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Research Article

Leadership, Perceived Organizational Support, and Organizational Commitment in the Canadian Armed Forces: The Mediating Role of Person–Organization Fit

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Abstract

High quality leadership and support from the organization are two well-established factors that influence an individual's commitment to their organization. However, very little is known about the processes through which these variables influence commitment. This empirical study drew on theory and research to propose person–organization (P–O) fit as a mediating variable to explain these relationships. A sample of 6,503 personnel in the Canadian Armed Forces provided responses to a personnel survey. Results indicated that P–O fit fully mediated the relationship between leadership satisfaction and organizational commitment and partially mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. These results contribute to the extant literature and theory by testing these relationships in a military context and by demonstrating the importance of P–O fit as a mediator of leadership, support, and organizational commitment. The results and their implications are discussed with particular emphasis on their importance in a military environment.

Keywords

Leadership satisfaction • Perceived organizational support • Person–organization fit • Organizational commitment

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In military organizations, a premium is placed on loyalty above all else and personnel are met with demands and challenges unlike those that are found in most civilian occupations. However, as argued by Moskos (1977) in his institutional/occupational thesis, Western military organizations have become increasingly similar to civilian organizations by moving away from the traditional institutional form towards more of an occupational form. Personnel in institutional military organizations are highly distinct from their civilian counterparts in the sense that they are primarily compensated through non-monetary instruments, acquire esteem and legitimacy through service, and are expected to serve for a fixed term of enlistment without the autonomy to resign or negotiate working conditions. However, personnel in occupational military organizations bear a striking resemblance to civilian employees, who receive monetary compensation distributed in a meritocratic fashion and possess substantial rights and freedoms to determine their working conditions and length of service (Moskos, 1986). These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, as many military organizations consist of both institutional and occupational aspects. Additionally, recent research utilizing the institutional/occupational framework found that the form of compensation desired by military personnel can significantly shift over time for a variety of national strategic, social, and economic reasons and that institutional and occupational motives can increase in tandem (Jans & Franzer-Jans, 2009). Specifically, for Australian military personnel, certain institutional and occupational motives (e.g., duty and pay/conditions) simultaneously increased over a period of 10 years, whereas other occupational motives decreased (e.g., adventure/variety). Moskos cautioned that military organizations shifting towards more of an occupational form would experience greater challenges with personnel retention, given that the sense of duty and moral imperative experienced in institutional organizations would become less salient. Accordingly, as the expectations of military personnel continue to change, and in many cases shift towards more occupational motives, understanding how to foster a sense of belonging and commitment from personnel is imperative if we are to secure the health and stability of military organizations in society. To aid in this task, it is argued that the field of sociology could benefit by drawing on research from fields with well-established literature on organizational commitment.

The literature on organizational commitment in industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology closely parallels the dialogue in military sociology and has made considerable progress in our understanding of the factors that bind people to organizations, the nature of these ties, and their implications for on the job behavior (for an integrative review and summary of empirical results, see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Although this research is primarily based on a civilian model of organizations, the institutional/occupational thesis advanced by Moskos (1977) suggests that research conducted through the lens of civilian organizations may become increasingly relevant as military organizations move towards an occupational form. More

specifically, as personnel acquire greater autonomy, expect more monetary remuneration, and focus less on the intrinsic meaning of duty, issues of retention become more salient given that personnel are likely to become increasingly more mobile and willing to exit the organization for another one with better working conditions. As such, I/O psychology is ideally situated to supplement the literature on military sociology because of its focus on studying and improving organizational, work, and social factors in an effort to enhance employee performance, well-being, and attitudes (such as organizational commitment). I/O psychologists' and military scholars' concern for the importance of organizational commitment is perhaps best exemplified by the 2003 special edition of *Military Psychology*. This special edition was solely dedicated to furthering research on organizational commitment in the military (Gade, 2003). Its articles were devoted to exploring and clarifying the nature of commitment as a construct and to expanding its nomological network by examining a wider variety of antecedents and outcomes than had been previously considered in military research. However, despite the progress made since then, there is still much that we do not know about organizational commitment and how it develops, particularly in a military milieu (Allen, 2003; Karrasch, 2003).

Gade (2003) also lamented that in the past, military researchers had not used validated measures when studying organizational commitment. As such, he encouraged future military researchers to measure commitment with an approach consistent with the well-established three-component-model (TCM) of organizational commitment originally developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). According to the TCM, commitment is defined as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301). Thus, organizational commitment is an attitude that binds the individual experiencing it to stay with their current organization. Moreover, the TCM conceptualizes commitment that comprises three components or facets, termed affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Affective commitment (AC) represents an individual's emotional attachment to the organization. Affectively attached employees strongly identify with their organization and tend to feel like their organization is a second family. Normative commitment (NC) is a feeling of obligation to remain with one's organization, which could stem from a sense of moral duty or feelings of indebtedness (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Lastly, continuance commitment (CC) is a feeling that the perceived costs associated with leaving one's organization (e.g., pay cut, loss of benefits) are too high to quit, even if one desires to do so (Meyer et al., 1993). It is tantamount to feeling "stuck" in one's job. Drawing a parallel to Moskos' (1977) institutional/occupational thesis, much discussion around institutional motives appears to relate closely to affective and normative commitments (e.g., through a sense of duty and pride), whereas occupational motives would relate more closely with feelings of continuance commitment (e.g., through work conditions and instruments of monetary remuneration).

