to deal with the wider spectrum of needs confronting Singapore. Key, however, to the success of this transformation resides in the quality and commitment of its soldiers, of whom 70% are NSFs. By extension, therefore, issues that concern NSFs will invariably affect SAF readiness levels. The system of compulsory military service is important to the state but "…NS is not without sacrifice and opportunity cost to the individual…" (Ng, 2006, p. 20). This study thus aims to shed light on how conscripts cope in NS and contribute to the efforts to improve the NS system in Singapore in recognition of the sacrifices and commitment of Singaporean conscripts.

1.6   Limitations of the Study

This study has a few inherent limitations.

- First, this study is limited in its ability to generalise its findings beyond the investigated conscripts and the specific research context.

- As an "insider" researcher in this study, my sensitivity, prejudices, and bias regarding how conscripts cope in NS may affect its credibility to some extent.

- As with all studies that use interviews, data collection is dependent on the informants' ability and readiness to recall significant events. Hence, the data collected may not be perfectly accurate.

These limitations will be elaborated on further, together with ways to mitigate them, in Chapter Three.

1.7   Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter One provides background information, delineates the aims and significance of this study, as well as the main research questions, and offers a brief description of the research. Chapter Two presents a literature review of the pertinent aspects of the study. Chapter Three describes and justifies the research methodology underpinning the study. Chapter Four gives a summary of the findings, while Chapters Five and Six elaborate on them. Chapter Seven concludes with a discussion of the implications and recommendations that arise from the study's findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review is framed by the main research question in this study: "What are young Singaporean males' perspectives on compulsory military training in relation to their personal lives, education and careers?" It seems reasonable to assume that young Singaporean males form their perceptions of national service (NS) based on their socialisation experiences at home, in school, and in society at large. Once enlisted, conscripts' perceptions of and commitment to NS are influenced by their socialisation in the military. Hence, in this study, conscripts' perspectives of NS are investigated in terms of how they manage, appraise, and assimilate their NS experiences. The three specific research questions below explore ways young Singaporean males manage their NS in relation to their personal development, their studies, and their career plans:

1. What are conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal lives, careers, and educational and development needs prior to enlistment?

2. How do conscripts perceive and cope with their 2-year conscription experience?

3. In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?

Since very few Singaporean studies have examined conscripts' experiences, the theoretical framework for the present study connects published work from overseas to relevant issues for the Singaporean context, drawing inferences and discussing implications. These findings may be useful in the data collection stage in terms of generating questions during the initial interviews and refining the sampling criteria. They may also help to increase the present researcher's theoretical sensitivity in terms of differentiating and analysing the properties of the categories that emerge through the process of induction and deduction characterising the grounded theory methods adopted in this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, this literature review is divided into five sections that address the three specific research questions:

11

The first section of this literature review will examine the key aspects of theories of organisational socialisation (OS), adjustment, and coping, to establish the overarching theoretical basis. The second section will address the research question **"What are conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal lives, careers, and educational and development needs prior to enlistment?"** by reviewing the factors, personal and societal, that influence youths' perspectives of conscript service in the military. The third section will review the literature on how soldiers cope with military service. In this respect, the third section addresses the specific research question **"How do conscripts perceive and cope with their 2-year conscription experience?"** To many conscripts, serving time in the military is a life-changing experience. Hence, the fourth section will review relevant literature relating to the effects of military service on soldiers and address the third specific research question: **"In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?"** A **theoretical framework** will be proposed in the last section to provide the research context. This conceptual framework will also provide guidance in the data collection and analysis stages.

2.1 Organisational Socialisation, Adjustment, and Coping

The ways in which military conscripts manage their military service may be examined within the theories of OS, adjustment, and coping. The following sub-sections provide an overarching review of the literature on OS, adjustment, and coping that underscores the theoretical basis of this study.

2.1.1   Organisational Socialisation (OS)

OS is a process through which a newcomer is integrated into an organisation or part of an organisation. Through this process, the newcomer transforms from an outsider into an effective insider. This process takes place when a new member enters an

organisation (crossing external boundaries) or moves within an organisation (crossing internal boundaries) (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The field of OS also includes the study of changes in or the development of new skills, attitudes, and values, as well as the sense making of new entrants (Chao et al., 1994; Chatman, 1989; De Vos, Buyens, & Schalk, 2003; Louis, 1980; Thomas & Anderson, 1998). In this regard, OS is an important consideration for new conscripts and the military. First, failure to socialise new conscripts may have a negative impact on the soldiers themselves and their units (Soh & Chan, 2002, p. 9-31). Second, OS is critical in enabling new conscripts to adapt quickly to their environment and to make a contribution. This point is even more compelling considering the short deployment time conscripts have in the military, as compared to that of regular soldiers (Louis, 1980, 1990). Third, OS is important due to its lasting impact on conscripts, who will re-enter society after their NS stint (Chan & Schmitt, 2000). The current literature on OS is driven by four important theoretical perspectives: 1) the "stage models" socialisation process (Wanous, 1992a); 2) Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) model of socialisation tactics; 3) the uncertainty reduction theory (URT); and 4) social cognitive and sense-making theories (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Louis, 1980).

Stage Model Socialisation Process

Literature on OS suggests that the "stage model" socialisation process remains the predominant view of how social scientists analyse newcomers' entry into and development within the organisation (Buchanan, 1974; Feldman, 1976a; Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). Although there are different stage models with respect to OS, the conceptual essence of the stage model socialisation process advocates a stage-centric perspective that views socialisation as a process comprising a series of distinct and sequential stages whereby each stage is defined by a set of activities or events engaged in by an individual over time. Their movement to the next stage depends on their successful completion of the activities in the current stage (Buchanan, 1974; Feldman, 1976a, 1976b; Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975; Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1992a, 1992b).

Moreland and Levine (1982, p. 152-180, 1989, p. 144-146) proposed that new entrants into an organisation undergo five phases of OS (investigation, socialisation, maintenance, resocialisation, and remembrance) during which individuals experience

four role transitions (entry, acceptance, divergence, and exit). According to Moreland and Levine (1982), the socialisation of new members and resocialisation of marginal members are the most stressful socialisation phases as the group tries to inculcate and assimilate the outsider so that he or she becomes an insider. Van Maanen (1976b), in his study of police recruits, noted that the socialisation process could be divided into four stages: 1) self-selection into police work, 2) introduction into the police organisation, 3) participation in actual police work, and 4) metamorphosis into a full-fledged 'cop'.

Military organisations are also believed to influence soldiers by "transforming" them from civilians into effective fighting entities. Although it is still not entirely clear how this "transformation" of soldiers takes place, it is possible to adapt the stage model as an analytical frame through which to examine how conscripts cope in the military (Bourne, 1967; Salo, 2008). The main criticism of the stage model of the OS process is that it is an organisation-centric model that portrays individuals as passive and malleable. On the contrary, some critics have argued that individuals play active roles in the socialisation process (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993, p. 688).

Socialisation Tactics

The literature on socialisation tactics suggests that the manner in which newcomers are treated is likely to determine the outcomes of the socialisation process. Schein (1978) for example suggested six opposing pairs of "tactics" commonly adopted by organisations to influence the socialisation experiences of newcomers. These tactics, according to Ashforth and Saks (1997) and Jones (1986), can be grouped into two broad categories, namely institutionalised and individualised socialisation (see Fig 2.1). The former emphasises organisational control over the newcomers' transition, whereas the latter typically reflects an absence of structure in the socialisation process and, in so doing, encourages the newcomers as agents to develop their own approaches to their roles.

Institutionalised Socialisation		Individualised Socialisation
Collective		Individual
Formal	←→	Informal
Sequential		Random
Fixed		Variable
Serial		Disjunctive
Investiture		Divestiture
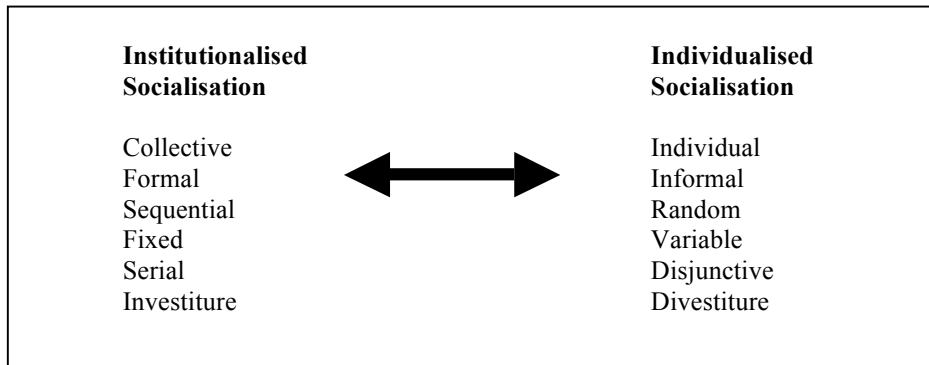
Figure 2.1 Relationship between socialisation tactics and outcomes

Whether using institutionalised or individualised tactics, the question is which of these is more likely to influence newcomers at a deeper level and to what extent these influences are permanent. No clear consensus has emerged and indeed, it may well vary across different types of organisational environment and culture. Although institutionalised socialisation tactics in the form of formal training programmes are found to be effective in socialising new members into an organisation (Klein & Waver, 2000), Ashford and Saks (1996) argued that an institutionalised approach is likely to centre on behavioural compliance and attitudinal change is only secondary. In the SAF context, institutionalised socialisation tactics are likely still the dominant strategy when socialising conscripts (Chiang, 1997). If true, the question about the influences on conscripts' being solely behavioural (Ashford & Saks, 1996) remains to be verified.

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT)

Another useful theoretical framework is the URT (Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Lester, 1987). This theory posits that newcomers experience high levels of stress during the organisational entry process and are thus motivated to reduce uncertainty such that the workplace becomes more predictable, understandable, and controllable. Improved communication channels (Morrison, 1993a) and well-designed socialisation tactics (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995) reduce newcomers' uncertainty. According to Baker (1995), role guidelines also help to reduce uncertainty during the socialisation process. From the training point of view, Saks (1996) found that both the amount and effectiveness of entry training were related to lower anxiety. Therefore, the URT would imply that the actual social environment in the military and certain systemic

15

structural components, such as the induction programme and training design, play a significant role in reducing initial anxiety levels among new conscripts and the speed at which they adjust to the new environment. This research highlights two categories of uncertainty: 1) uncertainty about the stressors that new conscripts may encounter in military service and 2) uncertainty about the possible effects of military service on conscripts' studies and career plans. While most of the URT literature centres on uncertainties associated with coping in the organisational environment, how conscripts resolve concerns about their studies and career plans remains unclear, as these concerns fall outside the organisational environment.

Social Cognition and Sense-Making Theories

According to social cognition theory (SCT), human behaviours and psychological functioning can be explained by the reciprocal causation in which behavioural, cognitive, personal, and environmental factors interact and influence each other (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Three aspects of SCT have been identified as particularly relevant for this study and in the context of OS: vicarious learning and mastery modelling, goal systems, and self-regulatory mechanisms in the area of self-efficacy beliefs (Wood & Bandura, 1989a). Studies have found that new recruits learn from each other and insiders as part of their socialisation experience in the military and see their commanders as role models (Soh, Chan, & Ong, 2000). In terms of personal factors, self-efficacy theory posits that self-efficacy comprises "beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989b, p. 408). Self-efficacy theory research has also revealed that information acquisition influences self-efficacy perceptions and, correspondingly, individual behaviours and psychological well-being (Bandura, 1986, 1997). For example, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) found that newcomers acquire information from role models and through observation and experimentation achieve a sense of mastery of their tasks and roles. SCT and the concept of self-efficacy provide a perspective as to how this research might examine the process in which new conscripts acquire necessary information and knowledge prior to and during NS and ways that process influences their perception of NS and ability to cope with the stresses of their impending military service.

Related to social cognition is the concept of sense making suggested by Louis (1980).

Sense making is defined as a cognitive process in which newcomers interpret and make sense of surprises that occur in interactions with insiders and encounters in a new environment (Louis, 1980; Reichers, 1987). According to Katz (1980), newcomers strive to acquire situational definitions and achieve a state of coherence of their new organisational reality and their roles through social interactions. He also suggested that newcomers make sense of their new surroundings by developing an "interpretive schema" or "cognitive map" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Weick, 1995). The potential of sense-making theories for this research is evident in terms of understanding how new conscripts make sense of their initial entry into military service and at different phases of their military training. Regarding data collection, the concepts of social cognition and sense making will guide the framing of the interview questions.

2.1.2 Adjustment and Coping

According to the literature on adjustment and coping, the former refers to the process of unconscious physical and mental adaptation and active explicit personal adjustment to situations (Salo, 2008). Successful adjustment means managing the demands of environmental changes better (Anderson, 1974, p. 28). The real outcome of adjustment, according to White (1974, p. 52), is seeking an acceptable compromise rather than a total triumph over one's situation. Lazarus (1993, p. 31) added that adjustment is essentially induced by stress, which may be moderated by personal resources and social support (Milgram & Hobfoll, 1986, p. 323-325). In short, people are active players in the adjustment process (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993, p. 688).

In relation to adjustment, coping is "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the [person's] resources" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Coping may be regarded as a discrete, rational, and reactive response to a challenging situation (Costa, Somerfield, & McCrae, 1996, p. 45; Dawson et al., 1994b, p. 15). Studies have also found that personal affective attributes, cognitive styles and skills, social skills, and emotional abilities play important roles in discerning how individuals eventually cope with circumstances (Dawson et al., 1994b, p. 15). Other literature on personal resources used in coping suggests that past experiences influence how one mobilises personal resources to cope with challenging situations

(Farley & Veitch, 2003, p. 357; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 158). Hamburg, Coelho, and Adams (1974, p. 410) observed that people often use coping mechanisms that have previously worked, although they may be totally unsuitable for the present situation. This suggests that coping is a function of continuous appraisals of one's environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 142; Moos & Schaefer, 1993, p. 238).

Stress experienced by new conscripts is often overwhelming given that the military milieu is considerably different from civilian life (Bourne, 1967, p. 190). Hobfoll and Vaux (1993, p. 696) opined that the ability to garner personal resources to deal with stressors would considerably lighten conscripts' burden, especially at the beginning of military service. More significantly, Hobfoll and Vaux (1993, p. 696) argued that personal resources, which mitigate the effects of stressors experienced in military service, comprise not only abilities and experiences but also the social environment.

In summary, the concept of OS and the ways in which personal resources, personal appraisal, and the social environment influence adjustment and coping serve as useful theoretical frameworks and heuristics for the exploration of how conscripts manage their NS. Specifically, OS theories provide a possible theoretical basis for exploring the effects of pre-enlistment socialisation and actual socialisation in the military environment on individuals. In contrast, the concepts of social cognition, sense making, adjustment and coping serve as useful starting points for examining how individual conscripts manage the training regime, the military culture, and the overall NS experience in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans.

2.2 Youth's Perspectives on Impending Military Conscription

Future conscripts' perspectives on military conscription influence conscripts' expectations of and subsequent adjustment to military service. Four broad categories of factors come into play when conscripts first enter military service: unmet expectations, family issues, military-related attitudes, and person-environment fit (Sumer, 2004b, p. 1-4). Expectations, in particular, play a great role in adjustment problems. For example, those with positive and realistic expectations are more likely to succeed (Fisher et al., 1983, p. 20; Van de Ven & Van Geloovaen, 2006, p. 2; Dawson et al., 1994b, p. 13-14). Unrealistic expectations can be harmful to conscripts' adjustment process because it induces a "rebound" effect in the conscripts'

commitment once reality is experienced (Brown, 2000, p. 27). Therefore, understanding how potential conscripts perceive compulsory military service is an important aspect of this study.

2.2.1 Factors Influencing Future Conscripts' Perspectives of Conscripted Military Service

Youth's perspectives on compulsory military service are influenced by a combination of ideological, social, and personal factors. Mayseless (1988, p.32-36) revealed that 93% of Israeli youth view compulsory military service as a necessity (ideological factors), and about 70% expressed their willingness to serve in more demanding combat units for personal growth and altruistic reasons. Similarly, Carmeli (1991, p. 37-42) found that 95% of Israeli inductees are willing to enlist: Respondents perceive that serving in the military is not only expected but also prestigious (social factors). Besides associating military service with positive personal growth (personal factors), these youth regard their personal contribution as important. Leong's (1978) study on Singaporean youth's perspectives of NS revealed that Singaporean youth, unlike Israeli youth, are generally disinclined to serve. Leong opined that Singapore is a multicultural migrant society with a relatively short history and thus with little social cohesion to galvanise conscripted military service. He also found that Singaporean youth are reluctant to serve because of concerns about their ability to cope with the rigours of military service and the subsequent disruption to their studies and career plans. Furthermore, he observed a social stigma. According to Leong (1978), military service is generally regarded as low in prestige. What is more, the prevailing societal views about military service are generally tainted by the Chinese saying "A good son will never become a soldier".

The above studies on Israeli and Singaporean youth suggest that adolescents are influenced by ideological, social, and personal factors with respect to their views on conscripted military service. Although Leong's (1978) study is dated, having been conducted during the foundational years of Singapore's nationhood, it provides useful insight in terms of the ideological, social, and personal factors that influenced young Singaporeans' perspectives in the seventies. However, Singapore's socio-political conditions have changed since then. NS has been reduced from 2.5 to 2 years. At the system management level, the military's communication with the public has generally

improved, and the government has implemented numerous initiatives to assist young enlistees transit smoothly into the military and to garner recognition for national servicemen from the public (Huxley, 2000, p. 97-100). Nevertheless, these changes do not necessarily translate into greater readiness to serve. From the ideological viewpoint, many Singaporean youth still do not regard Singapore to be under any immediate or real threat to its survival – unlike perhaps Israeli youth - and hence may not see the need for NS (Lee, 1997).

The question for this study is how do current ideological, social, and personal factors influence the views of young Singaporean males about NS. The differences in Israeli and Singaporean youth's ideological perspectives of military service suggest that the socialisation process prior to enlistment *inter alia* plays a significant role in shaping youth's perspectives of defence and conscripted service. In addition, one should also bear in mind important differences between the political situations of Israel – a state whose very existence is challenged and which is under constant threat of war – and Singapore.

2.2.2 Ideological Factors – Military and Political Socialisation of Youth to Compulsory Military Service

This section reviews the literature on the ideological socialisation of youth in Israel and Singapore with the aim of understanding the uniqueness of the Singaporean context in shaping how Singaporean youth perceive NS. Furman (1999, p. 149) asserted that military socialisation is an all-encompassing process in Israel: The fusion of the state's political ideology and formal education begins in preschool and continues in high school. In eleventh grade, students are sent to *Gadna* (youth regiments) camp for a week to get a taste of army life (Levy, Lomsky-Feder, & Harel., 2007, p. 138-40). The Ministry of Education and the military also collaborate to identify and develop initiatives to increase students' motivation to serve in combat units (Levy & Sasson-Levy, 2008, p. 349). Preparation for military service is intended to not only to prepare youth for life in the military but also to facilitate their socialisation into adult society. Parents are also engaged in their children's induction process (Israelashvili, 1995, p. 43-49). Given the depth of penetration of militarisation in Israeli society, Shafir and Peled (2000, p. 1-13) concluded that Israeli society as a whole and the ways in which young Israelites are socialised into military service are

founded on a militaristic metacode derived from Israel's unique history and security-political context.

Like Israel, NS for young Singaporean males is non-negotiable, as the government considers such service necessary to Singapore's survival as a nation-state. Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed this in no uncertain terms:

> *As long as Singapore remains sovereign, there will be National Service, and so long as we take National Service seriously, there will be a sovereign Singapore…(Speech by Prime Minister Goh, C.T., 1994).*

However, a review of the literature on military socialisation reveals fundamental differences in the socialisation approaches of Singapore and Israel. In the case of Singapore, the approach taken is subsumed under the larger umbrella of active citizenry driven by a political socialisation process rather than the more explicit military socialisation process seen in Israeli society. The impetus for this approach stems from deeper concerns that young Singaporeans (compared with their previous generation) might not share the same perspective with regard to public service and security threats to the nation, as they have not experienced the turmoil of Singapore's formative years.

> *Thirty years of continuous growth and increasing stability and prosperity have produced a different generation in an English-educated middle class. They are very different from their parents. The present generation below 35 has grown up used to high economic growth year after year, and take their security and success for granted. And because they believe all is well, they are less willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of the others in society, They are more concerned about their individual and family's welfare and success, not their community or society's well being…(Lee, 1996, p. 23-33).*

The above concern is reinforced by two national surveys conducted in 1996 and 1997. In 1996, the Ministry of Education conducted a study of 2500 students in secondary schools, polytechnics, and universities. The study showed disappointing results. For instance, fewer than a quarter of participants could explain why Singapore had

separated from Malaysia in 1965 (Goh, 1997a). A nationwide study undertaken by the Singapore 21 (S21) Committee (1997) also found evidence of political disengagement among Singaporean youth. The committee noted that a key problem was Singaporean youth's unwillingness to contribute to public life. The study showed that only 15% of Singaporeans were willing to contribute to their community, citing no ownership of issues, no respect from officials for their views, and a lack of trust necessary for making their views known as the main reasons (S21 Committee, 1999).

Consequent to these surveys, two parallel efforts were undertaken to improve the national education (NE) system. The idea of active citizenship was also introduced to promote a greater sense of belonging and a willingness to contribute and serve, particularly among younger Singaporeans (Government of Singapore, 1999). Kluver and Weber (2003), in their research on the key economic policies and efforts undertaken by the Singapore government to create national unity and build "a national myth" for Singaporeans in a globalised world, concluded that the Singapore government has achieved economic success and political stability at the expense of social cohesion, identity, and patriotism. Other critics also questioned the efficacy of NE against the backdrop of other larger social and economic forces. Gopinathan and Sharpe (2004), in their examination of the past and present NE approach and systems undertaken by the Ministry of Education, noted the contradictions inherent in NE initiatives meant to engender a deeper appreciation of national security and public service in students against the backdrop of an emerging knowledge economy.

The above literature review on the larger political socialisation of Singaporean youth and its attendant challenges provide a better understanding of the context in which the participants of this research are situated. Clearly, the ideological ambiguities with respect to serving and defending the country among young Singaporean males must be understood in terms of deeper socio-political influences.

2.2.3 Social Factors – The Influence of Family and Significant Others

At the social level, future conscripts interact with those who have previously participated or who currently participate in military service. With military systems based on conscription, as is the case of Singapore, almost every future conscript has some contact with current or former conscripts: a father, brother, or friend. This

contact influences enlistees through behaviours, attitudes, and stories of their own military service (Dovrat, 1995, p. 55). Studies have shown that family and friends are particularly influential because they are more likely to be trusted and used as sources of information (Barrios-Choplin et al., 1999, p. 27; Pancer et al., 2000, p. 53) and support (Thompson & Gignac, 2001, p. 9). However, Gal (1986, p.100) opined that information from family and friends might be inaccurate and therefore harmful to conscripts' adjustment. Informational accuracy is important, as studies have shown that accurate and complete information prior to enlistment is related to positive expectations (Shaw, Fisher, & Woodman, 1983, p. 5), whereas inadequate and/or inaccurate information is likely to cause dissatisfaction (Fisher, Shaw, & Woodman, 1985, p. 10-11).

The influence of significant others and the ways they shape conscripts' attitudes for or against conscript military service is well documented (Hayden, 2000, p. 4; Shaw, Fisher, & Woodman, 1983, p. 32). Faris (1981, p. 551-558) noted that military offspring are twice as likely to enlist. These offspring demonstrate strong attachment and familiarity with values congruent with those advocated in the military (Janowitz & Little, 1974, p. 71). Conversely, family and friends may transmit negative attitudes towards military service to future conscripts. Janowitz and Little (1974, p. 71) concluded that negative attitudes towards the military usually stem from social factors, such as influence of family and friends, rather than from ideological factors. Understanding the influence of significant others on future conscripts' perception of military service is important to this study. Therefore, it explores two questions: How do significant others shape respondents' perspectives of NS prior to enlistment? And to what extent do they continue to play a pivotal role in influencing respondents during NS?

2.2.4   Personal Factors - Obligations and Personal Aspirations

At the individual level, future conscripts' perceptions of and responses to enlistment may be viewed from the perspective of involuntary transition and role identification theories. Enlistment in conscript military service is generally regarded by youth as an involuntary transition. The more involuntary the transition appears, the more it is likely to threaten youth's sense of control. Highly involuntary transitions may also induce individuals to lower their expectations and aspirations to reduce the chances of

being disappointed (Brandtstadter & Rothermund, 1994, p. 265-273). Following reactance theory (Brehm, 1993, p. 3-30), individuals may react against a threat to their perceived control by adhering to foregone alternatives even more. So how do youth's attitudes towards NS moderate their educational and career plans?

Although Ho and Chia's recent survey (2006, p. 37-53) has shown that young Singaporeans are proud of the SAF and are patriotic, these findings are an expression of youth's views when they are not forced to serve and thus cannot be translated to real behaviours and attitudes when they are. The same national poll also highlighted their aspirations to perform well in school and secure good careers perhaps in part due to parental pressure. Youth's desire to excel in school and the workplace and the requirement that they perform NS likely puts them in a dilemma. In this regard, Ashforth's (2001, p. 78) conception of ambivalence provides a useful analytical frame. He suggested that individuals are likely to become ambivalent about their impending roles if they partly identify and dis-identify with that identity. He identified five paths to ambivalence: 1) conflicts within role identity, 2) conflicts between multiple identities, 3) fear of loss of self, 4) protection of dualistic values, and 5) social stigma, which may help to develop and sharpen conversations with respondents in terms of their perspectives of NS prior to enlistment.

2.3   Coping with Military Conscription

The literature on the characteristics of military institutions acknowledges that the military environment is challenging for most people (Anderson, 1974, p. 20; Harris and et al., 2005, p. 2). Induction into the military is especially stressful for conscripts because recruits have to deal with the rigours of military training while living against their will in a highly controlled and authoritarian environment (Mechanic, 1974, p. 35). More recent literature on military-social development suggests that the youngest generations (Generation X and the Net Generation) will have an even more difficult time coping in the military because of increasing personal aspirations and differing values and attitudes towards authority (Dandeker & Strachan, 1993, p. 282-283; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005, p. 20). The current generation of recruits are also tech-savvy, which will pose an even greater challenge in terms of person-environment fit because of the increasing gap between the military's IT environment and the technologies young recruits use at home and in school (Hartman, Moskal, & Dziuban,

2005, p. 61-70). Therefore, how conscripts manage their NS experience cannot be understood without examining organisational, social, and personal factors. Organisational factors such as official rules, training regime, and personnel policy and processes directly influence the lives of conscripts in the military (Siebold, 1981, p. 4). Equally important are the peers and leaders who interact and shape the behaviours and attitudes of members of their group and the individual conscripts' personal traits (social and personal factors).

2.3.1 Studies on Conscripts' Adjustment to Military Service

Bourne (1967) suggested that army recruits go through four stages of socialisation: 1) environmental shock, 2) engagement, 3) attainment, and 4) termination. In the initial stage, recruits experience maximum stress because they are new to the environment. Fortunately, they gain confidence as they acquire the required skill sets. The terminal stage is typically depicted by a sense of self-confidence and a shift in focus towards future plans. Despite being relatively dated, Bourne's (1967) model contains valuable propositions. First, the concept of entry-shock highlights the unique entry experience of soldiers into military organisations, as compared to entry into civilian organisations. The dominant view indicates that the high level of stress of entering an unfamiliar environment makes soldiers more malleable to change (Feldman, 1976a; Katz, 1980; Wanous, 1980). However, to what extent such entry-shock may affect subsequent adjustment outcomes remains unclear. Second, Bourne's (1967) socialisation model provides a possible frame for analysing new conscripts' adjustment to military service from a stage model socialisation perspective. Unfortunately, Bourne's (1967) model does not delineate the role(s) played by individuals, the resultant changes in roles and individuals, and the magnitude of the influence of mandatory service on newcomers' response to the socialisation process.

Leong (1978) conducted a study to determine how Singaporean conscripts coped with their NS in the 1970s. Using a case study approach, he found that soldiers' adjustment followed a U-shaped curve that is typical of a person's adjustment in organisations in general. In the first 3 months, Leong observed that conscripts are still fresh and enthusiastic about the military environment. Therefore, in the beginning of military service, soldiers tend to be more satisfied and show positive attitudes towards various aspects of army life, such as uniforms, accommodation,

training, and the general feeling of having a good or bad time. As time passes, however, soldiers become more dissatisfied because the novelty of military service starts to dissipate with routinisation. In the last few months of NS, soldiers' enthusiasm starts to pick up again in anticipation of their impending release.

While Bourne's (1967) study pointed to the strength of structural factors in shaping soldiers' behaviours, Leong's (1978) study on Singaporean conscripts illustrated that individuals play an active role in the socialisation process. His conclusion that conscripts follow a U-shaped adjustment pattern because of routinisation, which causes boredom and hence the dip in adjustment outcome, may not have taken into account the influence of structural factors such as micro-transitions that typically occur in different stages of military service and the different roles conscripts assume.

Salo's (2008) study on Finnish conscripts examined the effects of micro-transitions during conscripts' military service on their adjustment patterns. Salo collected data from 2003 Finnish conscripts to examine the relationship between conscripts' expectation of adjustment and actual adjustment during their basic military service and later service and ways their adjustment changed over time. He found that four main dimensions of adjustment, affective commitment, sociability, physical health, and perceptions about obedience and regimentation, are responsible for 50% of the variance in adjustment expectation, 58% of the variance in basic training adjustment, and 61% of the variance in later adjustment. The identification of certain individual traits that affect adjustment and coping outcomes in Salo's study reinforces the idea that individuals play an active role in the socialisation process. The difference observed in basic training and later service adjustment outcomes also demonstrates the influence of micro-transitions on soldiers' overall adjustment outcomes.

Role identity also affects how conscripts adjust to and cope with their military service. Levy and Sasson-Levy (2008) interviewed 52 Israeli conscripts serving in combat roles, blue-collar positions (e.g., drivers and cooks), and white-collar positions (e.g., clerks) to determine how conscripts cope with military service based on placement. They found two categories of responses, conformity and obedience and conformity and subversion, which correlate to those in combat and non-combat roles, respectively. According to Levy and Sasson-Levy, those in combat roles are

motivated to serve because of role-expectation matching in that serving in combat roles allows conscripts to prove their masculinity and gain social prestige and acceptance. However, those serving in non-combat roles (white- or blue-collar positions) exhibit "patterns of ambivalence" in their behaviours largely because of their role-expectation mismatch.

The observed responses of participants in Levy and Sasson-Levy's (2008) study differ markedly from the responses of the Singaporean conscripts observed by Leong (1978) despite the fact that both studies adopted similar data collection approaches and methodologies. Clearly, Israeli youth are much more committed to military service based on their strong desire to take up combat roles, whereas Singaporean youth are less inclined to do so. At this juncture, the most probable explanation for this difference is the pre-enlistment socialisation process, as well as the different levels of political and military threat facing the two respective states. Earlier literature has demonstrated that Israeli youth are immersed in a more militarised environment compared to their Singaporean counterparts.

The above mentioned studies on conscripts' adjustment to and coping with military service highlight several key issues. First, structure-agency interactions exist in all stages of the socialisation process, as revealed by Bourne (1967) and Leong (1978). Second, pre-enlistment socialisation is critical in terms of its influence on conscripts' perceptions, which in turn will affect how these conscripts adjust to and cope with military service. This point is evident in Levy and Sassion-Levy's (2008) study of conscripts in the militarised Israeli society. Third, individual traits, such as acceptance of obedience and regimentation, as illustrated in Salo's (2008) study, are important factors in determining how conscripts cope with their military training even as they try to adjust to the demands of military life.

2.3.2 Social Factors

Leaders

Military commanders have been identified as crucial in terms of supporting conscripts. In his study on conscripts, Gal (1986, p. 97) noted that 91% of the recruits opined that having caring commanders is important. Similar studies have also noted that good relationships with commanders also account for shorter periods of perceived

stress at the beginning of service (Payne & Huffman, 2005, p. 159). Golding et al. (2001, p. 2) posited that the inherent authority and span of control bestowed on military commanders have significant effects on conscripts' adjustment process and turnover rates. Commanders plan and design training, which directly influences conscripts' experience of military service. Zurcher, Patton, & Jacobsen (1979, p. 84) contended that commanders do not have unlimited influence, as much of what they do is determined by the organisational structure and the policies that structure promulgates. In other words, the bureaucracy and impersonality of the military system may cause commanders to ignore recruits' needs. As an institution, the military system exerts substantial influence on members' behaviours; however, some researchers have maintained that soldiers' immediate leaders, such as squad leaders, wield significance influence over soldiers (Barrios-Choplin et al., 1999, p. 9-10; Janowitz & Little, 1974, p. 102) in terms of self-confidence, proactive orientation, and prosocial behaviours (Popper et al., 2004, p. 246-7).

In the Singaporean Army, the issue of squad leaders' maturity is a salient one. Often, squad leaders have little more time served than their men. Hence, squad leaders' ability to positively influence younger conscripts is debatable. In his study on Finnish conscripts, Salo (2008, p. 82-83) found that squad leaders with about 6 months more time served than their men are not the best choice for leadership. Being young and relatively immature, these squad leaders tend to focus on managing situations rather than their soldiers' welfare. Therefore, the issue of the quality of leaders is key. Leaders who have a wide range of leadership, social, and task competence can better support their men's ability to obtain the cultural knowledge and skills needed to cope in the military (Levine, Bogart, & Zdaniuk, 1996, p. 543). Good leaders induce their soldiers to achieve affective and organisational goals by using methods that build trust and enforce practices that adhere to institutional training standards (Gal, 1986, p. 115; Perry, Griffith, & White, 1991, p. 130-131).

Another aspect of a leader's influence is role modelling. The literature suggests that effective role models exhibit a commitment to share information, military competence, and concern and respect for subordinates (Farley & Catano, 2006, p. 288; Gal, 1986, p. 110). Gal (1986, p. 108, 115) argued that leaders' competence is the key to gaining subordinates' respect. A leader's competence is often manifested in

leadership by example where the leader himself presents "an image of soldierness par excellence" (Hockey, 1986, p. 31), which evokes admiration and respect in subordinates. At this juncture, little research has been conducted on the the impact of poor leadership on conscripts' adjustment outcomes, although some research has suggested that defective leadership is more likely to lead to maladjustment problems, such as attrition, poor motivation and morale, and extended sick leaves (Anderson, 1974, p. 48; Thompson & Gignac, 2001, p. 18). This begs the following question: To what extent does the perceived quality of immediate leaders affect conscripts' perception of NS and their ability to cope with training?

Peers

Peers in the military also play an important role in conscripts' adjustment and coping process. In the military, soldiers are organised into groups. Thus, peer-to-peer interaction (as part of the group formation process) is an intrinsic component of conscripts' socialisation. In the process of forming groups, the value of other group members' support is emphasised, as members rely on each other to learn new skills and other habits of the military to complete group-level tasks (Barrios-Choplin et al., 1999, p. 9). According to Gal (1986, p. 112), the process of forming teams and getting to know other members in the group creates a supportive social network that serves as a psychological buffer against existing anxiety in the largely authoritarian environment (Fleming et al., 1985, p. 329-336; Salo, 2008, p. 121). However, Katz and Khan (1978, p. 58) argued that the buffering hypothesis might not always be true. They found that the social aspects of team formation tie soldiers to their teams and induce the development of interdependent behaviours necessary for group task accomplishment. This process may create social pressure and shape conscripts' attributes. Hockey (1986, p. 36-37) extended this point by highlighting that military regimentation is unique in the sense that if somebody has not learnt the required knowledge or achieved the expected competence or behaves incorrectly, that is taken as a threat to group survival.

The argument that successful team formation is important is premised on the assumption that it not only creates a psychological buffer but also leads to positive development and adjustment outcomes (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993, p. 686; Pearlin, 1985, p. 44; Pierce et al., 1990, p. 174). Many social scientists have found that the team

formation process may fail, or lead to undesirable outcomes. Hervig, Vickers, & Bischoff. (1991, p. 4) observed that exposure to undesirable attitudes within a group can be contagious and that contact with recruits who hold negative attitudes can create adjustment problems for others, even those who did not perceive any problems before that contact. The literature highlights three possible sources of negative attitudes despite successful team formation: a rupture in the socialisation process that is ignited by less direct control and change in core activities (Hockey, 1986, p. 87), conscripts' engaging in tasks that are perceived as meaningless (Ingraham, 1983, p. 42), and the group's being allowed to redefine its values and actions in a way that is conducive to negligence and dereliction of duty (Winslow, 1999, p. 453).

The abovementioned studies highlight the complexity of the interactions between conscripts and their leaders and peers during the socialisation process. More critically, they call into question the value of social support for conscripts, a group largely comprised of relatively inexperienced squad/team leaders and their peers, who may not be very motivated to serve. Possible causes of rupture in the socialisation process therefore serve as useful references for understanding the complex social relationships influencing conscripts' adjustment outcomes and coping strategies.

2.3.3   Personal Factors

Personal Characteristics and Coping Styles

Relatively well acknowledged in the current literature is that personality affects coping style. While this research does not aim to discern the types of personality traits that affect conscripts' coping styles, appreciating the current thought on personality and coping abilities is nevertheless useful. According to Milgram (1991, p. 59), personality is defined as the "traits, needs, motives, goals, attitudes, interests, determining tendencies, and generalised dispositions of a personal-social character". Several theoretical models in the literature attempt to associate personality traits and coping styles. According to the mediating model, personality affects coping style (Hewitt & Flett, 1996, p. 410). Alternatively, the additive model perceives personality and coping style as independent factors contributing to maladjustment. In contrast, the integrative model views personality as interacting with certain coping styles to produce maladjustment (Hewitt & Flett, 1996, p. 411). No one model best explains the relation between personality traits and coping styles. However, this

research espouses the viewpoint that personality influences overall adjustment and coping styles. For example, Dovrat (1995, p. 6) found that low self-esteem, high frustration, problems with authority, and high aggression are often associated with disadvantaged soldiers who are likely to be lost through attrition. Conversely, soldiers with morale, discipline, and pride are likely to remain in service (Dawson et al., 1994b, p. 8; Hayden, 2000, p. 8).

In the literature on coping and personality, among the various personality traits, sociability, emotional stability, acceptance of authority, and achievement motivation are viewed as significant in terms of coping outcomes (Parkkola, 1999, p. 56, 62; Salo, 2004; Stouffer et al., 1949, p. 133; White et al., 1993, p. 105). Sandal et al. (1999, p. 382) asserted that social adjustment and sociability influence successful adjustment experiences. Their hypothesis is that socially sensitive people are better at using coping strategies adaptively, get along better with others, and are good team players (White et al., 1993, p. 105). According to Parkkola (1999, p. 56, 62), emotionally unstable conscripts have a higher risk of turnover, whereas effective fighters are more emotionally stable, dominant, and socially mature (Zook, 1996, p. 52). As for acceptance of authority, Antel, Hosek, & Peterson (1987, p. 3) proposed that soldiers inclined to accept authority and the military regime are more likely to adjust and complete their military service. Shaw, Fisher, & Woodman (1983, p. 23) defined achievement motivation as readiness for cognitive coping and suggested that it contrasts sharply with avoidance or more passive coping styles.

The main theoretical weakness in the personality-driven coping perspective is that it suggests that the coping process is independent of situational conditions. The literature reveals several methodological approaches to coping: the psychoanalytical, personality-based, and process approach (Aldwin, 1999; Lazarus, 2000). The first and second approaches focus on defence mechanisms and coping styles and assume that adaptation is a function of personal characteristics (Aldwin, 1999). However, Lazarus opined that situational factors influence coping and consequently advocated the process approach. The coping approach and its processes are flexible and responsive to environmental demands, as well as personal preferences. It views the manner in which individuals cognitively appraise situations as the primary determinant of how they cope (Lazarus, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984)

31

identified four types of appraisal: benign, threat, harm/loss, and challenge. All are influenced by circumstances and personal factors, such as beliefs, values, and level of commitment. The general consensus is that there are five types of coping strategies, though these are not mutually exclusive: the problem-focused, emotion-focused, social support, religious coping, and making-meaning strategies (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Berkman & Syme, 1994; Mikulincer & Florian, 1996; Monroe & Steiner, 1986).

Like most military organisations, the SAF has a very strong institutional culture that exerts significant influence over its members (Goffman, 1960; Greil & Rudy, 1984; Hollingstead, 1946). Therefore, one can reasonably conclude that the environment in which conscripts are placed will have a significant influence on their perceptions and coping strategies. The ways in which conscripts appraise their situation may comprise one or a combination of the appraisal types identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). For instance, a conscript may appraise entry into the military as both a challenge and a loss in terms of disruption to his education. Hence, while this research does not aim to identify the most effective coping strategies, the various types of coping strategies guide this research with respect to the appraisal processes that lead to the selection of coping strategies.

Identity and Commitment

Burke and Reitzes (1981, p. 84) hypothesised that variations in role performance are associated with different role identities and that behaviours and identities exist in a common reference frame. The notion of the common reference frame is similar to the idea of congruence or "fit" in the organisation. In their study of college students, Burke and Reitzes found that a common reference frame explained the relationship between identity and role performance. Studies of regular soldiers and conscripts have also found that positive person-organisation fit is directly related to higher motivation levels and better role performance in the military. Trainor's (2004) study on midshipmen in the United States Naval Academy found significant evidence suggesting that the greater the congruence, or fit, between organisations and individuals in terms of values, beliefs, attitudes, and role identities, the more positive the outlook midshipmen have in terms of their plans for military service. Levy and Sasson-Levy's (2008, p. 356-365) survey on Israeli military conscripts likewise found

that conscripts who identify strongly with combat roles perform well in elite combat units and that those who are assigned to non-combat roles tend to dismiss the importance of their contribution.

The relationship among role identities, common reference frame, and behaviours provides insight into factors influencing Singaporean conscripts' behaviours in NS. In the OS literature, a common reference frame may be founded on the congruence of the individual's and the organisation's values. This begs the following questions: How does this happen? What are the determinants that influence the congruence of values in the Singaporean context where the conscripts may not identify with their military roles and may not be committed to serve at the point of enlistment?

Burke and Reitzes (1981, p. 84) suggested that commitment drives people to seek congruence between identity and reflected appraisals from the social setting (Burke, 1991, p. 243). Burke and Reitzes (1981) argued that variances between an individual's and an organisation's values create dissonance which a committed individual would attempt to eliminate either by changing himself or the environment. The underlying assumption in Burke's (1991) proposition is that individuals must first be committed, which, in the case of Singapore conscription, is unlikely at the point of enlistment. So how does the process of seeking congruence take place in NS? Equally important is the question of how conscripts engender a greater sense of commitment to serve if they are unlikely to be committed in the first place?

According to Moreland and Levine (1982, p. 149), commitment (from the group) is the "acceptance of the individual's needs and values, positive affective ties to the individual, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the individual and to fulfil his or her expectations, and desire to gain or retain the individual as a group member". Based on Meyer and Allen's (1997) conception, commitment consists of affective, normative, and continuance components. Affective commitment refers to the person's emotional attachment and identification with the organisation, normative commitment refers to conscripts' feeling of obligation towards the organisation, and continuance commitment means an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation. While Meyer and Allen's (1997) definition of commitment lends clarity to the understanding of the constituents of commitment, how conflict between the

various components of commitment resolves itself remains unclear.

The literature on organisational commitment suggests that employees have multiple commitments (Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Lawler, 1992; Wallace, 1993). Muller and Lawler (1999) argued that employees do not become attached to an organisation but to its different sub-units. Drawing on attribution theories, Muller and Lawler contended that employees commit themselves in response to positive emotions. As such, employees are more likely to commit to proximate than distal units because they tend to attribute their positive emotional experiences to their immediate work environment. However, Wallace (1995b, p. 228-55) argued that commitment "distance" may not apply to professional commitment, which is underscored by professional norms and values rather than organisational work conditions.

Meyer and Allen's (1997) and Muller and Lawler's (1999) conceptions of commitment are congruent. These two concepts present the multiple dimensions of commitment. The above definitions indicate that commitment has both cognitive and socio-emotive aspects, which provide an added lens for this study to discern the complexities of socialisation in NS and ways it may engender a greater sense of commitment and congruence of values and identities in conscripts.

The literature on soldiers' commitment posits that the military creates identification and commitment that binds recruits with their units (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 72; Moskos, 1981, p. 5). Burke and Reitzes (1991, p. 242) found that the strength of commitment is correlated to the strength of the relationship between identity and behaviours. More importantly, the strength of commitment is not directed at maintaining a particular behaviour set but towards sustaining the identity associated with the behaviour set. As such, Burke (1991) opined that interference with highly salient identities to which one is committed will result in distress. To a large extent, Harris et al. (2005, p. 7) extended Burke's (1991) views. Harris et al. (2005) found that commitment is a good predictor of perceived stress, as it can be observed that committed recruits report lower stress levels than uncommitted soldiers. Other studies on soldiers' attrition have also pointed out that affective commitment is perhaps one of the strongest predictors of experienced stress and attrition (HumRRO, 2004, p. 111, 119, 300; Salo, 2008).

The literature review above suggests that commitment is the key to understanding how soldiers cope in the military. The argument that commitment supports performance is principally derived from the notion of the supremacy of the "human spirit" in overcoming adversity. While this may be so, there are other confounding factors, such as performance of the group and nature of the training, which may influence the outcome of soldiers' performance. The relationship among role identity, behaviours, and commitment influences conscripts' perception of congruence, and role identification and performance are complex and relevant to this research from the perspective of understanding how Singaporean conscripts appraise their NS experience, which will in turn shape their commitment and performance.

2.4   Effects of Military Service

The literature on the effects of military service has generally substantiated the perspective that the military experience has long-lasting influence and changes soldiers' personal characteristics and subsequent life achievement in terms of education and careers. Johnston and Bachman (1972) proposed that military service acts as a resocialising mechanism, stripping conscripts of unwanted identities and incorporating more resourceful and positive aspects into their global identities through new reference groups and primary group support. Sharp and Krasnesor (1968) opined that military service is akin to a psychological moratorium wherein enlistees acquire maturity, assertiveness, and self-direction. Some empirical studies have examined the impact of military service on the personal development and educational and career attainments of ex-soldiers. Although a review of these studies has shed light on the issue of military service influence on conscripts, how military service impacts personal development and educational enrolment and achievement remains unclear. This is because contextual factors, which vary from country to country, such as availability of systemic support, actual experiences, and positions assumed, play significant roles in shaping the outcome of military experience (Di Pietro, 2009; Elder, 1986; Keller, Poutvaara & Wagener, 2009; Lau et al., 2004; Leong, 1978; Nair, 1991, 1994).

2.4.1 Studies on the Influence of Military Service on Education, Income, and Achievement

In terms of the impact on education and income attainment as a result of military

service, Lau et al. (2004) argued that conscription creates long-term costs, as it impinges on young adults during the period where the greatest human capital accumulation occurs. Di Pietro's study (2009) found that abolishing compulsory military service increased university participation among young Italian males from more advantaged backgrounds, but it had a detrimental effect on the enrolment of men from less advantaged backgrounds. Buonanno (2006) analysed the effects of the abolition of compulsory military service in the United Kingdom in 1960 and found that men exempt from conscription experienced an increase in earnings of between four and seven percentage points, relative to those still drafted. Keller et al. (2009) analysed 22 OECD countries and found evidence that countries with conscription have consistently registered lowered rates of higher education enrolment. They opined that military service diminishes individuals' desire to continue their education for the following reasons: 1) If military service interrupts studies, it will take a longer time to complete higher education, 2) previously acquired skills and knowledge may depreciate during military service and their recovery would require extra education, and 3) military service shortens the active period on the job chosen.

Other related studies have identified the availability of systemic support and the actual experience of serving in the military as important determinants of whether a soldier will continue to pursue his education and succeed in life (Baskit & Strauss, 1978; Maclean, 2005; Teachman & Call, 1996). MacLean (2005) studied the effects of military service on college education for American soldiers serving between 1955 and 1965 and found that, in the absence of government funding, those veterans who were drafted were less likely to pursue higher education than non-veterans and veterans who volunteered. He also noted that military service disrupted the transition to adulthood among academically ambitious men, but had no net effect on men who had no plans of attending college. Studies on WWII and Korean War veterans yielded similar findings in that post-service attainment, such as years of collegiate attainment, was higher if benefit eligibility support structures, such as the G.I. Bill, were in place to support servicemen (Fligstein, 1976; Olson, 1974; Stanley, 2000).

The above studies suggest that conscription is more likely to discourage soldiers' desire to pursue higher education and that conscripts' lives and educational pathways are more likely to be interrupted when systemic support for continuing education is

lacking. This is a pertinent point because in the Singapore context, although the educational system is highly marketised and hence opportunities to study are readily available (Tan, 1998), special educational benefits or privileges for conscripts are limited. For instance, all conscripts have to compete on equal footing with the females of their cohort and foreigners, who need not serve in the military, for places in local universities or scholarships. Under these circumstances, conscripts' experience of NS becomes even more salient with respect to how NS may influence their decision to pursue higher education. Also important is to what extent the availability of financial support mitigates or influences conscripts' decision to pursue higher education.

In terms of income attainment, research on American soldiers drafted in WWII and the Korean War has indicated that military service presents new opportunities, directions, and beginnings for enlistees. Using a life course approach to study American veterans who were drafted into service in WWII and the Korean War, Elder (1986) concluded that military service allowed these young veterans occupational achievement equal to that of non-veterans and provided some with a brighter future even as it caused others death and injuries. Elder (1986) contended that at the personal level, military service provides enlistees with new options and experiences and exposes them to competent male models, group discipline, social responsibility, and a broader perspective associated with overseas deployment opportunities. At the process level, Elder (1986) argued that military service presents an opportunity to mitigate the impact of initial family and personal disadvantages. Elder's (1986) findings present a view that contradicts the earlier literature in that military service, while seemingly tending to harm educational trajectories, is likely to have a positive impact on economic attainment at a later stage. Important to note is that Elder's (1986) study focused on veterans who lived during the Great Depression and WWII era, and as such, his study may not be directly relevant to the impact of military service on soldiers who are financially well supported and would pursue studies and careers if not for the disruption by military conscription. Therefore, in the context of this study, the question is to what extent NS presents an opportunity or a disruption to Singaporean conscripts.

The relationship between military service and subsequent achievement may be understood from the perspective of military service influence on self-efficacy. Gade,

Lakhani, and Kimmel's (1991) research suggests that veterans view the military as beneficial to their sense of self, which is of value to them in the civilian labour market. Other researchers have argued that the military serves as a "bridging environment" whereby appropriate values and skills necessary for mainstream society are learned (Browning, Lopreato, & Poston, 1973; Magnum & Ball, 1987; Martindale & Poston, 1979). There is also evidence that the skills obtained during military service are transferable to the civilian world. Magnum and Ball (1987), for instance, argued that there will be greater transferability of technical skills from the military to the civilian sector given the increased sophistication of modern warfare. The implication of this argument is that soldiers, especially from lower income or educational groups, may potentially benefit from serving in the military. Agreeing that soldiers' perceived career opportunities are enhanced by military service, DeTray (1982) opined that employers appreciate the capabilities of those employees who have served in the military, thereby enhancing their overall employment opportunities. However, the validity of this conclusion is dependent on the prevailing civil-military relationship in Singaporean society and, more specifically, on the views held by employers and conscripts with respect to how they perceive the value and utility of the NS experience.

2.4.2 Studies on Military Service Influence on Singaporean Conscripts

Thus far, only three published studies focus on the effects of military service on Singaporean conscripts in terms of personal development, education, and career – and all were completed more than 17 years ago (Leong, 1978; Nair, 1991, 1994). These studies suggest that individuals do indeed develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy due to military training, as well as the military's strict regimentation and disciplined lifestyle. However, no evidence suggests that soldiers' educational or occupational attainment improves because of NS. Leong (1978) researched the impact of NS on the examination results of two cohorts (1971 and 1972) of university students. His study found no significant difference in the university examination results of three groups of students: students who had served NS, those who disrupted from NS, and those who did not serve. In the same study, Leong (1978) found that although NS had contributed to the positive development of those who served, especially in the area of physical health, NS's impact on personal development is contingent on the roles assumed by the conscripts. For instance, conscripts who held officer or leadership

appointments reported more positive development in terms of their skills. In contrast, conscripts who served in non-leadership posts, such as cooks, drivers, and clerks, were more cynical towards serving and had acquired some degree of negative attitudes towards work.

Nair (1991) conducted two studies on the impact of conscription on Singapore youth. In her first study, she surveyed 33 undergraduates who had already served. Her findings indicate that the respondents expressed concern over the delay and disruption to their education and personal life. In terms of personal development, Nair found that NS enhanced respondents' physical, psychological, and general understanding of self, improved their self-discipline and communication, organisational, and leadership skills, and increased their confidence in personal abilities. In her second study, Nair (1994) interviewed 20 military commanders to discern their views regarding the impact of NS on conscripts. They asserted that the military environment facilitates the development of self and group competence. Although both studies found congruence, Nair (1991, 1994) remarked that commanders' responses tended to focus on organisation-level outcomes and benefits, whereas the soldiers tended to look at NS from the perspective of their personal interests. This lends credence to the idea that soldiers and commanders hold slightly different views on the influence of NS. Nair's (1991) selection of undergraduates and use of surveys to collect data may pose problems in terms of data validity associated with retrospective data collection methods and the inability to distil deeper insights due to the lack of data density needed to uncover other confounding factors distinguishing individual conscripts. Accordingly, this study aims to understand how conscripts manage NS by interviewing them directly.

Although Nair's (1991, 1994) studies indicated that NS contributes positively to conscripts' personal development, Leong (1978) pointed out that actual experiences and roles might play an even more important role in the final outcome of soldiers' NS experiences. The differentiation of roles and tasks in NS is important to note during the data collection and analysis phases of this study. This is because differences in roles are likely to influence, as Leong (1978) suggested, conscripts' motivation, commitment levels, and coping strategies. In terms of actual military experiences, Lyons et al. (2006) found that those who served in Vietnam and those with increased

exposure to combat completed fewer years of formal schooling 30 years later. They opined that some of the potential processes might have lowered educational attainment, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or the interruption of social roles. In peacetime, the experience of NS in Singapore is unlikely to be as traumatic as that of Vietnam or other combat situations. Still, some do not cope well with the current NS system in Singapore (Cheok et al., 2000). Despite evidence suggesting that, in general, soldiers view NS as having a positive influence on their sense of self, which is of value to them in the civilian market (Nair, 1991, 1994; Soh, Chan & Ong., 2000), the ways in which positive and negative NS experiences affect conscripts' perception of their personal development, education, and careers is yet unclear.

2.5   Preliminary Theoretical Framework

In formulating a theoretical framework, cognisance must be taken of the main research question in this study: "What are young Singaporean males' perspectives on compulsory military training in relation to their personal lives, education and careers?" The three specific research questions are as follows: 1) What are conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal lives, careers, educational and development needs prior to enlistment? 2) How do conscripts perceive and cope with their 2-year conscription experience? 3) In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?

To help address these three research questions in the initial stages, a theoretical framework is proposed. As defined in this study, conscripts' perspectives of NS comprise their initial perceptions of NS, their commitment to serve, their appraisals of and coping with actual NS experiences, and the perceived influence of NS. The theoretical framework below (Fig 2.2) brings together salient findings of previous research to illustrate explanations of conscripts' perspectives in managing their NS experiences.

Socialisation Factors (before NS)	Process	Person
- Ideological, - Social (Family & Friends) - Personal **Socialisation Factors (in NS)** - Military environment - Culture, rules, training regime etc - Leaders & peers - Personality traits	- Organisational socialisation - Adjustment and coping	- Perceptions prior to enlistment - Appraisal (expectation vs reality) - Past experience - Roles & identity - Commitment - NS influence on Self

Figure 2.2. Proposed theoretical framework

The proposed theoretical framework envisages the issue of how conscripts manage their NS experiences in three inter-related domains, namely a. Socialisation factors, b. Process, and c. Person. In the domain of socialisation factors, these influence conscripts prior and during their military service. Previous research has suggested that ideological, social and personal factors influence young enlistees' perception of their impending military service. Once enlisted, it is found that organisational factors such as military culture, training regime, leaders, peers and individual personality traits play the important role of shaping the conscripts's perception and adjustment in the military. In this respect, the domain of socialisation factors serves as a useful conceptual guide for this research to identify those factors that influence the Singaporean conscripts prior and during NS. This identification provides a useful starting point for data collection instruments, especially the interview schedule, and data analysis. Another component of the framework is the process domain, which consists of organisational socialisation, individual adjustment and coping processes. The process domain highlights the critical processes that typically exist in most oranisational socialisation processes, and therefore can be adapted to guide the data collection and analysis of this research with respect to the conscripts' adjustment and development over the 2-year NS period. Lastly, the conceptualisation of the person domain lends clarity and focus to how individual conscripts manage their NS experiences. The person domain emphasises the individuals' role in the entire

socialisation process. Previous studies have identified factors such as a. individuals' perception before and during NS, b. self-appraisal, c. one's past experiences, and d. roles in NS - as important in terms of influencing the conscripts' adjustment and development outcomes. This research will leverage on these factors as a guide in the formulation of its interview questions in the data collection stage. In summary, the three domains of socialisation factors, process and person tie together the environmental (organisational), the individual and the interactions between them, into a conceptual framework that allows the exploration of the conscripts' adjustment and development prior to and during their time in NS.

In conclusion, this chapter has reviewed the relevant literature on the issue of conscripted military service and provided an indepth perspective on the arguments and findings put forward by previous studies. At this juncture, there are only three published works on Singaporean conscripts - the last one being 17 years ago! In this respect, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap considering that the conditions in the SAF and the profile of its conscripts would have changed considerably. This study is also significant because it is the first qualitative research using grounded theory to study the issue of Singaporean conscripts. It is hoped that the theory that emerges from the data will lend a new perspective to the issue of how the conscripts in the SAF manage their two-year NS experience.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research aims to study young Singaporeans' perspectives on compulsory military training in relation to their personal lives, careers and education. Taking into account its small scale, this study seeks to develop a substantive theory as to how the sample of conscripts selected for study manage their NS experience, and how they see NS affecting their future education, lives and careers.

The present chapter describes the methodology of the study in detail. It examines the theoretical assumptions and relevance of the paradigm of interpretivism to this study, explains the choice of grounded theory methodology, and lays out the research's sampling strategy, methods of data collection and analysis. This chapter is organised into 11 sections (excluding introduction): (1) educational research paradigms: interpretivism versus positivism; (2) symbolic interactionism and research questions; (3) research setting; (4) grounded theory methodology; (5) theoretical sampling; (6) data collection; (7) data analysis; (8) trustworthiness of the research; (9) ethical considerations; (10) limitations of the study; and (11) summary.

3.1   Educational Research Paradigms: Interpretivism and Positivism

Educational research approaches, whether quantitative or qualitative, are based on certain underlying paradigms. A paradigm can be defined as a set of philosophical assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes 'valid' research, and which research methods are appropriate for a given investigation (Kuhn, 1970; Usher, 1996). Two main types of paradigm in education research are positivism and interpretivism. Central to positivism is the belief in the existence of an external reality that is independent of people (Popkewitz, 1980). The notion of truth corresponds to an existing reality. As such, knowledge and truth are merely questions of correspondence with respect to an external referent reality (Smith, 1993). Implied in this perspective is that social reality exists under a set of established 'facts' that can be discovered through the use of scientific methods similar to how a scientist would study the natural world. Positivism sees the construction of social reality as being underpinned by

causal relationships, and focuses on the universality of law-like relationships in order to explain human behaviour and phenomena in their setting (Lee, 1991).

In positivist thinking, the physical world and social events are analogous, in that researchers can study social phenomena as they do the physical world. Hence, from a methodological viewpoint, positivists regard the proper application of quantitative or objective methods of inquiry as the only way to produce reliable and valid knowledge. The application of empirical methods is essential to producing knowledge (Babbie, 1993; Walker & Evers, 1999) because empirical methods specify how scientific investigation is formulated and conducted without ambiguity. For instance, empirical methods seek to distil the relationships between dependent and independent variables through a set of hypotheses; the process of hypothesis testing and elimination is deemed as inherently self-correcting and rigorous (Borg & Gall, 1996). As such, this methodology generates 'objective' knowledge that constitutes an accurate description of reality to be qualified as accepted truth. To a positivist, knowledge is only significant if it is based on observations of this external reality.

Interpretivism sees social reality not as objective and exterior, but as socially constructed and given meaning by people (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Constructs such as culture, social norms and languages are building blocks with respect to one's views of the world. In interpretivist thinking, therefore, social realities are defined by meanings derived from social interactions. Given that people can draw different meanings from the same social interaction, interpretivism proposes that there are multiple realities, not a single reality of a phenomenon, and that these realities can differ across time and place. In contrast to positivism, interpretivists reject the notion of mind-independent reality and argue that hypotheses and norms defining social realities are constructed as a product of theorising, and this theorising itself shapes and affects reality (Walker & Evers, 1999). In other words, knowledge is derived from meaning established in the context of a social interaction, and it is not something that is external to people waiting to be discovered by scientific experimentation (Williamson, 2000). All knowledge is, therefore, mind dependent, culturally contextual, personalised and intertwined with the self of the inquirer (Smith, 1989). Knowledge comprises of multiple sets of interpretations that are part of the social and cultural context in which it occurs.

The underlying assumption of interpretivism is that the whole picture – the phenomenon to be studied in relation to its full context – needs to be examined in order to understand a social phenomenon. Social research, therefore, is about understanding and uncovering the complex interplay of social, cultural and political factors. The thrust of interpretive research methodology exists in determining how and why people act and what sense they make of given situations, rather than acting directly in response to external stimuli.

Based upon the above comparisons of positivism and interpretivism, the researcher determined that interpretivism is compatible with the purposes of this study, which are predominantly centred on examining issues that relate to conscripts' perspectives and their NS experiences in the context of a military setting. In more specific terms, the purposes of this study are as follows:

- to determine the conscripts' perspectives of NS in relation to their personal development, study and career plans, prior to their enlistment into NS;
- to identify how conscripts cope with the diverse challenges of NS, during the two-year NS period; and
- to identify the factors, circumstances and social interactions during the NS period that, according to the conscripts, influenced their personal development, study and career plans.

3.2   Symbolic Interactionism and the Research Questions

From an epistemological standpoint, interpretivism is compatible with symbolic interactionism. The central premise of symbolic interactionism holds that individuals develop a sense of self through interactions with others (Mead, 1964). The essential feature of self is the notion of reflexivity that enables humans to reflect on themselves and evaluate their behaviours. Blumer (1969) articulated three core principles to this theory:

- Humans act towards people and things based on the meaning that they have given to these people and things;

- Language gives humans a means to negotiate meanings. It is by engaging in speech or acts with others that humans come to identify with the meanings of the interaction; and

- Humans' interpretation of symbols and their meanings are manipulated through an interpretive thought process.

The principles governing symbolic interactionism have significant influence on the framing of the research questions, assumptions and methodology adopted in this study. To recap, the specific research questions presented in this study are as follows:

1. What are conscripts' perspectives on NS in relation to their personal lives and careers, and their education and development needs, prior to enlistment?

2. How do conscripts perceive and cope with the two-year conscription experience?

3. In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?

The following assumptions underscored each of the specific research questions. First, it is assumed that the conscripts' perspectives and how they manage their military experience can be meaningfully understood from a symbolic interactionist perspective – that is, through a personal interpretive process. The interpretive process may be understood as having two stages (Blumer, 1969). In the first stage, a person interacts in a communication process with himself or herself with respect to the meanings of phenomena. In the second stage, the person "…selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he [or she] is placed…" (Blumer, 1969, pp 4f). Next, it is assumed that the conscripts' experience of NS is necessarily situated within a larger social context. Interaction with commanders and peers, therefore, forms part of the interpretive process that concerns the ways conscripts interpret, understand and cope with military instruction, culture and values. According to Hoffman (1987), such interactions facilitate the understanding of social knowledge that "provides the basis for the mutual understanding of intentions and actions" (Hoffman, 1987, pp. 231). Third, given that conscripts spend most of their time in the military base during the two-year NS period,

it is assumed that the actual NS experience constitutes an important component of the conscripts' internal rationalisation and learning processes that influence changes in their personal development as well as their perspectives towards life goals, such as career aspirations and education plans.

Field and Morse (1985) emphasise the importance of methodological relevance to the research problem and the congruence of the researcher's epistemological focus. For this study, qualitative research methods are deemed to be most compatible with the principles of symbolic interactionism. Qualitative research methods are centred on the revelation, development and understanding of inter-subjective meaning based on "consensual norms and expectations" (Mezirow, 1981, pp. 3), and are therefore well-suited to examine complex human social systems. This assertion also is based on the premise that the conscripts' experience of NS takes place within a complex social situation that is not definitive, too fluid to permit systemisation. The knowledge sought and methods deployed should therefore reflect and support this claim.

3.3   Research Setting

A key element of conducting meaningful qualitative research is understanding the study's context. Qualitative research design is generally non-interventionist in facilitating study of the issue in its natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, the SAF is a large organisation, comprised of three different services: the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. There is a need to identify and scope out the research site to enable the chosen sampling strategy to be implemented. For this study, the research site is situated within the Army, which is the largest service and the main agency responsible for training conscripts.

Of the estimated 13,000 conscripts (also known as National Servicemen or NSF) who are called up for NS every year, about 95% of the conscripts are assigned to Army combat units to undertake a two-year combat training regime. Depending on their academic qualifications, leadership and soldiering qualities, these conscripts are streamed into various leadership and vocational training schools (officer cadet school, specialist school and various vocational schools) after the basic military training phase

(BMT) to be trained as officers, specialists or soldiers (commonly referred to as 'other ranks').

At the end of BMT, conscripts are streamed into officer/specialists/other ranks tracks.
Main selection criteria:
 a. Performance in BMT;
 b. Educational Qualification;

Position (Rank)

	Officer Cadet	Platoon Commander (Second Lieutenant)	Officer Track
Recruits	Specialist Cadet	Platoon Sergeant (Sergeant)	Specialist Track
	Trainee	Trooper (Lance Corporal or Corporal)	Other Ranks Track

Pre-Operational Training Phase (0 - 12 months)

Operational Training Phase (12-24 months)

Transition into reserves

Basic Military Training (7-9 weeks – Common to all)

Vocational or Leadership Training (~3-9 months)

Unit Posting

Figure 3.1 – Training Profile for National Servicemen

The time spent on leadership and vocational training varies considerably depending on the types of courses and training. For instance, conscripts selected for officer cadets training undergo a 38-week course, whereas the specialist cadets undergo a 3- or 6-month course for basic and advanced specialist courses, respectively. Upon the successful completion of their leadership or vocational training, conscripts are promoted in rank to recognise their newly-acquired competence and status. Those who failed are 'revocationalised' to combat or administrative roles, depending on their medical status. In the units, conscripts are assigned various junior leadership and vocational positions where they serve out the remainder of their two-year NS (See Fig 3.1). Quite evidently, therefore, the transition from one phase to another, and the roles

and positions held by the conscripts, are important factors that determine how conscripts experience NS.

3.4   Grounded Theory Methodology

In essence, grounded theory is a qualitative research strategy that aims to generate theory inductively from data (Punch, 2005). The present study adopts the grounded-theory approach for two main reasons. First, the research aims to generate a substantive theory with regard to how conscripts manage their NS experience. Unlike other approaches that may focus on theory verification, the grounded theory approach is designed to generate theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.23) observe:

> ...[grounded theory] is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon…[the methodology] does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, [it] begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge… (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23)

The grounded theory method (GTM) is a systemic, inductive and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of building theory. This study adopts the method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which is designed to encourage the researchers' interaction with the data, thereby generating theory that is 'grounded' in data. According to the principles of the methodology, the researcher frequently has to return to the field of study to gather additional data, which are then analysed and compared with previously collected data. "…The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical…"(Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.1). By alternating induction and deduction, the iterative process causes the researcher to frame and reframe the research hypotheses at each succeeding stage. The emphasis on the dual interaction of the agent-actor and action in grounded theory also leads researchers to attend to the process rather than assuming the structure (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

The grounded-theory methodology is thus a form of inductive analysis suited to investigation of complex situations with multiple interacting factors and/or areas about which little is known or about which no pre-existing theory or research exists. At this juncture, almost all the accessible research on conscripts and their military training experience in the SAF is focused primarily on the psychological aspects of the soldiering experience (Cheok et al., 2000). Very little is known about the deeper experiential aspects of conscripts' learning and impacts on their personal development in terms of education, career and personal lives, after the interruption of military service.

The application of the grounded theory method in the present study is elaborated upon further in the next few sections of this chapter.

3.5   Theoretical Sampling

Researchers using grounded theory attach great importance to the issue of sampling. The principle of theoretical sampling in grounded theory is centred on the idea of 'dialectic interaction' between data collection and data analysis (Punch, 2005). Theoretical sampling stresses that subsequent data collection should be guided by theoretical development that is emergent in the analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.45) describe theoretical sampling as "…the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses the data, and decides what data to collect next and where to find it, in order to develop the theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory…".

Fundamentally, theoretical sampling is different from other methods in that it is responsive to the data rather than established before the research begins. With theoretical sampling, the researcher has the flexibility to follow the lead of the analysis, and collect data from multiple sources with the objective of saturating the concepts. In this regard, the sampling is not confined to a single source of data nor is it limited by any pre-determined sample size. Data collection aims to gather information from people, places and events that will maximise opportunities to develop concepts (and thus theory), and to achieve theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical saturation is reached when further data produces no new

50

theoretical development. In this sense, saturation is necessary to ensure that the theory is complete. However, to achieve theoretical saturation by letting the data guide the next sample group may be time consuming and pose a challenge, given the limited time available to do this doctoral study. Instead, the adopted sampling strategy for this study has incorporated the principles of theoretical sampling with maximum variation sampling.

Maximum variation sampling is a form of purposeful sampling underpinned by the notion that extreme data points will gravitate towards the mean – the principle of regression. It involves deliberately seeking out cases that differ from each other; that is, participants who hold views and have experiences that extend across a wide range in relation to the phenomenon being investigated. Thus, this form of sampling suits studies with a small sample size where traditional methods, such as random sampling, are ineffective. More important, maximum variation sampling is congruent with theoretical sampling ideals in that the variations and properties in the various groupings of soldiers are in themselves rich sources of information that can add depth and force a range of comparisons while facilitating the formulation and generation of concepts—the key aim of theoretical sampling (Gall & Gall, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Hence, this study's sampling strategy seeks to capture a wide range of views in order to develop a theory, rather than capture a large sample size in order to be able to generalize.   To achieve this aim, the adopted sampling strategy incorporates the principles of combining theoretical sampling along with maximum variation sampling.

3.5.1 Criteria for Selecting Respondents

In terms of sample size and selection of samples, there are two important considerations: (a) flexibility; and (b) selection of a group of 'appropriate' participants, who not only have first-hand experiences of NS but also vary widely in terms of their 'characteristics' (Morse, 2007).   This study sampled about 21 participants from the three tracks (officers, specialists and other ranks) of the same cohort. These participants have completed their pre-operational phase and are serving their time in units (operational phase) (See Fig 1). In this respect, the participants would have gone through a good part of their NS experience to be able to give

accurate and meaningful accounts of how they have coped with NS in the first and second year, and how NS has impacted them (Ashforth, 2001).

To maximise the sample variation, participants' selection was based on the key dimensions below (Table 3.1). A form of stratified variation sampling was used. However, there was a need to maintain flexibility by ensuring that the sampling plan also catered to additional participants resulting from new conceptual leads that arose from the first group.

Table 3.1 Key Sampling Criteria

Sample Dimensions	Sample Dimension Description	Remarks
Highest Academic Achievement	Academic achievement (2 groups) – Conscripts with Cambridge A-Level, Diploma or higher certification; and those with secondary school or lower educational level.	Academic achievement and SES greatly influence conscripts' educational, career and personal aspirations (Ho & Chia, 2006).
Social Economic Status (SES)	Monthly household income grouping (3 groups) – High 20% [> $6000]; Middle 60% [$2000-$6000]; Lower 20 % [< $2000] {based on 2007 Singapore National Statistics}.	
NS Track	NS Track (3 tracks) – Officer Track; Specialist Track; and Other Ranks.	The Officer and Specialist Tracks focus on leadership development, whereas the Other Ranks track is oriented towards basic soldiering skill sets. Specialists can be seen as mid-level leaders with specific vocational expertise. Clearly, various track categorisation will define the overall NS experience for the conscripts.

Based on the above, 21 participants were selected from different units across the Army. The process of identifying and selecting the participants was as follows:

- The researcher approached the commanders for their support. An explanation of the purpose and methods of the research was provided.
- Commanders helped to identify potential participants based on the profile provided by the researcher (See Table 3.2).
- Researcher established initial contact with potential participants, explained the research purpose and methods, and sought voluntary participation.

- Researcher scheduled interview sessions with participants. The respective unit manpower officers were kept informed of the interview schedule. For confidentiality reasons, the unit manpower officers were not privy to the details of the interview or research.

- Commencement of interview sessions based on the interview schedule and design (See Section 3.7.4).

- Upon completion of all the interviews, letters of appreciation were sent to the commanders. Participants were given a small gift as a token of appreciation for their participation.

The profiles of the participants are listed in the table below:

Table 3.2– Participants' Profiles

Code ID	Track Category	Education Qualification	Social Economic Status (SES)
P01	Officer	GCE A Levels	High
P02	Officer	GCE A Levels	High
P03	Officer	Diploma	Middle
P04	Soldier	GCE A Levels	Middle
P05	Specialist	Diploma	Low
P06	Specialist	Diploma	Low
P07	Specialist	GCE O Levels	Middle
P08	Soldier	GCE O Levels	Middle
P09	Soldier	GCE O Levels	High
P10	Specialist	GCE O Levels	Low
P11	Soldier	GCE A Levels	Low
P12	Specialist	GCE A Levels	High
P13	Soldier	GCE A Levels	High
P14	Specialist	Diploma	Middle
P15	Specialist	GCE O Levels	High
P16	Soldier	GCE O Levels	Low
P17	Officer	GCE A Levels	Low
P18	Officer	Diploma	Middle
P19	Specialist	GCE O Levels	Middle
P20	Soldier	GCE O Levels	Middle
P21	Specialist	GCE O Levels	Middle

3.6   Data Collection

In grounded theory, data collection methods should support the development of theory that is grounded, systematically gathered and analysed. The data collection methodology in this study is based on documentary study and semi-structured interviews.

3.6.1 Documentary Study

According to Hammersely and Atkinson (1995, p.323), documentary study in qualitative research can provide a 'rich vein for analysis'. As a source and means of data collection, it is unobtrusive and allows the researcher to gain insights into the participants' background and other relevant areas that may facilitate the validating process and expand upon the data provided by the participants.

In conjunction with other data collection methods, documents can also be important in triangulation. Mathison (1988, p. 13) points out that "…triangulation has become an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and [to] establish valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology...". Hence, besides asking the participants to authenticate the accuracy of the interview recording – that is, through member checking – the researcher also sought out other documentary sources for the purposes of verifying the participants' account of their NS experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the present study, the researcher referenced three other sources of information: (a) personal reflections; (b) soldier performance record; and (c) commander's interview booklet. Prior permission to access these materials was sought from the relevant authorities and the participants (see ethics section 3.10). The use of the data in these documents was for the purposes of triangulation and investigation of any data inconsistencies. For instance, through the process of triangulation, the researcher managed to clarify some inconsistencies regarding a participant's (P05) description of his attitude towards NS and his commander's perception of the soldier's (P05) attitude towards military service. In P05's interview booklet, his commander had recorded a negative remark regarding P05's attitude towards training. Unknown to P05's commander, however, was the fact that P05's performance was affected by an injury sustained during training. P05 had decided to hide this fact from his commander out of concern that he (P05) might not be accepted for the impending pilot selection test. In his personal reflection, P05 noted that he was very concerned about not qualifying for pilot training as it had always been his dream to be a military pilot; it was the possible failure to fulfil this ambition that made him reluctant and unsure about confiding in his

commander. The above example illustrates how cross comparison of different data sources can add depth to the researcher's knowledge and understanding of a complex social phenomenon.

3.6.2   Interviewing

In this study, interviewing was selected as a method of data collection not just to get answers to the research questions, but also to "…have an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience…" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). In-depth interviewing also has allowed the researcher to access the context in which the conscripts' actions and experiences are situated. The basic assumption here is that people act based on the sense they make of their experiences (Blumer, 1969). As such, it is important for researchers who use interviews to keep check of their personal ego and be sensitive to what is emerging between the interviewees and themselves in the interview sessions. However, it is never possible to understand another perfectly, because to do so would mean that we would be that other person. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers should strive to comprehend their interviewees to the fullest possible extent (Schutz, 1967).

Although there are many types of interview methods, this study uses a semi-structured interview approach for two important reasons. First, it allows the interviewees to reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study while creating an opportunity to explore the participants' narration to those questions yielding 'thick and dense' data. Second, the 'structure' in this study is characterised by the estimated time for each interview session, the spacing of about 6-9 months between interviews, and the use of aides-memoires. This methodical choice intends to exercise a sensible degree of balance and control over the interviews, which otherwise may run the risk of taking up too much time or losing focus. McCracken (1988) emphasised the importance of structure in achieving "…a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the participants to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work…". For example, in the interview with P04, the notion of social capital was broached. The researcher believed that the concept of social capital was important and decided to 'chase' this theoretical lead in the follow-up interviews.

In this sense, the researcher felt the need to impose a degree of 'structure' into the interview in order to glean the required information.

3.6.3   Pilot Study

To test the validity and clarity of the research questions, a pilot interview was conducted with two conscripts separately. The pilot interview (S) was tape-recorded, and the transcripts were sent via email to the interviewees for verification. Interviewee feedback about the conduct of the interview also was requested.

The recorded interview allowed the researcher to refine the interview questions to ensure accuracy and relevance (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All questions that were found to be too vague or closed were adjusted. For example, the question '*What do you think of NS?*' was too vague and was further fractured into sub-questions, such as '*How would you describe your NS experience?*', '*What are your views about serving NS ?*' and '*Do you see the need for NS*?' On the other hand, all closed questions such as '*Does NS contribute to your personal development?*' were revised to more open-ended questions, such as '*In what ways, if at all, has NS influenced your personal development?*'

The pilot interview also allowed the researcher to examine and refine interviewing skills and the mechanics of the interviewing process in order to build trust and rapport. During the pilot interviews, for example, the researcher found that having some food snacks available in the interview room reduced participant anxiety levels and served as effective 'ice-breakers'. Other useful feedback included behavioural tics to avoid, such as 'looking at watch' and 'tapping on notebook', which would be negatively perceived by the interviewees as signs of impatience and lack of sincerity.

3.6.4   The Interviews

For the present study, a one-to-one interview was adopted over other methods, such as focus groups, because it allowed the researcher to sense and tease out contextual information as well as information that may be sensitive, including participant non-verbal and emotional cues (Mishler, 1986). Every participant was interviewed at least twice, each interview lasting about an hour, over a period of six to nine months in order to secure pre- and post-experience data (See Fig 3.2).
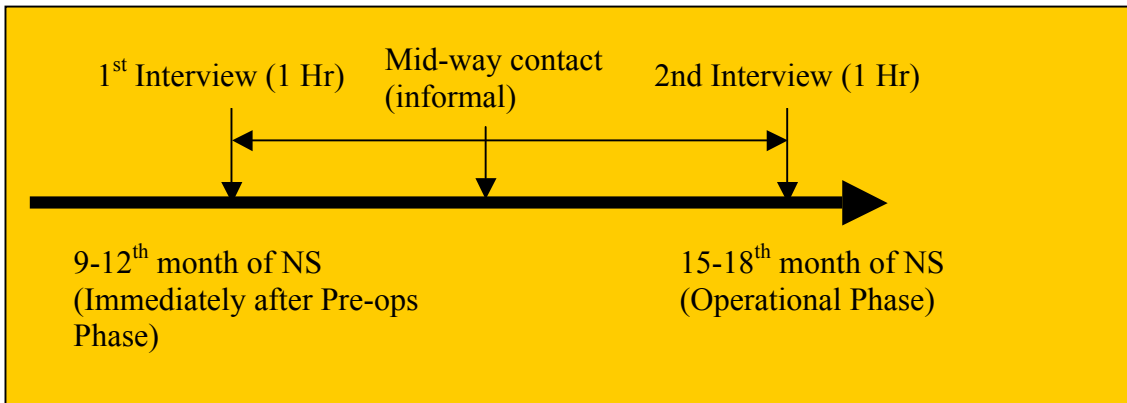
Figure 3.2 – Interviews & Contact Schedule

Of course, securing high quality data via interviews is not without challenges. For instance, the most data-dense interviews are often those that are unstructured and not dictated by any predetermined set of questions (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Admittedly, for a novice researcher, conducting unstructured interviews is not an easy task. The researcher experienced what many qualitative researchers have experienced: awkward moments of long silence during the interview or interviewees saying very little during the interviews even though they have agreed to be interviewed (Mishler, 1986; Schutze, 1992). Fortunately, these problems were largely addressed once a rapport with the participants was established. On reflection, the researcher agrees with the point that, from the participants' point of view (especially given the relative youth of the participants in this study), they usually want some guidance about the nature of the research and information sought. Totally unstructured interviews therefore may cause some degree of confusion. Structured interviews, on the other hand, may be merely an extension of the researcher's expectations. Therefore, this study has rightly adopted a semi-structured approach for interviewing participants (Corbin & Morse, 2003). They key to this approach lies in finding the right balance—providing the participants enough 'structure' to expand on their experiences without dictating to them what to say (Goulding, 1999).

In seeking to achieve the objectives of each interview, two sets of aides-memoires were designed. These aides-memoires serve to remind the researcher of the objectives of the interview, therefore assisting in maintaining focus. The researcher was also careful to facilitate a free-flowing conversation, hence not all questions in the aides-memoires were asked. During the interview, the researcher was also constantly looking for interesting and relevant information offered by the participants – a point

emphasised by Glaser (1978), who called upon researchers using grounded theory to always be ready for such serendipitous opportunities.

As mentioned earlier, two sets of interviews were scheduled for each participant. The first interview had the following objectives: (i) to introduce the purpose and aim of the research; (ii) to establish rapport; and (iii) to obtain general information from the participants. The first interview also was supported by an aide-memoire (See Table 3.3).

Table 3.3– Aide-memoire for first interview

Aide-memoire
First Interview
[Objective: To establish initial rapport and stage setting]

- Explain what the study is about and answer questions about the research aims, involvement, procedures, confidentiality issues etc.
- Induce the interviewee to talk about what he does currently, family background, etc.
- Induce the interviewee to reflect about his NS experience thus far.

[Objective: To establish a baseline understanding of what conscripts' perspectives of NS are prior to enlistment.]

- Ask him about his preparation for transition into NS. Concerns and preparation.
- Ask him about his personal development, study and career plans prior to enlistment.
- Ask him about his personal views and beliefs regarding NS and its purpose.
- Ask him about his personal views about the purpose and need for NS prior to enlistment.
- Ask him about his views on serving NS in relation to his personal development, study and career plans.

[Objective: The intent here is to determine the range of coping strategies adopted by conscripts in NS.]

- Ask him to describe his experiences of military training and military life.
- Ask him to recall/relate events or incidents that have had a large impact or most influenced his NS experience.
- Ask him about coping strategies, if any, that he used to cope with military training and way of life in the training units.
- Ask him to identify persons who have influenced or assisted him in coping with the military training.

The first interview was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and sent to the interviewees by email for verification. The researcher also made slight changes to the selection of words used during the interview. The second interview was scheduled about 6-9 months later subject to availability of the interviewees. In between the two interviews, the researcher called on the participants mainly for the purpose of keeping in touch and building a stronger rapport. The researcher also took opportunities to check on the participants' status in terms of new assignments, postings, and other developments that might have been of interest or relevance to the research. For instance, in one of the calls, the researcher was informed by the unit manpower officer that a particular participant (P01) had sustained serious injuries in training, and had to withdraw from the research. For this case, although there was insufficient reaction time to look for a new participant, the researcher was still able to make use of the data collected in the first interview for analysis.

The objectives of the second interview were as follows: (i) to induce the interviewee to talk about his military experiences since the first interview; (ii) to induce the interviewee to talk about how his overall military experiences had influenced his personal development, career and study plans; and (iii) to provide closure to the interviewee's participation in the research. Like the first interview, an aide-memoire was prepared for the second interview taking into account new 'leads' mentioned in the first interview (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 – Aide-memoire for second interview

Aide-memoire
Second Interview

- Induce the interviewee to reflect on his NS experience since the first interview.
[Note: Settle in with the interviewee]
- Ask him to describe his experiences of military training and military life since the first interview.
- Ask him about his challenges and success stories in NS.
- Ask him about coping strategies, if any, that he used to cope with military training and the way of life in the operational units.
- Ask him to identify persons that have influenced or assisted him in coping with the military training.
[Note: Establish the nature of new military experiences and how interviewees have coped.]

- Ask him about his personal views of NS and its purpose, and if he believes in NS.
- Ask him about his personal development, study and career plans (changes if any? and why?)
- Ask him how he sees serving NS influencing his personal development, study and career plans at this juncture.
- Ask him how his peers/commanders may have influenced his choices of study and career plans.
- Ask him how he prepared for his transition from NS.

[Note: To establish how new military experiences have further influenced the conscripts in such a way that may cause some to change their original plans]

Thank the interviewee for his participation

3.6.5   The Researcher's Positioning

According to Griffith (1998, pp. 361), an insider is "…someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her [sic] a lived familiarity with the group being researched…", while the outsider is "…a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group…" . From this standpoint, the researcher may be considered as an insider because he is an in-service officer, with experience, views on, and responsibility for, soldiers serving NS. Also implied in this statement is that the researcher should be in a better position to establish rapport and trust with the participants because of the familiarity factor (Merton, 1972). Therefore, the obvious advantages of being an

insider are the researcher's access and ability to discern relevant information from the data.

Hannabus (2000) contends that the insider researcher has the unique advantage of being able to tease out the power structures and subtexts of the company because of familiarity with the organisational culture and workplace 'scripts'. In this study, the researcher found that, although familiarity with the organisational cultures and workplace did somewhat enhance the understanding and communication during the interview, it did not automatically translate to having access to more sensitive or intimate information. The researcher noted that the degree of openness by the participants was dependent on the issue or topic of conversation in relation to the participants themselves. For example, whilst some participants were very candid with their comments about military rank and power structures, others chose not to comment at all. Under these circumstances, the researcher had little choice but to try to engage the participants on the same issue at a later stage to avoid being intrusive.

On reflection, as much as the researcher tried to leverage the 'benefits' of being an insider, the researcher agrees with Mercer's (2007) sentiments; the perceived advantages of being an insider can be contested. Foremost, the researcher cannot completely discount the fact that his personal experience may produce 'blind spots' and his position in the military may influence the participants' responses either directly or indirectly. An example of a 'blind spot' is the researcher's personal views about 'good' and 'bad' soldiers and their behaviours in the military. There is a tendency to associate 'bad' soldiers to poor performance and being ill-disciplined without due consideration about to how these soldiers perceive the situation and people around them. To mitigate these problems, self-awareness is important. The researcher asking for verification and feedback from the participants after each interview session helped enhance this self-awareness.

The power relationship between the researcher and participants is another important factor that may potentially skew or distort the conversation during the interview. In this study, the respondents were aware of the researcher's position as a senior officer in the SAF, and thus, the researcher's position potentially may have intimidated the respondents, affecting their behaviours during the interview. To mitigate this problem,

the researcher took great care to ensure that the participants were not intimidated by his position. The researcher was careful to hold all interviews outside of the military compound and wore civilian attire for all sessions; the intent was to minimise visible traces that might remind the participants of the researcher's position in the military. Although the researcher was confident that his efforts to 'normalise' the power differential were effective, there was no absolute certainty. Some participants might still have 'tempered the truth' to safeguard themselves after the interview was completed. According to Mercer (2007, p. 14), "…pragmatism may outweigh candour…", and the potential for distortion in such situations cannot be disregarded.