In terms of predicting organizational commitment in I/O psychology, researchers have examined a variety of potential antecedents such as the characteristics of the individual, the job, and the organization, but have focused on process variables to a much lesser extent (Allen, 2003). Two concepts that have been shown to be important and consistent predictors of organizational commitment are perceived organizational support (POS) (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and the quality of leadership received by employees (Meyer et al., 2002). As its name implies, POS comprises the amount of support employees feel they are receiving from their organization in the form of caring, appreciation, or non-monetary assistance. Leadership, as discussed here, is defined as the degree to which personnel are satisfied with their supervisor or manager. Although POS and leadership are considered important antecedents of organizational commitment, little is known about the actual processes through which they exert their influence on the various facets of organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In the case of leadership, this lack of knowledge has been troublesome enough for some researchers to describe its relationship with certain employee outcomes as a “black box” (Avolio et al., 2004). In terms of POS, organizational support theory proposes a number of processes by which POS can influence organizational commitment—particularly AC. First, it suggests that employees who receive support from their organization will reciprocate such positive treatment through the development of AC (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Second, POS is also likely to fulfill employees’ needs for affiliation and emotional support. When these needs are met, employees are more likely to incorporate their organizational roles and membership into their social identities, which in turn fosters a sense of belongingness (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). However, it has also been proposed that POS can serve as a buffer against negative feelings of entrapment, or CC (Shore & Tetrick, 1991). Research on these processes has been limited, albeit consistent with organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Exploring the psychological processes that explain the relationship between satisfaction with leadership, POS, and organizational commitment in a military context would further our understanding of why personnel remain committed to military organizations, and enable military practitioners to develop more targeted interventions with the goal of increasing this commitment.

This research proposed person–organization (P–O) fit (i.e., the compatibility between a person and an organization) as a possible mediating variable to explain the relationships between satisfaction with leadership, POS, and organizational commitment. P–O fit has been described as a “potentially important factor in the development and maintenance of employee commitment to organizations” (Meyer, Hecht, Gill, & Toplonysky, 2010, p. 458); an assertion that has been supported

by meta-analytic evidence (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Furthermore, given the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) strong identity as an international peacekeeping organization, the experience of P–O (mis)fit would be highly salient in the minds of personnel and have important implications for their commitment to their unit or the CAF as a whole. As a process variable, P–O fit is consistent with the role that leaders play as organizational agents who are partially responsible for the socialization process (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Huang, Cheng, & Chou, 2005) and in some cases “transform” employees’ values (Bass, 1985). Although our research did not directly measure leadership behavior per se, there is meta-analytic evidence suggesting that follower satisfaction with leadership is highly related to effective leadership behaviors such as providing support, guidance, and structure to employees (Judge et al., 2004). The role of P–O fit is also consistent with organizational support theory, which proposes that POS increases employees’ sense of belonging through the incorporation of organizational roles and values into their own social identities (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Empirically testing these processes would provide I/O psychologists and military sociologists with a more detailed understanding of how the commitment of military personnel can be maintained in an organization with both institutional and occupational characteristics.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to test P–O fit—conceptualized as perceived value congruence between CAF personnel and their organization—as a mediator of satisfaction with senior- and unit-level military leadership, POS, and organizational commitment. In the following paragraphs, we briefly describe the rationale behind the conceptualization of our study variables and draw on theory and empirical evidence to develop our hypotheses.

Conceptualization of P–O Fit

P–O fit specifically pertains to the compatibility between a person and his or her organization as a whole (Kristof, 1996). This compatibility can be either complementary (the employee or organization provides something that the other wants) or supplementary (the extent to which characteristics of the person and organization are congruent). These two conceptualizations can be further broken down into various content dimensions or specific characteristics of the person and environment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Examples of content dimensions for complimentary fit include needs-supplies fit (e.g., the needs of the person are fulfilled by what the organization provides) and demands-abilities fit (e.g., the demands of the organization are sufficiently met by the abilities of the person). In contrast, supplementary fit has most commonly been considered in terms of goal, value, or attitude congruence (e.g., the employee and the organization possess or prioritize

the same goals or values). A final distinction that is necessary to make is that P–O fit can be measured either directly or indirectly. Direct measurement involves asking respondents about how well they perceive themselves as fitting with the organization, whereas indirect measurement involves measuring two separate content dimensions and comparing them statistically using difference scores or response surface methodology (Edwards, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

This study conceptualized P–O fit as employees' perceived congruence between their own values and the values of their organization, or supplementary fit. Studies focusing on complementary fit usually focus on applicant attraction or job choice (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Rynes & Cable, 2003), and stress in the work environment (Edwards, 1996), of which the findings have been weak or inconclusive (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Cable, 2009; Ostroff & Schulte, 2007). However, supplementary fit is usually examined in relation to workplace attitudes such as organizational socialization and commitment. This type of fit has been found to have strong associations with turnover and organizational commitment (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003), and was therefore better suited for the outcomes of interest in this study. For the remainder of the paper, the degree to which personnel perceive their own values to be congruent with the values of their organization is referred to simply as P–O fit.

Linking Leadership and Commitment through P–O Fit

Although there is very little research on its antecedents, existing theory can explain the influence that military leaders can exert on the P–O fit perceptions of personnel. The two mechanisms traditionally conceptualized as resulting in personnel fit with the organization are selection and socialization (Chatman, 1989, 1991). Indeed, the CAF uses the personal suitability interview in the recruitment selection process in order to select individuals that are most likely to be well-suited for a career in the military, with the assumption that this type of strategic selection will result in better performance and reduced attrition. From this perspective, P–O fit is conceptualized as stemming from individual traits which personnel bring with them when joining the organization. In contrast, the present paper focused on the role of socialization, as well as leadership, in influencing employees' P–O fit once they have joined the organization. In particular, it is contended that leaders can play an important role in the process of socializing personnel to the organization's goals, values, and norms (Huang et al., 2005), and in this way influence P–O fit. The importance of this role is clearly expressed in the Leadership Doctrine of the Canadian Forces, where effective leadership is defined in part by promoting and exemplifying the military ethos or values describing the general standards of appropriate military conduct (Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2005). Given that much more research has focused on the outcomes rather than the antecedents

of the P–O fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), the intent of this research was to contribute to the body of knowledge on P–O fit by examining the relationship between personnel’s satisfaction with two levels of military leadership effectiveness (unit- and senior-level) and P–O fit, an area that has not received empirical attention in this context.