3.7   Data Analysis

Adopting the grounded theory methods of data analysis proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the analysis involved three types of coding: open, axial and selective. In line with the GTM of data analysis, code notes and theoretical memos were maintained throughout the data collection/analysis process to ensure focus, clarity and accuracy in the development of theoretical ideas. While doing the analysis, the researcher made cross-conceptual comparisons, moved back and forth among the collecting of data, and coding and writing of memos to enhance theoretical sensitivity. The researcher was also careful to delineate the context or the conditions in which the data were situated to derive the 'appropriate' concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Deriving the 'appropriate' concepts also has to do with the notion of sensitivity and creativity in terms of how the researcher interprets the data, and constructs the story and concepts within the relevant context (Beveridge, 1963; Sandelowski, 1994). According to Denzin (1998), interpretation is a generative process that sets forth multiple meanings of an event or experience. Different analysts arrive at different conclusions from the same piece of data, and for this reason, the idea of qualitative analysis is not about searching for a definitive answer but rather providing a deep and grounded perspective on the events as experienced by the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Eisner, 1991; Barone, 1990). According to Glaser (1978), extant knowledge becomes a vital component of the sense-making process and of ensuring that the analysis remains 'grounded'. So far as this study is concerned, the researcher's personal experience serving in the military and dealing with conscripts

serves as another informant source in facilitating the analysis. Without such extant knowledge, pattern recognition and conceptualisation would be limited to the obvious and the superficial, depriving the analyst of the conceptual leverage from which to develop theory (Glaser, 1978). In short, while grounded theory advocates approaching the data with an 'open mind', the researcher should not start the research process from a 'blank sheet' (Goulding, 1999).

The key concepts in analysis adopted in this study are summarised in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 - Key Concepts In Grounded Theory Analysis [Source: Punch (2005)]

Overall Processes	Constant Comparative Method Coding - writing memos - elaborating Theoretical sorting and integrating
Types of Coding	Open ←→ Substantive Axial ←→ Theoretical Selective ←→ Core - Open coding is '…the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data…' - Axial coding seeks to '…put back together data in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories…' - Selective coding is '…the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development…'
Guidelines	Theoretical Sensitivity Theoretical Sampling Theoretical Saturation

3.7.1   Open Coding

Open coding is the first stage of the GTM of data analysis. Its purpose is to expose theoretical possibilities and find conceptual categories from the data, generating what is known as *substantive* codes. Substantive codes are generated through the open coding process whereby the researcher identifies conceptual categories and their properties and dimensions directly from the data (Glaser, 1978).

In this study, open coding was applied to all interview transcripts and documents. The initial sets of transcripts were micro-analysed line by line for concepts idea generation. Interviews were coded line-by-line, where appropriate. As concepts and categories started to emerge, more generalised analysis was conducted to allow the relevant concepts to coalesce to a higher order of abstraction. Throughout this stage, the

memos and diagrams were maintained as part of the overall recording management system adopted in this study.

An illustration of how the researcher coded, analysed and developed the category – BRACING is shown below. The process started with the intention of finding out about conscripts' perspectives of NS prior to enlistment. From the interview, an open code – Knowing NS was derived to which a code note was written (see below Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 – Example of Code Note – Knowing NS

Code Note
Code name: Knowing NS (prior to enlistment) (P04-CN-1)
Related codes: New experience Stories about NS Need for NS Acceptance
Code note: How does conscript know about NS (prior to enlistment)
P04 got to know about NS from various sources. But mostly from stories told to him by relatives and friends who have served in NS or in-service personnel *[…heard horror stories from friends about NS, you are definitely afraid because you have never been put in such as situation before…people have so many views of what NS is and you hear some people saying that it is the best thing that ever happened to them, some say that it is the worst two years of your life… interested to see how the NS experience and how different people can have so different views…]…(next page)*

Code Note (continued from previous page)

It will be important to explore to what extent conscripts' preparation and attitude towards NS are influenced by 'stories of NS'. Despite SAF's effort to reach out to students in schools, it seems that conscripts' perception of NS prior to enlistment are still heavily influenced by views from trusted individuals who who have served in NS. It is also important to explore how impressions about NS influenced their views as to how NS will affect their personal development and future plans.

Questions:
The above raises a few questions:
How do conscripts cope with or make sense of these 'stories'?
Supposing a conscript is positively disposed towards NS, does it mean that he will manage NS better than those who see NS negatively?

Dimensions of Knowing NS:
Imagination (from 'stories')< ------------- >Based on facts
Positive < ----------------- > Negative

What study are these data pertinent to?
Organisational Entry
Stress and Perception

During the analysis process, the researcher also kept memos to record his thoughts about the various concepts that emerged from the data collected in the interview. Excerpts of some memos that accompanied the conceptualisation of the category BRACING is shown below (Table 3.7 – p. 65-66).

Table 3.7 – Excerpts of Memos (BRACING)

Memo – 1-C-B (2 Apr 09) - Initial thoughts about Conscripts' Perspective on NS
Based on the initial coding of the interviews, I sensed that there might be several perspectives on NS, such as the following: NS is about Citizenry Obligation [P02]; NS is about No Choice [P05]; NS is about Personal Sacrifice [P06]; NS is about Defending the Country [P03]…
Memo – 13-C-B (7 Jun 09) – Impressions of NS
Several conscripts talked about National Education (NE) in schools and NE was something they had come to associate with NS [P03]. NE seemed to be prevalent in schools and had a great deal of impact on the conscripts. But, I noted that quite a number of participants were not really very clear about the purpose of NS. Many cited that their impressions of NS were based on what was told to them by family members and friends who had served in NS. Despite efforts by the SAF to reach out to the schools, many seemed to be rather ignorant about NS. Not interested? Come-what-may-come attitude? (*continue below…*)

(continue from p. 65)

Memo – 15-C-B (8 Aug 09) - Approach to NS

Approach refers to conscripts' general orientation towards NS. Possible orientations toward NS are as follows:

Positive vs Negative. Some are willing to try and hence are very positively disposed towards NS. Others are negative towards NS – ie, NS is a waste of time to them.

Doubt. Some have expressed doubt. They are doubtful if they can cope with NS. I think being 'doubtful' is about self-confidence, and it does not necessarily mean that the conscript is negative towards NS.

Acceptance. There is also an element of acceptance towards one's obligation to serve in NS although there are different shades of acceptance. For instance, P02 readily accepted his NS obligation but was uncertain about giving up his life for his country.

Suspended Judgment. There is another element of 'holding in suspension'. This situation arises when the conscript received mixed signals about NS and is confused as to what to make of it. As such, they do not want to pre-judge NS.

The way conscripts approach NS is very complicated, and it is also a highly emotional affair. I called this state – complex emotional state. An example is P04.

> *P04-OC-2-"… I was really interested to see how the NS experience and how different people can have such different views… I was also quite afraid because...you hear a lot of stories from your buddies who have been through it...they were all like… I was also quite worried wondering if I can handle all that…"*

Memo – 2-SA-B (2 Sep 09) – Forming Expectations – Acquiring/Contemplating/Approach to NS

It seems that conscripts form their expectations about NS through a couple of sub-processes. First, there is a process of acquiring in which conscripts gather information about NS. Mostly, the information about NS is received from family members and those who have served NS before. … Thereafter, the conscripts start to think about how NS may impact them. Many have expressed concern about the degree of disruption to their study plans. But they also do generally think that NS is going to do some 'good' for them as a person… The types of signals received by the conscripts are also important as they affect the way conscripts do their 'sums' regarding the negative/positive effects of serving NS and the 'trade-off' benefits. The outcome of this rationalization heavily influences their orientation or attitude towards NS, which can be very complex for some…

Memo 3-SA-B (10 Oct 09) – Gearing up for NS

At this stage, the conscript is preparing himself for NS. The preparation strategies vary from person to person. Elements of preparation take on physical, mental and emotional attributes.

Memo 1-A-B (1 Dec 09). Bracing - Perspective towards NS prior to enlistment

Conscripts' perspective towards NS prior to enlistment goes beyond the notion of duty or their take on NS (eg. NS as a citizenry obligation). It encompasses other aspects of how conscripts gather information about NS, form expectations about NS, and gear or prepare themselves for NS. Some are very clear that NS is an important citizenry duty, and all other personal concerns are secondary. Others placed personal interests such as disruption to their studies above larger national interests. It is also clear that just prior to enlistment, conscripts' views and disposition towards NS exist within a certain context: a highly charged and complex emotional state that encompasses elements, such as stress, uncertainty, anticipation, and fear. These emotions and tensions are only felt (more acutely) now because of the impending transition into the military…In a sense, just prior to enlistment, conscripts go through a series of processes to prepare, make sense of and finally come to terms with, accepting/rejecting (for some) the impending enlistment and situation confronting them.

The purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of establishing the relationship between substantive categories developed during open coding. The focus of axial coding adopted in this study follows the interactionist coding paradigm proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 3), which is "…specifying a category (*phenomenon*) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the *context* (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional *strategies* by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the *consequences* of those strategies…". As in the open-coding stage, code notes and memos were continually revised and maintained throughout this stage.

Using the same example of BRACING, the researcher made use of diagrams to develop the conceptual frame of BRACING. The frame served as a heuristic to support the analysis process. An example of the conceptual frame and axial code memo is shown below.
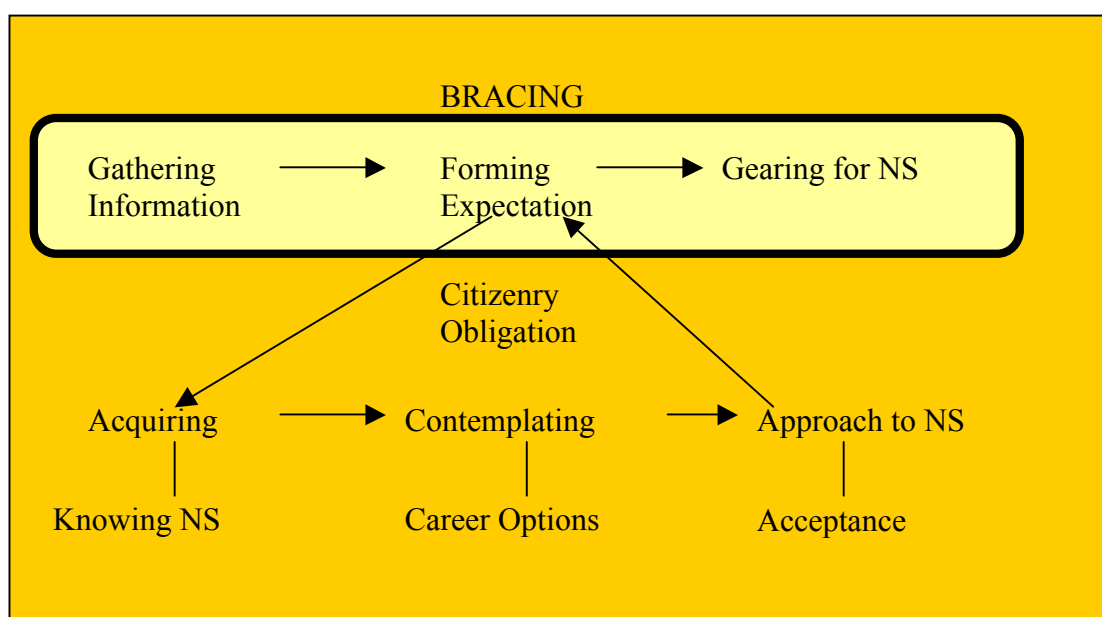
Figure 3.3 – Development of the Axial Category - BRACING

Table 3.8 – Axial Code (BRACING)

Category: Bracing	
Casual Condition: Date of enlistment/Impending entry into NS	Phenomenon: Bracing
Properties (Characteristics) Multi-dimensional Single period (from school to enlistment day) Relevance to self Impact on self	Specific Dimensions (Measurement/scale) Physical: Not Fit --------- Fit; Mental: Avoid ------- Accept Emotional: Fear ------ Anticipation Duration Sacrifice ---- Ready to serve Disruption ---- Benefit
Context: Under conditions where the impending enlistment into NS is drawing near, and enlistees start to prepares for NS	
Action/Interaction Strategies: Conscript gathers information about NS Conscript forms certain expectations about his roles in NS, gauges impact of NS on himself Conscript prepares physically and mentally for NS Conscript consults others (who have served NS) regarding their preparation for NS Conscript settles his studies/career/personal plans in preparation for enlistment Conscript copes with the emotional tension and stress; some embark on 'freedom spree', activities such as tours to take their minds off NS	
Intervening Conditions: Injury prior to enlistment Exigencies before enlistment Concurrent commitments to work and project deadlines	
Consequences for (conscripts) Confidence in one's ability to cope with NS	

3.7.3   Selective Coding

The selective coding stage accounts for and conceptualises the relationships among the categories developed during the axial coding stage to a higher level of abstraction captured as a *core* code around which the theory is built (Punch, 2005).   According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), selective coding is aimed at developing an abstract, condensed, integrated and grounded picture of the data and comprises two key concepts of core category and the storyline.   The core category refers to the central phenomenon around which other categories are integrated. There are several methods to identify the core category, namely writing a storyline, conceptualisation, review of memos and use of diagrams. The core category for this study is "committing" in managing NS, and the primary method used to identify it was the storyline method. This study uses the storyline method as a means to start the selective coding process by guiding the arrangement and rearrangement of the categories developed in the first two stages.

3.7.4   Data Recording

To exercise maximum control over the entire data collection and analysis process, the researcher maintained an efficient system of tape-recording all interviews as well as a file coding system to manage all code notes and theoretical memos. As it is natural for researchers to spontaneously think about concepts and new themes during the data collection process (Patton, 2002), research journals and memos also were used to facilitate the capturing of the researcher's thoughts that arose during the data collection/analysis process in a more intuitive fashion, reflective of the researcher's dual roles as discoverer and as social analyst (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) (See example in Section 3.8.4).

3.8   Trustworthiness of the Research

According to Seale (1999), the issue of trustworthiness of a research report *[qualitative]* lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability. The concept of trustworthiness can been further divided into credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability, which relates more to reliability; transferability, which is a form of external validity; and confirmability, which refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 1986).

3.8.1   Credibility

The credibility criterion requires establishing results that are believable from the perspective of the participants. As qualitative data are mostly collected from conversations and interviews, the data are subject to interpretation by researchers (Weiss, 1994). To accurately account for the participants' perspectives, from a research instrumentation point of view, the actions that were taken to establish credibility include the following: (a) prolonged engagement with at least 2-3 formal contacts over a minimum period of six months; (b) maintained reflexivity, such as the keeping of field notes and journals; and (c) deployed triangulation mechanisms, using member checking, multiple data collections and data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.2   Dependability

While acknowledging that meeting the dependability criterion is difficult in most qualitative work, this criterion first was established in this study by maintaining an

audit trail of the research process. Audio-tapes and transcribed interviews were monitored by the researchers to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Second, it was established by ensuring that the proposed frequency and length of each contact was sufficient to allow the researcher to take account of not only the contextual details but also the changes that arose from time to time. Table 3.9 shows the audit trail system used in this study.

Table 3.9 – System of Audit Trail

Participant	Date of Interview 1 & 2	Soldiers Performance Record	Unit Posting	Remarks
P01	Feb 09	Updated	BMTC-OCS-Unit	P01 – Withdrew mid-way
P02	Feb 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-OCS-Unit	
P03	Feb 09 - Nov 09	Updated	BMT-OCS-Unit	
P04	Mar 09 - Nov 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	BMT – Basic Military Training Centre
P05	Apr 09 - Nov 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P06	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P07	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P08	Apr 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	OCS – Officer Cadet School
P09	Mar 09 - Nov 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	Voc Trg – Vocational Trg Institutes
P10	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P11	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	
P12	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P13	Apr 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	
P14	Mar 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P15	Apr 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P16	Apr 09 - Jan 09	Updated	BMT- Voc Trg-Unit	
P17	Apr 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-OCS-Unit	
P18	Apr 09 - Dec 09	Updated	BMT-OCS-Unit	
P19	Apr 09 - Jan 09	Updated	BMT-SCS-Unit	
P20	Apr 09 - Jan 09	Updated	BMT-Voc-Unit	
P21	Apr 09 -Jan 09	Updated	BMT-Voc-Unit	

3.8.3   Transferability

Transferability was achieved by providing a thorough description of the context and assumptions that were central to the research. Besides contextual information, giving a dense and rich description of the results will allow the reader to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar. It will also allow the reader to ascertain whether the findings can justifiably be applied to another setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Section 3.4 - *The Research Setting* – provides a detailed description of the context of this study and

highlights the various pathways that conscripts may take into NS. To recap, the key aspects of the SAF conscript system that may have significant influence on the way conscripts experience NS are summarised in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10 – Pertinent Aspects of Military Environment (SAF)

Context Dimensions	Key Features of NS System	Potential Impact on Conscripts
Process	Various training phases in the 2-year NS cycle	Multiple socialisation processes and experiences
Deployment and Assignment	a. Leadership and vocational tracks b. Types of postings and appointments	Personal development and growth Career and study plans
Culture	a. Prevailing norms and practises in the Army b. Social environment in the unit	Socialisation experience Social capital and networking, career and study plans

From the methodology standpoint, grounded theory and its processes in terms of data analysis and concept formation are relatively well-defined; as such, transferability is enhanced when other researchers are able to follow the research process so as to decide on its relevance to future studies (Glaser, 1978).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Finally, to achieve confirmability, the researcher took steps to demonstrate that findings emerged from the data and not from his predispositions. In this regard, reflexivity during data collection and analysis was an important consideration. During the research process, the researcher was very conscious of the fact that participants responded to the researchers' verbal and non-verbal cues, and correspondingly adjusted their stances towards the issue being discussed (Chesney, 2001). Finlay (2002) opines that such reciprocal influence typically happens at the unconscious level, and can potentially affect the quality of the findings. While it might not be possible to eliminate the negative effects of reciprocal influence, according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), learning to reflect on one's behaviours, thoughts, and on the phenomenon under study, is a means for continuously becoming a better researcher. In this study, therefore, the researcher maintained a research journal (also forms part of the audit trail) to record his reflections along the way to enable self-examination of the

impact of his own position and disposition more clearly. See Table 3.11 for an excerpt of the content recorded in the researcher's journal.

Table 3.11 – Extracts from Researcher's Journal on Interviewing and Coding

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Self-Appraisal of Interviewing Skills

Interview 1 (P01 - Jan 09)
7   *Overall, the interview went quite well but could have been better.*

8   *Control & Balance. Did not really have good control over the interview. Not focused on the questions in mind. On several occasions, sort of let the interviewee 'run away' with his talking. Overshot the time. Can improve on preparation and familiarity with the questions*
9   *Mood. The interviewee appeared quite comfortable - Conscious about making sure the interviewee is comfortable to speak his mind☺*

Reflections on Coding and Recoding, Levels of abstraction and Literature Reviews (Jun 09).

…As I went through the process of coding of new transcripts, it seemed almost instinctive that my mind would sweep through the entire code set very rapidly for matching concepts, and sometimes I thought I could 'hear' the voices of the participants jumping out of the codes…very surreal and interesting…Now I am grouping the codes into more manageable conceptual 'chunks' but it was not until I actually sat down to make code notes that I realised some of the codes were of different orders and levels of abstraction. That gave rise to more thoughts about existing codes and changing them, adding new ones to better reflect the correct level of abstraction. I also felt the need to read up more on grounded theory - the Sage Handbook on Grounded Theory, and that led to more clarity and confidence in the process of coding and analysis…Also realised that one of the purposes of the literature review in grounded theory is to sensitise me to new conceptual terms that can add richness to the code set…

3.8.5 Summary

Overall, the approach and techniques to achieve trustworthiness in this study can be summarised in Table 3.12 (p. 72).

Table 3.12 - Investigative Strategy and Data Collection/Analysis

Criterion for Trustworthiness	Strategy/Techniques
Investigative Strategy	Grounded Theory
Data Collection & Analysis - Credibility	Maximum Variation Sampling Prolonged Engagement (multiple contacts methods) Triangulation Members Checking
- Transferability	Thick Description
- Dependability	Audit Trail
- Confirmability	Confirmation Audit (by another researcher) Research Journal

3.9   Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted according to BERA (British Education Research Association) (2004) and University of Leicester EdD guidelines. The key issues that concern the participants are noted below.

(a)   *Voluntary Informed Consent*. The principle of voluntary informed consent was applied to all participants in this research. All the potential participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research as well as the procedures involved. From the initial list of 56 potential candidates identified by the researcher, 21 participants volunteered and 35 conscripts turned down the opportunity to be involved in the research. It is impossible to say definitively whether or not this dichotomy between participants and non-participants affected the range of experiences captured in the sample. The 21 participants appeared to embrace a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experiences, a conclusion confirmed by the typology that eventually resulted from the data. Participant permission was also sought with regard to accessing their journals, soldier proficiency and interview records. It is important to note that none of the participants were minors.

(b)   *Withdrawal*. The participants were told they could withdraw at any time during the research.

(c)   *Dual Role*. Given that the researcher is a serving officer in military personnel, the issues associated with the dual role had to be handled sensitively. In this regard, all participants were assured that their remarks (especially the negative ones) would not be taken as evidence against them.

(d)   *Privacy*. All participants' data were treated with utmost confidentiality. Anonymity was enforced in order to maintain the privacy of the participants at every stage of the process. For instance, all participants were assigned code numbers and fabricated names were used.

(e)   *Detriment Arising from Participation*. At no time did participation in the research put the participants at risk. For instance, the time of interviews was carefully scheduled to ensure that none of the participants missed out on important training sessions that might put the participants in danger when they returned to training, or cause undue inconvenience to the participants and supporting units.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

Access and Attrition

Access to suitable respondents was problematic initially due to several reasons: (a) tight training schedule and the fear of having to do make-up training on weekends due to missing out on training because of the interview; (b) personal discomfort about participating in qualitative research; and (c) lack of commanders' support. After several attempts and with the support of commanders, the researcher managed to gain access to a good number of suitable respondents. However, one participant could not continue with the research because of serious injuries sustained in the course of training [P01].

Sampling

The study was confined to only a small number of conscripts chosen from several units and serving in different vocations based on the dimensional matrix. Therefore,

the views and opinions highlighted by the respondents do not represent the entire spread of conscripts in the Army. At best, the respondents' views are only indicative of their personal experiences localised in their own units' culture that constitutes part of the larger Army culture and norms.

Data Collection

The respondents' ability and readiness to share their personal experiences is important. Three respondents, unfortunately, refused to share the more 'sensitive part' of their NS experience that relate to their dealings with commanders – thus limiting the data collection in this regard. Also, as in all interviews, there is always a risk of what Denzin (1989) noted as informant's interpretation disparity with regard to retrospective collection of data. Therefore, every precaution was taken to make sure that the respondents were not under any form of pressure to say 'the politically right thing.' Interviews were conducted in a way that assisted the respondents in the reconstruction rather than the recollection of their NS experience.

3.11   Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the methodology adopted in this study. To recap, the purpose of this research is to develop a substantive theory that explains how conscripts manage their NS experience in relation to their personal development, education and career plans. Thus, it focuses on teasing out military experiences as experienced by the conscripts from their point of view. The underlying research paradigm for this study thus is interpretivism, which asserts that a social phenomenon can only be understood if it is studied in relation to its full context. Unlike positivism, interpretivism sees social reality not as objective and exterior, but as socially constructed and given meaning by people (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Following from this rationale, this study adopts a qualitative grounded theory approach. Unlike quantitative methods, which are generally oriented towards establishing causal relationships, control and predictions, qualitative study aims to understand the deeper experiential aspects of conscripts' learning to cope with military service (Punch, 2005). Among the many qualitative research methods, grounded theory was deemed appropriate for the purpose of this research—to generate a substantive theory regarding how conscripts manage their NS experience and how they think it might impact their future lives, education and careers (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Huberman &

Miles, 1994). Grounded theory also was chosen for its formulation of theory from data through induction, which is therefore applicable for research on social phenomena about which there is little research. In this case, very little is known about how conscripts' personal lives, education, and careers are affected by the two-year compulsory military service experience.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE THEORY OF SELECTIVE COMMITMENT
IN MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Introduction

This study aims to understand how young Singaporean males manage their national service (NS) in relation to their personal development, studies and career plans. In response to the dearth of published research that exists in Singapore, the current study attempts to understand the conscripts' viewpoint regarding how they manage the NS experience. The main research question of the study is as follows:

> **How do young Singaporean males manage their NS experiences in relation to their personal development, studies and career plans?**

The above main research question can be explained by the theory of Selective Commitment generated in this study. Hence, the aim of this chapter, considering that this study is anchored on grounded theory, is to present a general overview of the categories, processes and resultant typology in the theory of Selective Commitment to help readers understand and engage in the detailed development and interpretation of the data in the subsequent chapters that follow.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section provides an overview of the categories and processes in the theory of Selective Commitment in military conscription. The second section explains the conceptualisation of the core category, which is a key feature of grounded theory studies. The last section outlines the typology of conscripts that results from the theory of Selective Commitment.

A key finding of this study is that conscripts in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) manage their NS through a series of socio-psychological processes. First, upon receiving their notice of enlistment, the conscripts start to brace themselves for their impending entry into military service. They do so by gathering information about NS, preparing themselves both physically and mentally for NS and clarifying their personal motivation and commitment to serve NS with respect to the sacrifices they

will have to make. Once enlisted, the conscripts adopt various coping strategies to manage their military training and experiences. In NS, the conscripts continue to chart their study and career plans. In the course of serving NS, the conscripts appraise their NS experiences in relation to their personal development, study and career plans. The outcomes of this appraisal process influence the conscripts' perceived significance of serving NS and their levels of commitment, which will have a corresponding effect on the effort that the conscripts are prepared to put into serving NS. On a deeper level, the conscripts assimilate their NS experiences, acquiring new social identities as citizen soldiers and maturing in the process. By using the grounded theory research methodology, the researcher examines these processes to create the substantive theory of Selective Commitment in coping with military conscription.

Another important outcome of this study is the conception of a typology of conscripts based on their differences in managing their NS experiences. The current study also derived this typology from the theory of Selective Commitment. The typology recognises the following types of conscripts, namely a. advocates, b. adventurers, c. careerists, d. play-safes, and challengers. In brief, this chapter will be presented as follows:

4.5   The overview of the categories in the theory of Selective Commitment;

4.6   Relationships and processes between categories;

4.7   Typology of conscripts in the Army (SAF);

4.8   Conclusion.

4.1   The overview of categories in the theory of Selective Commitment

The aim of this study is to generate a substantive theory from the conscripts' perspective with respect to how they manage their NS. It describes the basic socio-psychological processes that the conscripts use to manage their military service.

To achieve this aim, the study primarily obtained the data from face-to-face interviews with 21 conscripts in the Army (SAF). In addition, the study used a literature review, reflective journals and soldiers' performance records to support the data. By analysing the primary and secondary data sources, the researcher formed the

concepts, categories and processes related to the issue of how the conscripts manage their NS.   All concepts and categories of this study were generated through the systematic process of open coding and axial and selective coding processes.   The initial open codes were generated from the raw data.   The researcher further conceptualised these open codes into more manageable numbers without losing the overall fidelity of the data set.   In axial coding, the open codes were categorised into sub-categories and categories in terms of their causal factors, dimensions, interaction/action strategies and consequences.   Using the same process, comparison and higher order conceptualisation across categories were also performed. Eventually, the core category was determined during the selective coding process, which subsequently led to the formation of the theory of Selective Commitment in the context of military conscription in Singapore.   The overview of the theory of Selective Commitment is shown below.
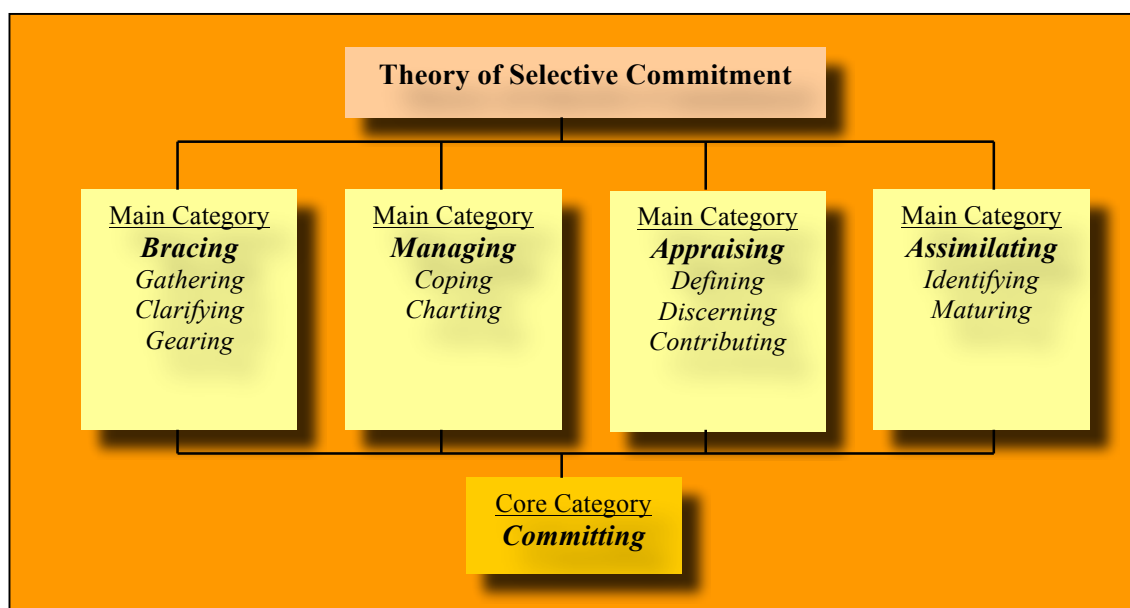
Figure 4.1   Categories in the theory of Selective Commitment

The core category in the theory of Selective Commitment is Committing.   It is supported by the other main categories of Bracing, Managing, Appraising and Assimilating.   Each of these main categories possesses sub-categories that indicate more comprehensively the depth and scope of the main categories.   Subsequent sections in this chapter will elaborate upon these categories and their relationships.

4.1.1 Bracing

The process that depicts how the participants prepare for their impending military service prior to enlistment is termed as bracing. Bracing is further sub-divided into three sub-processes of gathering, clarifying and gearing. Gathering refers to how the participants gather information about NS from various sources, which include formal and informal sources, prior to enlistment. Clarifying refers to the participants' inner processes, which clarify their own levels of commitment towards serving NS. Lastly, gearing describes how the participants prepare both physically and mentally for NS.

4.1.2 Committing

The core category of the theory of Selective Commitment is committing. Committing refers to the process of how the participants derive their commitment to NS based on their internalisation of the significance of serving NS and of the aims in NS. This internalisation ultimately translates into their commitment levels in NS. Before enlistment, the process of clarifying determines the participants' internalised significance of serving NS. Once enlisted, the processes of managing, appraising and assimilating influence the participants' internalised significance of serving NS, aims and levels of commitment. In this respect, the participants' commitment may be grouped into normative, transactional and affective to describe how the participants respond to their military training and military life during NS.

4.1.3 Managing

The process of managing describes how the participants manage their military training and life in the military. Two other sub-processes of coping and charting support their ability to manage. Coping refers to how the participants deal with the initial entry shock when they enter the military and the subsequent training transitions in NS. During the course of training, the participants continue to plan and prepare their study and career pathways through the process of charting. As mentioned earlier, the process of managing is driven, in part, by the participants' commitment to NS.

4.1.4 Appraising

The process of appraising refers to how the participants appraise their NS experiences. The process of appraising encapsulates the three sub-processes of

defining, discerning and contributing. Defining is an affective process that concerns the participants' perceived meaningfulness of their NS experiences. Discerning refers to the cognitive process of how the participants weigh their NS experience based on their analysis of benefits and threats with respect to their personal development, study and career plans. Lastly, the process of contributing refers the extent the participants perceived their contribution to NS. Together, the outcomes of defining, discerning and contributing determine how the participants appraise their NS experience.

4.1.5   Assimilating

Overtime, the participants begin to identify themselves as citizen soldiers in Singapore and concurrently mature in terms of self and social competence. This process is termed as assimilating. It consists of the processes of identifying and maturing. Identifying refers to how the participants identify themselves as citizen soldiers as a result of their military experiences. The process of maturing describes the participants' perception of their own maturation in the areas of self and social competence. Overall, the extent to which the participants assimilate their new identities as citizen soldiers will influence the participants' perceived significance of serving NS and, correspondingly, their commitment levels to NS.

4.1.6   Conclusion

The concise presentation of the various categories and processes of the theory of Selective Commitment provided above describes the core and main categories of the theory as individual conceptual entities. The following section will further enunciate the relationships and processes that stitch these categories into a coherent theory and will also explain why the researcher chose committing as the core category.

4.2   Relationships and processes between categories

The theory of Selective Commitment begins with the process of bracing. Through bracing, the enlistees begin the processes of gathering, clarifying and gearing for their impending entry into NS. In gathering, the enlistees commence the process of gathering information about NS from both formal and informal sources. Formal sources refer to official sources of information on NS, and informal sources refer to family members, friends and peers. The enlistees filter this information on the basis of several factors, such as personal beliefs, past experience and perceived credibility

of the sources. The outcome of this filtering process helps the enlistees to clarify their initial assessment regarding serving NS. Within the sub-process of clarifying, the enlistees evaluate the potential impact of serving NS, their level of readiness for NS, their personal aspirations within NS and their beliefs about serving NS. The outcomes of clarifying may either result in perceived affirmation or perceived dissonance. Participants who possess perceived affirmation are positive about their participation in NS. Participants perceive dissonance when they experience inner conflict with regard to their responsibility towards NS. The last sub-process of gearing illuminates the ways that these participants physically and mentally gear up for NS based on their assessment of their readiness for NS.

Through the process of bracing, the participants form their perceived significance of NS, their aims for serving NS and their commitment towards NS. This process convinced the present study to designate commitment as the core category. Hence, it is the process of bracing that gives rise to the core category of committing. However, given that the enlistees have not yet experienced NS, their perceived significance of serving NS, aims and commitment levels are heavily dependent on their prior socialisation experiences and the information they gather from others. Therefore, their perceptions remain largely transient in nature at this preparation stage. Therefore, the relationship between bracing and committing is cyclical, whereby they mutually influence one another during the period leading to enlistment.

Once they enter the military, the conscripts begin their process of managing as they cope with the entry shock of military life and the rigours of military training that follow the two years of NS. More importantly, their commitment to NS predicts how the participants cope and determines their effort levels. The outcomes of the process of coping determine the participants' training and social experiences in NS. In NS, the participants seem to continue to chart their study and career plans. The process of charting is influenced by their interactions with fellow soldiers, peers, commanders and the other people they meet in their units. To an extent, the process of charting distinguishes the uniqueness of the conscript's environment in the sense that almost every conscript in NS shares similar concerns and issues regarding study and career plans. Hence, the environment itself readily supports such a process.

The process of managing provides the context in terms of NS experiences for the category of appraising. The process of appraising, which consists of defining, discerning and contributing, encapsulates how the participants appraise their overall NS experiences. The process of defining is related to how the participants define what is meaningful to them in terms of the events or experiences in the course of serving NS. The process of discerning captures the cognitive aspect of the appraisal process that analyses the benefits and threats of serving NS in relation to the participants' personal development, studies and careers. The last aspect of the participants' appraisal process concerns how the participants evaluate their NS experiences based on their perceived contribution to the NS system itself.

By going through these processes of managing and appraising, the participants begin to assimilate into their new roles as citizen soldiers under the category of assimilating. The process of assimilating involves the two sub-processes of identifying and maturing. The former refers to how the participants connect with their new identities and roles as citizen soldiers. The latter depicts the self-maturation process of individual participants in terms of self and social competence. Both of these sub-processes are influenced by how the participants have experienced NS under the category of managing. More importantly, the outcomes of appraising and assimilating mutually impact the core category of committing. Therefore, the relationship between managing, rationalising, assimilating and committing is also cyclical in nature, as shown below.
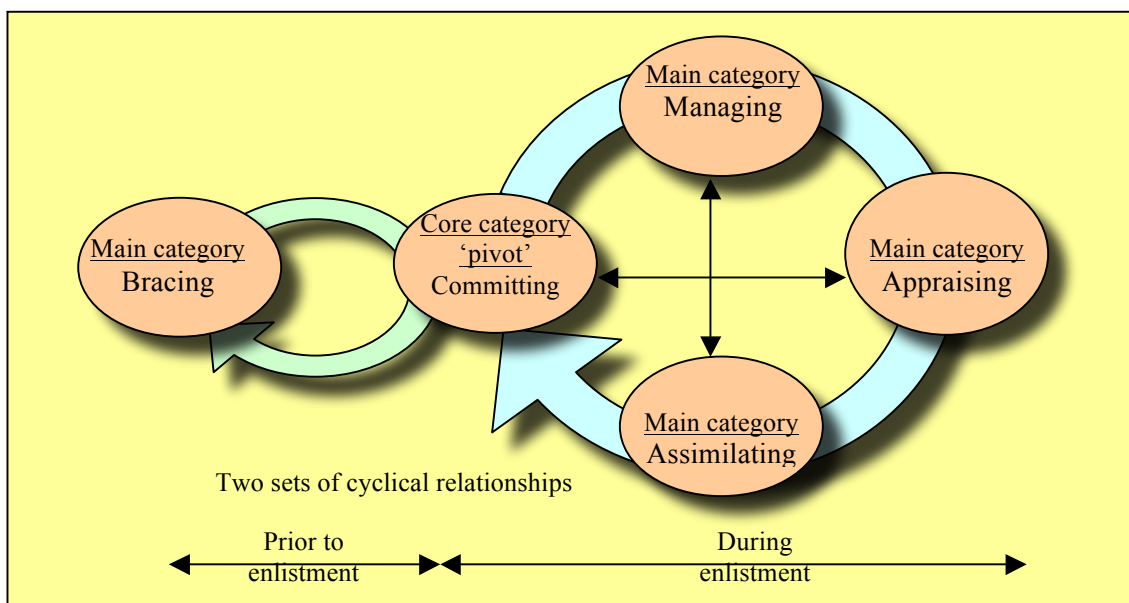
Figure 4.2 Relationships between core categories in the theory of Selective Commitment

In summary, there are two sets of cyclical relationships that both involve the core category of committing. One of them is between the process of bracing and committing. The other is between the processes of managing, appraising, assimilating and committing. Thus, the core category of committing serves as a 'pivot' that carries the momentum set forth by the first cycle between bracing and committing for the second cycle of processes. Therefore, the category of committing is the core category in the theory of Selective Commitment.

Different conscripts may not have the same level of commitment with regard to serving NS. They consciously decide how much time and energy they are prepared to commit based on their internalised significance with regard to serving NS. In turn, the participants' internalised significance of serving NS is dependent on how the conscripts cope during training, how they appraise their NS experience and how they assimilate to their roles as citizen soldiers. In this regard, every conscript approaches NS differently, as he is affected by his internalised significance of serving NS, aims and commitment levels. Therefore, the concept of 'Selective Commitment' – created from the core category of committing – can best encapsulate the presence of the conscripts' own 'selected commitment' in terms of serving NS. Overall, 'selective commitment' defines their unique two-year NS experience.

4.3   Typology of conscripts managing two-year NS training

A significant outcome of this study is the development of a typology of conscripts with regard to how they manage their NS in relation to their personal development, study and career plans. The researcher derived the typology from the distinct manners that the participants respond to bracing, committing, managing, rationalising and assimilating processes in the theory of Selective Commitment. In this study, the participants can be broadly classified into five groups, namely, advocates, adventurers, careerists, play-safes and challengers.

4.3.1   The Advocates

The advocates have generally shown enthusiasm towards NS even before enlistment. Despite national service's disruption to their study and career plans, the advocates believe in the importance and the need for national service, and are therefore committed and very willing to serve NS. Thus, the advocates are usually self-driven,

motivated, optimistic and committed to giving their best during training. It is therefore not surprising that they cope well in training, because they see the purpose of tough military training. In addition, their positive attitudes toward NS also mean that they are well liked by their peers and their commanders in NS. As a result, the advocates will find that NS is meaningful and will derive many positive experiences from it. For these same reasons, the advocates readily assimilate into the roles of being citizen soldiers and mature in both aspects of self and social competence. In turn, these positive outcomes reinforce their perceived significance of serving NS, aims and commitment levels.

4.3.2   Adventurers

The adventurers live for adventures and challenges, because their primary belief system compels them to push their own limits and to seek excitement. Therefore, the adventurers are attracted and motivated to serving NS because NS is intrinsically onerous and challenging. The adventurers' perceived significance of serving NS and aims are based on the notion that serving NS affords them the dual benefit of pushing their own limits and fulfilling their citizenry obligation at the same time. Like advocates, the adventurers are hard working and they thrive under challenging conditions, which make them popular and admired by their peers and commanders. The adventurers appraise their NS experiences based on the numerous 'adventures' that they experienced in NS. From the point of assimilation, the adventurers can psychologically connect to the identity and roles of being citizen soldiers because they derive much maturation and excitement from serving.

4.3.3   The Careerists

The careerists' attitudes toward NS are largely driven by considerations that concern their personal development, study and career plans. In that sense, they are motivated to serve NS because they deem serving NS as a possible career platform and an opportunity to advance their careers or study plans. Unlike the advocates, personal interests motivate the careerists. In terms of managing NS, the careerists are usually very focused and are motivated to work hard in NS. They are also constantly seeking opportunities that may enhance their personal development, study or career prospects. Although the careerists may connect with their identity and roles as citizen soldiers, the careerists remain largely 'economists' at heart in that their perceived significance

of serving NS and commitment levels are contingent upon whether NS continues to be a viable career option or that it benefits their future plans.

4.3.4   The Play-safes

The play-safes serve NS because the law mandates that they do so. Given a choice, they would rather not serve, because they view NS as an unnecessary risk and disruption to their personal development and plans. The play-safes place their personal development and plans as higher priorities than serving NS. In this sense, the play-safes perceive very little significance in serving NS. The play-safes' principal aim is to secure a safe passage through their two years of NS, and their commitment to serve remains normative at best. As such, their main modus operandi in NS is to do just enough, to minimise risk taking and to avoid getting into trouble so as to safeguard their personal development, study and career plans. Invariably, the play-safes keep a low profile in the military, exercise minimum initiative and work only when tasked or asked to do so. Their appraisal of their NS experiences is largely based on risk or threats to their personal development and plans. Thus, the play-safes derive little meaning and satisfaction from serving NS. Given the above-mentioned description, from the point of assimilation, the play-safes can only partially identify with their roles as citizen soldiers.