An individual’s satisfaction with leadership is tantamount to perceiving the leader as effective in his/her role, and indicates that the individual has had positive experiences working under the leader. As mentioned earlier, satisfaction with leadership is strongly linked to the amount of respect and consideration provided by the leader, as well as how effectively the leader defines and organizes the roles of his/her followers (Judge et al., 2004). Social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) supports the notion that positive experiences with one’s leader are likely to lead to a greater willingness to adopt the values of the organization, which consequently leads personnel to report higher levels of P–O fit. Although positive relationships were expected between leaders at all levels and P–O fit, our study differentiated between satisfaction with senior-level leadership (e.g., Colonels, Captains, and General/Flag Officers) and unit-level leadership because the way personnel perceive these two categories of leaders can differ substantially (Avolio et al., 2004).

Additionally, as shown in previous research, we aimed to confirm that leadership plays an important role in fostering organizational commitment. For example, the relationship between transformational leadership (a specific kind of inspiring and visionary leadership) and organizational commitment has been demonstrated in a meta-analysis by Meyer and colleagues (2002). Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Gerstner and Day (1997) found a corrected correlation between leader-member exchange (LMX; i.e., a positive and trusting relationship between a leader and follower) and organizational commitment of .42. Although the direction of causality is unclear, these results suggest that promoting healthy and fulfilling leader-follower relationships are an important means of ensuring personnel remain committed to the organization.

Effective military leaders champion the interests of personnel, manage relationships with tact, and exemplify the military ethos of the CAF. Thus, as a corollary to the evidence discussed above, we expected that satisfaction with unit- and senior-level leadership would also be positively related to the organizational commitment of military personnel. We did not expect a relationship between leadership satisfaction and CC because this component of commitment pertains primarily to the costs associated with losing instrumental benefits associated with one’s job (H. S. Becker, 1960). Moreover, the TCM of commitment posits that a lack of alternatives and personal characteristics of the employee are the primary antecedents of CC (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002). Accordingly, there was no theoretical reason to expect that military leaders’ effectiveness would influence this component of commitment.

Finally, based on the rationale that effective military leaders exemplify the military ethos and play an important role in socializing personnel, and given the extensive empirical evidence that has documented the strong relation between P–O fit and organizational commitment, we hypothesized that P–O fit would partially mediate the relationship between satisfaction with senior- and unit-level leadership and the organizational commitment of military personnel. Although effective leadership can potentially influence commitment in other ways, the congruence between the values of personnel and those of the organization are likely to be one of the most proximal antecedents of commitment directed towards the organization. We suggested partial mediation because there are other probable mediators of the leadership-commitment relationship such as psychological empowerment (Avolio et al., 2004) and positive affect (Tsai, Chen, & Cheng, 2009). In sum, we hypothesized that P–O fit would be an important mediator in the relation between satisfaction with senior- and unit- level leadership and organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 1. P–O fit will partially mediate the relationships between senior- and unit-level leadership and a) AC and b) NC.

Linking POS and Commitment through P–O Fit

Recent meta-analyses have shown that P–O value congruence and POS are consistently related to affective organizational commitment. Moreover, POS has been shown to be negatively related to CC (for P–O fit, see Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; for POS, see Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). We suggest that these relationships are not independent of one another but instead that P–O fit is a more proximal antecedent of organizational commitment and can partially explain the relationship between POS and the three components of organizational commitment.

Consistent with this notion are some of the propositions put forth by organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986). In particular, we proposed that organizational support would influence the AC of personnel through the fulfillment of socioemotional needs. When these needs for affiliation and/or emotional support are met, personnel incorporate their status as organizational members into their own personal identities, which consequently leads to feelings of belonging and to affective commitment to the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As a part of the process of incorporating organizational membership into their own identity, personnel must also come to see the values of their organization as their own. Indeed, to socially identify themselves as members of their organization and to potentially serve as ambassadors to the public and other nations, individuals must feel comfortable with the values of the organization they are representing. The process outlined above clearly positions P–O fit as an outcome of POS, and as a more proximal antecedent of organizational commitment. Accordingly, higher levels of POS should be related to higher levels of P–O fit.

We also predicted that P–O fit would mediate the relationship between POS and the three components of organizational commitment. However, we predicted that the directionality of these relationships would depend on the component of commitment being predicted. First, consistent with the needs fulfillment process described by organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), POS and AC should be positively related.

Second, organizational support theory proposes that actions made by the organization that are perceived by personnel as positive and discretionary increase their felt obligation to reciprocate in the form of affective commitment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001). We predicted that this process is actually most likely to result in increased NC, or a felt moral obligation to remain with the organization. NC has been commonly overlooked in much of the commitment research, but was expected to be a particularly relevant facet of commitment in a military context (Gade, 2003).

Third, Shore and Tetrick (1991) suggest that POS can protect personnel from feelings of entrapment, best characterized by CC, which specifically involves the feeling that there are a lack of alternatives outside of one’s current job or that there would be other negative consequences to leaving one’s job. As mentioned before, this relationship has received some empirical support (Meyer et al., 2002; Rhoades

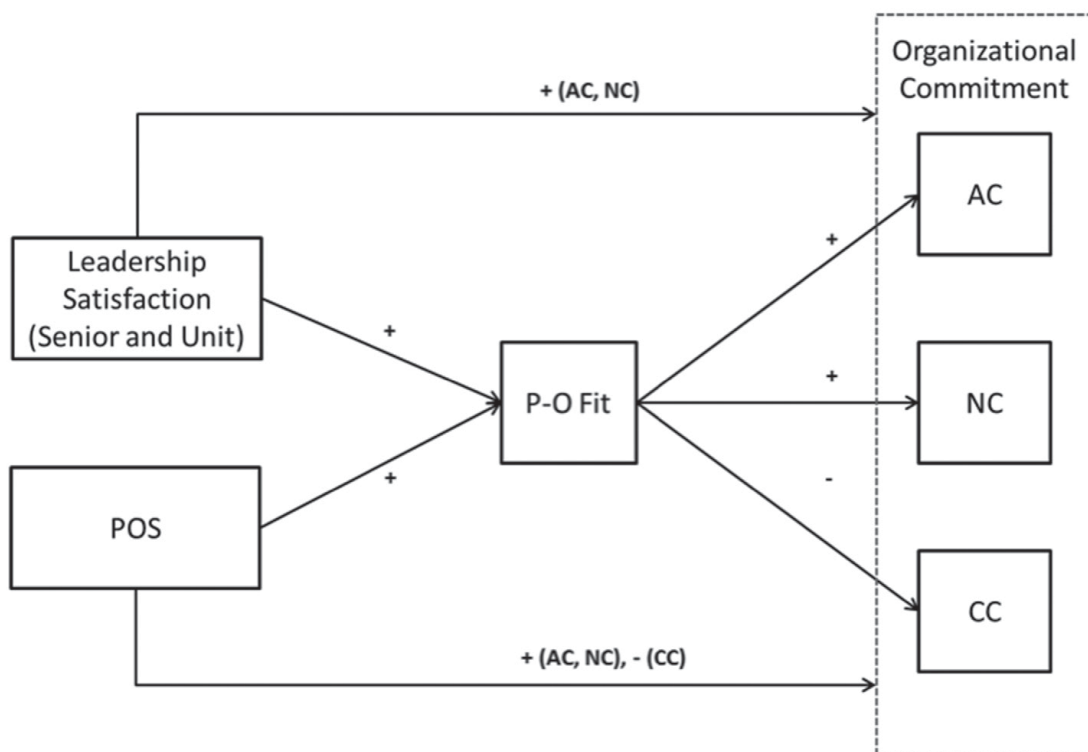


Figure 1: Summarized path model of the expected relationships among study variables.

Notes. AC = Affective Commitment, CC = Continuance Commitment, NC = Normative Commitment, POS = Perceived Organizational Support, P–O Fit = Person–Organization Fit.

& Eisenberger, 2002). Consequently, it was expected that POS and CC would be negatively related.

Given that the propositions put forth by organizational support theory position P–O fit as a more proximal antecedent of organizational commitment than POS, it was expected that P–O fit would be one of the processes by which POS influences the organizational commitment of personnel. Additionally, to be consistent with previous research, we expected that these mediating relationships would be positive for AC and NC, but negative for CC (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Hypothesis 2. P–O fit will partially mediate the positive relationships between POS and (a) AC, (b) NC, and (c) partially mediate the negative relationship between POS and CC.

A visual summary of the expected relationships is presented in Figure 1.

Method

Participants

The sample included responses from a total of 6,503 CAF personnel, which constituted a 25.6% response rate of the sampled Regular Force population of 25,435. After accounting for missing data, our final sample size was 6,418. The majority of respondents were male (78.2%), Junior Non-Commissioned Members (NCMs; 44.4%), and served in the CF for 15–24 years (37.1%). More than half were in the Army occupations (55.9%). Most respondents were between the ages of 35–44 (39.7%), although a third were over 45 years of age (33.8%). The majority were Anglophone (75.2%), were either married or in a common-law relationship (77.1%), and almost half (46.6%) had at least a college diploma or university degree. A comparison of our sample demographics to the population data revealed that our sample was quite representative overall. It was representative in terms of first official language, gender, marital status, and occupational authority (OA; i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Support) but differed modestly in terms of age and rank such that our sample was slightly older and higher ranked. A more comprehensive comparison of the demographics of our sample and the population (from the official CAF personnel databases) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of CAF Sample and Population Demographic Characteristics

	Sample (n = 6,503)		Population (N = 25,435)	
	Number (#)	Percent (%)	Number (#)	Percent (%)
Rank				
Junior NCMs	2,883	44.4%	13,520	53.2%
Senior NCMs	1,145	17.6%	5,698	22.4%
Junior Officers	1,289	19.8%	3,344	13.1%
Senior Officers	1,186	18.2%	2,873	11.3%
Occupational Authority				
CAS	691	10.6%	1,424	5.6%
CLS	1,999	30.7%	9,640	37.9%
CMS	675	10.4%	2,264	8.9%
A/CMP	3,138	48.3%	12,082	47.5%
Age				
16 – 24 years old	225	3.5%	2,213	8.7%
25 – 34 years old	1,481	23.0%	8,673	34.1%
35 – 44 years old	2,562	39.7%	8,724	34.3%
45+ years old	2,181	33.8%	5,824	22.9%
Gender				
Male	5,064	78.2%	20,144	79.2%
Female	1,413	21.8%	5,290	20.8%
First Official Language				
English	4,846	75.2%	17,830	70.1%
French	1,600	24.8%	7,605	29.9%
Marital Status				
Married/Common law	4,997	77.1%	17,245	67.8%
Single	899	13.9%	6,562	25.8%
Separated/Divorced	564	8.7%	1,602	6.3%
Widowed	20	0.3%	25	0.1%