4.3.5   The Challengers

The challengers are basically anti-NS. They formed negative impressions of NS partly because of their socialisation experiences prior to enlistment. The challengers loathe the NS system and do not see any significance in serving NS. Therefore, they are never committed above the normative level. Given their negative attitudes towards NS, the challengers often behave in ways that contradict the norms in the military. They are constantly challenging the system by deliberately flouting the rules, which in turn, will land them in trouble with the commanders and authorities. This study also observed that the challengers are generally loners. Others would shun them because the challengers are usually not cooperative and do not make good team players. Hence, the challengers normally perform poorly in NS and their relationships with their peers are also limited. Given these behaviour patterns, the researcher concluded that the challengers are likely to be caught in the vicious cycle

of poor performance, negative social experiences in NS, poor assimilation as citizen soldiers and, finally, perceived lack of significance in serving NS.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has given a concise overview of the theory of Selective Commitment and the relationships of the categories and processes that constitute the formulation of this theory. At the same time, the study has identified a typology of conscripts in terms of how they manage their NS training in relation to their personal development, study and career plans. The next two chapters, chapters five and six, will elaborate upon the theory of Selective Commitment and the resultant typology, respectively.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES OF THE THEORY OF SELECTIVE COMMITMENT

Introduction

The previous chapter presented a concise overview of the theory of Selective Commitment, covering its concepts, categories, and resultant typology of conscripts serving NS. This chapter will describe in detail how these concepts, main categories, and the core category are derived and interact to give rise to the theory of Selective Commitment in the context of the selected participants. In summary, this chapter is organized into seven main sections, following the four main categories and one core category that comprise the processes and sub-processes of the theory (Figure 5.1).
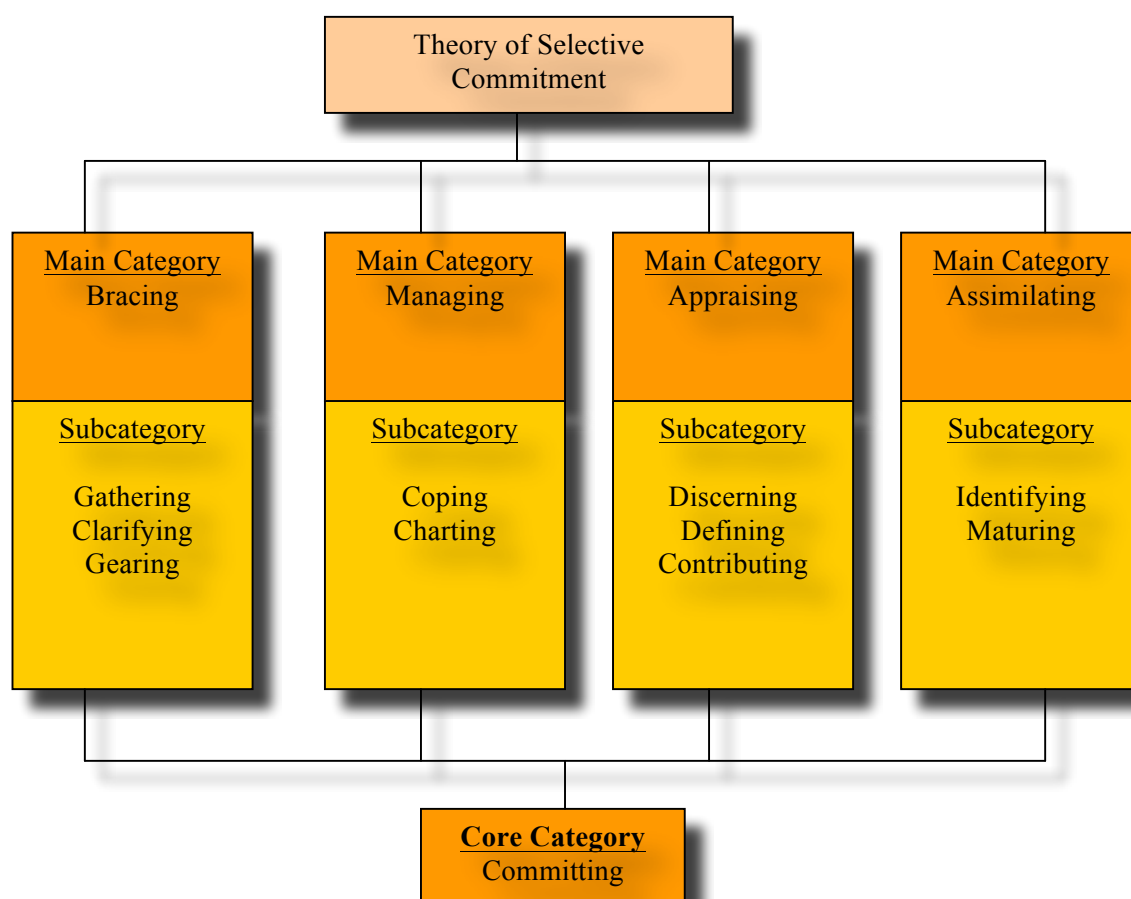
Figure 5.1 Theory of Selective Commitment and its categories

To recap, this study examines how young Singaporean males manage their NS experience in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans. The study has also identified three specific research questions (SRQs):

1. Prior to enlistment, what are conscripts' perspectives on NS in relation to their personal lives and careers and their educational and developmental needs?

2. How do conscripts perceive and cope with the 2-year conscription experience?

3. In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe that the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal lives and careers?

More importantly, the concepts and categories that constitute the theory of Selective Commitment address these SRQs. All categories and concepts discussed in this chapter were generated through the process of system coding (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding), according to the principles and teachings of grounded theory. The raw data were collected from 21 selected conscripts through interviews and other supporting documentary evidence. In the end, a total of 1,330 concepts were generated in the open coding process. During axial coding, the categories have been further conceptualized through the process of examining the relationships, interactions, and conditions within each category and between categories.

At the end of the axial coding stage, four main categories were identified, namely: bracing, managing, appraising, and assimilating. Along with these categories, their relationships and properties have been distilled. Eventually, the core category of committing emerged during the selective coding stage. The core category serves as the underpinning explanatory category, along with the other four main categories and their associated subcategories. The emergence and integration of the core category with the other main categories resulted in crystallization of the theory of Selective Commitment.

5.1   Bracing

Bracing is a main category within the theory of Selected Commitment. The process of bracing depicts how the participants brace themselves for the impending enlistment. It

consists of three distinct sub-processes, namely: a., gathering; b., clarifying; and c., gearing. The causal conditions and context in which these sub-processes are embedded are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 The Category of Bracing and its Subcategories

Core process	Bracing		
Sub-processes	Gathering	Clarifying	Gearing
Causal conditions	a. Advice and stories from family and friends b. Formal school curriculum c. Participation in symbolic events like National Day Parade	Initial perceptions of NS (outcome of gathering process)	Perceived gap in one's readiness levels (physical and mental)
Dimensions of information	Factual and non-factual Structure-oriented Function-oriented Interest-oriented Survival-oriented	Expectations: Optimistic-Pessimistic Emotional: Positive, neutral, negative Attitudinal: Positive, ambivalence, negative	States of physical readiness -fit $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ unfit States of mental readiness -ready $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ not ready
Context where information is gathered	Pre-enlistment period	Personal clarification process of impact of serving NS	Preparation for NS in the period leading to enlistment
Interaction strategies	Information-seeking approaches: Active or Passive Information filtering: Based on credibility of sources and influence of significant others	Cognitive assessment: Idealistic, Realistic, Distorted, and Vague Responses to perceived dissonance: - Rejection - Accommodation - Avoidance	Strategies for gearing: Active Passive Avoidance
Intervening conditions	a. Family background: Coming from families with no males or experiences of serving in NS b. Workplace environment: May not be conducive to gathering process	a. Personal and work commitments prior to enlistment may prevent participants from having time for clarifying	- Current commitment (study and career) - Time available for preparation for entry into NS

5.1.1   Gathering

Gathering is the process of gathering information about NS prior to enlistment. The process of gathering consists of: a., information sources; b., gathering approaches; c., access preferences and information types; d., factors affecting the gathering process; and e., filtering.   Figure 5.2 illustrates the various components of the process of gathering.
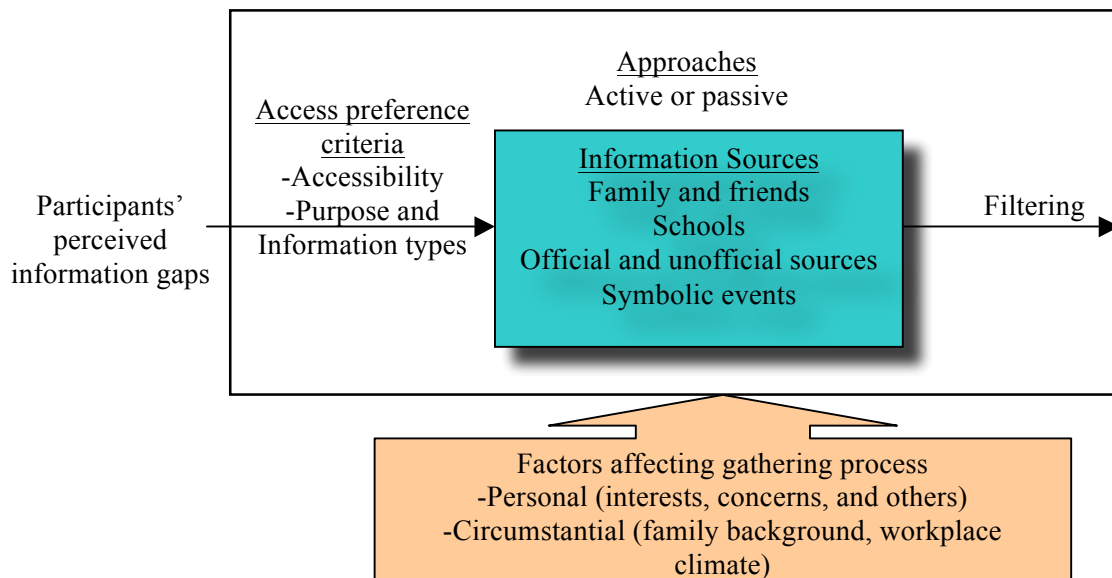
Figure 5.2 Process of gathering and its components

In terms of information sources, the participants drew information from various sources, such as family and friends, schools, official sources, and symbolic events. For example, family members and friends who have had the experience of doing NS may offer advice to the participants, with the aims of educating and assisting the participants in their preparation for the impending enlistment (see P09's comments below).

> *P09 - My father was from Armour formation… he gave me lots of advice, so I have some ideas about life in NS.*

In schools, the participants received information about NS through formal and informal channels. Formal channels refer to the national education programs in the schools' curricula. For example, schools organize visits to military units; this constitutes an important aspect of the students' experiential learning regarding the defence of Singapore. Besides being introduced as part of the school's formal

curriculum, the participants also have the opportunity to interact informally on NS-related topics with their male teachers who have served NS. Hence, by the time of the enlistment, the participants would have some knowledge or ideas about NS, its roles, and purpose. These aspects are illuminated by P08.

> *P8 - I did ask my teachers in schools about NS and life in the military…he shared with the whole class about his experiences in NS…very interesting…*

The participants also make use of official sources to learn more about NS prior to enlistment. The main official sources of information used are military publications, military news reporting, and the National Service (NS) Portal.

Significant or symbolic events such as National Day celebrations and Army Open House, which are opened to the public and organized annually, are also important sources of information to the participants. Through such events, the participants glean useful information and insights about the military and military life in general. Besides information gathering, the participants also agreed that they are engaged at the affective level, to a varying degree, when participating in these events (see P19 remarks below).

> *P19 – I visited the Army Open House as a student and it allowed me to understand NS better…*

In terms of approaches to the information gathering process, it is observed that the participants demonstrate two main gathering approaches: active or passive. These approaches are illuminated by P02's and P04's comments below.

> *P07 - …I went to ask from those people, you know, people like cousin friends… all of them have been through NS…they tell you what life in NS is all about… [**active approach**].*
> *P04 - …I did not actively find out about NS…sort of "let it be" attitude [**passive approach**].*

Within these approaches, the participants exhibit certain access preferences. All the participants prefer to access information about NS from online sources. Two key reasons that account for this behavior are: a., accessibility; and b., the types of information the participants are seeking.

> *P10 - It is quite troublesome to go to the Central Manpower Base (CMPB)* ***(accessibility)****...I just checked out the MINDEF Web page; it is more convenient...I also go into the forum to talk to others and find out more...life in NS... because I also wanted to know more about life in NS and small, small things like that which I do not think is found in the main portal* ***(types of information)****.*

The types of information being sought by the participants may be grouped into four main categories, namely: a., structure-oriented; b., function-oriented; c., interest-oriented; and d., survival-oriented. Structure-oriented information refers to information such as the history, establishment, and organization of the SAF and NS. Function-oriented information refers to pertinent information, such as medical coverage, insurance, and remuneration issues. Interest-oriented information relates to the participants' specific areas of interests, such as the types of occupational vocations available in NS for conscripts. Finally, survival-oriented information refers to tips and small bits of information that the participants seek to help them manage and cope with their military training. These aspects are reflected in the participants' remarks below.

> *P03 - More or less to find out about the history and organization of the SAF...I am interested to know about how NS came about...(structure-oriented information)*
>
> *P12 - I have no idea about NS, so from these online forums I find out about the pay, leaves, (function-oriented)*
>
> *P17 - I chat with others to learn about how to get selected for officer training...(interest-oriented)*
>
> *P06 -...I logged into the forums to chat with others on NS matters and life in NS....get their experiences on how to survive, etc....(survival-oriented)*

From the data analysis, it is observed that the factors that influence the aforementioned gathering process are: personal and circumstantial factors. Personal factors refer to personal interests, aspirations, and concerns that motivate the individual participant to a specific area of information search (see P05's comments).

> *P05 - Before NS....I found out quite a lot about the air force, because I wanted to be a pilot...*

Circumstantial factors, such as family background and workplace environment, also influence the participants' gathering process. For instance, P12 opined that a combination of factors--such as a focus on study and "being born into a family of a lot of women"--did not afford him the environment in which NS-related matters could be discussed more readily.

Those who are working prior to enlistment are observed to be less clear about certain aspects of NS, such as its purpose and establishment. For example, P16, who left school early to join the workforce, has very scant impressions of NS with respect to its roles and purpose.

> *P16 - Not much impression of NS in school...just to protect the country, that's all I know.*

It is also found that the environment in the workplace may not be conducive to such information gathering, because of competing work demands or job priorities.

> *P06 - ...And, before that (enlistment), I was doing [a] project--that is why I did not train at all ...because we got to work on the project from morning till night...*

5.1.1.1 Filtering

The process of gathering includes an important sub-process of *filtering*. The purpose of filtering is to sieve and manage the amount of information on hand. The process of filtering involves the following, namely: a., suspending one's judgment; b., referencing one's past experience; and c., relying on perceived trustworthy sources and

significant others. Suspending one's judgment is usually applied in situations in which the participants are confronted with information that is perceived by the participants to be overly exaggerated or cannot be verified. This is illuminated by the experiences of P13:

> *P13 – My friends said NS is a waste of time…I didn't think so…so I…chose not to believe them…somehow I need to experience NS before I listen to them.*

The process of filtering is also dependent on one's past experiences. Past experiences may filter out other information and influence the perspectives of the participants in terms of how they perceive NS. The effect of past experiences is more pronounced in cases in which the participants have experienced military-like activities. This is evident based on the account of P03, who perceive NS in the light of his own experiences in schools' uniform groups.

> *P03-…I think that NS is not much different from the uniform group I joined (Boys' Brigade)…*

Significant others play an important role in helping the participants to sieve and discern the credibility of the information gathered. Significant others are usually kin and friends who have served NS. More importantly, the participants trust them.

> *P08 -…I believe what my brother said about NS…he shares his NS experiences which helped to prepare me mentally…*

The filtering process is also shaped by what is being portrayed or transmitted in official sources, which, more often than not, is perceived to be more reliable or accurate compared to nonofficial sources (see P14's remarks below).

> *P14 - From what I heard [from] cousins, friends, then…a lot things about training injuries… but I believe that the training is quite safe…based on what I have read in the newspapers…*

5.1.2 Clarifying

Clarifying is a sub-process of bracing. Clarifying refers to the process of self-clarification with respect to serving time in NS and its impact on personal development, studies, and career plans. The process of clarifying consists of two components, namely: a., assessment based on initial perceptions of NS; and b., responses to clarification outcomes.

Process of clarifying
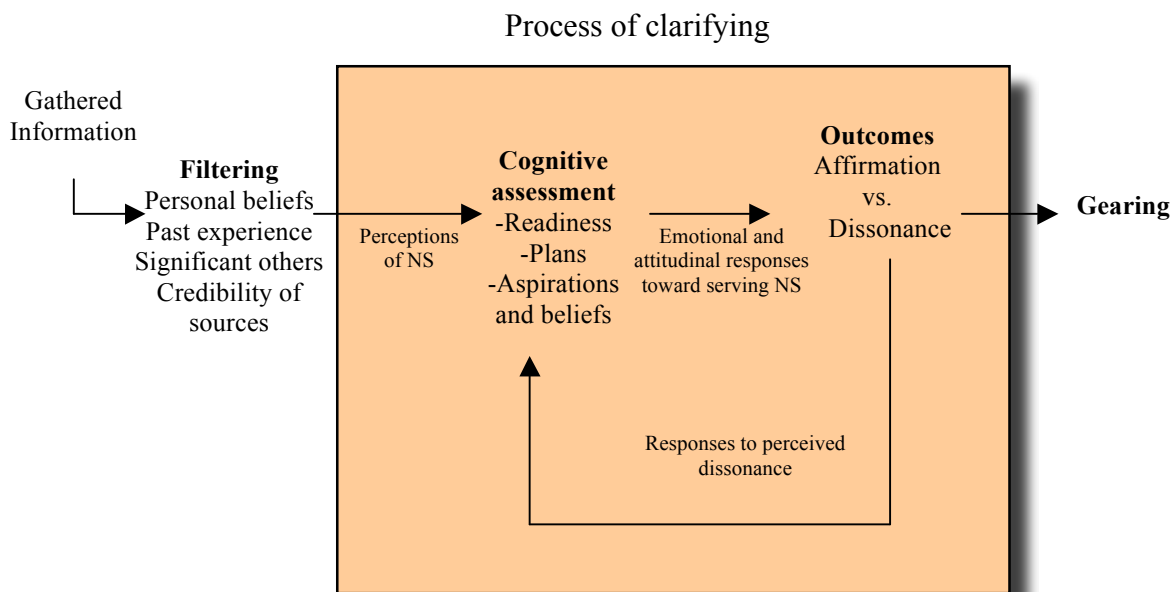
Figure 5.3 Process of clarifying and its components

Deriving from the process of gathering, the participants form initial perceptions of NS, which may be classified into: a., idealistic; b., realistic; c., distorted; and d., vague. In turn, these perceptions influence the participants' assessment of the impact of NS and their emotional and attitudinal responses. For instance, it is observed that idealistic perceptions of NS are likely to lead to optimistic expectations of how one may benefit from serving NS, positive emotions, and attitudes toward serving NS. On the other hand, distorted or vague perceptions of NS are likely to produce pessimistic expectations; predominantly negative emotions, such as fear; and negative attitudes toward conscription. The evidence for these classifications and their effects on the clarifying process are summarized in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Classification of Participants' Perceptions of NS, Resultant Emotional and Attitudinal Responses

Classification of participants' perception of NS prior to NS (cognitive assessment)	Likely emotional and attitudinal responses	Illustrations
Idealistic	Optimistic expectations Predominantly positive emotions: Excitement, anticipation, Positive attitudes: -"NS is important" -"NS is good for me"	*P18-...I think NS is important [**attitudinal response**]...actually, I look forward to enlistment [**positive emotional response**]...look forward to making a lot of new friends then I be close to some guys as a brotherhood...fight together [**idealistic perception**]...*
Realistic	Optimistic expectations Positive/Neutral emotions: Mixed emotions Attitudes: range from positive to ambivalence -"NS has its good and bad points" -"no choice"	*P05- NS is something all must do [**attitudinal response**]...it is not such a bad thing...but I was worried [**emotional response**] about which vocation I will be posted and whether it is relevant to my future job...*
Distorted	Pessimistic expectations Neutral/Negative emotions: Worry, concern, fear Attitudes: range from ambivalence to negative -"no choice" -"waste of time"	*P12 - I didn't get a real picture of army and NS prior to enlistment ...I was worried [**emotional response**] about my lodging, food because... heard from somewhere that the food in the military is really bad [**distorted perception**]...so I thought it [NS] was somehow a waste of time [**attitudinal response**]...*
Vague	Pessimistic expectations Predominantly negative emotions: Anger, frustration Negative attitudes: -"NS is a total waste of time" -"NS is a violation of personal rights"	*P20 - I think NS is a complete waste of time [**attitudinal response**]...just feel that it is not fair [**emotional response: anger**]...*

As for the second component within the process of clarifying, responses to clarification outcomes follow from the outcomes of the assessment component, which may be either *perceived affirmation* or *perceived dissonance*. Perceived affirmation means that the participants do not perceive serving NS to be in conflict with their personal interests. For instance, P03 is positive about serving NS and is prepared to subjugate his personal interests in service of NS:

> *P03 - I felt good to be able to serve my country in the best possible manner by being a soldier and fighting for the land I loved…my studies can wait…*

When the process of clarifying results in a state of conflict or tension, perceived dissonance occurs. This occurs when the participants assess that their personal interests or beliefs are in conflict with the notion of serving NS. At this point, the participants may respond in the following ways, namely: a., rejection; b., accommodation; and c., avoidance, to deal with the perceived conflict. This is illuminated by the experiences of the participants below.
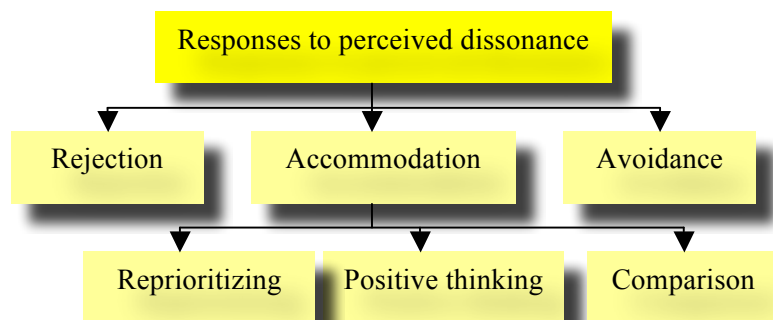
Figure 5.4 Responses to perceived dissonance

An example of the rejection response to perceived dissonance is P16. P16 has deemed that NS is disruptive to his career advancement and continues to maintain this perspective throughout the period leading to his enlistment.

The accommodation response may take the forms of reprioritizing, positive thinking, and comparison. P08, who initially opined that NS is a waste of time because it [NS] disrupts his study plans, provides an example of reprioritizing. However, he reconciles this internal conflict by re-rationalizing his priorities through the invocation of a higher-order reason, such as one's duty to serve the country.

> *P08 - ...I am thinking that it [NS] is going [to be a] waste of time...I think...apart from the whole waste of time, I also think that it might be Singapore's security that there has to be NS...maybe it's my time to do [my] part for Singapore...also many people have already done their part for Singapore for 2 years....*

The participants may attempt to mitigate the conflict by channeling their focus and thoughts on the potential gains of serving NS, as illuminated by the comments of P14 below.

> *P14 - Probably, I was trying to console myself by thinking that maybe I can meet more new friends in NS...looking forward to another phase in my life...some say it is about boys becoming men...*

In terms of comparison as a form of accommodating, in spite of his personal distaste for NS, P04 finds solace from the fact that NS is universally and fairly implemented:

> *P04 - I do not like NS...but every other guy has to go through it...so you can't really say that it is unfair to yourself because the others are also doing it.*

Lastly, the participants may choose to deal with their conflict by avoidance. This aspect is gleaned from P10's remarks.

> *P10 - NS is a waste of time...but it is a place to escape from my family, because they always nag at me every day...NS is like sort of a refuge for me.*

5.1.3   Gearing

Gearing refers to the participants' preparation process for their impending military service. The process of gearing consists of several components, namely: a., gearing strategies; b., perceived readiness; and c., intervening factors, as shown in Figure 5.5:
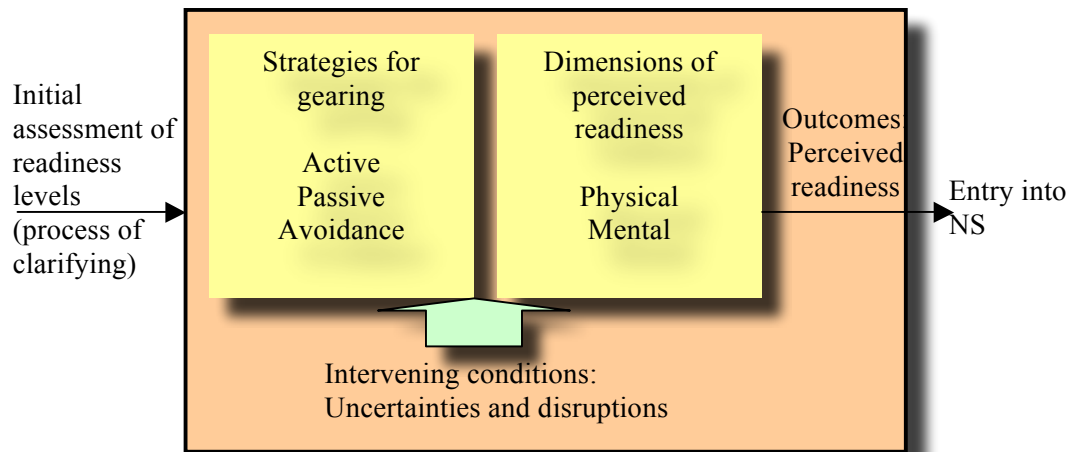
Figure 5.5 Process of gearing and its components

From the data analysis, there are three observable strategies adopted by the participants to prepare for their impending military service: a., active strategy; b., passive strategy; and c., avoidance. Active strategies refer to methods adopted by the participants that directly address problems or concerns in relation to their preparation for enlistment. Passive strategies refer to inaction on the part of the participants with regard to preparing for NS. Lastly, avoidance strategies refer to methods that seek to avoid solving the perceived enlistment problems directly. Table 5.3 summarizes the various strategies within the process of gearing.

Table 5.3 Strategies for Gearing

Strategies for gearing	Illustrations
Active	*P05 - Every weekend I will go for a jog...to maintain my stamina.*
Passive	*P13 - I just told myself to go and exercise, must exercise; but, in the end, I didn't really do it…*
Avoidance	*P04 - And then what happens is that before enlistment I decided to give myself a nice break…so to just relax myself, I just decide to go 3 months backpacking on my own.*
Intervening conditions, such as current school or work commitments	*P06 - Because NS was a few weeks after I graduated from poly…and before that I was doing a project, that is why I did not train at all …because the project required me to [work] from morning till night...to see how fast I can finish it ...that is why I have no time to exercise…*

Perceived readiness has two dimensions, the physical and the mental. The physical dimension refers to the physical aspects of training and buildup in preparation for NS. For example, P05 opined that he was ready for NS because he had prepared himself physically by embarking on a series of runs prior to enlistment. There is also a mental dimension which concerns the participants' perceived state of mental readiness for NS. The participants' perceived mental readiness is influenced by their perceived adequacy in terms of knowledge of NS. For instance, P06 felt that he was mentally unprepared for NS because he did not possess adequate information or knowledge of NS prior to enlistment. In contrast, P03 felt that he was mentally ready for NS because he had assessed that his knowledge and past experience with the Boys' Brigade uniform group were sufficient to see him through NS.

Based on the participants' comments, physical or mental readiness alone does not lead to perceived readiness. Both physical and mental readiness conditions must be met for perceived readiness to occur. These aspects are illuminated by P05 and P18:

> *P05 - I went jogging, making sure to get myself physically fit…but mentally…I totally have no idea inside…so I felt that I am not very prepared for NS.*
> *P18 - I did some physical training myself… other than that, I gathered information from my friends about BMT…what to expect…so I was prepared mentally…overall, I think I am well prepared for NS.*

It is also observed that intervening conditions, such as abrupt disruption to one's studies and careers and uncertainty over one's placement in university, can potentially affect the participants' sense of preparedness for NS. For instance, P19 felt that he was not ready for NS because his studies were disrupted near their completion:

> *P19 - I wasn't able to complete my studies in Monash College because …halfway through I got my letter for enlistment…I am really not ready for NS…*

5.1.4 Summary for Bracing

In summary, the process of bracing consists of three sub-processes of gathering, clarifying, and gearing. These processes play important roles in the lead-up to

enlistment into the military and reflect the key aspects of participants' preparation for their entry into NS. More importantly, from the data analysis, individual participants may have different methods in terms of gathering information, clarifying their perceptions of NS, and gearing for NS.

5.2 Committing – The Core Category

From the process of selective coding, the participants' commitment to NS is conceptualized as the core category. It consists of the following components: their internalized significance of serving NS, aims, and levels of commitment.

The study found that the participants begin to internalize the significance of serving NS and clarify their commitment in the process of bracing. More significantly, the process of internalizing the significance of serving NS deepens when the participants commence their military service. In the military, the process of internalizing is influenced by: a., training and social experiences in NS (within the process of managing); b., clarification of the purpose and need to serve NS in relation to the sacrifices the participants have to make (within the process of appraising); and c., identification and maturation as citizen soldiers (within the process of assimilating).

From the processes of managing, appraising, and assimilating, the participants create their aims in serving NS. These aims can be grouped into five orientation types: a., maximizing learning and development opportunities in NS (adventurers' orientation); b., leveraging NS to enhance one's own career opportunities (careerists' orientation); c., fulfilling one's citizenry obligation (advocates' orientation); d., minimizing risks for self-preservation ("play-safes" orientation); and e., seeking to avoid social responsibilities ("troubled kids" orientation). These aims, in turn, regulate and direct the levels of commitment of the participants with respect to serving NS.
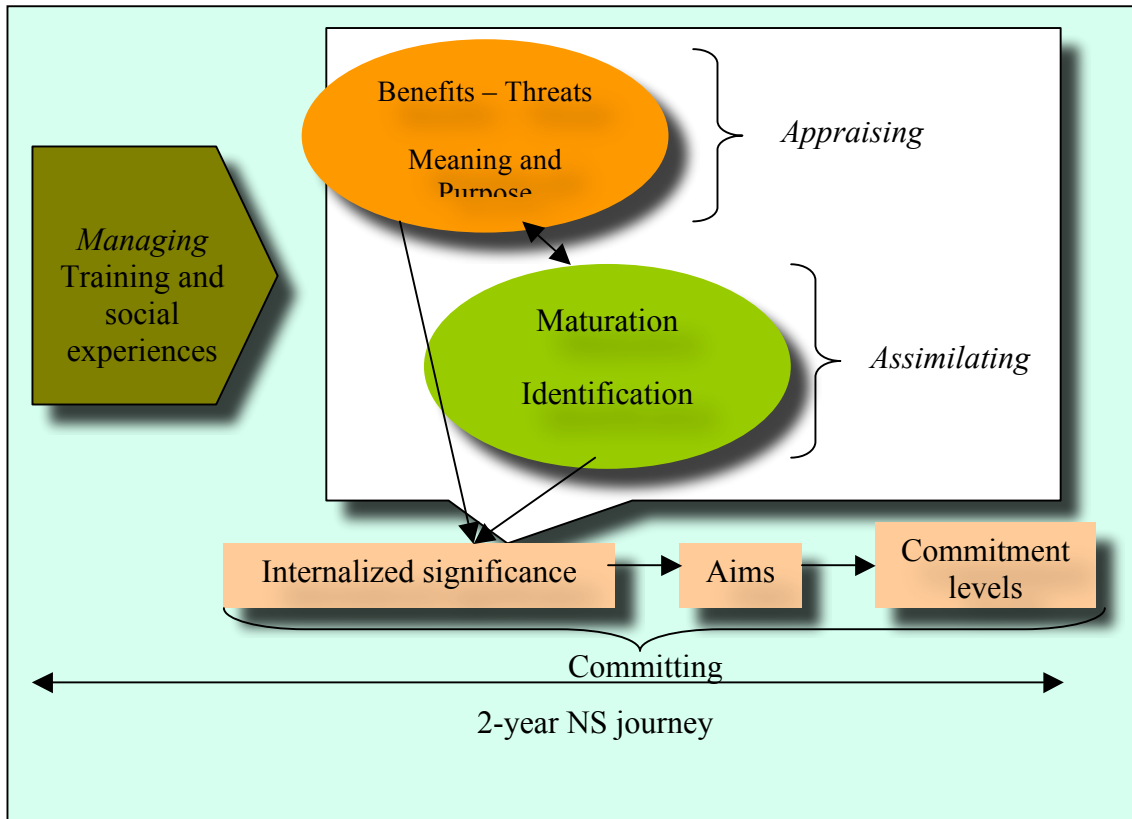
Figure 5.6 Core category of committing and its components

It is important to note that the participants review their aims regularly over the entire duration of NS and may change their aims according to how they experience and manage their military training and life in the military. For instance, 18 out of 20 participants reported that positive experiences in training tend to encourage greater participation in training and reinforce their commitment to serve. On the other hand, disruptive events, such as course failures or injuries, are likely to demoralize and affect the participants' commitment toward NS. Disruptive events, according to the participants, produce other negative effects with which the affected participants must cope, such as the loss of self-confidence and adjustment resulting from role reassignment. It is observed that disruptive events trigger the processes of reappraising, re-assimilating and reexamining of the participants' original aims of serving NS, as shown in Figure 5.7 below.
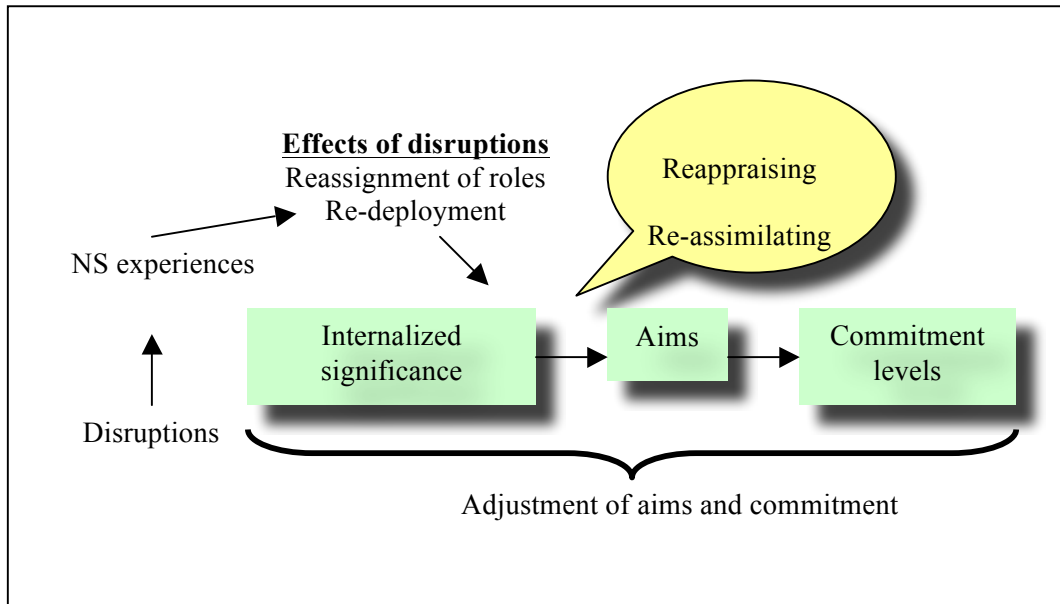
Figure 5.7 Effects of disruptions on the process of committing

An example of how the internalized significance of serving NS and, consequently, the aim of serving NS are changed because of personal perceived failures in NS is illuminated in the case of P10:

> P10 - ... To tell the truth, before I entered NS, I was thinking…I will die for my country, protect my country with my life *[initial aim]*, but after I entered NS, my ideal wavered *[change of internalized significance]*…will I really die for my country?*[re-examination of aim]*…I kept asking myself the same question …maybe I wasn't cut out for military life…I cannot cope with the GCC (Guards' Conversion Course)…yes, I failed the course *[experience of failure]*…actually I don't feel like being converted to Guards, I just want to stay like as an infantry specialist…Why? *[re-appraisal process]* Partly because the IPPT (Individual Physical Proficiency Test) requirement for Guards is quite hard to meet… and I find myself unable to cope with that kind of standard so… might as well remain in the infantry…

Deriving from their aims of serving NS, the participants selectively decide on their levels of commitment, which can be classified as: a., normative; b., transactional; and c., affective. Each of these commitment levels is then differentiated along three dimensions, namely: a., object of commitment; b., effort; and c., priority. The first

category of normative commitment, for instance, describes participants who are not committed to serving NS. This category of participants feels forced to serve NS because the law mandates it. Their object of commitment is the self, not the country. Correspondingly, this group of participants would place personal interests above the national interests and are unlikely to give their best effort in training. These aspects are reflected in P13's comments below.

> *P13 - I felt that NS is one where all the citizens must go through… you cannot really change such constitution…[it] has been a law, and it is also a tradition…**[internalized significance]**…so I just do my part **[aim]**… have to serve, no choice **[commitment level: normative]**…I would say my commitment is about 40% **[effort: minimum]** …I am more concerned about my future **[object: self]**…do not really care about NS...physically, I am present, but mentally I am somewhere else, as I have better things to do **[priority: personal interests]**…*

Transactional commitment describes participants who are committed to serve because of perceived personal gain or benefit. For this category of participants, their object of commitment is also the self, and their effort in training is conditional on whether they perceive the training to be beneficial or not, as shown in the case of P02:

> *P02 - I can accept the fact that I have to serve my duty to the country **[internalized significance]**. But as to whether I will lay [down] my life, that is another question mark **[object: self]**…my aim in NS is to maximize the opportunities **[aim]**…I felt that if I gave it my best **[effort: conditional]**, I would get the best experience out of this whole NS **[priority: personal interests]**…*

Lastly, the participants are said to be affectively committed when they identify with the purpose of NS and have internalized the need to serve. An example of affective commitment is found in P08:

> *P08 - To me, NS is important **[internalized significance]**…we have to defend our country, otherwise who is going to do so?**[object: country]** With terrorists*

around, we have to keep ourselves and our place safe...family safe, so...not
many people want to be soldiers, but they have to be, so have to do it
*altogether **[priority: national interests]**...to me...it's just training hard*
***[aim]**...give them my 100%* ***[effort: maximum]**...*

A summary of the different levels of commitment is shown in Table 5.4

Table 5.4 Comparison between different levels of commitment

Commitment Levels	Dimensions
Normative	Object of Commitment: Self Effort: Minimum effort in training Priority: Personal interests over national interests
Transactional	Object of commitment: Self Effort: Conditional on expected benefits or gains Priority: Personal interests over national interests
Affective	Object of commitment: Duty. Country Effort: Maximum effort Priority: Personal interests are secondary to national interests

The category of committing is the core category of this study. The other categories formed (bracing, managing, appraising, assimilating) are related to the participants' internalized significance, aims, and their commitment levels. Prior to enlistment, the process of bracing initiates the process of clarifying the participants' internalized significance, initial aims, and commitment levels with respect to serving NS. The participants' internalized significance, aims, and commitment towards serving NS influence the process of managing in terms of how the participants cope with the military training and life in NS, while the process of managing sets the basis for the processes of appraising and assimilating. The process of appraising is related to how the participants make sense of their NS experiences in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans. The process of assimilating is about how the participants mature as individuals and begin to identify with their roles as citizen soldiers as a consequence of how they cope in NS. More importantly, the outcomes of appraising and assimilating influence the internalized significance of serving NS, aims, and commitment levels towards NS, which, in turn, influence the process of managing. Thus, the category of committing operates as the centre of the theory of

Selective Commitment, with the other four categories "orbiting" around it. This will be described in detail in Section 5.7.

5.3   Managing

Managing refers to the process of how the participants manage military training in NS in relation to their study and career development. The process of managing is derived from the axial coding process and consists of two distinct sub-processes, *coping* and *charting*. The sub-process of coping relates to participants learning to cope with military training and military life in general as they transit from one phase of military training to another. The sub-process of charting depicts how the participants manage their study and career plans while serving NS.

Table 5.5 represents the process of managing, its sub-processes, and causal conditions in the context of how conscripts cope with NS in relation to their study and career plans.

Table 5.5 The Category of Managing and its Subcategories

Core process	Managing	
Sub-process	Coping	Charting
Causal Conditions	Entry into NS Transition and participation in training	Interactions with: Platoon mates, commanders, parents Others (friends, NSmen*) * NSmen are people who have completed NS
Interaction Strategies	Reacting, acquiring, deploying	Realizing, adjusting, preparing
Context	Physical, social, and cultural domains within the Pre-Operational and Operational training phases (refer to Fig 5.3.1a)	Social interactions during free time, such as on weekends, non-training days, etc.
Sources of support and motivations	Peers, commanders, family	

5.3.1   Coping

Coping refers to how the participants cope with training and military life in the preoperational training phase (includes Basic Military Training and Vocational Training) and operational training phase. Within the process of coping, there are three

sub-processes, namely: a., reacting; b., acquiring; and c., deploying, which will be elaborated in detail later.   The key factors in the coping process are: a., the participants' assessments of their situation; b., environmental and personal factors; c., interaction strategies; and d., perceived outcomes, as shown in Figure 5.8.
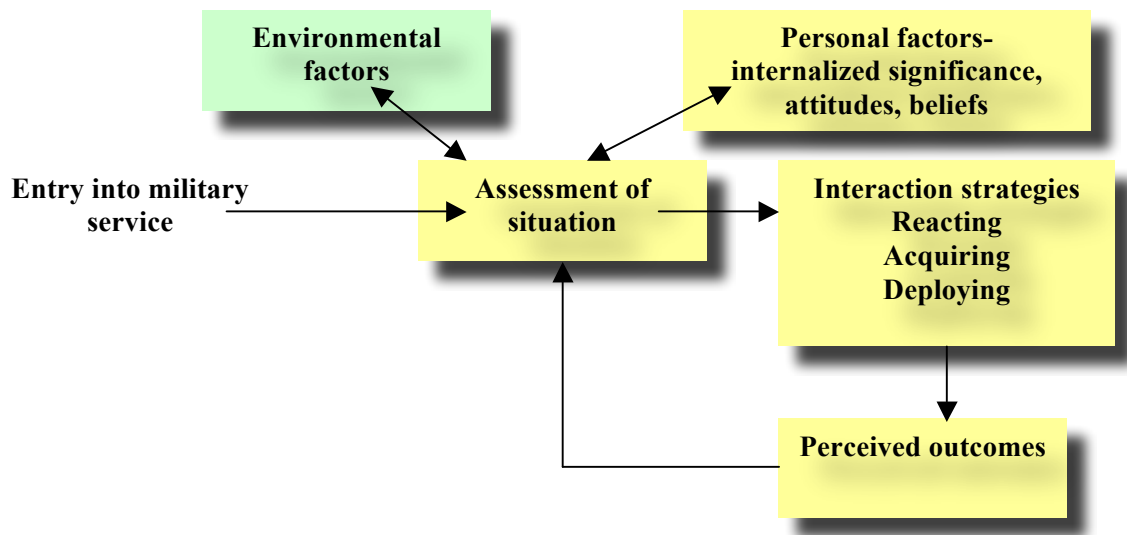
Figure 5.8 Process of coping and its components

In terms of context, there are three sets of environmental factors within the context of coping: physical, cultural, and social.   First, the physical environment refers to the nature of military training and orientation of performance.   Second, cultural environment refers to certain aspects, such as status and authority that characterize the military organization.   Third, social environment refers to interactions with peers, commanders, family, and friends.   In the preoperational training phase, the participants are accorded trainee status, and the training is individual-based.   In the operational training phase, the participants assume their actual ranks and operational roles, and training is focused on group-based performance.   In terms of social environment, the participants interact mostly with their peers and people in the units because they have to live in barracks for most of the week.   Hence, their interaction time with family and friends is somewhat reduced to non-training time, such as weekends.   Figure 5.9 illustrates the relationship between the physical, cultural, and social factors in different stages of the 2-year NS.