Notes. Chief of Air Staff (CAS); Chief of Land Staff (CLS); Chief of Maritime Staff (CMS); Assistant Chief of Military Personnel (A/CMP). Sample statistics may not total 6,503 due to missing data; Sample percentages are based on number of valid responses and exclude missing cases; NCM = non-commissioned member (non-officer);

Procedure

The CAF Retention Survey is a web-based instrument administered electronically to CAF members from 47 “at-risk” occupations, which were selected by the OAs that govern them. Occupations were considered at risk if they had slightly higher attrition, were under-staffed due to issues with recruitment, or had a risk of being under-staffed in the future due to a projected labor market shortage. After the OAs had identified the appropriate occupations, a census methodology was utilized to invite all appropriate personnel across the four occupational authorities via e-mail. Invitees were provided with a URL to complete the survey in the official language of their choice—English or French. Two reminders were sent during the course of survey administration. A census methodology was used in that all CAF members in the selected occupations who could be contacted through the CAF’s internal e-mail were invited to participate.

Measures

Organizational commitment. AC, NC, and CC were measured using 17 items designed by (Meyer et al., 1993). The items were tailored to the Canadian Forces respondents, such that the term “my organization” was replaced with “the CF” in each item. The AC subscale comprised 6 items (e.g., *The CF has a great deal of personal meaning for me*). The NC subscale also comprised 6 items (e.g., *I would feel guilty if I left the CF right now*). The CC subscale comprised five items (e.g., *Right now, staying with the CF is a matter of necessity as much as desire*). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were .83, .82, and .77 for affective, normative, and continuance commitment, respectively.

Person–organization fit. P–O fit was measured using a three-item scale developed specifically for assessing the perceived fit of Canadian Forces personnel (e.g., *The CF values, as expressed in military ethos, have a great deal of personal meaning for me*). The process of developing this measure involved consulting with military members and defense scientists in the CAF who are subject matter experts in this domain. Participants were asked to rate each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). This measure had a Cronbach’s alpha of .78.

Satisfaction with senior and unit leadership. The items measuring aspects of satisfaction with senior and unit leadership were drawn from the theory and doctrine from the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (2005; 2007). Similar to the development process of the previously described measure, these measures of satisfaction were developed in consultation with military members and defense scientists in the CAF specifically for the purpose of this study. Six items comprised the scale on senior leadership (e.g., *The way senior leaders develop the operational capabilities necessary to fulfill defence tasks*). The scale on unit leadership also consisted of six items (e.g., *The way my unit leaders direct, motivate and enable the achievement of goals and completion of tasks*). Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction for each item on these scales ranging from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 6 (*completely satisfied*). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for these two scales were .94 for organizational leadership, and .96 for unit leadership.

Perceived organizational support. POS was measured using nine items, including eight from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986). The one original item was tailored to the CAF population (i.e., *The CF would take care of me if I became injured or ill*). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .86.

Demographics. Respondents were also asked to provide information on a number of demographic variables including age; gender; first official language (French or English); tenure (i.e., *How many years have you served in the CF?*); highest level of education; Environmental Uniform (i.e., Sea, Land, Air); and military rank. Military rank was grouped into four categories: Junior Non-Commissioned Members (NCMs), Senior NCMs, Junior Officers, and Senior Officers.

Analyses

In preparation to test our hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the overall fit of our measurement model and to determine if each item loaded on its respective latent factor. This is consistent with the two-step procedure outlined by Kline (2011). To conduct the CFA, we constructed a measurement model and estimated the loadings using maximum-likelihood (ML) estimation in MPlus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). The chi-square model test statistics were significant $\chi^2(758, N = 6418) = 16715.48, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 22.05$. However, the chi-square test is known to reach very high levels of significance even due to slight discrepancies between the data and measurement model with very large sample sizes (Kline, 2011). However, approximate measures of fit suggested that the measurement model fit the data reasonably well: CFI = .91, RMSEA = .06 (Byrne, 2012). All indicators loaded significantly on the appropriate latent constructs ($p < .001$). Finally, a comparison of our measurement model to other theoretically plausible models (e.g., combining senior and unit leadership into one construct) revealed that our model possessed superior fit statistics.

After running the first set of models, the hypothesized model was adjusted based on modification indices (MIs) in the output. These MIs revealed a small number of misspecified error covariances. These covariances were between indicators loading on the same latent factor, suggesting that they were misspecified due to overlapping item content, and not due to systematic response bias (Byrne, 2012). Four MIs were estimated in total, and the model was rerun each time a modification was made. The fit statistics of the revised model are as follows: $\chi^2(754, N = 6418) = 13449.11, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 17.84, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .05$. In light of these improved fit statistics, we decided to continue with this measurement model. All indicators still loaded significantly on their respective factors.