Pre-Operational Training Phase   Operational Training Phase
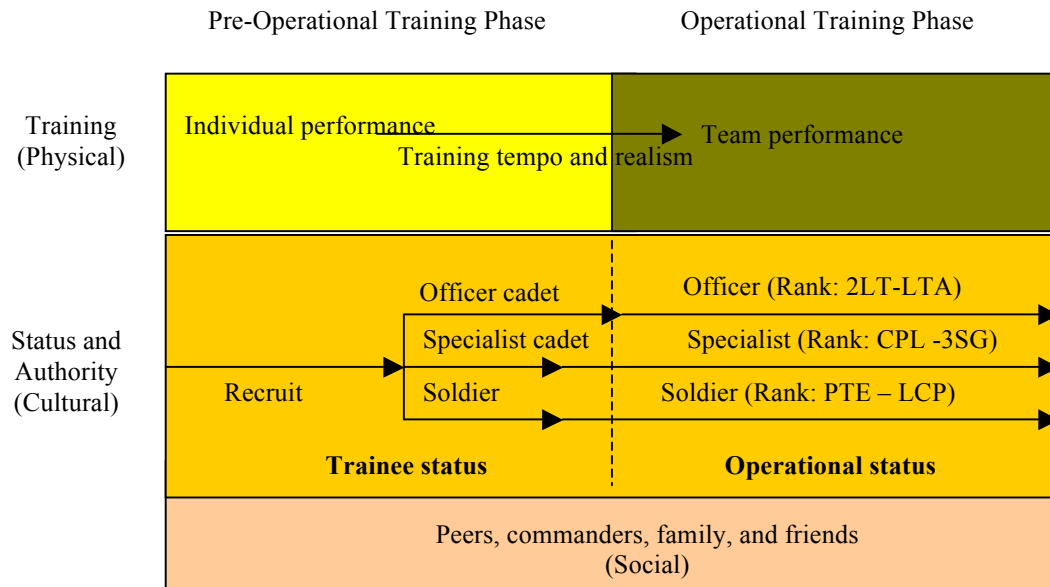
Figure 5.9 Environmental factors that shape the training context in NS

5.3.1.1 Reacting

Entry into the military is a traumatic experience for all participants.   All the participants agree that they experienced "entry shock" when they stepped into the military. Entry shock occurs because the participants are suddenly confronted with a multitude of unfamiliar elements unique to the military environment, such as a high training tempo, strict discipline and regimentation, and community living conditions (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 Comparison between the civilian and military environments

Based on the accounts of the participants, entry shock has both physical and psychological dimensions. The physical dimension refers to physical experiences such as military training and the living conditions. The psychological dimension relates to issues that affect the participants psychologically, such as: a., deviation in terms of actual and initial perceptions of NS; b., separation from family; c., new identities as citizen soldiers; and d., military culture, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Dimensions and Constituents of "Entry Shock"

Dimensions and components of entry-shock	Illustrations
Physical	
Training and living conditions	*P17 - Like how to say BMTC life is quite not use to… like wearing the uniform, bathing with others in the toilets, nonstop training and training under the hot sun …*
Psychological	
Deviation from own perception of NS	*P07 - First enter...The first week...I felt, like, cheated already…everything is different from what I imagined…when you are in NS…I mean all those kinds of physical training is not what I thought… I thought maybe 20 pushups a day and that is all…and it actually did not turn out to be like this…we are rushed to meet timings…always given orders to do this, do that…*
Separation from family	*P12 - That is the time where we…like, miss home… for the first time, and now…miss our parents, friends, er…well, at first it [is] hard to get through …*
New identity (soldier)	*P11- My BMT…first day is already very sad…first thing cut "bo tak" [crew cut] already then…suddenly, I realized I am a soldier and not a schoolboy now…*
Military culture (regimentation and discipline)	*P09 - …The first day when we entered the army, the first thing I knew was to "knock it down" (referring to punishment)*

In the state of entry shock, the participants are stressed. This study found that all the participants experienced a high level of stress and negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, confusion, frustration, and even disillusionment, at this point. According to P13, this psychological pressure is compounded by the threat of punishment. From a process viewpoint, therefore, the participants assess their situation to be a threat to their well-being. Hence, their primary concern is to react to the immediate environment and issues, and the participants' mental perspectives at this stage are about self-preservation and survival (Figure 5.11). It is noted that the participants are not concerned with deeper issues that relate to their internalized significance at this point. These aspects are illuminated by P13:

>P13 - My first 2 weeks in BMTC …I would say a pretty [big] culture shock, like…there is no time to think too much…the moment we stepped into the

camp….we have to…get out of our comfort zone, we have to meet timings, get

shouted at, and…a lot of regimental and discipline…
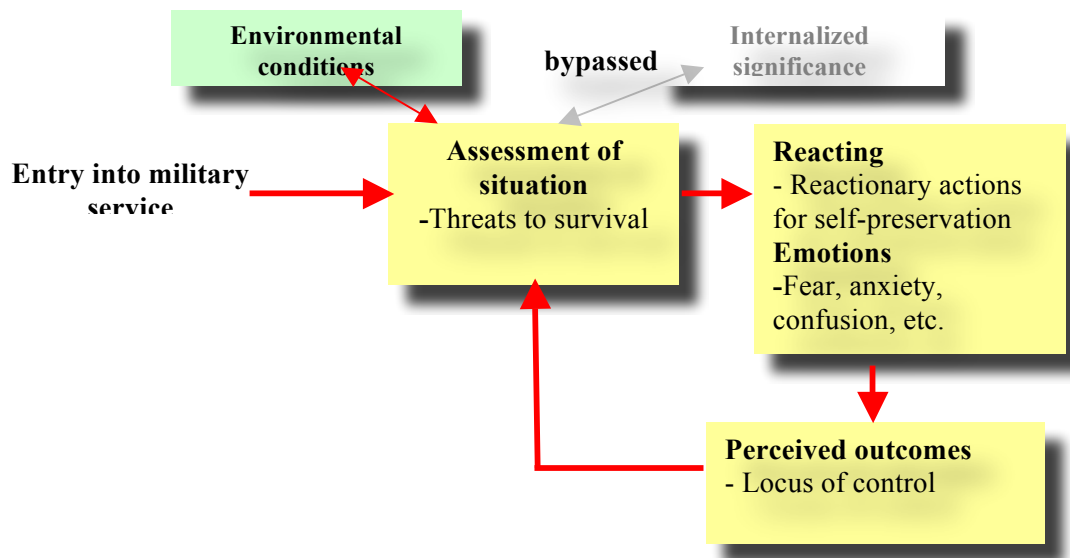
Figure 5.11 Process of coping (reacting to entry shock)

In terms of responses, the participants adopted various reactive actions--such as enduring, becoming self-reliant, cooperating with others, complying with orders, avoiding trouble, and being inconspicuous--to deal with the effects of entry shock, as shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 Mental Perspective and Methods of Reacting within the Process of Coping

Mental perspective	Methods of reacting	Illustrations
Trying to survive	Endure/ Persevere Be self-sufficient Cooperate with others Comply with instructions Avoid trouble Be inconspicuous	*P14 -… mentally, [you] have to tell yourself do this …then physically endure the physical training…I would say…like…any other human, if you are thrown into another environment and you have to survive…* *P14 - … We have to be self-sufficient to work things out ourselves, manage our own problems, learn how to work with others …* *P09 - …In the end, he (the commander)…[is] still the winner because of his rank, so I just kept quiet…* *P12 - I guess it was quite a mixture of stressfulness and disillusionment at the start….for me, I was just following instructions and trying to stay out of trouble and… mesh into the background…*

The study also observed that the process of reacting to the immediate perceived threat does not last very long. Twenty out of 21 of the participants are observed to have recovered from the initial shock by the second week of their military service.

Table 5.8 Estimated Time Taken to Recover from Initial Entry Shock

Time taken to recover from initial entry shock (based on verbal survey with the participants)	0-1 week	1-2 weeks	More than 2 weeks
Participants	P01, P02, P03, P05, P06, P07, P08, P17, P18, P19	P09, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P20, P21	P04

The participants recover from the initial entry shock when they start to become accustomed to the training routine and military culture (see P04's remarks). The effect of training routinization and familiarization with the military culture lowers the stress levels of the participants, as it gives them a sense of certainty, predictability, and familiarity.

> P04 - I think about 2 weeks or so into NS…yeah…it was about that time before I felt more comfortable, less stressed…I suppose it is getting used to the system…the training, routines, and culture…

5.3.1.2 Acquiring

The process of acquiring begins when the participants recover from the initial entry shock and begin to focus on acquiring the necessary competencies and know-how to deal with the training challenges and demands of military life. The participants are able to focus on their training, because the basic "survival" issues (at the point of entry into military service) are perceived to be less threatening, and this places the participants in a more secure and stable state of mind to focus on training and learning about the military environment. These points are illuminated by P12:

> P12 - Once the initial shock was over…I felt more at ease and started to focus on training and the things around me….

The process of acquiring is situated in the context of the pre-operational training phase. In this phase, the participants, as trainees, are required to achieve a stipulated level of individual soldiering competencies and skill sets needed for their subsequent deployment in the operational units. Hence, in this phase of training, the participants are primarily responsible for their own training performance and have very little influence over the training regime. The consequence of this arrangement tends to produce an inward-looking perspective that is oriented toward achieving personal performance. This is exemplified by P03:

> *P03 - The main thing for me as a trainee is to make sure I pass the officer course…I mean, if I fail my OCS course…then I have to give up the notion of being an officer…*

The process of acquiring, therefore, refers to how the participants acquire individual soldiering competence in the area of training and learn about the military environment and larger security context. The figure below illustrates the sub-process of acquiring within the process of coping in the preoperational training phase (see Figure 5.12).
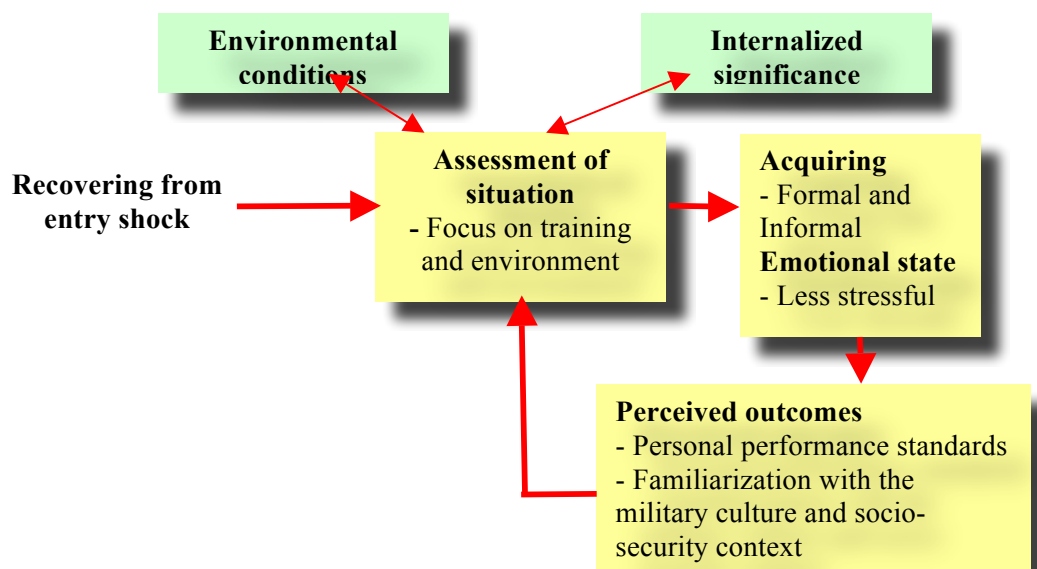
Figure 5.12 Process of acquiring

Drawing from the participants' comments, there are two dimensions to the process of acquiring. The formal dimension refers to how the participants acquire soldiering competence and knowledge through structured training programs. The second dimension refers to informal learning processes. The participants undergo rigorous

formal training regimes that are aimed at developing their combat soldiering skills and physical strength. Such training regimes often involve repetitive drills and long hours of practice. Through such structured formal training regimes, the participants acquire the required level of combat skills and physical strength. An important aspect of this process is associated with the system of incentives and disincentives in training. It is noted that the participants are motivated by monetary rewards, recognition, and promotions prospects. However, they are also mindful of the punishment and other disincentives should they not meet the required training standards or performance levels. These aspects are illuminated by P03 and P10 below:

P03 -…I became fitter because of the physical training, and they give out monetary rewards and a badge, say, if I get a gold award for my IPPT ([Individual Physical Proficiency Test), which is quite good…

P10 -…No choice, have to train hard…if not, I have to stay back to do remedial training on the weekends…

The tempo and perceived realism of training affect how the participants learn and cope. All the participants acknowledged that progressive training sessions give them time to recover and build their physical strength to deal with the physical demands of the training. This point is illustrated by P07:

P07 - Slowly…slowly I got used to the training and life in the army…I think…less stress…and progressive training also helps…

The participants also highlighted that realism in training encourages them to be more receptive towards training and eliminates doubts and skepticism about the viability of peacetime training with respect to preparing for real operations. These aspects are highlighted by P05:

P5 - Training is certainly tougher than BMT…but I think the training is quite realistic, which is important…otherwise, it is such a waste of time…

Besides formal training regimes, the participants may also embark on informal self-training. The reasons for self-managed training are usually motivated by intrinsic factors, such as personal interests, pride, and goals (see P08's remarks).

> *P08 - …I train myself in the weekends as well…because I want to be selected to go to GUARDS, which is an elite unit…*

Being relatively new to the military, the participants are also unfamiliar with many aspects of the military culture, practices, and the larger socio-security context. The participants are socialized to different aspects of the military culture and practices through formal lessons and social interactions with the people they meet in NS. In the participants' comments, they make references to official documentary sources, such as the soldiers' guidebook, to learn about the military and its practices. However, these documentary sources provide only basic information. A large part of how the participants learn and understand the military culture and operating norms is through trial and error, observations, and direct interactions with insiders, whom the participants tend to regard as role models and enforcers of the military discipline standards. These aspects are highlighted by P13 and P15 below.

> *P13 - The soldiers' guidebook is only useful in the beginning. After that, a lot is learned through trial and error…I mean you make mistakes, you get punished…that is how I learned about the military discipline and culture…*
>
> *P15 - …My platoon sergeant will talk to us about what and how to behave and what is acceptable in the military…basically, my sergeant is the guide…*

Another important aspect of acquiring is the understanding of the security and sociopolitical landscape of Singapore and the region. In NS, the participants are educated on security and sociopolitical issues as part of their national education programs. Deriving from the participants, they also engage in informal discussions with their peers and commanders on such issues, and in the process develop a deeper appreciation for the need and purpose of NS. This aspect is illuminated by P07:

> *P07-…In NS, they teach you about the security issues in Singapore…sometimes, my friends and I will discuss these issues, and it helps us to understand why we need to do NS…*

In summary, the process of acquiring begins when the participants, recovering from the initial entry shock, start to focus on their training as they continue to learn about the military culture, its practices, and the larger socio-security context. The process of acquiring has two dimensions of formal and informal aspects that depict the way the participants acquire their soldiering competence and knowledge about the military, as shown in Figure 5.13 below.

Domains	Dimensions	Conditions	Methods
Training			
		Incentives and	Drills
Military	Formal	disincentives	Practices
culture			Observations
	Informal	Intrinsic	Interactions with insiders
Socio-		motivators	Trial and error
security			Self-management
context			

Context
Stipulated training standards
Trainee status
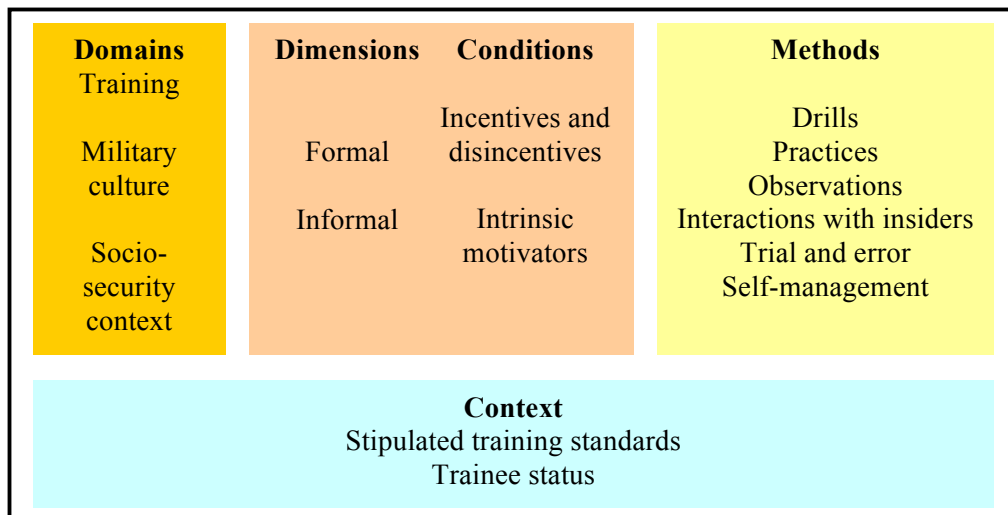
Figure 5.13 Process of acquiring and its components

5.3.1.3 Deploying

The process of deploying refers to how the participants cope in the operational training phase. There are two key conditions that distinguish the training context in this phase from the preoperational training phase. First, upon the completion of the preoperational training phase, the participants are accorded operational status, and they assume actual operational roles and responsibilities in the units. Second, unlike preoperational phase in which personal performances in the training courses are important, the emphasis in the operational phase is centred on a collective effort to achieve the units' goals and mission success. When the participants progress into the operational training phase, they operate in the context of a unit. As such, they become more aware of their responsibilities toward others in the team. In terms of training issues, it is observed that the participants are less concerned about training because

they are physically and mentally conditioned at this stage of their service. Thus, the types of issues and how the participants cope in the operational training phase differ from the preoperational training phase. From the data analysis, the participants have expressed issues in two aspects of job responsibilities and interpersonal issues (see Figure 5.14).
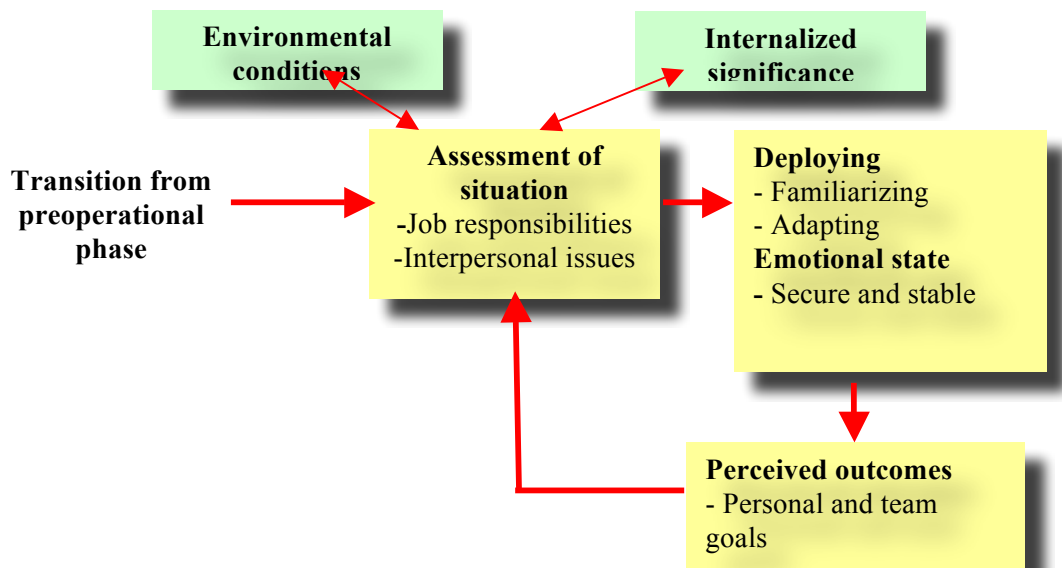
Figure 5.14 Process of deploying

The sections below will elaborate the process of deploying, which consists of two sub-processes: familiarizing and adapting.

5.3.1.3.1 Familiarizing

The concept of *familarizing* refers to how the participants familiarize themselves to their jobs and others' expectations of them in their newly acquired roles in the operational units. An important aspect of familiarizing involves the self-discovery of what the actual job scope entails in relation to their initial perceptions and those tasks that are formally specified to the participants. These aspects are reflected in the comments of P02:

> *P02 -…Although I know I am a PC [platoon commander], I did not expect to do so many tasks…many of the tasks sort of…emerged along the way [and were] not told to me in the initial job brief…*

117

The participants may also be oriented to their jobs by formal sessions (such as unit-organized induction programs) and informal sessions with insiders (such as commanders and peers). Although these formal and informal sessions are useful from the point of socializing the participants to the new environment, there is a possibility that the participants may be overloaded with too much or contradictory information, leading to confusion and uncertainty:

> P15 - ...I got mixed information from the S1's [manpower officer] briefing and what my section mates told me...it is kind of too much and confusing...

Another important aspect of familiarizing involves the participants' sensing of their personal boundaries and freedom of action in their new appointments, as well as the realization that they are no longer trainees but operational soldiers who are expected to be independent and less reliant on their commanders for instructions. These aspects are highlighted by P02 and P15:

> P02 - As a platoon commander ...sometimes, I just do what I think is right even though I am not very sure...
> P15 - In BMT, anything that you don't know, you can just ask your sergeant...but, in unit, you got to find your own ways to solve problems

Lastly, the concept of familiarizing is extended to include determining the job scope and responsibilities of those with whom the participants have to interact or work. This aspect is essential in situations when the participants are assigned to existing teams with established working norms, as in the case of P02:

> P02 - ...When I got posted to the unit, the first thing I did was to find out what the rest of my men do in their own areas before I decided what to do...after all, they had been together for quite some time by the time I took command...

5.3.1.3.2 Adapting
The concept of *adapting* refers to how the participants cope with their job responsibilities and manage the people with whom they have to work. After familiarizing themselves with their new appointments, the participants are more or less

sensitized to possible competency gaps, expectation mismatches with respect to their job responsibilities, and interpersonal issues that may exist in their workplace. It is observed that all the participants have to make some adjustments to adapt to their new job assignments and deal with the interpersonal issues in their workplace.

One aspect of adapting involves the upgrading of one's competencies to cope with the new job responsibilities. P02 mentioned that, despite undergoing 9 months of officership training, he had to work very hard as a new platoon commander to acquire sufficient workplace experiences and know-how before he could lead his men well. Adapting also refers to the participants having to improvise what they learn in training schools to the workplace environment. P19, for instance, opined that he had to adapt to some aspects of the combat procedures he learned in training school because of contextual differences in the unit.

The concept of adapting also encompasses job-fit issues. When posted to the operational units, there is a possibility that the participants may be assigned to appointments that they do not like or do not suit them very well. In these situations, the participants may address such issues through the formal channels, such as asking for job reassignment, moderating their personal expectations, or changing their job scope altogether. These aspects are highlighted by P15, P05, and P04:

> *P15 - …Initially, I was posted to be a clerk…but I do not like [it],…so I asked for an interview with my commander for posting to a logistics unit…*
> *P05-OC-30- …I was posted to the infantry because I failed my air grading test…I did not like infantry jobs…but no choice….maybe I am not cut out to be a pilot…*
> *P04 - …When I was posted to [the] training design department as a clerk…I was very disappointed, because I know I can do more…so I volunteered to help out in other areas and projects…*

Another aspect of adapting is associated with interpersonal issues. Inter-personal issues are observed to be a prominent issue in this phase of training compared to the earlier phase. This is because, in the operational phase, the participants have to work with others to achieve units' goals; in contrast, in the preoperational phase, the

participants are primarily focused on personal training performances. When dealing with others, the participants may resort to methods such as coercion, collaboration, subordination, avoidance, confrontation, and rejection. To some extent, the participants' status and positions in the military and their personal attributes play important roles in determining their choice of methods in resolving interpersonal issues. For instance, P19, a platoon sergeant, would resort to both "soft" and "hard" approaches when dealing with his men in training. P16 managed his problems with his superior, who was making life difficult for P16, by avoiding him.

5.3.1.4 Summary

In summary, the contextual differences that separate the civilian environment from the military environment, distinguish the preoperational and the operational training phases, oblige the participants to cope in three distinct sub-processes of reacting, acquiring, and deploying (see Figure 5.15).
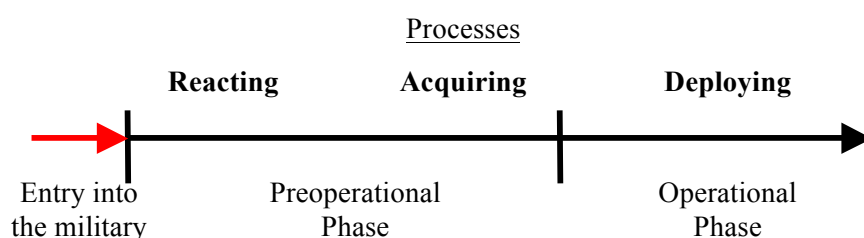
Figure 5.15 Sub-process of reacting, acquiring, and deploying within coping

5.3.2. Charting

Charting refers to the process of developing one's future plans while serving NS. The process of charting is derived from the axial coding process and consists of three sub-processes, namely: a., realizing; b., adjusting; and c., preparing. These processes are iterative in nature, and the participants engage in these processes throughout the duration of their NS.

5.3.2.1 Realizing

Realizing is the process of developing personal perspectives with respect to one's future plans. The process of realizing is influenced by personal experiences in NS and interactions with the people in the unit. Table 5.9 shows two subcategories of personal perspectives within the process of realizing.

120

Table 5.9 Personal Perspectives and Subcategories

Personal perspectives categories	
Careers and education pathways	Careers and education perspectives
Externally influenced	Personally experienced
Learning from peers, commanders, and others in the units: Other career and education pathways and possibilities Details of careers and education options Through peer comparison: Future plans are sound Achieving greater things in life Losing out to younger cohorts Personal qualification is too low Need to do something about personal future plans	From reflections of personal NS experience: Education is important to get good jobs Desire to get back to studying Working life is hard

The participants' perspectives about their career and education pathways are influenced by interactions with their peers, commanders, and others in NS. It is observed that peer-to-peer comparison and learning from others in the units are prevalent among the participants. The participants learn about other career or education possibilities from their fellow conscripts and the people they meet in NS. The information being shared covers details such as choice of university or education institutions, university entry requirement, study subjects combination, and cost of study. These aspects are illuminated by P09:

> *P09 - So the people in camp is asking me…also giving me advice, like the cut-off points for entry into polytechnic and the type of courses to choose…*

There is also comparison among the conscripts with respect to their study or career pathways. In comparing with others, the participants may calibrate their educational targets or form different perspectives with regard to their own abilities. Some feel that they could achieve more and set higher targets for themselves, while others feel compelled or pressurized to improve their existing educational qualifications to be competitive in the job market. Comparisons with others may also create a sense of

insecurity that causes the participants to pay attention to their future plans, because they note that their peers are also actively preparing for the future. This sense of insecurity is reflected in the participants' views and concerns about losing out to those who need not participate in NS. These views are extracted from the participants' comments below.

> *P02 - Pressure from peers?…definitely…but I consider this pressure as reinforcement…I view it as "Wow, these people are going big ways and there is no reason why I should be staying where I am staying…" I should be achieving big things like them as well…*
> *P06 - When I came into NS, I start to feel that I may lose out to the people who need not serve…maybe I should try working and studying at the same time in order not to lose out…*

The second aspect of realizing concerns the participants' deeper reflections on the broader notion of career and education. For 18 out of the 20 participants, serving NS represents their first working experience outside of school life. As such, the participants are able to compare the different aspects of school and work life, and form their personal perspectives regarding the importance of education and career in Singapore society. Selected comments below explain the types of perspectives and perceptions formed.

> *P15 - Because I get to know how hard working life is based on my experience in NS …somehow, [I] think that I should study harder to achieve to what I want to achieve…*
> *P08 - …Education is important, because like my section 2IC, he is very good, but because of his qualifications, he cannot be a sergeant major …education in Singapore is important. I think…everything depends on education to get a better job…*

5.3.2.2 Adjusting

From the process of realizing, the participants make adjustments to their career or study plans. This process is termed as adjusting, which may include one of these interaction strategies: a., exploring new options; b., reaffirming the original option;

and c., developing fall-back options. In terms of exploring new options, the participants begin to explore new options when they realize that their original options can be improved or enhanced and that they have the means to do so. These aspects are expressed by P06:

> *P06 - After consulting my friends, I was thinking of what other courses to pursue… since these other options are within my means…*

When there is the perceived approval or support of peers, the participants are likely to feel assured or confident of their choices of study or career plans. In these situations, the participants are likely to maintain their plans. Conversely, should there be doubt expressed by others, the participants become less confident about their own choices of study or career and may choose to develop backup plans as safety nets. This is illustrated by P03 and P17:

> *P03 - In my conversations with my platoon mates, I was convinced of not going overseas because local universities are just as good…*
> *P17 - I wanted to be a pilot…but my friends feel that the pilot failure rate is very high…so…I started thinking about other fall back options …*

In this study, it is noted that the participants are stuck in the process of adjusting when they have not decided or cannot decide, or are unclear about their career or study plans. In these situations, the participants are unable to proceed beyond this process into the preparing stage (to be explained in the next section). P12, for instance, decides to procrastinate in making his decisions until after NS, and P13 is observed to be content to take a step-by-step approach:

> *P12 - …Now what I have got is a place in common engineering in NUS …it is sort of a second option…because I don't really know what I want to study…it is hard to decide now…just wait till the time comes, then decide.*
> *P13 - After NS, er…obviously, the immediate thing will just be, like, studying back to school again, getting a degree and…and see how life after work is, like, in Chinese "zou yi bu suan yi bu" [translated: "take one step at a time"]…*

As part of the process of adjusting, the participants take support, personal, and environmental issues into consideration, as depicted in Figure 5.16.

Support	Personal	Environmental	
Financials	Interests	Competition	Opportunities
Parental Support	Potential	Place in University	Social Norms
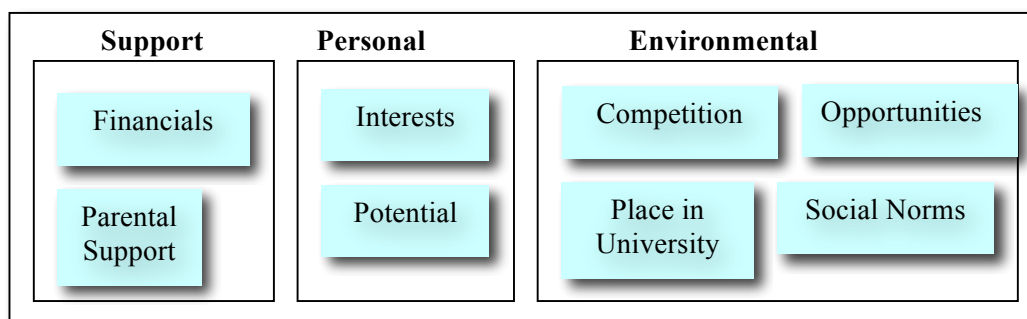
Figure 5.16 Considerations for adjusting

An important consideration for adjusting one's plans is financial. All the participants highlighted finances as one of the primary determinants of the feasibility of their plans. However, 17 out of 20 participants also need to take into consideration the issue of parental approval or support. This is because the parents are the ones sponsoring the participants for studies. These are extracted from the comments of P03 below:

>*P03 - That is why I have to ask my parents regarding my choice of university, whether local or not, because they are the ones who are forking out the money.*

Personal interests and ability are important considerations as well. All participants are mindful of choosing options that are within their abilities and aligned with their interests. These are highlighted by P03 and P05:

>*P03 - I decide my options based on my interest in IT…and my passion in youth projects.*
>*P05 - I am determined to study aero-engineering because I can do it…*

Another consideration in the process of adjusting is related to the participants' assessment of the environment in terms of competition and prevailing economic and social norms. For instance, the participants are keenly aware of the competition in their cohort for placement in universities and job opportunities. They are also

cognizant of the job opportunities in the prevailing economic situation and social expectations. P09, P13, and P16 illuminated these points in their comments below:

> *P09 - I was thinking: what if I don't get recognized and people like my commanders… they will get their jobs…like, snatch all the jobs…then what I am supposed to do?...so, I need to train myself in another way to…prepare for the future…*
>
> *P13 - …Like anybody or any person, we usually have the practical side of us to meet the practicalities of the society - which is going to university, study get a job, get a cert.…*
>
> *P16 - …Now, [the] economy outside is also quite bad … cause I got to ask around…I'm thinking of signing on…to go [into] either logistics or transport…*

5.3.2.3 Preparing

The process of preparing refers to how the participants prepare for their studies and careers while serving NS. It is observed that the process of preparing is directed at two important aspects: self-readiness and social networking. The former relates to how the participants prepare themselves to be ready for further study or work. From the data, the participants may adopt methods such as reading, researching, and revising relevant topics of their study to keep abreast and prepare for eventual entry into university or higher learning institutions. Selected comments from the participants that highlight these aspects are listed below.

> *P04 - …Try to read and [get] caught up as much as possible…*
>
> *P08 - …Normally, I just go to the library and borrow sport science books, and read what it is all about, then do a lot of research…to prepare myself…*

However, in the process of preparing, the participants have to deal to challenges, such as difficulty in concentration due to lack of time, fatigue, loss of reading habits, and losing touch with one's field of study. These aspects are highlighted by P08 and P09:

> *P08 - In the combat units, most of the time is taken up in training…by the time I finish my training, I am too tired to concentrate or to read up on anything…*

P09 - I was quite a good engineer technician…I fixed computers for my friends, family, that kind… But in NS, I do not touch the computer as often, so I have lost some skills, got outdated, obsolete already…

In terms of social networking, the participants view networking as important and hope to leverage on these networks as social capital. This view is highlighted by P18:

P18 - In NS, you get to work with a lot of people and networked…I know a lot of people along the way…it is a good opportunity…at least when I work…I know who my friends are and their areas of expertise…

Based on the data collected, the participants adopt the following strategies to build their social networks, namely: a., nonspecific; b., group-specific; and c., interest-specific strategies. In nonspecific strategies, the participants socialize with the intent to maximize their social networks. To do so, for example, the participants may move beyond their immediate unit locality to socialize with soldiers in other units. For group-specific strategies, the participants confine their socializing activities to people in the same unit. Lastly, interest-specific strategies refer to socialization with others who share similar interests. These aspects are highlighted by P18, P06, and P02, respectively:

*P18 - I am keen to make as many friends as possible in NS…it does not matter which units they are from…once you know one of them, he can introduce me to others…[**nonspecific**]*

*P06 - I usually keep to my small group of friends from my section…we help each other, and we go out together on weekends…besides that, I do not really interact with others…[**group-specific**]*

*P02 - I intend to study law and, as such, I try to link up with those who are also intending to do law as well…[**interest-specific**]*

5.3.2.4 Summary

In summary, the process of charting takes place simultaneously with the process of coping. The process of charting focuses on preparing oneself for the eventual

transition out of NS. It involves a series of sub-processes of realizing, adjusting, and preparing. These processes take place throughout the entire duration of NS.

5.3.3 Sources of Support

In this study, the social environment, such as support from peers, commanders, and families, plays an important role in terms of how the participants manage their training and life in the military. These aspects are explained in detail below.

5.3.3.1 Peers

In a military environment, soldiers live and operate in groups. Thus, the ability to work as a cohesive group is vital in terms of achieving or completing the assigned tasks. In this regard, peers play an important role as a major source of support for the conscripts to cope with life in the military. In this research, all the participants stated that they received some form of support or encouragement from their peers at one point or another during NS. P18 reported:

> *P18 - My platoon mates are wonderful people…we will motivate each other… that is how we went about BMT…*

It is also evident from the participants' accounts that peer support is mutually supporting, in that all parties involved are likely to benefit from it. More importantly, peers constitute an indispensable component of social bonding among the participants:

> *P17 - When out in the field, I have my buddy just beside me… helping me and I help him in return…our bonding is very strong…*

Another possible outcome that one may derive from peers is the expansion of one's social circle, as highlighted by P16:

> *P16 - …Initially we are strangers…but we just help one another to settle the stores and in the process…also become friends…*

Peers, besides lending support, may also exert pressure on each other to act or perform. In the case of P10, he is motivated to perform because he does not want to let his team down:

> *P10 - … I mean, if the whole route march I am the only one walking…I might as well not do it. But, since I am doing with my friends, and their spirits were quite high throughout the whole journey…I find myself enjoying it …*

P11 persevered because of peer pressure:

> *P11 - Tough training…just have to do, because everyone is going through it, I cannot fall out…must go through it...*

Peer pressure plays an important role due to concern over personal reputation and standing among peers. In Asian culture, the notions of face-saving and avoiding being publicly shamed are important and strong behavioral motivators. P07's account of his route march experience illustrates this point succinctly:

> *P07 - I think it is the peer pressure …because I feel like quite "bo-bin" (dialect meaning: "lose face") and quite "maru" (dialect meaning: "shameful") if I fall out…so no choice, just "dahan"(dialect meaning: "endure") and keep marching until the end point…*

5.3.4.2 Commanders

Commanders play important roles to help the conscripts cope in the military. Many participants share the view that commanders who demonstrate empathy have helped them (participants) to adjust and adapt faster to the new environment. P08 recalled how his section commander assisted him in the first field training to overcome his fears of insects:

> *P08 – My section commander has helped me to overcome my fear of insects. For example, during our first field camp, he found a suitable site for me… somewhere away from the bush, so that I am more secure…*

P18 remarked that his commanders were also his confidantes.

> *P18 - The sergeants are closer to us… they will scold us…but we feel closer to them because we can share our problems with them, if there are any…*

Commanders are also seen as role models. For instance, P18 has expressed his admiration for his platoon commander and aspires to be like his commander.

> *P18 -…I see my BMT platoon commander as my role model. He is always very composed and communicates well. I hope I could be like him when I become an officer.*

Being more experienced, commanders are valuable sources of advice. P10 recalled how his commander's advice helped him to overcome challenges in training:

> *P10 - …The person I respected most is my OC …he was very fit and knowledgeable…and always there to help me…*

Support from commanders is important in helping the conscripts to cope. Commanders support the soldiers by empowering them. P10 recalled how he was given more space to act and deal with issues in training:

> *P10 - I was lucky. My commander supports me and gives me the authority to decide on certain issues that he thinks are within my ability to handle…*

In summary, the key roles played by commander in helping conscripts to cope in the military are as shown in Figure 5.17.
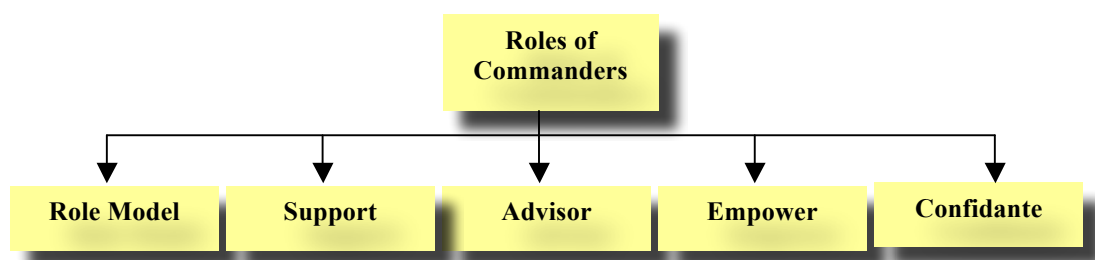
Figure 5.17 Roles of Commanders

5.3.4.3 Family

Family provides another source of support for the participants. Once enlisted into the military, the conscripts are required to stay in the barracks, except on weekends or non-training days. Despite the physical separation, it is noted that the family support remains important and serves as a "refuge" for the conscripts, as in the case of P16:

> *P16 - OK, the feeling was quite funny… because, usually, I will not stay at home on the weekends. When I came to NS... I [now] feel like staying at home with my parents and stuff. Home has become some kind of refuge…*

Especially in trying or difficult times, family can be a crucial factor in determining how well the conscripts cope. For instance, P04 recalled the strong support he received from his parents when he was injured in training and taken out of course:

> *P04 - When I got my injury and got out, of course, I was very disappointed but my parents were very supportive and concerned…very important…*

P17 recounted the added mental stress he deals with due to a lack of family support:

> *P17-OC-20- …It not easy… because, for me, it is a bit different; I do not have my family support…like during Jungle Confidence Course, parents are encouraged to write letters to their children so that they can boost their morale…it is kind of upsetting to see everyone was, like, having some motivation…and I don't have anything…*

Besides being a source of support, family can also be a reason for staying motivated, as in the case of P10.

> *P10 - there are moments in NS I feel like giving up…then I think of how my mother will feel if I give up…somehow, that keeps me going…*

5.3.5 Summary

The process of managing highlights two distinct sub-processes of coping and charting. The process of coping refers to how the participants deal with the challenges of

military training, and the process of charting refers to how the participants manage their study and career plans during NS. More significantly, the process of managing reflects the unique circumstances and problems with which the conscripts have to deal when enlisted for national service in the Singapore context.

5.3.6 Relationship between committing and managing

The relationship between the core category of committing and the main category of managing is defined by the interaction between the participants' internalized significance, goals, and their personal beliefs regarding the approaches to manage their military training and life in the military. The participants' internalized significance gives rise to three groups of aims. These groups of aims are: a., purpose-driven; b., interest-driven; and c., establishment-driven training aims. These aims, in turn, discriminate the participants' personal beliefs about training and influence their approaches to managing. Figure 5.18 (next page) illustrates the relations between one's internalized significance and the process of managing.

Aims of managing | Personal beliefs and approaches to managing (coping and charting)

Purpose-driven
Belief – Training is essential
Coping - Maximize learning and achieve all training
Charting – Places organization's interest before personal interests

Internalized significance

Interest-driven

Personal development
Belief – Training will benefit personal development
Coping - Maximize learning and achieve training standards for personal development

Career prospects
Belief – Training should benefit and/or should not compromise studies and careers
Coping - Selective learning and achieving training standards in areas that may impact on career options

Personal security
Belief – Training is a risk; minimize risk
Coping - Learn enough to achieve minimum training standards

Note: For all subgroups in the interest-driven category, personal interests are of higher priority than organization's interests.

Anti-establishment-driven
Belief – Training is a waste of time
Coping - Minimum interest in learning or training
Charting – Personal interests first, with hardly any consideration for the organization's interests

Figure 5.18 Relationship between core category of committing and main category of managing

Internalized significance that is aligned to the purpose of NS gives rise to purpose-driven aims. Purpose-driven aims are translated to personal beliefs that view training as an essential part of national service and soldiering. As such, the approach towards training centers on maximizing learning and achieving all training standards. In relation to charting, purpose-driven aims are likely to accord lower priority to the process of charting compared to the process of coping. However, this does not mean

that the participants concerned do not regard their career and studies as important. These aspects are highlighted by P18:

> *P18 - Actually I was like very happy that NS is finally coming…even though it is very torturous at some points… but, to me, NS is important, and I will do my best in training, that's all…as far as preparing for my studies and career, it is important, but I can wait till I am about to ORD, then prepare…*
> *[Note: ORD stands for Operational Readiness Date, which means the end of active service.]*

Interest-driven aims can be subdivided into three groups, namely: a., personal development; b., career prospects; and c., personal security. For personal development aims, the corresponding personal belief is that the military training will add value to one's personal development. Thus, within the process of coping, the approach to training is centered on maximizing personal learning experiences. For the second group, the associated personal belief is that training should benefit one's career or studies, or at least not compromise one's future plans. Therefore, the approach to training is selective and focused on areas that are perceived to be useful in advancing one's career prospects. Personal security aims involve the belief that training is inherently risky to personal security, and, therefore, one should seek to minimize the exposure to risk during training--such as not doing more than necessary in terms of job responsibilities. The examples below illuminate the various aims, personal beliefs about training, and approaches to training.

> *P02 - I viewed this whole NS thing quite positively, because I will get plenty of new experiences here…I basically put in my best effort in training because I know I will gain even more at the end of the day…*
> *P05 - I tried my best to keep up with the training…because I wanted to be a pilot in the air force…I am more interested in learning about the air force…not really interested in infantry training.*
> *P06 - I was scared that I might get injured in NS…what is going to happen then? A lot of things run through my mind…will I get injured or will I get charged like this…that's why I will do my part, and, also, I am very careful in training…*

The relationship between interest-driven aims and the process of charting is such that the process of charting takes a higher priority compared to coping. This relationship is reflected in participants who are very conscientious about their studies and careers, and would spend a significant amount of time during NS preparing themselves for the transition out of NS. See P04's comments below.

> *P04 - No choice, everyone has to serve NS. But, my studies are my main concern. Actually, I do think about what I want to do, my studies and career almost every day in NS... so I try to prepare myself as much as possible...*

Lastly, anti-establishment-driven aims are associated with the personal belief that military training is a waste of time. As such, the approach to coping shows a lack of interest and, at times, may act against prevailing training practices and expectations, as shown in P20's account below.

> *P20 - I think NS is a waste of time...there is no meaning in what I do here...just received a lot of punishment...I really don't care much about training...why bother to train so hard?...just wait for 2 years to pass.*

In relation to charting, anti-establishment-driven aims may not necessarily be associated with an emphasis on charting. For instance, P20 sees no purpose in serving NS, and he is also observed to not to be preparing himself in terms of career and studies.

5.4   Appraising

The main category of *appraising* is derived from the axial coding process. The process of appraising refers to how the participants appraise their NS experience in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans. There are two aspects of appraising. One refers to how the participants perceive themselves to have grown or gained from serving NS. The other aspect relates to how the participants perceive their contributions to NS. The process of appraising consists of three distinct sub-processes of discerning, defining, and contributing. *Discerning* relates to the cognitive process of how the participants discern the impact of NS on their personal development, studies, and career plans. *Defining* describes the affective process of

how participants define their experiences in NS, based on their emotional experiences of serving NS. Lastly, *contributing* refers to how the participants perceive their contributions to NS. The outcomes of these processes influence the participants' internalized significance with respect to serving NS. The table below represents the process of appraising and its components.

Table 5.10 Main Category of Appraising and its Components

Main process	Appraising		
Sub-process	Discerning (cognitive)	Defining (affective)	Contributing (affective)
Causal conditions	Training activities Disruptive events such as injuries, reassignment of duties, etc. Special events, such as graduation ceremonies, rites of passage, etc.	Emotional experiences associated with specific or cumulative events of significance -positive or negative	Voluntary contributions Participation in assignments that deploy one's skills
Interaction strategies	Assessing Comparing	Experiencing Sense-making Reflecting	Assessing Reflecting
Context	Impact on personal development, Studies, and career plans	NS training experiences	Perceived contributions to NS

5.4.1 Discerning

The process of *discerning* is derived from the process of axial coding. Discerning describes how the participants assess the impact of NS on their personal development, studies, and career plans (see Figure 5.19). The outcome of discerning is the participants' assessment of the impact of NS on their personal development, studies, and career plans, along the dimensions of threat-opportunity or cost-benefit. These aspects are reflected in P05's comments below.