Next, a structural model was constructed to test the hypotheses outlined in the introduction. Absolute and relative indices of fit were examined for each model, as well as the significance of the path coefficients of interest (i.e., the indirect and direct effects of leadership and POS on organizational commitment through P–O fit).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. AC	4.37	0.98	(0.83)														
2. CC	3.36	1.10	0.04	(0.77)													
3. NC	3.47	1.06	0.64	0.22	(0.82)												
4. P-O Fit	4.70	0.96	0.69	-0.01	0.53	(0.78)											
5. Sat. Senior Leadership	4.04	1.04	0.46	-0.01	0.41	0.47	(0.94)										
6. Sat. Unit Leadership	4.07	1.23	0.47	-0.01	0.40	0.45	0.64	(0.96)									
7. POS	3.87	0.93	0.58	-0.04	0.52	0.54	0.60	0.61	(0.86)								
8. Age	39.92	8.25	0.11	-0.08	0.05	0.11	0.09	0.05	0.10	-							
9. Gender ^a	1.22	0.41	-0.01	0.06	0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.02	0.00	-0.10	-						
10. Tenure	18.29	9.07	0.11	-0.09	0.02	0.12	0.09	0.05	0.08	0.82	-0.19	-					
11. First Language ^b	1.25	0.43	0.08	-0.05	-0.02	0.09	0.08	0.10	0.02	-0.01	-0.03	0.03	-				
12. Education ^c	4.26	2.12	0.03	-0.13	0.00	0.01	0.09	0.03	0.02	-0.05	0.05	-0.09	-0.04	-			
13. Land Uniform ^d	0.56	0.50	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.05	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.08	-0.10	-0.05	0.11	-0.06	-		
14. Air Uniform ^d	0.26	0.44	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.01	-0.3	0.03	0.08	0.12	0.04	-0.03	0.01	-0.68	-	
15. Rank ^e	2.12	1.17	0.12	-0.17	0.04	0.10	0.19	0.09	0.10	0.19	-0.09	0.24	-0.01	0.72	-0.06	-0.02	-

Notes. N = 6418 due to missing data. AC = affective commitment; CC = continuance commitment; NC = normative commitment; Sat. = satisfaction with; P-O Fit = person-organization value congruence; POS = perceived organizational support. Correlations .04 or greater are significant at $p < .01$. Cronbach's alpha values for each scale are in diagonals where applicable.

^a Male = 1, Female = 2; ^b English = 1, French = 2; ^c Some high school = 1, High school graduate = 2, Some college = 3, College graduate = 4, Some university = 5, Undergraduate degree = 6, Graduate degree courses = 7, Graduate degree = 8; ^d Land Uniform and Air Uniform were dummy coded 0 or 1 and the excluded category, Sea Uniform, served as the comparator; ^e Junior Non-Commissioned Member (NCM) = 1, Senior NCM = 2, Junior Officer = 3, Senior Officer = 4.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables are presented in Table 2. Consistent with theory and previous research, an examination of the correlations between the study variables reveals that all correlations were in the expected direction and of the expected magnitude (e.g., see Meyer et al., 2002). The authors also examined correlations between all study variables and the demographic variables mentioned above (table has been excluded due to space considerations). Age, gender, tenure, education level, and rank had significant correlations with many of the dependent variables. We controlled for these variables in our model as previous research shows that they are predictors of organizational commitment (Ang, Dyne, & Begley, 2003; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). This enabled us to partial out any variance that was associated with these demographic variables and attain more accurate estimates between study variables that are applicable to the entire sample. The remainder of the demographic variables were excluded to preserve statistical power (T. E. Becker, 2005).

Hypothesis Testing

The structural model used to test our hypotheses fit the data reasonably well: $\chi^2(1050, N = 6418) = 15688.58, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 14.94, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .05$. The unstandardized and standardized coefficients estimated in the structural model are

Table 3

Direct and Indirect Relationships of Leadership and POS with Commitment

Hypothesized Relationship(s)	Direct				Indirect (through P-O Fit)			
	<i>b</i>	S.E.	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	β	<i>p</i>
Senior Leadership → P-O Fit	.06	.01	.10	< .01	-	-	-	-
Unit Leadership → P-O Fit	.02	.01	.04	< .05	-	-	-	-
POS → P-O Fit	.43	.02	.55	< .01	-	-	-	-
Senior Leadership → AC (H1a : partial support)	.00	.02	.00	n.s.	.06	.01	.06	< .01
Senior Leadership → NC (H1b : partial support)	.00	.02	.00	n.s.	.03	.01	.03	< .01
Senior Leadership → CC	-.03	.03	-.02	n.s.	.02	.004	.01	< .01
Unit Leadership → AC (H1a : partial support)	.02	.01	.03	< .05	.02	.01	.03	< .05
Unit Leadership → NC (H1b: partial support)	.01	.02	.02	n.s.	.01	.01	.01	< .05
Unit Lead → CC	.04	.02	.03	n.s.	.005	.002	.005	< .05
POS → AC (H2a : supported)	.31	.02	.28	< .01	.38	.02	.34	< .01
POS → NC (H2b : supported)	.47	.03	.39	< .01	.22	.02	.18	< .01
POS → CC (H2c : not supported)	.13	.05	.08	< .01	.10	.02	.06	< .01
P-O Fit → AC	.89	.03	.61	< .01	-	-	-	-
P-O Fit → NC	.51	.03	.33	< .01	-	-	-	-
P-O Fit → CC	.24	.05	.11	< .01	-	-	-	-

Notes. N = 6418 due to missing data. *b* = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; S.E. = standard error; n.s. = not significant; AC = affective commitment; CC = continuance commitment; NC = normative commitment; Senior/Unit Leadership = satisfaction with senior/unit leadership; P-O Fit = person-organization value congruence; POS = perceived organizational support.

presented in Table 3. We report the unstandardized coefficients because standardized coefficients can be misleading in some circumstances; particularly when researchers seek to compare the results of a study to later studies conducted with different samples (Kline, 2011). Furthermore, to enhance interpretability of our results, we also report the standardized coefficients. The two sections below describe the role that P–O fit played in mediating the relationships between leadership and commitment, and POS and commitment, respectively.

P–O fit as a mediator of leadership and commitment. Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted that P–O fit would partially mediate the relationships between senior and unit level leadership and organizational commitment (specifically, AC and NC, respectively). To test this hypothesis, direct relationships among study variables were first examined. The results indicated that senior and unit leadership had positive relationships with P–O fit ($b = .06, p < .01$, and $b = .02, p < .05$, respectively). Among the leadership and commitment variables, the only significant relationship was between unit leadership and AC ($b = .02, p < .05$). Furthermore, P–O fit was positively related to AC ($b = .89, p < .01$), NC ($b = .51, p < .01$), and CC ($b = .24, p < .01$). The indirect (mediation) results indicated that the relationships between senior leadership and AC and NC were fully mediated by P–O fit ($b = .06, p < .01$, and $b = .03, p < .01$, respectively). Moreover, the relationships between unit leadership and AC and NC were partially and fully mediated by P–O fit, respectively ($b = .02, p < .05$, and $b = .01, p < .05$). Thus, although Hypothesis 1a and 1b predicted partial and not full mediation, they both received partial support because the relationships were in the expected direction.

P–O Fit as a mediator of POS and commitment. Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c predicted that P–O fit would partially mediate the relationships between POS and the three facets of commitment. Results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between POS and P–O fit ($b = .43, p < .01$). Furthermore, there were significant positive relationships between POS and all three forms of commitment (AC: $b = .31, p < .01$; NC: $b = .47, p < .01$; CC: $b = .13, p < .01$). Results between P–O fit and organizational commitment were the same as described above in the previous section. The indirect results revealed that POS had positive indirect relationships with AC ($b = .38, p < .01$), NC ($b = .22, p < .01$), and CC ($b = .10, p < .01$). The final relationship was contrary to the expected direction. Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported, but not Hypothesis 2c.

At this point it is noteworthy to mention that some of the results presented above reached statistical significance but did so due to our high sample size and are unlikely to be of substantial practical significance (i.e., very low effect size). This will be addressed in more detail in the discussion.

Supplementary analysis. Although it was not hypothesized, the structural model did include direct paths between senior and unit leadership and continuance commitment, which were non-significant ($b = -.03, p = \text{n.s.}$, and $b = .04, p = \text{n.s.}$, respectively). The indirect relationships between senior and unit leadership and continuance commitment were significant, however ($b = .02, p < .01$, and $b = .005, p < .05$, respectively).

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to examine one of the potential underlying processes by which satisfaction with leadership and POS influence organizational commitment in a military setting. While there is some preliminary evidence that P–O fit mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and commitment (Huang et al., 2005), our paper was the first to examine P–O fit as a mediator of the relationship between leadership satisfaction and organizational commitment. Another unique aspect of our study is the proposed role of P–O fit as a mediator between POS and organizational commitment. To the best of our knowledge, no other research has tested the needs fulfillment process proposed by organizational support theory in such a way (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), particularly in a military context.

The Role of Leadership in the Military

Our results revealed that in general, P–O fit fully mediated the relationship between leadership satisfaction and organizational commitment, and partially mediated the relationship between POS and organizational commitment. Despite their statistical significance, the absolute magnitude of the indirect coefficients for the relationships between leadership and organizational commitment were uniformly low ($b = .001-.06$). These weak coefficients are unlikely to be of practical significance and reached statistical significance primarily due to our very large sample size ($N = 6418$). Interestingly, when the same model was run with POS removed, most of the indirect coefficients between leadership and organizational commitment increased by .15 to .20. POS and both forms of leadership were also strongly correlated ($r = .45-.47$). This suggests that senior and unit leadership satisfaction share a large amount of variance with POS in predicting organizational commitment. From a practical standpoint, this may lead one to believe that leadership satisfaction is not a particularly important factor in the development of organizational commitment in personnel when the organization provides support through practices such as recognition and assistance. However, as agents of the organization, leaders also provide rewards, recognition, coaching, and other forms of support. Thus, it is likely that POS and leadership satisfaction share quite a bit of similarity in the eyes of military personnel. Indeed, this may be particularly the case in the CAF, as leaders are agents of creating and actualizing programs and policies for personnel. Under the senior leadership of the

Chief of Military Personnel (CMP), many policies and programs that apply to all CAF personnel are developed and carried out with the help of various personnel in leadership roles. Examples of such programs include career management, health services, individual training and education, and morale and welfare programs (National Defence and the Canadian Forces, 2012). The mission statement of the Military Personnel Management Doctrine also indicates that providing support to personnel is an important aspect of leaders' roles: "To recruit, train and educate, prepare, support, honour and recognize military personnel and their families for service to Canada" (Director General Military Personnel, 2008, p. 15).

The results of our study also indicate that there was no direct relationship between leadership satisfaction and the three facets of organizational commitment (with the exception of the marginally significant relationship between unit leadership and AC). Thus, any additional variance that leadership explained in commitment beyond POS was through P-O fit. This suggests that beyond the support provided by personnel policies and practices, leaders may have some room to "personalize" the socialization process, by offering extra guidance, advice, or coaching. In a military environment, where many of interactions between leaders and subordinates are formalized, informal interactions may play a relatively minor role. Nonetheless, informal interactions are inevitable in any organization, and may be responsible for the indirect relationship between leadership and commitment.

The Role of Perceived Organizational Support

Based on the above, it is reasonable to suggest that the primary means by which leaders can effectively enhance the organizational commitment of military personnel is to provide organizational support through policy and procedure. Indeed, POS had much stronger relationships with P-O fit and organizational commitment than senior and unit leadership satisfaction. Although we cannot be certain about the direction of causality, the direct and indirect relationships between POS and organizational commitment suggest that POS plays a dual role in fostering the organizational commitment of employees.