> P05 - ...I don't think *[interaction strategy]* what I do is very relevant to my future... this is not really OK... it is good if it is something to do with your studies or career *[dimension: threat-opportunity]*...
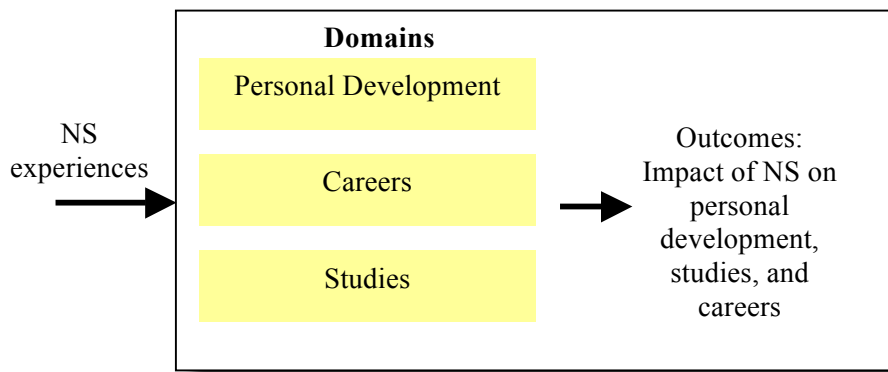
Figure 5.19 Process of discerning and its components

5.4.1.1 Impact on personal development

Based on the data collected, NS impacts on several aspects of personal development. These are, namely: a., self-awareness and life experiences; b., qualities and personal traits; and c., skills and personal competence. In terms of self-awareness and life experiences, the onerous nature of military training challenges the participants both physically and mentally. In the process of coping with such challenges, the participants become more aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and potential. The military environment also provides a rich and diverse social setting from which the participants learn and gain invaluable life experiences. These aspects are highlighted by P03 and P04 below.

> *P03 - I feel that NS is a good platform to test and understand oneself.*
>
> *P04 - …Meeting the people, getting to know good friends…being able to see capable people in action…being able to learn from them…these are experiences that I will never forget, because they are for life…*

The participants also shared the view that the rigors of military training and culture have helped to develop certain qualities and traits, such as leadership, maturity, confidence, self-reliance, discipline, and determination. These aspects are illuminated in the statements of P03 and P04:

> *P03 - NS has made me more independent, able to manage time better and to understand the need for urgency and the importance of discipline….*

> *P04 - I learned to be more confident and how to carry myself in front of people…I [have] definitely become a stronger person in terms of character, skills and confidence…*

Lastly, the participants also relate the value of their NS experiences to the acquisition of life skills, such as learning to communicate with people from different backgrounds and dealing with superiors or subordinates:

> *P06 - …when I am outside, I am able to use these skills. For example, dealing with officers is like dealing with your bosses; all these are life skills…*
>
> *P13 - …in NS, you get a taste of community life and improve on the social skills…*

In terms of negative impact, the participants highlighted that NS may negatively affect them in two ways: by blunting their creativity and degrading their physical well-being in the event of an injury. These aspects are highlighted by P03 and P05:

> *P03 - Feels that NS being restrictive and regimental tend to fixate me to only certain ways of doing things. This may have potential influence over my personal development… losing some degree of creativity…*
>
> *P05 - Right now, the injury I sustain…could be an impact…so I hope it wouldn't affect my future job…*

5.4.1.2   Impact on study plans

In terms of discerning the impact of serving NS on participants' studies, two aspects are mentioned. The first aspect refers to the participants' perceived readiness to resume their studies after NS. There is a perception among all the participants that the operating environment in the military emphasizes different cognitive skills and proficiency compared to the schools. As such, serving 2 years of NS affects their cognitive sharpness, knowledge retention, and knowledge currency. These aspects are drawn from the comments of P02 and P06:

> *P02 - … I can feel I lose track, less sharp…in NS you just move with the flow… every day, you just follow the training program…and sail through the 2*

years…and, at the end of the day, you suddenly realize that "Wow, I can't speak English for nuts now," you know…now I look at a problem sum, and I go "huh?"

P06 - After 2 years, it is a blank…you do not know what is new in technology development, coding all these…

The second aspect relates to delay and disruption to their study schedules. For instance, P04 opined that serving NS has delayed his entry into university. There is also comparison with others who need not serve NS:

P04 - Personally, I feel that there is some delay to my university studies. I suppose those who need not serve will have a head start …

In P05's situation, his school term starts before his completion of NS liability; hence, his view is that NS will cause him to miss some lessons in the first school term:

P05 - …Because I ORD on 14 August, and the school starts on the 1ˢᵗ [of] August, I am going to miss out [on] a few lessons…and… not enough time to refresh what I have learned…these are my main concerns…

5.4.1.3 Impact on career plans

The participants' assessment of the impact of NS on their career plans may be categorized along three dimensions, which are: a., specificity; b., utility; and c., potential. In terms of specificity, this refers to the participants' assessment of the transferability and applicability of the knowledge and skills acquired in NS to their careers. For instance, there is a view that NS does not prepare one for any specific jobs, because the military training is perceived to be generic in nature.

P04 - I also mentioned that the work we [are] doing in National Service [is] basically too generic, that, in that sense, it doesn't really prepare you for any specialized work, for example...

From the utilitarian view, some see specific achievements and skills acquired from military training as useful in adding to their personal credentials and enhancing their career prospects. For instance, P17 opined that being a military officer might enhance

his job application chances, whereas P18 believes that the management skills he acquired in NS would be widely applicable:

> *P17 - ...Like, being an officer is a testimony of your leadership skills, which could put you ahead in term of your resume and opportunities...*
>
> *P18 -...The management skills I learned in the Army certainly will be applicable in the future...*

Lastly, from the potential perspective, there is a view among the participants that the friendship and networks established in NS can be leveraged upon as potential sources of social capital. These points are illuminated by P04's comments below.

> *P04 - ...I quite happy to have made more friends in NS...you never know when you will need their help...*

In summary, the process of discerning is a cognitive process that is concerned with weighing the impact of NS from a cost-benefit or threat-opportunity perspective.

5.4.2   Defining

The process of defining refers to the affective process of how the participants define their NS experiences. In the process of experiencing NS, the participants invariably encounter events that have significant affective meaning for them. These events, which may be single or multiple events, are termed as defining moments in this study. Based on the data analysis, defining moments may impact on the participants in one or more of the emotional, physical, social, and psychological dimensions. It is also noted that defining moments are typically associated with experiences of perceived hardships, achievements, successes, or failures.

Defining moments, which may be positive or negative, play an important role in terms of how the participants relate to their NS experiences. Positive defining moments are moments that the participants regard as significant and meaningful because they have positively gained or grown from those experiences. These aspects are illuminated by P17:

> *P17 - To me, it is all the happy times I spent with my buddy **[emotional and social impact]**…the things we have been put through…all the training **[physical and psychological impact]**; when I think back…I have really grown from this experience **[perceived personal growth]**…it is something unique that you wouldn't get to experience outside **[perceived meaningfulness]**.*

On the other hand, there are defining moments that are regarded as negative. Negative defining moments, such as injuries and training failures, may impact how the participants feel and define their NS experiences. Negative defining moments are likely to result in perceived irrelevance, as seen from P06's comments below.

> *P06 - I was injured in training **[physical impact]**, and it [was] quite depressing after that…because even [if] I bend down or sit too long…the pain will come…it was quite depressing **[emotional impact]** …I used to play basketball, but I cannot turn my back now…in this sense, NS is not good for me…**[perceived irrelevance]**.*

Based on P20's account, a perceived lack of positive or defining moments in NS may result in indifference.

> *P20 - …There is no meaning in what I have done so far…I just received a lot of punishments…for every little thing that I have done…so I do not really care about NS…**[perceived indifference]**.*

In summary, the process of defining is the affective process of how the participants gauge their NS experiences. Depending on their NS experiences, the participants may perceive them to be either meaningful or irrelevant. A lack of defining moments may result in the participants being indifferent about NS. The process of defining is illustrated in Figure 5.20.
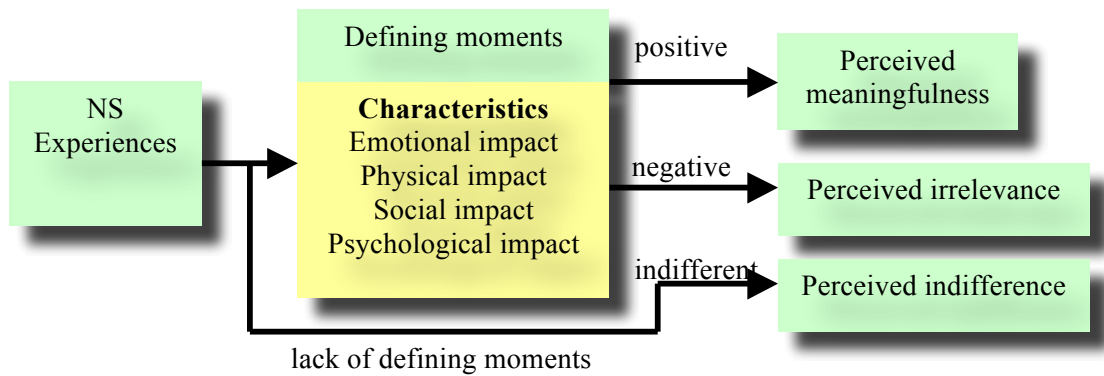
Figure 5.20 Process of defining and its components

5.4.3 Contributing

There is another aspect of the appraising process that is concerned with the notion of one contributing or "giving back" to the system. It is observed that the process of appraising is mitigated by the participants' perception of gainful employment. In other words, the participants' view of the value of NS is not only influenced by how much the participants perceive they have gained but also by the participants' perceptions of their contribution to NS. The process of contributing is defined along two dimensions, which are: a., time utilization; and b., skills utilization. For example, P02 felt positive about serving because he has not wasted his time in NS, despite NS not being very relevant to his career or study:

> *P02 - Even though NS is not very relevant to what I want to do in the future, I'm actually satisfied with my time spent in NS...I have learned a lot and I don't feel I have wasted my time...*

In the case of P04, the participant was satisfied with his NS experience because his computer skills were put to good use.

> *P04 -... I feel gainfully employed... I am involved in some project work, such as developing the CAST (Combat Analysis Simulation Trainer)...it is good...like my skills are used and [the job is] playing to my strengths...*

5.4.4 Summary

The process of appraising has three distinct sub-processes. The process of discerning is largely a cognitive process that weighs the positives and negatives of the

participants' NS experiences. The process of defining, on the other hand, is an affective process that is concerned about the participants' affective experiences of NS. Lastly, the process of contributing relates to the participants' perceptions of their contributions to NS. Collectively, the outcomes of these processes influence the participants' internalized significance of serving NS.

5.5   Assimilating

The process of *assimilating* describes how the participants assimilate into the NS system. The process of assimilating consists of two sub-processes, *identifying* and *maturing*.

5.5.1   Identifying

Identifying is an important sub-process of assimilating which depicts how the participants identify with their military identities as citizen soldiers. Deriving from axial coding process, identifying consists of three stages: a., exit; b., assumption; and c., identification. These three stages are related and sequential. Figure 5.21 illustrates these three stages and their relationships.
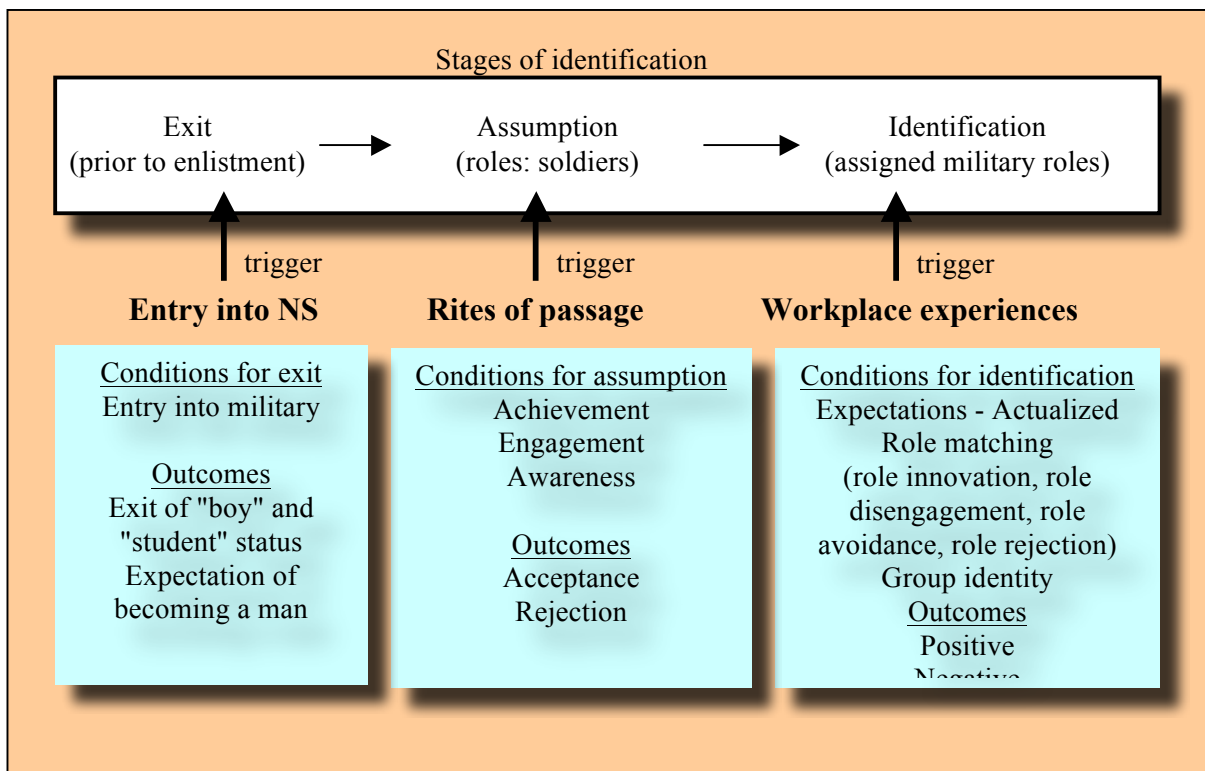
Figure 5.21 Process of 'identifying'

The first stage, exit, refers to the exit of the participants' pre-adult identity or change of status. The trigger for this stage is normally associated with entry into the military. The change in environment from a civilian to a military setting is perceived as a signal of change in one's identity or status, which is reflected in comments such as *"...I am no longer a school kid..."* [P03] and *"...Coming into NS made me realize that I am no longer a boy...it is time to grow up and be a man..."* [P14].

The second stage is assumption, in which the participants assume in a formal manner different soldiering identities and statuses at different points in their NS journey. In the military context, soldiers undergo a series of rites of passage aimed at bringing about a realization of change of status and assumption of new identities. Rites of passage are institutional socialization tactics to mark specific achievement milestones in the soldiers' military journey. Based on the accounts of the participants, the rites of passage not only recognize one's achievement in training but also evoke strong emotions and engagement that lead to one's acceptance and assumption of their new identities and status:

> *P12 - When we were handed our weapons...and we were, like, very excited **[emotions]**, finally got to hold weapons, and in the parade ...that's...one of the memorable moments **[engagement]**...I realized I am a soldier now **[awareness]**...*
>
> *P08 - My memorable moment **[engagement]** was...getting my Khaki beret **[assumption of identity]**... we have to we spend 4 days doing route marches, clearing obstacle courses, and all sorts of activities...**[physically demanding]**... during that time, my section was really motivated because we know the khaki beret is in reach, so we just "chong" (dialect: "give everything") **[achievement]**...although it is tough, it is all worth it...**[outcome: acceptance]**.*

The third stage is *identification*. This refers to the participants' identification with their military roles. Based on the analysis of the data, two conditions are essential to achieving identification. The first condition is role-expectation match. Identification occurs when there is a positive role-expectation match. A positive role-expectation

match means that the participants' expectations of their role(s) resonate with what they do on the job (actualized roles). These are extracted from P02's account:

> P02 - I am a PC *[Identity: platoon commander]*...and on [a] regular basis...ah...I have to ensure that the troopers have the adequate skills required for [performing] the tasks during operations, or during exercises *[roles of PC]*...it is challenging, but rewarding, because it is what I am trained to do...*[role-expectation match outcome: positive]*.

On the other hand, negative identification occurs when there is a role-expectation mismatch. When the participants' expectations of their role(s) do not match what they do in the workplace, they are likely to feel negative and disengaged from their assigned roles. Comments extracted from P15, a store man, highlight the issue of role-expectation mismatch.

> P15 - ...I am a store man and supposed to take care of stores *[perceived roles]*, but I also do a lot of other odd jobs *[actualized roles]*... don't really find any ... sometimes feel like the things I do are shit work *[role disengagement]*...

It is observed that the participants adopt various interaction strategies, such as role innovation, disengagement, avoidance, and rejection to achieve a better role-expectation match, as listed in Table 5.11 below.

Table 5.11 Interaction strategies adopted in role-expectation gaps

Interaction strategies adopted by the participants	Illustrations
Role innovation	*...I have to adapt my roles to the unit's requirements...[P02]*
Role disengagement	*...I do not feel that I am a soldier... [P16]*
Role avoidance	*... I try to change my job to do something that I like...[P05]*
Role rejection	*...I do not want to be a citizen soldier [P20]*

The second condition that is essential for identification to take place is group identity. The study found that the participants make sense of their own identities in the context of their groups or units. For instance, the participants would identify themselves as members of their units, such as *"...I am a GUARDSMAN"* [P08]. The reasons for this are the participants' association with the pride of being a member of that unit and the camaraderie they have forged with members of their units. These aspects are highlighted by P08 and P12:

> *P08 - I am proud to a GUARDSMAN, because GUARDS is the elite unit in the Army...*
> *P12 - ...I like this unit because of my section mates and my platoon mates - we were quite bonded... working as a team...*

Conversely, a participant's identification of his own soldiering identity may be affected if group cohesion is lacking. For instance, P17 questions his own identification as an officer due to the lack of cooperation among fellow officers in his unit:

> *P17 -...Sometimes I feel that it is better not to be an NSF officer (national service full-time officer)...I dislike the working environment and the way the regular officers in my unit treat me...*

Although identity within one's group is essential, it is not a mandatory condition. P04, for instance, continues to see himself as a soldier, despite not being close to other members in his team.

> *P04 -...I continue to do my job as an NSF and try not to be influenced by other members of my team who are rather anti-NS...*

An important aspect of identifying is the outcome. The outcomes of the process of identifying may be full or partial. Full identification occurs when the participants successfully transit through the three stages of identifying, as in the case of P02:

> *P02 - The first time I entered Tekong...I felt a sense of separation from parents...you know sailing to this island...separated from mainland*

*Singapore…I think it is a gradual process of change…starting with BMT… I feel that I am no longer a student **[exit: identity as student]**…they hand us our weapons…don the Army uniform…then after OCS (Officer Cadet School) graduation, I start to think of myself as an officer **[assumption: identity of an officer]**… and once I entered the unit…the first moment I saw my men…it just happens naturally that I feel that I am their commander **[identification: roles of a platoon commander]** and cannot let them down…got to lead them…*

Partial identification refers to situations in which the participants do not progress beyond a particular stage of identifying. For instance, P20 rejected the notion of NS and his role as citizen soldier from the onset. Hence, he did not complete the stage of assumption within the process of identifying. P15 considered himself a soldier but could not identify with his operational role as a store man, because he felt that he was tasked to do many non-occupation-related tasks. In the case of P15, partial identification occurs as a result of role-expectation mismatch in the workplace.

5.5.2   Maturing

The concept of *maturing* refers to the participants' perceived self-maturation resulting from the internalization of their NS experiences. Through axial coding, maturing is observed to consist of two subcategories: self-competence and social competence. See the diagram below (Figure 5.22).
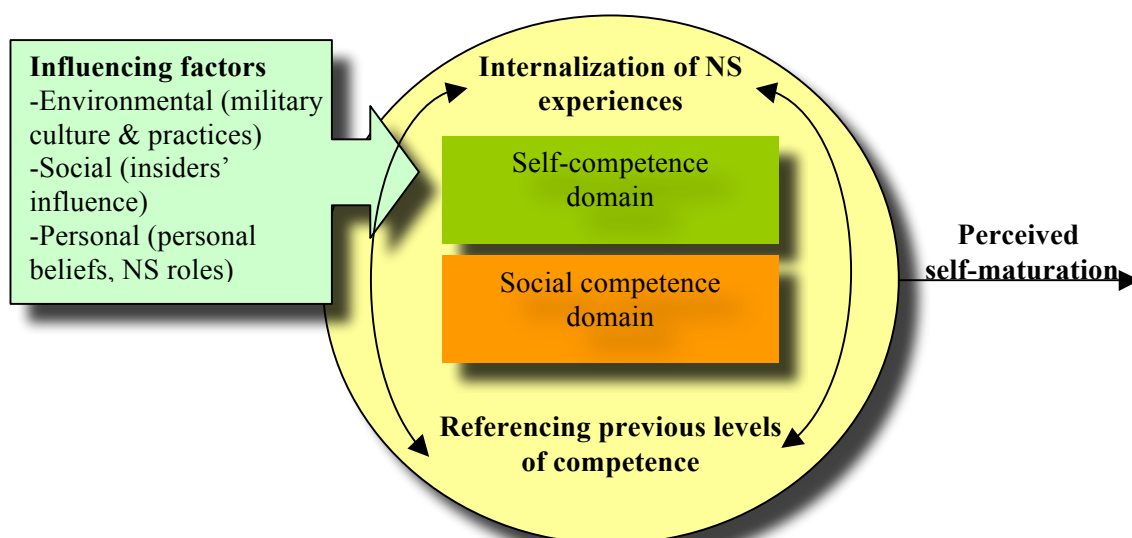
Figure 5.22 Concept of maturing and its subcategories

146

The self-competence aspect of maturing refers to the participants' perceived self-maturation with respect to self-centric attributes such self-efficacy, self-reliance, confidence, discipline, and physical strength.   The participants' remarks below demonstrate these aspects of perceived self-competence:

> *P03 - …I am physically stronger, more disciplined, and confident now…*
> *P16 - …I have become more disciplined and mature in the way I think…*

The social competence aspects of maturing refers to the participants' perceived self-maturation in terms of social attributes such as other-awareness, sociability, leadership, and empathy.   These aspects are illuminated by the comments of P08 and P15:

> *P08 - …I have learned to be more sensitive to others…*
> *P15 - …Now I am less of an introvert and more sociable…*

From the analysis of these two subcategories, it is observed that the concept of maturing is relative, in that the participants usually make references to previous levels of perceived competence. This is reflected in remarks such as *"…Compared to the past…"* [P04], *"…I am more disciplined…"* [P08].   The analysis also suggests that there are environmental, social, and personal factors that influence the participants' perceptions of their own maturation.   For example, there are aspects of the military environment, such as military culture, organizational norms, and practices that play important roles in shaping the maturation of the participants.   In the military, formal socialization tactics are used to compel the participants to comply with the organization's norms, practices, and expectations.   Over time, the participants acquire certain soldiering habits that are consistent with the organization's expectations and, in the process, internalize various aspects of the organizational culture, practices, and norms. This is evident from P03's account:

> *P03 - I have learned to be more disciplined, especially coming from polytechnic, we do not have much discipline…always struggling to get our homework done…and 2 years in NS, there are punishments to force us to learn the hard way…*

In the social dimension, insiders, such as peers and commanders, are also important influencers shaping the maturation and development of the participants. Commanders, in particular, are influential because they play critical roles in helping the participants to overcome challenges and guiding them through each stage of the NS journey. As such, the participants regard their commanders as role models and confidantes. These aspects are evident from the comments below.

> *P08 - My sect commanders for the first year and second year were both very good…learned from them about care for soldiers, responsibility, and being professional…which, I believe, are very important….*

Personal factors, such as the participants' beliefs, roles, and positions in the military may also determine the extent to which certain attributes (such as social awareness and empathy) are internalized, as shown in P19's remarks below.

> *P19 -…In the Army, it is important the we think [as a] group rather than individual **[personal belief]**…I feel that the Army [gives] me the opportunity to grow to be more socially aware and sensitive to others **[perceived social competence]**…*

Lastly, it is also noted that the roles and appointments participants hold in NS influence the opportunities for certain attributes to develop. For instance, P02, who held a leadership appointment in NS, is observed to make more references to his maturation and development in the aspects of leadership qualities. On the other hand, P05, who is not in any leadership position, perceived himself to have matured in a more generalized manner, in attributes such as confidence and self-reliance.

> *P02 - I believe that being an officer and a commander **[NS roles]** has helped me to internalize the important aspects of leadership…*
> *P05 - NS is able to build up your physical [skill]; as I become more senior, I have also gain[ed] more confidence…*

5.6   Relationships between Appraising, Assimilating, and Committing

The process of appraising reflects the participants' cognitive and affective evaluation of their NS experiences. The outcomes of this process determine how the participants make sense of their NS experiences in relation to their aims of serving NS (within the core category of committing). The participants are likely to reevaluate their aims if the appraisals of their NS experiences deviate from these aims. Positive deviation is likely to result in the participants' willingness to contribute more to NS, whereas negative deviation produces the opposite effect. These aspects are illustrated below.

> *P012 - ...Initially, I was a bit reluctant to put effort in the training, but after being with my platoon for a while...I enjoyed the experience and do not mind doing more...*
>
> *P10 - ...Before NS, I was all set to give my best...but after I entered NS, my commitment levels [wavered]...I started asking my questions...maybe I was not cut out for the military...*

The outcomes of the appraising process influence the process of assimilating. Positive appraisal outcomes are likely to engender the participants' identification with their citizenry responsibilities as citizen soldiers and perceptions of self-maturation. Conversely, negative appraisal outcomes are likely to cause the participants to disassociate themselves from NS. The outcomes of assimilating determine the participants' deeper perception of their personal growth and development in NS. In turn, these outcomes influence the participants' internalized significance of serving NS within the process of committing.

5.7   The Theory of Selective Commitment

This section will demonstrate how the main categories mentioned earlier integrate to form the theory of Selective Commitment. The core category in this theory is the category of *committing*. Commitment, as defined by the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2004), is a state of being committed to a cause. Hence, the other four main categories--bracing, managing, rationalizing, and assimilating--are closely related to this state of being committed. The state of being committed to NS is derived from the internalized significance of serving in NS and the aims of serving in NS. More importantly, it is this state of commitment that drives the other main categories

in this study. Without this state of commitment, these four main categories may not exist in the context of the conscripts serving NS in Singapore, and there may be no coherent theoretical relationship that exists or connects the categories as well.

Although the state of commitment towards NS exists in all the participants, it differs from person to person, depending on their initial socialization experiences prior to and during enlistment and how the participants internalize their NS experiences and set goals. In this study, the different states of commitment are conceptualized as levels of commitment to depict differences in the degree and nature of the commitment. Thus, the concept of Selective Commitment best encapsulates how the participants "select" different levels of commitment towards NS, which determine the way they manage, appraise, and assimilate their NS experiences in relation to their personal development, studies, and career plans.

The theory of Selective Commitment begins with the process of bracing. Through bracing, the enlistees begin processes of gathering, clarifying, and gearing for their impending entry into NS. In gathering, the enlistees gather information about NS from both formal and informal sources in preparation for their impending enlistment. Formal sources include official sources such as military recruitment agencies and the MINDEF official Web page, and informal sources include family members, friends, and peers. The information gathered is filtered based on several factors, such as personal beliefs, past experience, and perceived credibility of the sources. The outcome of this filtering process provides the basis from which the enlistees make their initial assessments and form initial perceptions regarding serving NS.

Within the sub-process of clarifying, the enlistees also evaluate the potential impact of serving NS, their level of readiness for NS, and their personal aspirations and beliefs regarding serving NS. The outcomes of clarifying may either result in perceived affirmation or perceived dissonance. For perceived affirmation, it means that the participants are positive about their participation in NS; perceived dissonance occurs when the participants experience an inner conflict with regard to their citizenry obligation toward NS. The last sub-process of bracing concerns the ways these participants gear up for NS based on their assessments of their own readiness for NS.

Based on their initial assessment, the participants form the perceived significance of NS, their aims for serving NS, and their commitment towards NS. This is the process by which the core category of committing is created. Hence, it is the process of bracing that gives rise to the core category of committing. However, given that the enlistees have not actually experienced NS, their perceived significance of serving NS, aims, and commitment levels are heavily dependent on their prior socialization experiences and the information they gathered. Therefore, their perceived significance of serving NS, aims, and commitment levels remain largely transient in nature.

Once entered into the military, the process of managing begins, as the participants cope with the initial entry shock of military life and the rigors of military training. The manner of coping and the effort the participants put into training are influenced by their commitment levels regarding serving NS. In the process of coping, the participants also form relational bonds with the people with whom they interact. Collectively, both training and social experiences in NS define the participants' NS experiences and influence the subsequent process of identifying. In NS, the participants continue to chart their studies and career plans based on their personal aspirations and plans and their interactions with fellow soldiers, commanders, and the people they meet. The NS environment is unique in the sense that almost every conscript in NS shares similar concerns and issues regarding studies and career plans. Hence, the environment itself readily supports the charting process.

The process of managing provides the context in terms of NS experiences for the category of appraising. In the process of appraising, the participants evaluate the meaningfulness of their NS experiences against the sacrifices they make through the two sub-processes of discerning and defining. The former may be described as a cognitive process that is concerned with how the participants perceive the benefits and threats to their personal development, studies, and careers as a result of serving NS. The latter is an affective process that relates to how the participants define what is meaningful to them in terms of the events or experiences in the course of serving NS.

From the processes of managing and appraising, the participants begin to assimilate into their new roles as citizen soldiers under the category of assimilating. The process of assimilating involves the process of identifying, in terms of how the participants

identify with their new identities and roles as citizen soldiers, and the process of maturing, which refers to how the participants perceive their self-maturation process. More importantly, the outcomes of assimilating influence the participants' internalized significance of serving NS within the core category of committing. Therefore, the relationship between managing, appraising, assimilating, and committing is also cyclical in nature, as shown in Figure 5.23.
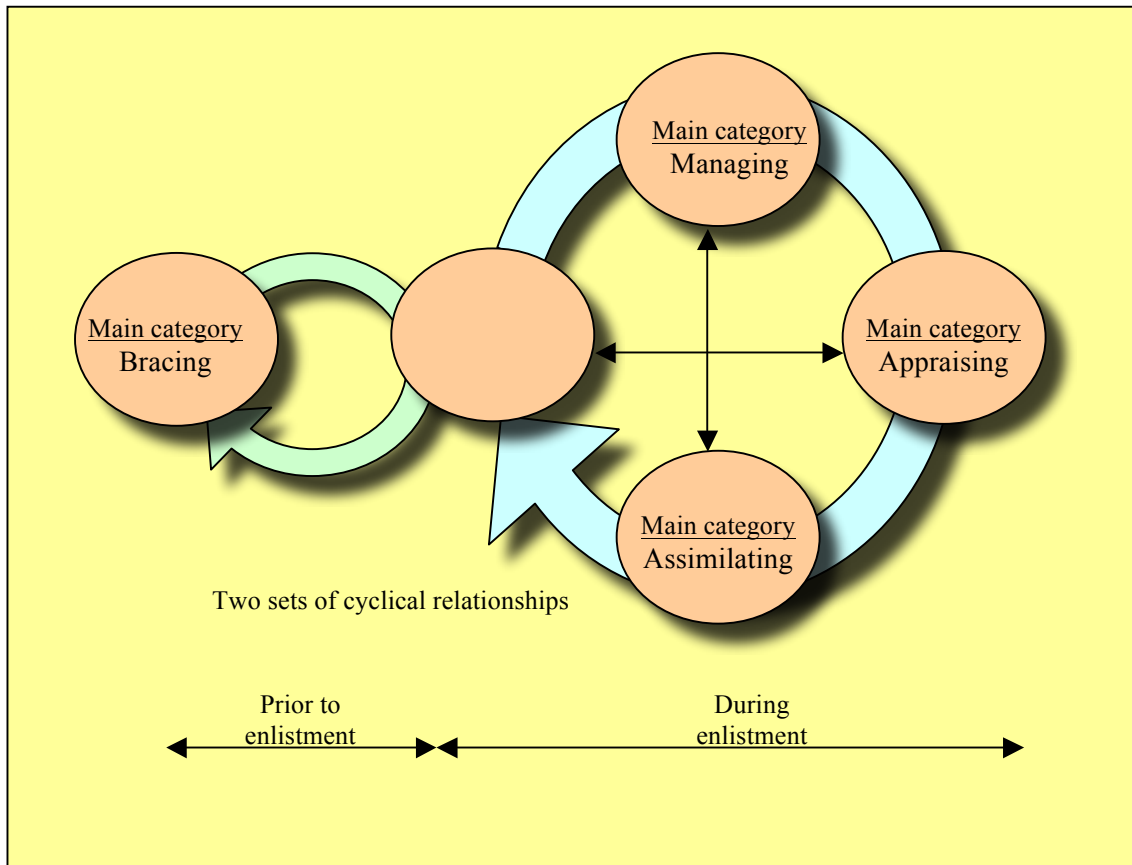
Figure 5.23 Relationships between core categories in the theory of Selective Commitment

In summary, the theory of Selective Commitment may be seen in two phases. The initial phase involves the cyclical relationship between the main category of bracing and the core category of committing prior to enlistment. The second phase sets forth the cyclical relationship that involves the core category of committing with the other main categories of managing, appraising, and assimilating. Thus, the core category of committing serves as a "pivot," in which the first cycle sets the momentum for the second cycle of processes. More importantly, together, these two sets of relationships

create the theory of Selective Commitment in terms of managing national service in the context of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

CHAPTER SIX

A GROUNDED TYPOLOGY OF CONSCRIPTS MANAGING MILITARY SERVICE IN SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES

Introduction

A major outcome of this study is the development of a typology of conscripts with respect to how they manage their military training in relation to their personal development, study and career plans. The study developed this typology based on the distinctions made by the conscripts in their responses to bracing, committing, managing, appraising and assimilating processes in the theory of Selective Commitment. According to the research, the conscripts may be classified into five types, namely a. advocates, b. adventurers, c. careerists, d. play-safes, and e. challengers, as shown in the table below.

Table 6.1   Distribution of the participants, according to the typology classification

Types of conscripts	Advocates	Adventurers	Careerists	Play-safes	Challengers
Participants	P03, P07, P08, P09, P11, P15, P18, P19	P02, P04	P05, P16	P06, P10, P12, P13, P14, P17	P20, P21

The main discriminating factors in the typology are the categories of bracing and committing, whereby the conscripts are distinguished in terms of their internalised significance, aim and commitment levels in NS at their point of entry into NS.

There is a need to note that the findings in Chapter 5.2 indicate that the conscripts' commitment to NS may be fluid, because the conscripts have not actually experienced NS prior to enlistment. Once enlisted, however, their commitment levels usually stabilise by the second year, because they would have completed their training transitions in the pre-operational phase and they would have ascertained operational status and roles. Therefore, the proposed typology is based on the stabilised commitment of the conscripts at the end of the first year of the pre-operational training phase of NS. This study ensured a stable sample group, as the researcher interviewed the participants at the beginning and towards the end of their operational training phase of the second year. Having a stable sample group is important, because

different commitment levels can influence how the participants behave and respond to military training in the categories of managing, appraising and assimilating. Thus, the stability of the conscripts' commitment with respect to serving NS will then ensure consistency in their managing, appraising and assimilating processes, which are all representative of the different conscript types.

In the category of managing, the differences are reflected in terms of the conscripts' coping and charting processes. For the category of coping, the conscripts are differentiated according to their attitudinal responses, coping methods and performances in the various coping orientations of reacting, acquiring and deploying. In terms of charting, it is noted that the conscripts are differentiated by how they gather information and prepare for their transition after NS.

As for the process of appraising, the different types of conscripts differ in the following ways: a. how they define the importance and meaningfulness of serving NS, b. how the participants discern the benefits and threats of serving two years of NS in relation to their personal development, study and career plans, and c. how the participants perceived their contribution to NS.

With respect to the category of assimilating, the conscripts are differentiated by the extent to which they identify with their roles as citizen soldiers and the development of their self and social competence within the process of maturing. The table below summarises the predominant variables that discriminate between the characteristics of the different conscripts in the suggested typology.

Table 6.2 Summary of the predominant variables in the typology

Bracing	Managing	Appraising	Assimilating
Contemplating *Personal beliefs and attitudes *Perceptions of NS	*Coping* *Assessment of situation *Beliefs and attitudes towards training *Coping strategies *Charting* * Information gathering strategies *Preparations for transition	*Appraisal proclivity *Defining* *Perceived meaningfulness in training *Discerning* *Perceived impact on self, career and study *Contributing* *Personal beliefs *Perceived gainful employment	*Assimilation orientations *Identifying* *Stages of identification *Maturing* *Self and social competence
Core Category - Committing			
*Internalised significance, Aim, Commitment levels			

Although each conscript type consists of certain predominant attributes in their processes of committing, managing, appraising and assimilating - enough to distinguish them from one another - there are common attributes shared among all the conscript types in some processes within the main categories in the theory of Selective Commitment. These common attributes are mostly found in the process of bracing. After the comparative analysis of the characteristics of the different types of conscripts in the proposed typology, two propositions are generated. These propositions may serve as useful guides for several groups of people, namely, a. practitioners managing conscripts, b. conscripts who are serving NS or enlistees who are about to serve in the military, and c. for other researchers who are interested in furthering the findings of the current study.

In summary, this chapter will illustrate the five types of conscripts in a comparative analysis of the differences in their attributes in the processes of bracing, committing, managing, appraising and assimilating. This chapter is organised into the following sections:

6.1   Commitment and Typology

The participants' commitment to NS drives their other processes in the theory of Selective Commitment.   The differences in the components of the participants' commitment will help to discriminate the different types of conscripts described in the typology.   The participants begin to clarify their commitment to NS in the processes of bracing and committing.   Once enlisted, the participants continue to internalise their commitment to serve in the processes of managing, appraising and assimilating. The sections below cover the characteristic commitment of each conscript type.

6.1.1   The Advocates

The advocates subscribe to the notion that all able young Singaporean males must serve NS, because they believe that the defence of the country is important, and every male citizen must uphold his citizenry obligation towards serving this end.   A significant factor that accounts for the advocates' belief regarding the significance of serving NS is related to their earlier socialisation in schools and family.   For example, it is noted that among the various social contexts, the national education (NE) programmes taught in schools and familial influence by parents and siblings who may have already served their stints of NS - play important roles in influencing how the advocates view and internalise the significance of NS in their growing years, prior to their enlistment into NS. These aspects are exemplified by P03, who internalised the need to and importance of serving NS largely because of parental influence and his active involvement in the school's national education programmes.

Because the advocates have internalised the significance of serving NS, their aim in NS is to maximise their contribution to the defence of Singapore.   It should be noted that advocates are not idealistic in the sense that they do acknowledge their fears and concerns regarding military service.   Nevertheless, they are driven by a higher

157

purpose. Therefore, the advocates are affectively committed to serving NS in three important ways. First, their object of commitment is serving their country. Second, in terms of personal effort, they are prepared to put their best effort into training. Lastly, in terms of priority, the advocates place the country's interests before the self, and are prepared to delay their study and career plans to serve NS. The table below illustrates the components and an example of a patriot conscript in the category of committing.

Table 6.3 Components and illustrations of the commitment of the advocate-conscript type

Committing	Advocates	Illustration (P03)
Internalising significance of serving NS	NS is important and everyone has a role to play	*...I realise the importance of NS, and all of us play an important role in it...*
Aim	To maximise personal contribution while in NS	*I am concerned about whether I can cope in NS, but I will definitely do my best...*
Commitment levels	Affective a. Object – Country and duty b. Effort – Put the best effort into training c. Priority – Place national interests before self interests	*...I committed to serving the country. If we do not defend it, then who will? Therefore, I will do my best in NS...in terms of studying, I am ok to delay for two years...*

6.1.2   The Adventurers

The adventurers are high achievers and adventure seekers. Since their youth, the adventurers are brought up to believe in themselves, to be independent and to pursue their interests and personal aspirations passionately. They usually do well in school, and are confident individuals who are always seeking new challenges to test their personal limits. Like the advocates, the adventurers also respond positively to the call for national service. The main difference that separates these two conscript types is the internalised significance that they have with respect to serving NS. The adventurers internalised the significance of serving NS from a self-development perspective. They subscribe to NS primarily because of the experiential and developmental opportunities that NS offers. This, in turn, translates to their aim to maximise their learning experiences and personal development in NS. Following from this aim, the adventurers' commitment may be described as transactional-

actualisation, in that they are committed to giving their best in training because they also believe that they will stand to gain the most by doing so.

Table 6.4 Components and illustrations of the commitment of the adventurer-conscript type

Committing	Adventurers	Illustration (P02)
Internalising significance of serving NS	NS is good for my personal development	*...to me, NS is a good opportunity for personal development and to experience new things…*
Aim	To maximise personal learning and experiences	*I will definitely do my best in whatever comes along, because it is a personal philosophy…I felt that if I gave it my best, I would get the best experience out of this whole NS. That is why I am generally quite motivated, want to excel and want to perform…*
Commitment levels	Transactional-actualisation a. Object – Personal development b. Effort – Put the best effort into training c. Priority – Personal interests have top priority	

6.1.3   The Careerists

The careerists are concerned about their study and career plans. They are brought up to think in very realistic terms with respect to their academic qualifications, career options and study plans. Possible reasons that explain the careerists' orientation are financial constraints and their awareness of the competition in the labour market. Thus, the careerists are always looking out for opportunities to further or enhance their career options. In this regard, the careerists do consider military service as a possible career option. Based on the participants' accounts, the researcher notes that all the identified careerist-type conscripts have already charted out their study and career options prior to enlistment into NS. These attributes are clearly illuminated by P05's comments below.

> *P05-OC-3/6- everyone needs 'paper' in this society…academic qualification is quite important in Singapore…can't really consider going overseas to study because of family background...come from a low-income family. My father works as a deliveryman…that is why I have plans to be a pilot in the SAF…*

The careerists internalised the significance of serving NS from the perspective of enhancing their career options. As such, the careerists aim to enhance their career opportunities whilst serving NS. In terms of training, the careerists focus on doing well in areas of training that they perceive to be relevant and aligned to their career choices. In this sense, their commitment to NS can be described as transactional-opportunistic, in that they are motivated to serve because NS may advance their career prospects or secure a possible career track for them.

Table 6.4 Components and illustrations of the commitment of the careerist-conscript type

Committing	Careerists	Illustration (P16)
Internalising significance of serving NS	NS may enhance my career prospects	*... I don't think two years of NS is a waste of time, because I can look for a job in the SAF...*
Aim	To enhance my career prospects whilst serving NS	*I worked hard because I wanted to learn about logistics management ... maybe I can find a job as a quartermaster...work for a few years...gain some experience and do something else outside...*
Commitment levels	Transactional-opportunistic a. Object – Personal career prospects b. Effort – Put effort into areas of training that are relevant to career prospects c. Priority – Personal careers have top priority	

6.1.4   The Play-safes

The play-safe conscript type generally lacks confidence. From their earlier socialisation, they formed the perception that serving NS is a risky undertaking, and they believe they are not quite suited for NS. As such, if granted a choice, they would not serve NS, because they doubt their own suitability and ability to handle the rigours of military training. Hence, while the play-safes may recognise the need for NS, they also feel that they are not the 'soldiering-types' and that the task of defending the country is best left to the professional soldiers. P06's and P12's comments exemplify these attributes.

> *P06-OC-4- I am concern about serving NS...so many things that can go wrong in NS...will I get injured?*

> *P12-OC-14- I…believe I am not the soldiering sort…better leave the*
>
> *soldiering to the professional soldiers…*

Therefore, the play-safes have internalised the significance of serving NS as an unnecessary risk to themselves. Their aim in NS is self-preservation. Thus, the play-safes' commitment to NS may be described as normative-compliant. They serve NS under obligation, and they are unlikely to commit fully in training. In most circumstances, the play-safes will maintain a low profile in NS to minimise their exposure to risk, and they are unlikely to do more than their share of responsibilities. P12's comments illuminate these aspects.