The indirect relationship between POS and organizational commitment is readily explained by the propositions of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Specifically, supportive gestures by the organization fulfill employees' socioemotional needs, which lead them to personally identify with their organization and feel a sense of congruence or fit. The results suggest that this process is positively related to all three facets of organizational commitment. The strongest relationship was with AC. Indeed, it is not surprising that feeling similar to one's organization is related to a strong desire to remain with that organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The

process of organizational support through P–O fit was also positively related to NC. This is readily explained when NC is considered as a moral imperative, rather than a feeling of indebted obligation (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). When individuals share their organization's values, they may be more likely to feel "called" to remain with the organization and to uphold the values and mission that they identify with. This form of identification with the organization parallels the means by which personnel seek to achieve legitimacy in military institutions (Moskos, 1986). The indirect relationship between POS and CC was the opposite of what was hypothesized. It contradicts previous results (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), and runs counter to the proposition made by Shore and Tetrick (1991). It is possible that this finding is a result of personnel perceiving organizational support and membership as a resource that would be sacrificed or lost if they were to leave. Military personnel and their families are often deeply embedded in the work and social communities of military organizations such as the CAF. Individuals who strongly identify with the military are likely to lose an important piece of their social identity, along with the sense of community and the military way of life, if they choose to leave.

The second role that POS played has a more direct relationship with organizational commitment. Consistent with expectations, affective and normative commitment had positive relationships with POS. It is interesting to note that out of the three facets of commitment, normative commitment had the strongest relationship with POS. This is consistent with Gade's (2003) assertion that normative commitment is likely to be a particularly relevant form of commitment in a military setting, and that a sense of obligation of duty or calling still holds an important place in the form and structure of military organizations (Moskos, 1977, 1986). As mentioned previously, many individuals spend their entire career in the military and are often quite imbedded both in terms of their work and their family life. The long term support and development provided to many personnel is likely to make them feel both indebted and driven to reciprocate such gestures (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Finally, although the relationship between POS and CC was of a lower magnitude than the other facets of commitment, the direction ran contrary to expectations. To explain this, it is likely that many personnel perceive the support provided by the military as unique and irreplaceable. For example, career management, and morale and welfare services offered by the CAF are less likely to be found in equivalent civilian occupations.

To summarize, POS clearly plays an important role in fostering organizational commitment in the military. Supportive organizational practices such as offering personal career management and health services may be very important to ensure that personnel identify with, and remain fully committed to their organization. Moreover, this research demonstrates that P–O fit may play a key role in commitment and retention of military personnel at multiple stages of their military employment. In

particular, in addition to the traditional emphasis placed on recruiting and selecting individuals that “fit” into the military organization in the first place, these results indicate that P–O fit can be fostered (or compromised) by the quality of leadership and support personnel receive during the course of their employment.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a number of limitations of our research that should be acknowledged. First, our data was collected from a single source. This suggests that there is a possibility that the correlations between certain constructs may have been inflated due to common method variance. However, attitudinal variables such as leadership satisfaction, POS, perceived P–O fit, and commitment are arguably best collected using self-report. Furthermore, our CFA provided evidence that the constructs examined were distinguishable and provided a better fit than alternative theoretically plausible models. Although perceptions of P–O fit typically provide the strongest and most consistent relationships with attitudinal outcomes (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), future research could operationalize P–O fit in a different way such as the actual difference between the values of the organization (reported by management) and the values of employees (self-reported). Alternatively, leaders could report on their behavior towards subordinates and/or report on specific practices of the organization that are likely to be perceived as supportive.

Second, our data were collected cross-sectionally, limiting our ability to infer causality of the relationships found. Some evidence for the causal direction of these relationships is provided by the theoretical rationale provided a priori. Nonetheless, future research employing a longitudinal and quasi-experimental or experimental methodology would provide much stronger evidence of causality.

Third, some of our measures (particularly of P–O fit and leadership satisfaction) were developed specifically for the purpose of this study and had not been previously validated. Although Table 2 does provide some evidence for convergent validity between leadership and other theoretically-related constructs (e.g., POS), future research may benefit from further refining and clarifying this measure of military leadership satisfaction.

Finally, our sample had a response rate of only 25.6%, which gives rise to the possibility that certain groups were underrepresented in our study. An examination of Table 2 shows that the mean levels of AC ($M = 4.37$) was quite high. Due to the voluntary nature of CAF retention survey, it is possible that many of the most committed personnel responded, while the uncommitted personnel chose not to participate. In fact, such an occurrence would be consistent with predictions made using the TCM of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Future research may also seek to consider how P–O fit develops for different classifications of military personnel. For instance, the CAF is comprised of two cadres of personnel (i.e., officers and NCMs). Each cadre receives different forms of training, and necessitate different skill-sets and educational requirements (MacArthur & Mantler, 2015). Accordingly, the antecedents of P–O fit, and process by which P–O fit develops may be quite different for these groups.

Implications

The findings of our research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on organizational commitment in both military and non-military contexts. More specifically, our results suggest that interventions to increase organizational support are a viable means of fostering greater organizational commitment among military personnel. In fact, this is explicitly emphasized in the CAF Military Personnel Retention Strategy which states that the CAF and its leaders “must create and sustain a work environment that provides our personnel with purpose and opportunities for achievement, satisfies the lifestyle needs of members and their families, makes them feel valued, and thereby reinforces their willingness to remain part of the CF” (Canada, Department of National Defence, 2009). Indeed, the results presented herein offer notional support to this personnel strategy by demonstrating that leadership and provision of support can affect P–O fit and thereby commitment to the organization. These benefits may generalize to other organizations outside of the military if they choose to support their employees both at work and at home.

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