> *P12-OC-12- I was just trying to stay out of trouble and mesh into the*
>
> *background …*

Table 6.5 Components and illustrations of the commitment of the play-safe conscript type

Committing	Play-safes	Illustration (P06)
Internalising significance of serving NS	NS is a risk to my personal safety and security	*… I think NS is quite risky…*
Aim	Self preservation	*Try to be alert and look out for risk all the time in training…there is no need to take too much risk…so long as I follow the instructions, I think I should be alright for these two years…*
Commitment levels	Normative-compliant a. Object – Personal safety b. Effort – Be safe in training; avoid high risk training whenever possible c. Priority – Personal safety	

6.1.5 The Challengers

Prior to enlistment, the challengers are not well socialised to the notion of national service. The reasons are many, and it is noted that problems at home and bad social influences are usually the main contributing factors influencing the challengers' anti-establishment perspectives regarding NS service. P20's remarks reflect these attributes.

> *P20-OC-33- why we are serving?…the government just wants to use us as cheap labour…on week-ends, I normally don't feel like going back home after training…cannot get along with my parents…*

The challengers conscript type deems NS as exploitative and violating their personal rights and freedom. As far as the challengers are concerned, NS is a waste of time, because they do not recognise the need for conscription. The challengers therefore aim to exert their anti-NS views in NS, and are prepared to disrupt the NS system from time to time as a way of expressing their displeasure with serving NS. Thus, the challengers' commitment to NS may be described as normative-dissonance, in that they have no commitment toward serving NS and are unlikely to want to contribute in any way.

Table 6.6 Components and illustrations of the commitment of the challenger conscript type

Committing	Challengers	Illustration (P21)
Internalising significance of serving NS	NS is a violation of personal rights	*… I think NS is a waste of time…*
Aim	Express anti-establishment views	*I cannot stand NS…I cannot see why we need to follow so many rules, for example, even smoking must be done in this stupid yellow box … and because of that, I got scolding from the commanders…they scold me for every small thing…and accuse me of 'testing' the system…*
Commitment levels	Normative-dissonance a. Object – Personal rights b. Effort – Exert personal views and may choose to disrupt the NS system c. Priority – Personal interests	

6.1.6   Conclusion

As shown above, the commitment of each conscript type differs qualitatively in the typology. The commitment to serving NS may be differentiated as a. affective, b. transactional-actualisation, c. transactional-opportunistic, d. normative-compliant, and e. normative-dissonance. After analysis of the data, the researcher believes these commitment levels are hierarchically related.
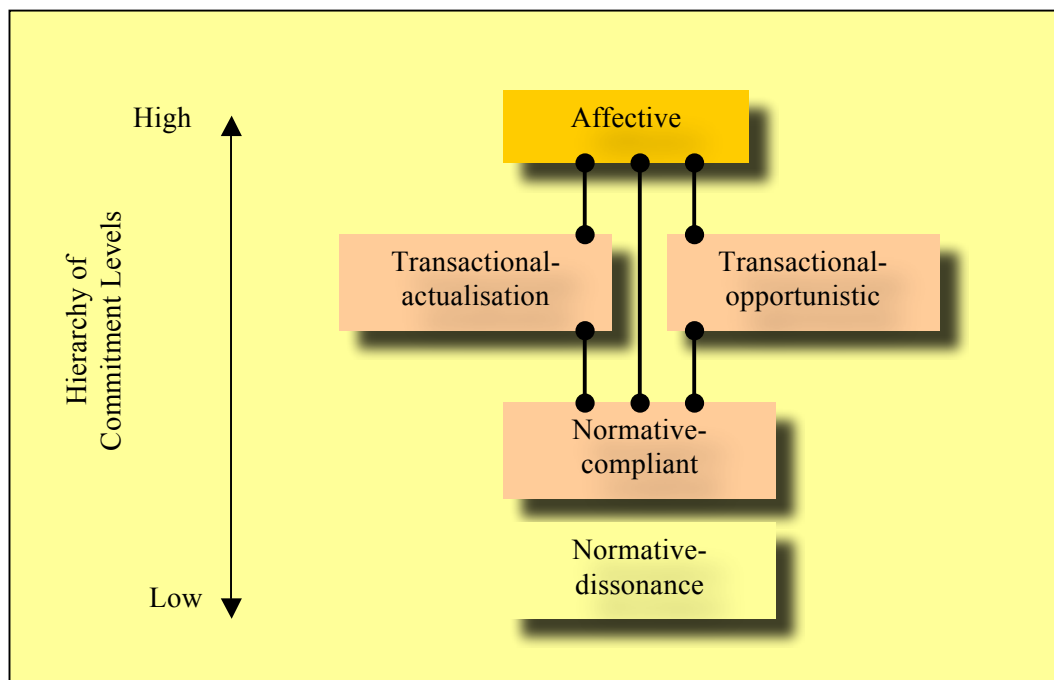
Figure 6.1 Relationships between commitment levels in serving NS

By studying the data, the researcher concludes that affectively committed conscripts (also known as 'advocates') are selfless individuals who place the country's interests above self-interest. However, advocates may recognise that personal aspirations (transactional-actualisation commitment) and future plans (transactional-opportunistic commitment) are important as well, and they can attain them without compromising their commitment to serving NS. Similarly, the careerists may also perceive serving NS (affective commitment) as important even though they are unlikely to place serving NS above their personal career and study plans (transactional-opportunistic commitment). As for the adventurers-conscript type, they may sustain their commitment levels at the affective level if they are deeply engaged in NS. However, the converse is also possible in that they may lower their commitment to normative-compliant if they do not find that serving NS contributes to their personal development and growth. Lastly, the challengers (normative-dissonance) appear to be resistant and solitary in nature. They are usually anti-social, rebellious and hold a deep-rooted dislike for NS, which make them rather impervious to change. In summary, depending on the circumstances, the participants may manifest other types of commitment levels toward serving NS while maintaining their subscribed commitment as the 'dominant' commitment level.

This study also found that while some conscripts' commitment to serve NS appear to be fluid during the pre-operational training phase, other conscripts' commitments are relatively stable throughout the two-year NS period. Regarding the conscripts who belong to the former group, the researcher found that their initial perception of NS usually varies quite significantly from their actual experience while serving NS. For example, P07, who felt negatively towards serving NS prior to his enlistment(normative-dissonance), changed his views subsequently because he experienced many positive moments in the course of serving NS, and these moments helped him to realise the purpose and value of Singapore's conscription system (affective commitment). On the other hand, there are others, like P14, who are very enthusiastic and affectively disposed toward NS in the initial stage, but then decide to maintain a low profile and do the minimum in NS (normative-compliant), because they were not selected for leadership school. As for P18, he was affectively committed throughout NS. His positive attitude towards NS has been the main factor that allowed him to overcome challenges and to derive positive value from adversity.

The researcher observed that all the participants' commitment to serve NS stabilise at around the operational training phase (or the second year of the NS) when they were assigned their actual operational roles in the units. Prior to this assignment, the participants undergo several micro-transitions, moving from one training course to another in the pre-operational training phase. More importantly, apart from the effects of micro-transitions, the rate at which the commitment level stabilises depends on the initial outcomes of the conscript's ability to manage military training and life in the military. The conscript's ability to manage life successfully in the military depends significantly on the conscript's personal characteristics and the external factors around him. The table below shows the changes in the participants' commitment toward serving NS from prior to enlistment to the operational training phase.

Table 6.7 Changes in the participants' commitment at different phases

Participants	Pre-enlistment	Pre-Operational Training Phase	Operational Training Phase
P01	TO	TO	TO
P02*	TO	TA	TA
P03	AF	AF	AF
P04*	NC	TA	TA
P05	TO	TO	TO
P06	NC	NC	NC
P07*	ND	AF	AF
P08	AF	AF	AF
P09*	NC	AF	AF
P10*	AF	NC	NC
P11	AF	AF	AF
P12	NC	NC	NC
P13	NC	NC	NC
P14*	AF	NC	NC
P15	AF	AF	AF
P16*	NC	TO	TO
P17*	NC	AF	NC
P18	AF	AF	AF
P19*	NC	AF	AF
P20	ND	ND	ND
P21	ND	ND	ND
Legend: Affective (AF); Transactional-actualisation (TA); Transactional-opportunistic (TO); Normative-compliant (NC); Normative-dissonance (ND) * - Refers to participants who have changed their commitment to serve NS			

In summary, the conscripts' commitment to NS appears to be hierarchical and inter-related, except in normative-dissonance cases. Although the participants' levels of commitment to NS are fluid, their commitments tend to stabilise by the second year of NS upon the completion of various training courses and their assumption of actual operational roles in NS.

6.2   Commitment and Managing Approach

This section focuses on how the conscripts' commitment to NS influences the ways that they manage their military training and life in NS. Different types of conscripts manifest different approaches towards coping with military training and charting their study and career plans.

6.2.1   The Advocates

The advocates generally cope well in all phases of their NS training, because the advocates hold positive attitudes toward NS. Their fundamental belief is that tough

training is an intrinsic and necessary part of military life. As such, the advocates tend to be more optimistic and accepting of the onerous nature of military training and the living conditions in the military. They are, therefore, generally more self-motivated, proactive and hands-on in the way they deal with issues and problems they encounter in NS. The advocates also believe that learning to cope with adversity is part and parcel of soldiering. In this regard, the advocates are not easily deterred by challenges or setbacks and are observed to be active learners, because they see learning as intrinsic to soldiering effectiveness. For example, P18 remarked that despite the tough training conditions he endured, he continued to seek opportunities to improve his soldiering skills and would readily take charge if necessary. In the units, this study also observed that the advocates are good team players. They are cooperative and work well with others to achieve mission success and their team's goals. Overall, the study observes the advocates to be high performing soldiers because of their positive disposition and commitment toward NS.

When it comes to charting their study and career plans, the advocates are clear about their priorities and focus in NS. They view NS training as their top priority in relation to their personal and future plans. In this respect, the advocates generally do not pay much attention to their future plans until near the end of their NS service or during later part of their operational training phase, when they are about to transition out of the NS system. These aspects appear in P03's remarks below.

> *P03-OC1-35…I did not really think about what I want to do after NS…this sort of thing can be done closer to ORD…in the meantime, I need to focus on my training first…*

6.2.1 The Adventurers

The adventurers' commitment to serve depends on the extent to which they see NS as an exciting undertaking, because the adventurers are 'wired' for adventure in that they look forward to challenges and new experiences. In short, they will remain motivated so long as the training perpetually challenges them. These aspects that define the adventurers are shown in P02's remarks below.

> *P02-OC-101 – I mean, I enjoy testing limits to see how far I can go, both physically and mentally. I am not sure how far these limits will be tested outside, but here [in NS], there are plenty of opportunities to test my limits.*

Hence, the adventurers generally cope and perform very well in training. The researcher observed that the adventurers are always keen to learn when in training, take initiatives and proactively solve problems. In fact, they thrive under the conditions of tough training, and are observed to lose motivation if they are assigned to do mundane or unchallenging tasks. These aspects are illuminated by P02's remarks below.

> *P02-OC-37- I thoroughly enjoyed the jungle confidence course. The overseas training was also quite an eye opener. But once we came back, then it started to get a bit more monotonous, boring. Look forward to getting back to unit to get the next fresh experience.*

The adventurers generally interact and integrate well with others in the units because they are naturally curious and attracted to new social experiences. However, they may disengage from the group should members of the group not share the same degree of enthusiasm. Under such circumstances, the adventurers may lean towards individualistic behaviours without much regard for team cohesion, as shown in P04's remarks below.

> *P04-OC2-23…Sometimes I will go and do my own stuff when I find that the others are not keen to explore new ideas…*

In terms of charting their career and study plans, the adventurers are generally high achievers, competitive and ambitious. In NS, they are constantly seeking out relevant information and comparing notes with their peers in terms of study and career plans. In this regard, the adventurers feel pressurised by any peers who seem to be performing better than they are. Under such circumstances, the adventurers are likely to work harder to prepare themselves for their eventual transition out of NS. For example, P02 admitted that rather than spending his free time relaxing on the

weekends, he would spend his free time researching and preparing for his studies, because he gathered that his platoon mates were better prepared for their studies.

6.2.2   The Careerists

The careerists have internalised their commitment to serve in order to secure career opportunities and advancement. In terms of training, the careerists generally seem motivated and normally perform well in training. However, this study also observed that the careerists tend to be selective in the way they channel their energy towards training, choosing to focus on areas that concern their career advancement. In this sense, the careerists also tend to exhibit individualistic behaviours in both pre-operational and operational training phases. An important distinguishing factor in the way the careerists manage their training relates to their assessment of the utility of training towards advancing their careers and their own performance in training. For example, P06 was motivated to work hard in NS, because he wanted to be an air force pilot. However, his attitude toward NS and his motivation were negatively affected when he failed his air-grading test.

In the process of charting, the researcher observed the careerists to be making elaborate and calculated plans. Unlike the other conscript types, the careerists are conscientious and deliberate about their future or possible career pathways. The researcher also observed them to be very proactive in gathering information and comparing notes with other conscripts with respect to their career options. Hence, it comes as no surprise that many careerists are very well informed of their career opportunities within and outside the military. Another aspect of the careerists is the view they hold with respect to socialising. The careerists view social networks as an important source of social capital, and therefore, they are generally well connected to the larger social network in the units. As such, the careerists are also able to draw better peer support from such social networks in relation to coping with training issues or challenges.

6.2.3   The Play-safes

The play-safes perceive NS to be an inherently risky venture. Thus, in terms of managing training, the play-safes choose only to do the minimum with the goal of minimising the risk of training injuries; they feel that this goal helps them to avoid

compromising their study and career plans. The play-safes' approach to military training is observed to be generally passive and reactive. They do not exercise initiative in training nor do they volunteer or take on more responsibilities. In terms of their relationships with fellow conscripts, the play-safes' interactions with others are primarily centred on their beliefs that others may be able to help them in times of need. As they are not very prepared to help others, they usually confine themselves to a small circle of friends and peers in the units, and shun others whom they think may invite trouble. In this regard, play-safes do not have extensive social networks, as they prefer to keep a low profile in NS. This study noted that the play-safes' performance in NS generally hovers at the average level.

In terms of charting their study and career plans, the play-safes are very concerned about the effects of NS on their personal development and future plans. In NS, they are more concerned about ensuring that their study and career plans are not jeopardised, and they are less interested in achieving success in training. Thus, the play-safes are observed to be very diligent and conscientious about making use of their available time in NS to prepare for their subsequent transition out of NS. P07's remarks reveal these motives.

> *P07-OC2-13-...I am glad that I am assigned to do administrative work. Because in this way, I am able to focus on preparing for my studies after NS...*

6.2.4 The Challengers

The challengers are disengaged and not committed to serving NS. Their lack of commitment is reflected in their poor attitudes toward NS, which affect the way they cope with military life and training. In terms of training, the challengers performed poorly, as they are not motivated and do not put their effort into training. The researcher also observed that the challengers have more problems adjusting to military life than the other types. They reject the military culture, specifically in the areas of regimentation and discipline, and would often get into trouble with the authorities for destructive behaviour. In the social domain, the challengers are generally uncooperative, and their anti-establishment sentiments and anti-social behaviours hinder their ability to interact with other conscripts in any constructive way. There is also a possibility that their behaviours also drive away the other 'types'

of NS conscript who want to work in teams. To make matters worse, the challengers are generally loners in the units, which further deprives them of the peer support they need to cope with NS. Overall, the challengers manage their NS training badly, which reinforces their views that NS is a waste of time.

6.2.5   Conclusion

The approaches taken by conscripts to manage and cope with their military training are distinctly different and enable a five-fold typology to be recognised. This section's further analysis of the different types of conscripts suggests that the approaches of managing military training may be classified as proactive, adaptive, selective, reactive and dismissive, distinguished along the properties of '**effort**' and '**presence,**' which draw from the sub-processes of *coping* and *charting*.

Table 6.8 Different approaches to managing according to conscript types

Conscript Type	Approach to Managing	Effort	Presence
Advocates	Proactive	Maximum effort, self motivated, driven	Complete presence, training focus
Adventurers	Adaptive	Maximum effort, interest-driven, achievement focus	Conditional presence refers to their focus on training on the condition that training is exciting
Careerists	Selective	Conditional effort, task focus, personal gains	Partial presence refers to selective focus on training and active charting of their own career/study plans
Play-safes	Reactive	Minimum effort, avoid trouble, minimum success	Partial presence in this case refers to little focus on training. Participants are more concerned about protecting their own study/career plans
Challengers	Dismissive	Minimum effort, resistance to training	Absence from training due to anti-establishment sentiments

This study found that the dimension of 'effort' may distinguish different processes of coping amongst the conscript types. The term **Effort** refers to the extent that the conscripts are prepared to commit to the achievement of success in training. In this regard, the 'advocates' are observed to put in the most effort and the 'challengers' the least. The diagram below shows the effort of the different conscript types.

Advocates	Adventurers	Careerists	Play-safes	Challengers

Maximum	Maximum-conditional	Conditional	Conditional-Minimum	Minimum

Legend
Maximum – always putting personal best effort toward achieving success in military training
Maximum-Conditional – putting in best effort when the training is exciting
Conditional – only putting in effort to succeed in areas that have study or career impact
Conditional-Minimum – putting in effort to achieve minimum success just to safeguard against risking study and career plans
Minimum – putting in minimum effort for all training activities; disregarding training success

Figure 6.2 Degree of effort in different conscript types

Presence, in this study, refers to the extent that different conscript types focus on doing well in training as opposed to concentrating on preparing for their own careers or study plans whilst serving NS. In the charting process, it can be seen that the different conscript types lend different emphases to training and preparing for their transition out of NS. The careerists and play-safes are always thinking about and making preparations for their future plans, whereas the advocates and adventurers tend to place their focus on their military roles and tasks, leaving the preparation of their study and career plans towards the end of their NS term. The challengers are neither focusing on training nor preparing for their eventual transition out of NS. The diagram (Figure 6.3) below shows the degree of presence in the different conscript types.

Advocates	Adventurers	Careerists	Play-safes	Challengers

Presence	Presence (conditional)		Partial	Absence

Legend
Presence – always focusing on military training while in NS
Presence (conditional) – focusing on military training whenever the training is exciting in the case of adventurers or only when it has study or career impact in the case of careerists
Partial – focusing on own study or career plans more than training
Absence – not focusing on military training at all; may be anti-military training altogether

Figure 6.3 Degree of presence in different conscript types

171

6.3   Appraising Training Experiences

This section focuses the different conscript types' appraisals of their NS experiences, which are differentiated by their internalised significance, attitudes towards soldiering and appraisal orientations within the processes of discerning, defining and contributing.

6.3.1   The Advocates

The advocates appraise NS training from the perspective of purpose. With respect to the process of discerning the impact of NS on their personal development, studies and career plans, it is observed that the advocates are less worried about how their personal studies or careers may be affected by NS. Rather, the advocates regard purposeful training as the most important criterion, because it resonates with their internalised significance of serving NS, which is to achieve self-actualisation in the context of fulfilling their citizenry responsibilities as model Singaporeans. Consistent with their internalised significance of the importance of serving NS, the advocates generally hold the view that military training has to be tough to be effective. Their perspectives on training influence their appraisals of their own performances. The advocates treat successes in training as positive reinforcement for even better performance. In times of difficulties or failures, the advocates do not feel discouraged, because they look upon failures as opportunities for improvement, strengthening of the self and character building. Thus, the advocates find NS training to be meaningful, as it consists of many positive defining moments. Another important aspect of the advocates' appraisal process is the process of contributing. The findings indicate that the advocates seek to maximise their contribution to NS, because they view the extent of their contributions as a measure of their soldiering performance and success. In training, for instance, they would exercise good initiative and were easily identified as the 'usual volunteers' in the team. The following table illustrates these traits of the advocates.

Table 6.9   Process of appraising for the Patriot conscript type

Types of conscripts	Patriot	Illustrations
Discerning Self Career Study	Self actualisation Fulfil citizenry obligation Second priority (whilst in NS)	*P03-OC-41…I think NS has been very fulfilling, because I have always wanted to serve.......my studies and preparations can come later, when I am about to ORD…*
Defining Success Failures	Positive experience Self motivated Desire to overcome weakness Learn from mistakes	*P08-OC-33…I think training should be tough…otherwise, we cannot be effective…even if I fail…no problem…just take it as character training…*
Contributing	Maximising personal contribution to NS	*P19-OC-14…I will do what I can to motivate my soldiers…sometimes on weekends, I will stay back to help them…*

6.3.2   The Adventurers

The adventurers internalised serving NS as an excellent opportunity to experience new challenges and to fulfil their citizenry obligation. They are achievement-oriented, and enjoy the challenges and new experiences they encounter in NS. In this regard, the adventurers generally thrive in challenging conditions. To the adventurers, the onerous nature of military training and its unique social environment are essential conditions for personal development and provision of useful life skills. Like the advocates, the adventurers view successes and failures in training positively. The main distinguishing point between these two conscript types is that the adventurers consider the aspect of training variety as an important condition in the process of discerning. To the adventurers, training must be exciting and not monotonous. So long as the above-mentioned conditions are met, the adventurers are likely to define their NS training as meaningful, relevant and comprising many positive defining moments.

In terms of the process of contributing, the adventurers hold the view that they should direct their skills and effort to areas that can enrich their NS experiences. Hence, the

adventurers exhibit active contribution in the areas that can energise them and make training more exciting by their definition. The table below shows the adventurers' appraising process.

Table 6.10   Process of appraising for the Adventurer conscript type

Types of conscripts	Adventurers	Illustrations
Discerning Self Career Study	Fulfil citizenry obligation & personal development opportunity Learn useful life skills	*P02-OC-44…I see NS as an opportunity to test my own limits and improve…I am always looking out for new challenges and experiences, otherwise, I will be bored quite easily…* *P04-OC-13…I think NS training is rather generic in nature, but I am ok with it because it sort of teaches us life skills…*
Defining Success Failures	Positive experience Self motivated Seek new challenges Perseverance Try again Learn from mistakes	*P02-OC-45…I am not deterred by failures. In fact, I see them as opportunities to improve and test my own limits…*
Contributing	Conditional Selective contribution	*P02-OC-46…I would say that I try to contribute in areas that would make training more interesting and exciting…that is how I see my contribution to NS…*

6.3.3   The Careerists

The careerists have internalised NS with a transactional paradigm. The careerists' enthusiasm for NS, if any, stems from how NS may enhance their career prospects within or outside of the military. According to their internalised significance, the careerists appraise NS training from an opportunity or relevance-to-career perspective. Within the process of discerning, the careerists' measure their NS experiences based on whether the military training has advanced or hindered their career prospects, either directly or indirectly. This study found that a principal reason that motivated the careerists more than the other conscript types is the notion that NS has expanded their social networks and increased their social capital. In terms of the process of defining their NS experiences, the careerists adopt a utilitarian perspective

in that they regard training to be relevant if training helps to advance their career prospects.   In cases where the careerists feel that the training in NS no longer adds value to their career advancement, they are likely to dismiss their training experiences as irrelevant. Within the process of contributing, the careerists maintain the view that they should be deployed in areas or assignments that also benefit their career advancement. In some ways, the careerists are similar to the adventurers in that both types are selective in how they want to add value to training.   In this instance, the careerists are likely to focus on contributing to areas that benefit their career progression. The table below illustrates these aspects of the careerists.

Table 6.11   Process of appraising for conscript type - Careerists

Types of conscripts	Careerists	Illustrations
Discerning Self Career Study	Personal sacrifice Possible career opportunities Useful life skills Social capital Not relevant	*P05-OC-35…I think NS will be ok if it is relevant to my career. Otherwise, it is really not ok…so far, I find that I learn useful skills, like how to manage people, which I think will be applicable to my future job…*
Defining Success Failures	Positive experience Motivated by opportunity to advance careers Seek relevant experience Dismissive Change courses of action Protect career or study plans	*P16-OC-13…I am quite motivated to work because I am learning logistic management skills as a storeman…but sometimes, I get frustrated because they asked me to do so many unrelated tasks.*
Contributing	Conditional – relevant to personal plans	*P16-OC-24…I try to help in areas…such as stores, etc., but not so much in other areas I am not interested in…*

6.3.4   The Play-safes

The play-safes have internalised serving NS to be a personal sacrifice and a high-risk endeavour.   Their attitudes toward NS characterise NS as presenting physical and psychological risks to their personal well-being.   Thus, if given a choice, the play-safes would rather not serve NS.   Another reason why they are not particularly

interested or motivated in military training is that they see serving NS as an unnecessary hindrance to their study or career plans.

Deriving from their internalised significance of NS, the play-safes appraise their NS experiences quite differently from the other conscript types. Within the process of discerning, for instance, the play-safes are likely to discount the positive aspects of the military training and prefer to focus on the risks or negative aspects of training. Such attitudes towards NS training manifest in the play-safes' commitment to caution during military training. For instance, it is noted that the play-safes are not inclined to volunteer or to do more than their share of responsibility, because the play-safes generally regard volunteerism as an unnecessary risk to their well-being and 'not my problem'. In this respect, the play-safes are not insistent that they must be gainfully employed in NS. Their appraisal of success in training is discerned by the extent that they are protected from harm or injury. Consequently, the play-safes also do not develop a sense of ownership of their NS training because of their unwillingness to contribute. These aspects are consistent with the finding in this study that the play-safes experienced relatively fewer positive defining moments in NS compared to other conscript types.

Table 6.12   Process of appraising for the Play-safe conscript type

Types of conscripts	Play-safes	Illustrations
Discerning Self Career Study	Personal sacrifice and risk Potential risk to career and study Fear of losing out to others	*P14-OC-24…I think NS training is quite risky…you may get injured if you are not careful…then what is going to happen to your studies and career?*
Defining Success Failures	Positive experience Cautious, avoid unnecessary exposure to risky activities, maintain status quo Self preservation Blame	*P14-OC-35…to me, success means not getting injuries…leaving NS in one piece…I just hope for a safe exit…*
Contributing	'Not my problem' Lack of ownership	*P17-OC-33…I do not really feel that I am the type who will volunteer to do this and that…I just want to do my part and that's it… it is not my problem unless it affects me…*

6.3.5 The Challengers

The challengers' appraisal of NS training is influenced by their own views about NS: they regard service as irrelevant and a waste of time. The challengers have discerned that serving NS is a violation of their personal rights, freedom and identity. This study found that the challengers held on to these negative views about NS regardless of the nature or outcome of their NS training. Given that the challengers are anti-NS, they tend to dismiss or devalue successes in training as insignificant and disregard the benefits that NS may provide to their personal development. However, the challengers are quick to blame or attack the NS system for every major or minute failure or issue that they may encounter in training. In terms of the process of contributing, the challengers have somewhat extreme viewpoints. P20, for instance, completely rejects the notion that NS would make good use of his skills. As for P21, he was very critical of the fact that he was not gainfully employed. Overall, the challengers appraise their NS training experiences as irrelevant and meaningless.

Table 6.13   Process of appraising for the Challengers conscript type

Types of conscripts	Challengers	Illustrations
<u>Discerning</u> Self Career Study	Loss of personal rights, freedom and identity Negative impact Waste of time	*P20-OC-45…I view NS as a total waste of time…it is completely against what I stand for…personal rights, freedom…*
<u>Defining</u> Success Failures	Dismissal Defiance Blame and attack NS training establishment	*P20-OC-46…NS is really quite meaningless…so many screw-ups in training…and I don't see why I should be the one contributing…* *P21-OC-34…it [NS] is really*
<u>Contributing</u>	Extreme viewpoints with respect to gainful employment in NS	*meaningless....they did not make use of the skills I have...*

6.3.6   Conclusion

Different conscript types portray distinct appraisal inclinations towards training outcomes, which may be classified into two types, namely, constructive and disruptive.   Constructive appraisals tend to gravitate towards more optimistic perceptions, whereas disruptive appraisals tend to elicit pessimistic perceptions of one's situation.   This finding is important, because it relates to how the different conscript types appraise and respond to adversities and challenges in NS.

Based on the proposed typology, the advocates and adventurers are likely to appraise their NS experiences positively and respond to failures or challenges in NS training in a constructive manner.   On the other hand, the careerists, the play-safes and the challengers seem to be more susceptible to the effects of training failures, because they are concerned about how NS training may impact their careers or well-being.   It is evident that the careerists, the play-safes and the challengers do not fully appreciate the intrinsic purpose and value of military training.   For example, P05 sees NS as an opportunity to seek a career as a pilot, even though he is not quite convinced of the need for NS.   In his second interview, P05 showed signs of losing interest in a military career because he failed the selection test for pilots.

The table below summarises the relationships between the different appraisal types and the sub-processes of discerning, defining and contributing across the conscript types in the typology.

Table 6.14 Appraisal orientations of different conscript types

		Advocates	Adventurers	Careerists	Play-safes	Challengers
Appraisal		**Constructive**			**Disruptive**	
Discerning		Self actualisation Fulfil citizenry obligation	Fulfil citizenry obligation & personal challenge opportunities	Possible career opportunities Useful life skills Social capital	Personal sacrifice and risk	Loss of personal rights, freedom and identity
Defining	Success	Perceived positive impact on self $\rightarrow$ positive experience				Neutral
	Failure	Perceived positive impact on self $\rightarrow$ positive experience		Perceived negative impact on self $\rightarrow$ negative experience		
Contributing		Maximise contribution	Selective contribution to NS		Optional contribution	Non-contribution

6.4 Consequences of Appraising

The process of assimilating, which consists of two sub-processes of identifying and maturing, is dependent on the outcomes of the conscripts' appraisal of their NS experiences. This study's interviews revealed that positive appraisals of NS experiences reinforce the participants' identification with their units and NS, and engender positive perceptions of one's maturation. With the sub-processes of identifying and maturing, different conscript types exhibit different characteristics in how they assimilate their NS experiences. The process of assimilating for each conscript type is explained below.

6.4.1 The Advocates

The advocates assimilate their NS experiences from the perspective of purpose. The advocates have internalised the need to defend Singapore and regard military training as an important element of soldiering. To the advocates, NS training develops not just soldiering skills, but also character and other life skills. Thus, from the process of identifying, it is observed that the advocates are already mentally primed to assume their roles as citizen soldiers (active acceptance) prior to NS. The advocates usually set their own expectations as to what they hope to be and do in NS. For instance, P03 mentioned that he aspired to be an officer in NS because he wanted to lead men, and P08 aspired to serve in the elite unit prior to his enlistment. In NS, the advocates are naturally motivated to perform well in training, because they readily identify with their NS roles (identification: positive) and proactively adapt and re-role themselves to make useful contributions. This can be observed from the advocates' comments that they are not easily disheartened in training, because they view failures as temporary setbacks. They are prepared to work hard and discharge the responsibilities required of them.

In terms of the process of *maturing*, the advocates' maturation process develops through two levels of engagement, namely, individual and group. At the individual level, the advocates are actively engaged in training. They are motivated to train and learn whilst serving NS. Within the group, the advocates are cooperative and helpful, because they believe in teamwork and doing their best to assist others in the team. Consequently, the advocates perceived themselves to have matured in certain attributes within the domains of self and social competence. For self-competence, the

advocates highlighted aspects such as confidence, leadership, discipline, responsibility and mental resilience. They also expressed aspects of social competence, such as empathy toward others, helping others and responsibility to teammates. These aspects are summarised in the table below.

Table 6.15   Assimilating process and properties (Advocates)

Conscript type:	Advocates	Illustrations
Identifying	Assumption of roles and responsibilities: **Active acceptance** Identification with NS roles: **Positive identification** Response to role mismatch situation: **Active role innovation**	*P07-OC-23- As section commander, I have to start to take care of more things; I mean you get a few more men under you, more problems to handle and have to be responsible for everything…* *P02-OC-12- when I got posted to MI, I had to quickly change my style to be able to interact with the people there…*
Maturing	**Attributes** *Self competence –* Confidence, leadership, discipline, responsibility, resilience *Social competence –* Empathy, ability to help others and to receive help, responsibility towards others **Process** Engaged in training Interact well with peers and commanders Belief in teamwork	*P18-OC2-4- NS has given me confidence …which was one of my weakness in school…now, as DyS3, I have to do a lot of coordination and communicate with people…so it has given me the confidence and helped me understand people better…* *P08-OC-39…my platoon is very cohesive…we work as a team all the time…very good…*
Assimilating orientation	**Affirmative**	

6.4.2   The Adventurers

The adventurers are intrinsically motivated by adventures. They are motivated to serve NS because they recognise the importance of serving NS and feel that NS training is exciting and challenging. Hence, the adventurers can identify with the onerous nature of military training to which they would typically appraise as exciting – a characteristic that distinguishes the adventurers from other conscript types.

Therefore, the nature of their NS assignment has a significant influence on whether the adventurers can identify with their NS roles. For instance, if placed in a challenging environment, the adventurers will thrive and perform very well, and in the process, establish positive identification with the roles they play. In the event that the adventurers are assigned tasks or positions that are routine-based or monotonous (perceived roles-actualised roles mismatch), they may become disengaged (role disengagement; identification: negative) or seek alternate assignments (role innovation).

The adventurers and advocates share a similar maturation process. The adventurers derive their maturation competence from two levels of engagement. At the individual level, the adventurers adapt well to military training and are typically high performing soldiers because of their affinity for challenges and adventures. Consequently, the adventurers perceive themselves to have matured in self-competence associated attributes such as risk taking, adventurous, mental strength, endurance, leadership and confidence. At the group level, the adventurers are usually well liked by their peers and commanders because they are high-energy individuals who generally interact well with people. However, the adventurers may choose to go on their own if they opine that the others are unwilling to take on challenges. Therefore, in terms of social competence attributes, the adventurers perceived themselves to have developed group-centric attributes, such as encouraging others who are not as enthusiastic about challenges before giving up on them entirely.

In summary, the adventurers' orientation within the process of assimilating may be described as contingent, because the extent to which the adventurers identify and mature is largely contingent on whether the military training is exciting or not (see Table 6.16 – next page).

Table 6.16   Assimilating process and properties (Adventurers)

Conscript type:	Adventurers	Illustrations
Identifying	Assumption of roles and responsibilities: **Acceptance** Identification with NS roles: **Positive or negative identification, depending on environment and assignment** Response to role mismatch situation: **Role disengagement or role innovation**	*P02-OC-43-… Because I understand this fact, I can accept the fact that I have to serve my duty to the country* (**assumption: acceptance**)*… I like my current job as a platoon commander* (**identification: positive**)*… it is a very challenging job…I will ensure that the troopers have the adequate skills required to perform the tasks during operations or during exercises…* *P04-OC-20a- I understand the importance of serving NS* (**assumption: acceptance**)*, but at the same time, I can't say that I like what I am doing in NS…because it is kind of boring as a clerk* (**identification: negative**) *…*
Maturing	**Attributes** *Self competence* – risk taking, adventurous, confidence, leadership, discipline, endurance *Social competence* – Ability to help others, team player **Process** Thrive in challenging training conditions, high performance Interact well with peers and commanders Operate well in teams but are prepared to operate alone	*P02-OC2-18a. I believe that being an officer and a commander has helped me to internalise the important aspects of leadership, which is going to stay with me for life…* *P02-OC2-18 - I felt I had developed the most since I entered the unit, where the soft skill side, how to interact with people, knowing when to speak, at the right place and the right time, er…. when to shut your mouth..*
Assimilating orientation	**Contingent**	

6.4.3   The Careerists

In the case of the careerists, they accept their NS roles and responsibilities from a transactional viewpoint, for NS may be a possible career opportunity and their experiences in NS may enhance their career prospects (conditional acceptance). Thus, the extent that the careerists identify with their NS roles is contingent on their appraisal of whether NS training is relevant to their career choices and prospects. For the careerists who are contemplating a career in the military, they direct their efforts toward securing their preferred military roles. The careerists may, at times, try out several roles in search of his preferred career choice (role selection). Under such circumstances, the careerists can positively identify with their NS identities and the roles they played in NS (identification: positive). If the careerists are no longer

contemplating a career in the military, they are less likely to identify positively with their NS identities (identification: positive [conditional]) and may seek to disengage themselves in training (role disengagement).

In terms of the process of maturing, the researcher observed the careerists to perform well as individual soldiers and within their groups. Hence, the careerists generally perceived themselves to have matured in self-competence attributes such as self-efficacy, confidence, responsibility and discipline. They also developed social competence attributes like teamwork and the ability to help others.

In summary, the careerists' assimilation orientation may be described as expedient, which suggest that the careerists' identification with their NS roles and maturation as individuals are dependent on whether NS is relevant to their career plans.

Table 6.17 Assimilating processes and properties (Careerists)

Conscript type:	Careerists	Illustrations
Identifying	-Assumption of roles and responsibilities: **Conditional acceptance** -Identification with NS roles: **Positive or negative identification, depending on perceived relevance to career prospects** -Response to role mismatch situation: **Role selection, role disengagement**	*P16-OC-26a-* *starting wasn't very good (BMT) but now it is ok...until recently, actually, I got this idea to sign on as a regular soldier...I have been asking around...making sure I know my job...because I think this job as store-man is quite good* (***identification: positive***). *It pays ok and I learn accounting skills.* *P05-OC-17a – I am not going to be a pilot anymore...failed my air grading test...so cannot be a pilot...very sad...now I must make sure I have a safe exit out of NS* (***identification: neutral***)
Maturing	**Attributes** -*Self competence* – Self-efficacy, determined, confidence, discipline, responsibility, -*Social competence* – Empathy, ability to help others, responsibility towards others **Process** Willing to learn new skills, generally do well in training Interact well with others and establish wide social networks	*P05-OC2-4- Yes, NS does make me more confident, determined to study, to excel...because what I thought is that I can do more outside than what I can do inside here, I can like...release my potential outside...* *P05-OC2-11-...I find that networking is important...when you help them, in return, they help you...*
Assimilating Orientation	**Expedient**	

6.4.4   The Play-safes

The current study classifies the play-safes' assimilation of their NS experiences as limited, because firstly, the play-safes only partially identify with their NS roles and secondly, the play-safes perceive themselves to have matured in a limited way. This section elaborates on these aspects.

In terms of the process of identifying, the play-safes may only partially identify with their NS roles. This is because the play-safes have internalised serving NS as an inherently risky undertaking in relation to their personal safety, study and career plans.   Therefore, the play-safes are reluctant to assume their NS roles and responsibilities fully. In many ways, their attitudes toward NS are reflected in their behaviours in training. In training, the play-safes are cautious, prefer to be followers and are unlikely to take the initiative to avoid trouble, additional work or duty. In the event that the play-safes are given additional responsibilities or assignments in NS, they are likely to feel stressed and may choose to avoid the assignment or seek others to replace them (*role avoidance*).

In terms of the process of *maturing*, the play-safes' maturation process is influenced by the way they manage training.   The play-safes tread carefully in training to minimise their exposure to training risk and injuries. They are likely to focus on completing their areas of responsibility and are unlikely to volunteer to do more than their share of work. As such, the play-safes limit the stretching of their own potential in terms of self and social competence.   Consequently, the play-safes perceive themselves to have matured, in a limited sense, in self-competence attributes such as confidence, mental strength and health consciousness.   They matured, to a much lesser degree, in social competence attributes such as sociability and the ability to help others.

Table 6.18   Assimilating processes and properties (Play-safes)

Conscript type:	Play-safes	Illustrations
Identifying	Assumption of roles and responsibilities: **acceptance-reluctance** Identification with NS roles: **Positive (partial)** Response to role mismatch situation: **Role avoidance, role displacement**	*P06-OC-43- I have two minds about NS and being a citizen soldier (**assumption: reluctance**)… a good way is that it helps you to be a fitter person, because I was obese…so it is good for you to have NS… the negative way is that you spent 2 years in NS…your education career might be over …no choice…just serve and do what they want me to do (**identification: positive [partial]**)…*
Maturing	**Attributes** *Self competence* – Confidence, discipline, heath consciousness *Social competence* – Sociability, ability to help others **Process** Cautious in training, minimise exposure to training risks, seldom volunteer Form small, close networks of friends	*P06-OC2-1-I am a bit more confident than what I was before… a bit more outgoing and a bit more health conscious…* *P06-OC-16- I saw my friends and bunk mates…some went out of course from injuries…that is why I was quite worried and depressed…got to be careful…*
Assimilating	**Limited**	

6.4.5   The Challengers

This study defines the challengers as negatively assimilated in the military because of their internalised significance with respect to serving NS and their negative appraisal of their NS experiences.   The challengers have internalised serving NS from the perspective of defiance.   They reject their NS roles and responsibilities because, fundamentally, they do not subscribe to the conception of NS.   Therefore, the challengers are unable to identify with their NS roles (identification: negative).   In fact, the challengers often act in a manner that contravenes the NS system (*role rejection*), which, in turn, negatively affects their NS experiences and how they appraise their time in NS.

As the challengers cannot relate to the purpose of serving NS, they remain fixated in their belief that NS is a contradiction to their personal rights and values (alignment: contradiction). Consequently, the challengers perceived themselves to mature only in very limited ways such as learning to control their temper. They are unlikely to develop other-centric attributes such as ability to help others.

Table 6.19   Assimilating processes and properties (Challengers)

Conscript type:	Challengers	Illustrations
Identifying	Assumption of roles and responsibilities: **rejection** Identification with NS roles: **Negative** Response to role mismatch situation: **Role rejection**	*P20-OC-21- I think NS is a waste of time (**internalised significance**)…there is no meaning in what I do here (**assumption: rejection**)…just received a lot of punishment…*
Maturing	**Attributes** *Self competence* – control of own temper, resilience *Social competence* – Nil **Process** Disengaged from training Do not interact well with others Reject NS	*P20-OC-20a- ….I think I am better now in that I can control my temper better and think before I flare up…* *P20-OC-22 – I am angry with the people in my department…they keep scolding me for no reason…and for small things…*
Assimilating	**Negative**	

6.4.6   Conclusion

As shown above, each conscript type assimilates into the military differently. The advocates exhibit affirmative assimilation in that they identify positively with their NS roles, and their self-maturation process extends into self and social competence domains. The adventurers differ from the advocates in that they exhibit contingent assimilation, which depends on whether their NS roles are challenging. The careerists, on the other hand, demonstrate expedient assimilation. They identify with those NS roles that align with their career plans or choices. The play-safes only assimilate into the military in a limited sense, because they are reluctant to identify with their NS roles for fear of added responsibilities and perceived risk. Finally, the challengers negatively assimilate, because they reject the notion of NS altogether.

The second finding from the analysis of different conscript types is the relationship that exists between identifying and maturing in the proposed typology. The analysis found that that positive identification with NS roles is likely to engender maturation in both self and social domains, whereas partial or negative identification is associated with maturation residing predominantly in the self-competence domain. The advocates, adventurers and careerists have demonstrated maturation in both self and social competence. The play-safes and challengers, on the other hand, displayed maturation only in the self-competence domain. Thus, the researcher can conclude that the capacity to develop one's social competence depends on one's willingness to own and assume wider social responsibilities, which, in this study, refers to the assumption of citizenry soldiering responsibilities. The table below summarises the relationship between identifying and maturing within the process of assimilating across the various conscript types.

Table 6.20 Summary of assimilating with respect to the proposed typology

Conscript Types	Advocates	Adventurers	Careerists	Play-safes	Challengers
Identification with NS roles	Assumption: Active acceptance Identification: positive	Assumption: acceptance Identification: depends on environment and nature of assignment	Assumption: conditional acceptance Identification: depends on perceived relevance	Assumption: reluctant acceptance Identification: positive (partial)	Assumption: rejection Identification: negative
Self maturation	Self and social competence	Self and social competence	Self and social competence	Self competence, limited social competence	Limited self competence

6.5   Propositions arising from the typology

Two propositions are raised as a result of the comparison of the characteristics of different conscript types. These propositions serve as useful information and as guides to better understand the recruitment and reactions of future conscripts to NS in Singapore. They may help military commanders in general and in particular, those officers who have responsibility for handling the conscripts, to reflect on and adopt more suitable strategies for better preparing, organising supporting and developing the

conscripts for the NS experience. Having stated that, it is important to note the assumptions that underpin these propositions.

    a.   Conscripts manage their own training in relation to their personal development, studies and career plans. There may be other confounding reasons that influence the conscripts in terms of how they manage NS, which are not examined here.

    b.   The propositions are made in relation to an important outcome arising out of how conscripts internalised the significance of serving NS – namely commitment to NS.

The two propositions regarding how conscripts manage NS in relation to their personal development, study and career plans are suggested as follows:

Proposition 1: External factors, such as families, commanders and peers, seem to have a significant impact on how conscripts manage NS and life in the military.

Proposition 2: How conscripts internalise the significance of serving NS to their careers and their lives in general has a significant impact on the way the conscripts manage their military training, appraise their NS experiences, assimilate into the NS system and, consequently, their commitment to NS.

6.5.1 Factors influencing conscripts' commitment to NS and how conscripts manage their NS

The process of managing directly influences how conscripts manage their NS in the theory of Selective Commitment. Prior to enlistment, the conscripts had not been exposed to the nature of military training in NS. Their perception of NS is largely determined by what they know or hear from family members and friends who have served NS. In schools, the conscripts are taught national education, which exposes them to the wider perspective of nation building and defence. Yet beyond this point, the conscripts have very little exposure to military life to gauge their own commitment to NS. Once enlisted, the conscripts are detached from their families. The process of how conscripts manage or cope has shown that they more or less have

to adapt to the new environment and that they look to the insiders, such as commanders and fellow conscripts, for support and assistance in the areas of training and transitions within the military. As the conscripts learn to cope with military training, they also seek advice from their fellow conscripts and commanders with regard to charting their future study and career plans. In this sense, commanders and fellow conscripts are important sources of motivation and support in the units to help the conscripts manage their military training and life in NS. **Thus, the first proposition states that external factors, such as families, commanders and fellow peers in NS, seem to have a significant impact on how well the conscripts manage military training and life in the military.**

The processes of appraising and assimilating suggest that the conscripts' internalised significance of serving NS – that is, how they make sense of it - directly influences the lens that they use to appraise their training experiences and outcomes (from the process of managing). The conscripts appraise their NS training based on cognitive and affective processes. The cognitive processes are primarily concerned with the analysis of benefits and threats to the conscripts' study and career plans that arise during NS training. The affective processes are concerned with the conscripts' derived meaningfulness of serving NS. This study recognises that the conscripts derive meaning in their NS training from significant or defining moments as well as their perceived contribution to the NS system. The outcomes of these two processes, however, do not necessarily always align and may even contradict at times. For instance, P04 understands the need to serve and yet finds it difficult to disregard the disruption to his study as a result of serving NS. Under such circumstances, the conscript's internalised significance of serving NS plays the critical role of helping the conscript to reconcile his perspective with serving NS.

The conscripts' internalised significance of serving NS also influences how the conscripts identify and mature within the process of assimilating. Conscripts, who have internalised the significance of serving NS, are able to reconcile their duty to serve NS and their identification with their NS roles. These conscripts are also observed to cope better in training and are better developed in terms of self and social competence attributes, which enables them to assimilate well in the NS system. For those who are unable to internalise the significance of NS, they are only partially

assimilated in the NS system, because they can neither identify with their NS roles nor reconcile with the need to make personal sacrifices to serve two years of NS. **Thus, the second proposition states that how they internalise the significance of serving NS has a significant impact on the way the conscripts appraise their military training experiences, assimilate into the NS system and, consequently, commit to NS.**

6.6   Conclusion

This chapter has depicted the different characteristics of the five conscript types that arise from the theory of Selective Commitment with respect to how the conscripts manage and cope with their military training in Singapore. The chapter bases these characteristics on the categories of committing, managing, appraising and assimilating. At the same time, this chapter puts forth two propositions. These propositions provide potentially useful information for military practitioners who manage the whole conscription process in Singapore – a process, which has a profound significance for Singapore as a nation. The next chapter will summarise the whole study and discuss its implications for conscription in Singapore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter comprises three aims. The first provides a summary of the main conclusions to the phenomenon of conscripts managing national service (NS) in Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). These conclusions are discussed in relation to the literature review in chapter 2. The second discusses the implications for the potential enlistees and military practitioners in the conscription system (commanders, policy makers and researchers). Finally, the third provides recommendations to improve the management of conscripts in the SAF. The chapter is sectioned as follows:

7.4   Discussion;

7.5   Implications;

7.6   Recommendations.

7.1   Discussion

This section summarises the main conceptions of this research and its investigative process. It also discusses the resultant outcomes in relation to the literature review and the specific research questions.

7.1.1   Conceptions of the Study

This study arises from my experiences as a military trainer responsible for the training of conscripts in the Singapore army. I have observed that many new conscripts have difficulty coping with military life and training, especially in the first few weeks. Some conscripts continue to struggle with life in NS in terms of lack of motivation and commitment to serve, while others seem to do very well. From the regular service trainers' perspective, there is a lack of clear understanding regarding the phenomenon of conscripts' management of NS. My concern is reinforced by the lack of research and understanding of the conscripts' perspective of NS. Thus, this study was conceived to address these concerns. It aims to develop a substantive theory of how conscripts manage their NS training and life in the military in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). This is achieved by addressing the main research question:

How do young Singaporean males manage their national service experience in relation to their education, development and careers?

7.1.2   Investigative Processes of the Study

Guided by the research question presented above, the study seeks to understand the conscripts' perspectives of coping with compulsory military training in relation to their personal development, study and career plans. The study does not attempt to establish casual relationships between the influencing factors in managing military training; rather, it utilises the interpretive research paradigm as the underpinning philosophical basis.

In adopting an interpretive perspective, the study recognises the need to examine the conscripts' beliefs, thoughts and behaviours as they manage their NS experiences. The study also recognises the roles and impact of external agencies such as family, peers and insiders, and environmental factors such as the military culture and practices on the conscripts' responses to military training in NS. In this respect, a grounded theory approach is adopted, because it is an appropriate methodology for an exploratory study of the kind envisaged here, where the aim was to generate a theory from emerging data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory also aims to generate propositions and a typology, which are appropriate for a doctoral study of this nature.

The data were collected from various sources. The main source was face-to-face interviews with 21 participants, using the sampling strategy that incorporates the principles of combining theoretical sampling and maximum variation sampling. This sampling method suits studies of a small sample size whereby traditional methods such as random sampling are inappropriate. More importantly, maximum variation sampling is congruent with the theoretical sampling ideals in that the variations and properties in the various groupings of soldiers are in themselves rich sources of information that can add depth, force a range of comparisons and facilitate the formulation as well as generation of concepts, which is also the key aim of theoretical sampling (Gall & Gall, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition to interviews conducted, other documentary sources and a literature review were used to ensure triangulation of the data collected and analysed.

The analysis is based on the constant comparative method, which involves asking questions and making comparisons of the data. The study adopted all stages of the grounded theory process, namely, open, axial and selective coding. The first stage is to find conceptual categories from the data, generating what is known as *substantive* codes. Substantive codes are generated through the open coding process whereby the researcher identifies conceptual categories and their properties and dimensions directly from the data (Glaser, 1978). The second stage of establishing the relationship between these conceptual categories is encapsulated in the form of *theoretical* codes, which refers to the process of axial or theoretical coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Theoretical codes are concepts that connect the various categories identified in the first stage. Finally, the last stage is to account for and conceptualise these relationships at a higher level of abstraction, captured as a *core* code around which the theory is built (Punch, 2005).

7.1.3   Outcomes of the Study

The outcomes of the study address each of the three specific research questions below:

- Specific Research Question 1: What are conscripts' perspectives on NS in relation to their personal lives and careers and to their education and development needs, prior to enlistment?
- Specific Research Question 2: How do conscripts perceive and cope with the two-year conscription experience?
- Specific Research Question 3: In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal life and career?

Specific Research Question 1

The first specific research question is **"What are conscripts' perspectives on NS in relation to their personal lives and careers and to their education and development needs, prior to enlistment?"** This question is addressed by the category of 'bracing' in the theory of selective commitment.

The category of bracing consists of the sub-processes of gathering, clarifying and gearing, and it is observed to be an integral process in preparing the enlistees for their impending military service. The category of bracing encapsulates the behavioural, affective and psychological processes of how enlistees gather information (**gathering**), form impressions of NS (**clarifying**), and prepare for their enlistment (**gearing**). The concept of bracing is not entirely new, however. It is widely acknowledged in earlier research under the term *anticipatory socialisation* (Merton, 1957, p. 265) and later known as the *investigation phase* (Moreland & Levine, 1982, p. 152), in which the enlistees create latent impressions about the military from the media, family, friends and significant others (Barrios-Choplin et al., 1999, p. 25). Using this information, the enlistees evaluate their options, expectations and personal commitment, and they make preparations for their impending enlistment (Mechanic, 1974, pp. 535, 541)

In this study, it is observed that the participants form their impressions about serving NS based on their socialisation at home, in schools and in society at large. Of significance, this study has found that pre-NS socialisation experiences do not necessarily result in enlistees having accurate or realistic impressions of NS. In fact, pre-NS socialisation experiences seem to have the opposite effect, creating unrealistic and inaccurate perceptions of NS among the enlistees. The explanation of such phenomena resides in the way NS is described to the participants. It is observed that friends and family members who have served NS tend to exaggerate their NS experiences when sharing them with the participants. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that there is no structured programme in schools in which students can learn about NS. Military-organised events for the public such as Army Open House also create, to some degree, unrealistic impressions, because these events tend to portray only the 'sexy' or 'perfect' aspects of the military service.

In terms of the enlistees' commitment and attitudes towards serving NS prior to enlistment, the majority of the participants are somewhat ambivalent about serving NS because they are resigned to the fact that conscription is compulsory for all Singaporean males. This finding is contrasted with the studies by Mayseless (1988) and Carmeli (1991) on the attitudes of Israeli inductees towards military service. Mayseless (1988) and Carmeli (1991) found very high levels of motivation to serve in

the military among the Israeli youth. The key determinants that account for the high level of motivation to serve are public acceptance and prestige, personal growth and ideology. Unlike Israeli youth, Singaporean youth generally view national service negatively, seeing it as an inconvenient sacrifice. Socioeconomic affluence and possibly negative social stigma regarding the military service may also contribute to military service not being perceived as prestigious in Singapore. At the ideological level, young Singaporean males generally do not regard NS as a necessity, because they do not think that there is an existential threat to Singapore, given the relatively peaceful environment they live in.

From the emotive viewpoint, this study concurs with current literature that the period leading to enlistment is generally stressful (Hicks & Nogami, 1984, p. 26, 40–41; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 147). Quite clearly, enlistees are stressed because of competing demands and the uncertainty associated with the disruption to their study and careers.

In terms of the ways potential enlistees rationalise and come to terms with their roles as citizen soldiers matched against their personal interests, this study has identified two probable outcomes, namely (a) perceived affirmation and (b) perceived dissonance that may arise at this stage (clarifying). Perceived affirmation is said to happen if the enlistees can reconcile their inner conflicts of pertinent issues that concern the purpose and personal commitment to serve with the personal sacrifices that come with two years of military service. Conversely, the enlistees will likely experience perceived dissonance if they cannot reconcile these tensions within themselves. In the case of perceived dissonance, it is observed that the enlistees may respond in the following manner, namely (a) rejection, (b) accommodation and (c) avoidance. Although the observed responses are consistent with the research on the coping process approach that emphasises environmental demands and influences on coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), they gravitate towards an emotion-focused coping strategy, which is generally associated with poor coping outcomes (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987). The probable reason for the phenomena may suggest weaknesses in terms of social and institutional support for our potential enlistees prior to enlistment.

Participants who fall into the category of perceived affirmation are found to be more positive and optimistic about their ability to cope in NS compared with those belonging to the category of perceived dissonance. This observation extends Salo's (2008) study, which has demonstrated that conscripts with an affective commitment to military service are found to have high adjustment expectation (of themselves) and higher success probability in the actual adjustment into the military.

In terms of preparing for NS, the study found that the majority of the participants opt for what might be called a *passive defensive preparatory* effort. The data showed that only two (P05 and P06) out of the 21 participants did some physical training before enlistment. The remaining participants adopted more passive coping strategies, such as finding time to relax or going for holiday before enlistment. There are two possible explanations for this. One, from an attitudinal perspective, it is highly probable that the majority of participants are somewhat resigned to the notion of having to endure the physical hardship of military training regardless of whether or not they prepare themselves physically. This perspective is drawn from research on involuntary transition (Ashforth, 2001). Two, from a structural perspective, there is an absence of structural support to assist Singapore youth in preparing for their impending military service. Hence, the majority of the participants adopt passive preparatory measures because they are neither supported nor sure of how to prepare for enlistment. This stands in great contrast with the Israeli society, where elaborate preparatory programmes for military service for enlistees and parents are incorporated into the schools' curriculum to facilitate youth in their transition into the military service and to garner parental involvement and support for their children entering the military service (Israelashvili, 1995).

7.1.3.1 Specific Research Question 2

The second specific research question is **"How do conscripts perceive and cope with the two-year conscription experience?"** Once enlisted, the conscripts' perceptions are continuously being shaped by their experiences in NS. More importantly, how the participants perceive and cope with the two-year conscription is underpinned by how they internalised their NS experiences through **managing**, **appraising and assimilating**.

Within the process of managing, it is observed that studies on newcomers' adjustment in organisations have focused largely on the responses to environmental factors such as socialisation tactics and culture (Jones, 1986; Ashford & Saks, 1996; Thomas & Anderson, 2002). This study has shown that for conscripts entering the military service, personal issues also play an influential role in conscripts' coping ability. In this respect, two distinct and inter-related sub-processes, namely coping and charting, underpin how the participants manage their military training in NS in SAF. The process of coping relates to how the conscripts deal with their military training, whereas the process of charting depicts how the conscripts prepare for their eventual transition out of NS even as they are serving time in the military.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings in this study support Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) view that coping is largely a cognitive behavioural response that is responsive to the environmental demands. Therefore, the environmental context in different phases of the two-year NS is salient to how the conscripts cope with training demands in the military. The key environmental factors that influence the participants' coping orientations are identified as (a) training context, (b) status and (c) roles in NS. Accordingly, the study has observed three coping orientations (namely, reactionary, acquisition and deployment) that correspond to the basic military training (pre-operational), vocational training (pre-operational) and operational training phase, respectively.

In the basic military training (BMT) phase (pre-operational training), all of the participants experienced some degree of entry shock. This shock is principally caused by the discrepancy between their expectations (formed prior to enlistment) and the realities of military life and the lack of preparation prior to NS. According to Moreland and Levine (1982), prospective members often have unrealistic or overly optimistic impressions of the military, which make them more susceptible to surprises. Other related studies have also observed that the majority of conscripts are most likely not fully prepared for the first days of basic military training (Moreland & Levine, 1982, p. 161; Nelson & Quick, 1997, p. 487; Hayden, 2000, p. 5; Ashforth, 2001). In terms of overcoming the initial shock, the participants in this study took about two weeks to recover from the initial entry shock; this finding is comparable to those of other studies. For instance, Salo (2008) has found a 61% attrition rate of the

Finnish conscripts in the first two weeks, and beyond the first two weeks, adjustment to regimentation appears to be less laborious. More importantly, the finding suggests that the length of time required for conscripts to become familiarised with their surrounding is relatively short, and the time for actual adjustment is probably longer.

In BMT, it is observed that the participants generally respond to the training in a very reactive mode. This is because as recruits, the participants do not have much authority or control over their life in the military. Invariably, the participants are stressed, because they feel threatened in the new environment. The dominant view among the participants at this stage of training relates to self-preservation and survival. Such responses from the participants in BMT are not unique and may be understood from two perspectives. First, from the perspective of involuntary transition, Ashforth (2001) opined that highly involuntary transitions, such as being conscripted into the military, threaten one's sense of control and tend to induce individuals to focus on their immediate needs for security and stability. Second, from a socialisation perspective, Hayden (2000, p. 5) remarks that the conscripts are tense and less confident at this stage, because they are not yet psychologically incorporated into the organisation.

Within a largely reactive mode of response, however, individual conscripts have displayed different coping methods, supporting the notion that personal factors also play a role in how conscripts respond to the military environment. This study has found that participants' attitude towards military service is salient in this regard. Those who are positively disposed to NS, such as conscript types – *advocates, adventurers* and *careerists* – are generally more forthcoming and committed in training. Overall, this group performs better compared with the other two conscript types (referring to *play-safes* and *challengers*). These findings lend support to Salo's (2008, pp. 193) conclusion that positive attitudes towards military service enhance conscripts' adjustment success.

In terms of social factors, this study has found that leaders and peer support are crucial to the conscripts' ability to cope in basic military training in the SAF. However, Salo's (2008) study did not support this view and opines that the lack of mention of the importance of leaders and peer support in the Finnish system points to

the possible weakness of a lack of emphasis on leaders' and peers' support for conscripts.

After basic military training, the participants are observed to switch to a more proactive coping orientation, referring to the processes of acquiring and deploying in the pre-operation and operational phase of their training. The process of acquiring is focused on acquiring military and social skill sets, whereas the process of deploying is oriented towards deploying acquired skills to achieve team goals. Clearly, these two processes attest to Dawson et al.'s (1994b, pp. 32) point that the conscripts are ready to utilise the learnt skills to achieve better social position once they are familiar with the organisational structures and demands. The key point here, therefore, is to identify the conditions that distinguish these two processes.

Unlike the process of 'acquiring', which is focused on self, the process of 'deploying' is focused on the group. Two conditions are salient in bringing about this shift. First, the status of the participants at pre-operational and operational training phases affects their coping orientation. As trainees in the pre-operational training phase, the participants are primarily concerned about their own performance, whereas in the operational training phase, the participants assume their actual operational roles and shift their focus to achieving mission success for their units or teams. Second, in the pre-operational training phase, the organisational emphasis is on transference of military knowledge to the trainees. However, in the operational training phase, the participants are given greater freedom of action and are expected to exercise their skills and initiatives to achieve team goals as part of the larger organisational aims.

The changing of coping orientation between training phases has led this study to conclude that the participants' adjustment to military service is influenced by micro-transitions within the NS cycle. This point has not been given sufficient attention in the existing research on conscripts' adjustment to military life (Leong, 1978; Nair, 1991, 1994; Levy & Sasson-Levy, 2008; Salo, 2008). The design of the two-year NS training forces the participants to adjust and adapt to the changing situational demands at different phases of the training. In this regard, this study deviates from the earlier research on Singaporean conscripts that adjustment takes on a U-shaped curve whereby conscripts' adjustment was found to be lowest at the midpoint of the NS (Leong, 1978, pp. 267). Leong explains that conscripts are enthusiastic about

training in the initial phase, but their enthusiasm wanes considerably in the middle of their NS cycle due to routinisation, and it only picks up again when the end of service is near. Salo (2008, pp. 194) noted that a number of conscripts' attitudes towards military service, such as affective commitment and achievement motivation, decline overtime. This has led Salo (2008) to suggest that leaders and training might not be very important predicators of adjustment. This study, however, has found that the conscripts' attitudes towards military service stabilise as they assume their operational roles in the operational training phase. The participants' attitudes towards service is also dependent on the participants' perceived significance of serving NS, which is influenced by their personal commitment to NS and other situational factors, such as training and social experiences in NS.

In addition to focusing on how conscripts cope with military training, this study reveals that the participants are also actively preparing for their eventual transition out of NS (within the process of charting). The participants exchange information with other conscripts, and they make adjustments and preparations for their study and careers throughout the two years of military service. However, participants manage this process differently according to their personal aims in serving NS. The participants' aims, in turn, affect how they prioritise (in terms of **effort**) and apportion (in terms of **presence**) their energy and focus towards managing the dual demands of military training and personal plans.

Deriving from the data, three categories of aims can be discerned: (a) purpose-driven, (b) interest-driven and (c) anti-establishment aims. The *advocates* conscript type is motivated by purpose-driven aims, the *adventurers*, *careerists* and *play-safes* are driven by personal interests and finally, the *challengers* have anti-establishment aims. In terms of behaviours, the *advocates* are observed to be focused and committed to training, often delaying their preparation for transition until the final phase of NS. The *adventurers, careerists* and *play-safes* are observed to accord more energy and focus towards preparing for their transition throughout the two years in NS. Finally, the challengers are observed to lack commitment in training as well as in their personal preparation for transition. Contrary to anti-establishment aims, the purpose-driven and interests-driven aims and the associated behaviours revealed in this study are somewhat congruent with those found in Levy and Sasson-levy's (2008) study of

Israeli conscripts. Levy and Sasson-levy (2008) found that Israeli conscripts exhibit two categories of behaviours: (a) conformity and obedience, and (b) conformity and subversion, reflecting different aims of serving in the military. The former is derived from the desire to serve in the military and hence produces a pattern of 'blind' conformity among the conscripts. The latter is derived from ambivalent aims that both conform to and challenge the notion of conscription.

This study has shown that the participants' aims and internalised significance of serving NS are influenced by how they appraise (within the process of appraising) their NS experiences and identify with their soldiering identity (within the process of assimilating).

There are several theoretical concepts with respect to how individuals appraise an event or situation. Research on group socialisation has typically regarded the appraisal process as an informational processing channel that determines one's courses of action. Personal factors such as attitudes, values and past experiences are important in making sense of the information received and in shaping the behaviours that follow (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 158; Folkman et al., 1986). Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 142, 151) present appraisal from a directional perspective. Outward appraisal is directed to find a response solution, and inward appraisal is concerned with the meaning or understanding of the event. The aforementioned appraisal concepts cannot adequately answer how conscripts reconcile what they want to do with what they need to do. In this respect, the appraisal process observed in this study suggests that it is a multidimensional process that occurs at two levels. The first level concerns the cognitive analysis of the threat-opportunity dimension. Here, the conscripts analyse the situation from an objective viewpoint with respect to their personal interests such as studies and careers plans. The second level is associated with how the participants appraise the actual NS experience from an affective dimension. At this level, the conscripts delve into less tangible and deeper conceptions such as meaningfulness and purpose. Although the outcomes of these two levels of analysis may be contradictory at times, it appears that the affective process plays a more significant role in influencing the internalised significance of the participants. In other words, the participants are more prepared to sacrifice their

personal interests if they find meaning (internalised significance) in what they do in NS.

The process of 'identifying' is another important facet affecting how conscripts perceived and internalised the significance of serving NS. Despite the presence of formal socialisation tactics to induct new conscripts into the organisation, positive identification with one's military roles is not guaranteed because of a mismatch between one's expected and actualised roles. This finding supports Trainor's (2004) study on Navy midshipmen. Similar outcomes are observed in Levy and Sasson-levy's (2008) study, where they observed that Israeli conscripts can identify with combatant roles more than with non-combatant ones, because the former is regarded as a prestigious, perceived contribution to the society and proof of individuals' masculinity. Non-combatant conscripts, according to Levy and Sasson-levy (2008), are likely to simultaneously resist military service and justify their military positions (non-combatant roles) by promoting the importance of other non-militaristic elements such as the importance of study and careers and the gainful employment of civilian skills in the military service.

In summary, this study has extended the view that the conscripts' adjustment to the military involves at least two concurrent processes of coping with the immediate training demands and charting one's study and career plans. At the deeper level, the appraisal and identification of actual NS experiences and military roles, respectively, are instrumental to how the Singaporean conscripts manage and internalise the significance of serving NS. Unlike the Israeli society, where military socialisation permeates every aspects of the society, a significant degree of how their conscripts perceive and cope in the military service is shaped prior to enlistment.

7.1.3.2 Specific Research Question 3

This section addresses the third specific research question: **"In what ways, if at all, do conscripts believe the conscription experience will influence their subsequent personal life and career?"** This question can be addressed from the perspective of perceived self-maturation within the categories of **appraising** and **assimilating**.

This study shows that the participants go through the process of 'appraising' with respect to how military service may affect their personal life, study and career plans. In terms of personal life, the participants have highlighted (a) self-awareness and life experiences; (b) qualities and personal traits; and (c) skills and personal competence as three key positive impact areas. These findings are consistent with Nair's (1991, 1994) study on Singaporean undergraduates who had served NS and military commanders' perception of the effect of national service on conscripts.

The perceived impact of military service on personal development, as seen in this study, may be attributed to two unique aspects of the military service. First, the onerous nature of military training challenges the participants both physically and mentally. In the process of coping with such challenges, the participants become more aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and potential. The tough military training and culture have also helped to develop certain qualities and traits, such as leadership, maturity, confidence, self-reliance, discipline, and determination. These findings reinforce existing research on conscripts' maturation process (Lieblich, 1989; Dar & Kimhi, 2001). Second, the military environment provides a rich and diverse social setting from which the participants learn and gain invaluable life experiences. The participants also relate the value of their NS experiences to the acquisition of life skills and better understanding of other communities and people from different backgrounds. According to Nair (1994), the conscript service not only brings people from different social backgrounds together, but more importantly, it is the practice of non-segregation in training and communal living that achieves a fusion of diverse populations.

The effect on studies of serving NS is also noted. First, the participants are cognizant that serving NS disrupts their study plans and, in turn, delays their entry into the labour force. However, the participants share Nair's (1994) view that the delay in entering into the workforce because of NS is compensated by the maturation that the male conscripts attain as a result of their NS experiences. Second, there appears to be an increase in the participants' readiness to enrol in higher education after NS. The readiness to seek higher education deviates from the study on the effects of conscription on higher education enrolment in OECD countries from the period of 1965 to 2000 (Keller, Poutvaara, & Wagener, 2009). The latter found that the

intensity with which military conscription is enforced has a statistically significant, negative impact on the acquiring of post-secondary education. The principal reason is that conscription reduces the returns to human capital to a large extent and, thus, depresses incentives to enrol in higher education. The reasons the findings in this study differ may be explained from both personal and social perspectives. At the personal level, the dominant view among the participants is that serving NS for two years affects their cognitive sharpness, knowledge retention and currency with respect to their intended course of study. Hence, there is a desire to get back to school to reduce this deficit. In terms of social influence, it is observed that the majority of the participants have been socialized in their childhood to regard education as a steppingstone to a good career in the Singaporean society. This view is reinforced in NS, because the conditions in NS naturally bring about comparisons among the conscripts. In the process, many of the participants feel the pressure to review and improve their study and career plans in relation to the other conscripts.

The participants' assessment of the impact of NS on their career plans is rather complex and may be categorized along three dimensions, which are: (a) specificity; (b) utility; and (c) potential. Specificity refers to the participants' assessment of the transferability and applicability of the knowledge and skills acquired in NS to their careers. In this study, the domain view is that military knowledge and skills are not directly relevant to one's careers. This perception is understandable, given that the participants are national servicemen who most likely will pursue non-military careers. On this, Magnum and Ball (1987) opine that the skills obtained in the military are transferable to the civilian sector — especially those involving technical skills. Magnum and Ball (1987) postulate that the transferability of military skills will increase with the increased technical requirements of modern warfare. Unfortunately, this study cannot verify the degree of transferability, because it is not designed to discern the military skill types that can be transferred to the civilian sector.

However, many participants regard specific achievements, social skills and networks acquired in NS as useful in adding to their credentials and career prospects. Studies on veterans have also found that the military has had a positive influence on the soldiers' sense of self, which is of value to them in the civilian labour market (Gade, Lakhani, & Kimmel, 1991). In this regard, some researchers have argued that the

military serves as a 'bridging environment' whereby appropriate values and skills necessary for mainstream society are learned (Browning, Lopreato, & Poston, 1973; Martindale & Poston, 1979). With respect to the participants' perceived career opportunities being enhanced by military service, Detray (1982) opines that the military service does represent to employers the capabilities of those employees who have served in the military. However, the validity of this conclusion is dependent on the prevailing civil-military relationship in the society. In Singapore's context, national servicemen are well regarded partly due to MINDEF's active engagement with the employers and the recognition of the contribution by our national servicemen (Koo, 2009).

At the deeper level, the consequence of having to cope with life in the military has a significant effect on the participants' perceived self-maturation. Current research on maturation presents two general approaches. One approach views maturation from an identity and roles formation perspective that emphasises one's readiness to assume social responsibilities (Erikson, 1968; Cote & Levine, 1987; Seginer, 1998a). The other approach focuses on self-empowerment and social competence, facilitating the adaptation of individuals in society (Bandura, 1989; Ford, 1987). In this study, the participants perceive their maturation in terms of the development and deepening of self and social competence. The reason military identity was less emphasised as an element of their maturation process is that most participants see NS as a transient issue and do not regard military roles as their primary social identity. Other studies that examine young people's criteria for adulthood have derived similar findings. Respondents in these studies have emphasised self and social competence in issues such as responsibility for one's own actions and independence from parents, rather than the formation of a consolidated identity, as important criteria for perceived maturation (Greene, Wheatley & Aldava, 1992; Arnett, 1997).

The key influencing factors that affect the conscripts' maturation can be classified as environmental, social and personal factors. Environmental factors such as culture and practices in the units have a bearing on the participants' maturation process. For example, units adopt various formal and informal socialisation tactics to facilitate the participants' internalisation of certain soldiering habits and values consistent with the units' culture. Participants belonging to elite units have registered greater levels of

personal change.   This is consistent with Dar and Kimhi's (2001) finding that conscripts belonging to elite units generally registered higher levels of personal change compared with those in noncombat units because of differing practices and the unit culture that exists in combat and noncombat units.

As for personal factors, it is found that the conscripts' roles and service trajectory in NS play important roles in determining the nature of the maturation process.   This finding differs from Dar and Kimhi's (2001) study, which presents ranks and trajectory as important factors influencing the maturation of Israeli conscripts.   In Singapore's context, both officers and other ranks serve the same duration, and the opportunities to hold leadership roles are less stratified by rank compared with the Israeli system, where officers serve longer and are given more leadership opportunities.

Social factors such as insiders' influence are also found significant in shaping the conscripts' maturation process.   Commanders, in particular, are the dominant figures whom the participants regard as their role models and confidantes.   This observation is vastly different from Leong's (1978) study on Singaporean conscripts, in which commanders seem to be the most feared people in the military.   Overall, the difference reflects a positive shift in the soldier-commander relationship over the years in the SAF.

7.1.3.3 A Typology of Conscripts Serving in NS

A significant outcome of this study is the development of a typology of conscripts with respect to how they manage their NS experience in relation to their personal development, study and career plans (depicted in chapter 6).   The study found that the main determining factor in distinguishing the conscripts in the typology is the difference in their commitment to serve.   This difference gives rise to other distinguishing factors in the various categories of bracing, managing, appraising and assimilating in the theory of selective commitment.   Accordingly, the study has classified the conscripts into five types, namely, *advocates, adventurers, careerists, play-safes* and *challengers.*

In terms of managing NS, the *advocates* are committed to serving because they believe in the purpose and need for NS, while the *adventurers* are attracted by the

challenges and adventures of military service. The *careerists'* commitment to serving is largely predicated on the opportunities NS can offer with respect to advancing their career prospects. The *play-safes* serve NS because they are obligated to so do by law, and they deem NS as an inherent risk to their personal safety, study and career plans. Finally, the *challengers* reject the very conception of NS and are not committed to serving at all.

A comparison of this typology with the one suggested by Levy and Sasson-Levy (2008) of the conscripts' approach in managing compulsory military service is noteworthy. Levy and Sasson-Levy (2008) classify conscripts into two main types: (a) *conformity and obedience*, and (b) *conformity and subversion*. The first group refers to conscripts who reflect conformity and consent as ideal combat soldiers. Conscripts in this category want to enlist into military service to prove their masculinity, to gain social prestige, and to be accepted by society. The second group is further divided into conscripts in blue- and white-collared roles. Conscripts in the second category consent but dislike participation in compulsory military service. Those in blue-collared roles express their ambivalent attitudes by bleating their limited roles in military service, whereas the white-collared conscripts express a conscious decision to opt for noncombat service.

The findings in Levy and Sasson-Levy's (2008) study are derived primarily from a single predetermined variable of roles assigned to the conscripts. The resultant typology of this study is drawn from more differentiating variables such as roles, socioeconomic background and personal aspirations. Thus there will be differences in the criteria by which the conscripts are differentiated in both typologies. There are also some parallels to be drawn from both studies. For example, the characterisation of *advocates* and *adventurers* in this study is similar to that of the conscripts in the category of *conformity and obedience* identified by Levy and Sasson-Levy (2008). The *play-safes* reflect similar attitudes to those of the conscripts in the category of *conformity and subversion*. More importantly, both studies have identified the conscripts' internalised significance and commitment to serving in military service as an important determining factor in the conscripts' approach to managing compulsory military service.

7.1.3.4 Intervening Factors in Conscripts' Managing of Military Service

An important outcome of the creation of the typology of conscripts in managing compulsory military service is the discovery of important internal and external factors that may affect how conscripts manage their military service. It is found that the conscripts' internalised significance of serving NS is a key factor in how conscripts manage and perceive their NS experiences. External factors that play a significant role in shaping how the conscripts manage their NS are families, commanders and fellow peers in NS who play the role of the significant others. The social interactions between the individual conscript and significant others are complex and significant in influencing how the conscripts perceive and overcome the challenges they face in the course of training (chapter 6).

In summary, this section has summarised and discussed the conception, investigative process and outcomes of the study. The following section elaborates the important implications of this study for students, teachers, researchers and policy makers.

7.2   Implications

In addition to generating a theory about conscripts managing their NS experiences, this study provides useful insights to conscripts, in-service military commanders, researchers and policy makers in the defence ministry of the conscription system. It is hoped that the highlighted implications below will be useful to these stakeholders.

7.2.1   Implications of the Study for Conscripts

This study has revealed different coping approaches by different conscript types within the theory of selective commitment. Other conscripts may be able to relate their own NS experiences to those of the participants in this study (transferability) and develop a better understanding of the factors that influence the way conscripts manage their military experiences.

This study has determined that *advocates*, *adventurers* and *careerists* are generally better adjusted than *play-safes* and *challengers*. The *advocates, adventurers* and *careerists* are observed to adopt proactive, adaptive and selective coping strategies, respectively, whereas the *play-safes* and *challengers* generally resort to reactive and dismissive strategies in how they manage their NS experiences. Proactive, adaptive

and selective strategies are characterised by a relatively higher degree of **effort** (i.e., conscripts' effort and commitment to the achievement of success in training) and **presence** (i.e., conscripts' focus in training as opposed to concentration on and preparation for their own careers or study plans whilst serving NS) compared to reactive and dismissive strategies.

Of significance, this study has identified commitment to serve NS as a key factor influencing how conscripts manage their military experiences. A high level of commitment is associated with greater effort and presence in training, which is generally translated as better adjustment outcomes. In his study of Finnish conscripts, Salo (2008) found that positive affective commitment predicts the success of the conscripts' adjustment to military life. Other studies have also found a strong correlation between commitment and adjustment success (Antel et al., 1987, p. 16; Moskos, 1990, p. 5–6; Harris et al., 2005, p. 7). Given that commitment to serve is a dynamic process influenced by how the conscripts internalised their NS experiences, purposeful training, positive attitudes and social health will be key determinants of a meaningful NS experience.

In summary, potential and current serving conscripts become better informed by this study in terms of understanding other conscript types that may exist among them. In addition to being able to use the findings of this study for self-management purposes, the conscripts may be in a stronger position to communicate with and assist other conscripts in their units.

7.2.2 Implications of the Study for In-service Military Commanders

This study has major implications for in-service military commanders who have to manage conscripts in terms of command and intervention. This study has affirmed that external factors, such as families, commanders and fellow peers in NS, have significant impact on how well the conscripts manage military training and life in the military (chapter 6). This reinforces the need to establish effective programmes for instructors' development and the engagement of parents in supporting their son(s) in NS.

The identification of the typology helps the military commanders to identify and understand the different conscript types. Using this knowledge, the military commanders may improve their strategies in the areas of counselling and training of conscripts, and to develop more soldier-centric approaches to managing conscripts.

The study also provides useful insights into how conscripts perceive and manage their NS training. For instance, it is observed that higher commitment levels are generally associated with a constructive appraisal process, whereas lower levels of commitment are linked with a disruptive appraisal process. Constructive appraisal is in turn associated with more effective coping strategies, and disruptive appraisal with less effective coping strategies. In this respect, military commanders need to focus on the critical issue of engendering commitment to serve among the conscripts. This may be achieved by incorporating a more holistic and purpose-centric perspective in the design and conduct of training for the conscripts. Instructor-centric training methods characterised by top-down instructions and repetitive drills without understanding of those drills have limited effect and traction in terms of engagement in training. To summarise, it is important to focus not only on the *'whats'* and *'hows'* aspects of soldiering but also on the *'whys'*.

7.2.3 Implications of the Study for Future Policy Making

This section highlights two important issues that have larger policy implications. One of the key issues arising for future policy makers relates to the issue of socialisation in schools. The study has revealed that despite 40 years of NS, there are still disparities and misperceptions as to how young Singaporean males perceive and understand NS. The data collected suggests that the existing national education programmes are focused on larger national agenda under the ambit of total defence and there is no structured programme to introduce and prepare male students for their impending national service. Family and friends' opinions, which are often inaccurate and exaggerated, therefore influence much of how the enlistees perceive NS. More critically, potential enlistees are left to prepare for NS on their own. Lack of preparation and misperceptions of NS can only increase the difficulty of the enlistment experience of the conscripts.

The second issue relates to the systemic design of the current NS system. Once enlisted, the primary focus and design of NS is to induct the new entrants into the military system and train them to be operational soldiers in two years. There is insufficient consideration to assist the serving conscripts for their eventual transition out of NS. The participants in this study are challenged in terms of preparing for their transition out of NS. Transitional issues, if not addressed, may distract the conscripts' focus in training, degrade their ability to cope with life in the military, and ultimately affect their confidence and support for NS.

The two key issues highlighted above have policy implications in terms of commitment to serve among young Singaporean males and the public's education on the purpose and value of NS in developing young Singaporean males. The need to develop a more holistic, end-to-end NS system that provides for the smooth transition in and out of NS cannot be overstated. In this regard, pre-enlistment socialisation of NS in schools plays an instrumental role in forging correct perceptions among young Singaporean males. The need to assist conscripts to transit out of NS should not be viewed as aftermath but as an integral aspect of the NS system. In this respect, the need to continually educate the public about NS, its purpose and the value NS brings to individuals who served NS is important, as it will enhance study and job opportunities for our full-time national servicemen.

7.2.4   Implications of the Study for the Research Community

There has been little research investigation on Singaporean conscripts' perspective of managing their military service. The theory of selective commitment and the resultant typology add significantly to the current research knowledge base on this issue. It is hoped that this study will provide the necessary groundwork on which other research may be built. This study also breaks new ground in adopting a grounded theory approach to investigate the issue of how conscripts manage their NS experience in Singapore, and is hoped that the study may spur other researchers to further explore the important issue of conscription in Singapore.

7.3   Recommendations

This study proposes a number of recommendations to address the implications for in-service military personnel who are responsible for the training of conscripts, policy

makers who deal with conscription in Singapore and researchers in this field of knowledge. The first set of recommendations, made in relation to each conscript type, concerns the improvement of the training and management of conscripts in the SAF. They are as follows:

1) Advocate Conscript Type – Such conscripts are very committed to NS and motivated in training compared to other conscript types in the typology. Therefore, they are generally better adjusted to military service. This study has observed that the advocates are usually the 'contributors' to the team's effort because of their conviction to serve NS. However, the advocates may be frustrated with other conscript types who do not share the same level of enthusiasm about NS. Such sentiments, if left unchecked, may cause interpersonal tensions and may negatively affect the team's dynamics. The measures below are recommended to address the above concerns.

    a. To help the advocates understand other conscript types better; self-awareness and team-building programmes may be incorporated in the induction phase to facilitate the team learning and building process before actual training commences.

    b. To recognise the advocates' effort and commitment in NS and provide them the opportunities to serve in leadership positions to enlarge their span of influence on other conscripts.

2) Adventurer Conscript Type – These conscripts are generally high achievers. They are motivated to serve NS because they regard military training as a challenging platform that tests and pushes their limits. However, the adventurers are likely to become restless or demoralised if the training lacks excitement or becomes routinised. Consequentially, commanders may mistake the adventurers as 'problem' soldiers. The recommendations below may assist with the management of the adventurer conscript type:

    a. To identify and engage the adventurers by ensuring appropriate job assignment. The adventurers should be assigned to high readiness units or be given roles that afford these conscripts greater freedom of action to which their energy may be channelled constructively.

    b. To provide the adventurers with the skills to manage boredom. Instructors

212

and commanders can serve as coaches to assist this conscript type in boredom management.

3) Careerist Conscript Type – The careerists are pragmatic and selective in how they approach NS. Such conscripts are motivated to train hard as long as military training is perceived to enhance their career prospects. Therefore, motivational issues may arise if the careerists do not perceive the utility of military training. The recommendations below are:

   a. To engender a deeper sense of the purpose of NS beyond self-centric interests, a sustained, holistic socialisation programme that involves education, self-reflection and coaching may be required.

   b. To institute reflection as a means to encourage the careerists to reflect more deeply about their roles and purpose in NS.

4) Play-safe Conscript Type – The study has identified the play-safe conscript type as risk adverse. The play-safes hold the perspective that NS is an unnecessary risk to their personal security and future plans. In this respect, the play-safes are likely to maintain a low profile and have a lack of commitment in NS. The following are suggested:

   a. To encourage them to contribute more by providing a 'safe-to-try' environment, especially in the initial stages of their NS journey; to build their confidence with respect to their own ability to cope in the military.

   b. To progressively build up the competence and confidence of this group of conscripts by ensuring that the tasks commensurate with the ability of the soldiers.

5) Challenger Conscript Type – The challengers are the least engaged group. They resist the NS system and are unlikely to want to contribute in any meaningful way in NS. The following are suggested:

   a. To assign well-adjusted and more experienced conscripts to engage the challengers. These mentor-conscripts could play important roles in encouraging, role modelling and guiding the challengers. This proposal is supported by studies on soldier management. In these studies, it is found that inexperienced soldiers gravitate towards passive coping strategies, which are less effective in coping with stress (Dolan et al., 2001; Day & Livingstone, 2001).

   b. As for the instructors and commanders, to exercise patience when dealing

213

with the challengers. It is equally important for the instructors to be trained as counsellors to deal with the emotive aspects.

The second set of recommendations is a system-level solution set targeted at improving the management of conscripts in the SAF.

1) Instructors-Trainees Roles and Relationships. The prevailing model in terms of instructor-trainee relationship is derived from a rank-based paradigm that does not engender deeper commitment among the conscripts. To engage the conscripts, there is a need for a fundamental shift in the instructor-trainee relationship to one that is defined by respect and empathy, and supported by a more open culture that builds trust, supports engagement and deepens commitment levels.

2) Pedagogies and Instructions. It is proposed that a review of the existing training pedagogies in the military is needed. Today, unlike during the formative years, the conscripts (although less rugged) are better educated and tech-savvy. Thus, there is a need to transform the current military training, incorporating the best of traditional and new training methodologies to minimise injuries, mitigate learning disruptions and engage the current generation of active learners serving NS. By the same token, there is a need to identify new skill sets and re-profile the in-service personnel, such as instructors and commanders, to manage the new generation of conscripts in the system.

The third set of recommendations focuses on macro issues that concern public education policies at the societal and institutional levels.

1) This study has identified the need for better inter-ministry coordination in the area of national education conducted in schools. The current form of national education taught in schools neither lends sufficient structure nor focuses on NS issues. This has resulted in a general lack of understanding of NS issues among the enlistees prior to enlistment, which will affect their adjustment in NS. Thus, the call for a review of the current national education (NE) programmes in schools is timely.

2)   The findings in this study have also highlighted that the skills and knowledge acquired in NS have been largely unrecognised and underrated by higher educational institutions in Singapore. For instance, most local universities do not take into consideration the achievement and performance of their students in NS as part of the entry criteria. It is hoped that the Ministry of Education (MOE) recognise the value of NS and deliberate a process that translates the NS experiences into tangible credits for entry into relevant disciplines or fields of study in local educational institutions.

The fourth set of recommendations relates to the research community on conscription in Singapore. The recommendations are as follows:

1)   Researchers can enhance the generalisability of this study by expanding the sample size and using different qualitative research methodologies. It is hoped that through these studies, the theory of selective commitment and the proposed typology can be further refined.

2)   Admittedly, for a small-scale study like this, there are certain areas that could not be explored in depth. It is proposed that researchers who plan to conduct a similar study may wish to further explore how conscripts cope with NS in an increasingly competitive society and how new citizens of Singapore cope with NS. The findings in these areas can benefit the military practitioners on the ground.

3)   Researchers may be able to use the findings in this study to further the exploration of other similar studies on conscription outside of the Singaporean context (transferability).

This study recognises that not all of the recommendations listed above will be accepted or agreed to by the various stakeholders. Notwithstanding possible disagreement, it is hoped that the recommendations above will raise awareness on the issues confronting military conscripts. Finally, in the true spirit of educational research, it is hoped that this study has provided an in-depth understanding of the issues of conscription and greater clarity to assist young men who have to make tremendous personal sacrifice in the service of their nation.

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