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The role of perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, and public service motivation on affective organizational commitment in high-reliability organizations: An empirical study of gender differences in a military context.

Navn: Marius Kristoffersen, Sondre Torgrimsen

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Abstract

How does perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, and public service motivation impact the affective organizational commitment among males and females in high-reliability organizations? Questionnaire data from 181 respondents from the Norwegian Army were gathered then analyzed through linear regression analysis. Gender differences were discovered for the impact of perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, and public service motivation on affective organizational commitment. Results show that perceived supervisor support was found to be of statistical significance for both male and female respondents. No effects on the construct level were revealed for perceived social support or public service motivation, although effects on the dimension level of both constructs were observed for both constructs. These effects were observed for the perceived social support dimensions of 'Attachment' and 'Social Integration', and the public service motivation dimensions of 'Self-Sacrifice' and 'Commitment to Public Interest'. The effect of construct dimensions varied by gender, indicating that males and females have different support needs and motivations that increase their affective organizational commitment. A discussion of the results ensues, with implications for how leaders and managers should cater to employees to increase employee retainment.

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Introduction

What makes it so that some individuals dedicate their lives in pursuit of the public good? What makes these individuals willing to endure the challenges placed upon them by uncertain and complex environments? These are questions pertaining to employees working within high-reliability organizations (HROs). Research on HROs, popular examples being air traffic controllers, military organizations, and healthcare organizations (Malish & Sargent, 2018; Pronovost et al., 2006; Roberts, 1989), has traditionally been rudimentary preoccupied with the internal characteristics of these organizations. This involved processes and mechanisms (Roberts, 2009), interventions for developing failure-free operations (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Denyer, Tranfield, & van Aken, 2008), decision making, decision dynamics, trust, organizational learning, and applied research (Ng et al., 2012). However, few studies within this field have been conducted on employee retainment. In other words, researchers have focused on how HROs function, and not why employees decide to stay with them. On the other hand, the literature on recruitment and employee retainment in organizations, in general, has been nothing short of widespread and well-scrutinized for decades. In bridging these research fields, there is evidence to suggest that the concept of *public service motivation* is associated with choosing to work in public organizations (Kim et al., 2013; Perry, 1996; Vandenabeele, 2007, 2009). Moreover, for workers in stressful environments, which HROs can be due to their uncertain and complex nature, social support can be an essential reservoir for personal resources in dealing with this stress (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985).

From a Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective, the attraction and selection of the most motivated candidates for serving within an organization and identifying the factors that contribute to keeping them may prove beneficial by securing valuable competence for a longer duration. Researchers have discovered many factors contributing to why employees choose to stay but have largely linked it to organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002), which in turn is influenced by other factors, most notably job satisfaction (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Williams & Hazer, 1986).

According to Statistics Norway (SSB, 2017), 70.1% of employees in the public sector in Norway are female. However, gender differences in the labor market can also be observed throughout different industries. For instance, in 2019

only 13% of military personnel in the Norwegian Armed Forces were female, while in 2018, 9% of working nurses in Norway were male (Unio, 2018). This constitutes a solid reason for assessing potential gender differences in motivations and needs for serving in HROs. With this in mind, our thesis aims to answer the following research question; "*How does perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, and public service motivation impact the affective organizational commitment among males and females in high-reliability organizations?*". Three hypotheses were constructed to investigate this question, scrutinizing gender differences in perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, public service motivation, and affective organizational commitment.

Literature review

High-reliability organizations

Organizations operate within different environments and serve different purposes, with the ultimate purpose being their successful survival (Coase, 1937). Different environments demand different ways of organizing to achieve this. Therefore, organizational success ultimately depends on an organization's ability to correctly enact the demands they face and adapt accordingly (Galbraith, 1974; Thompson, 1967; Weick, 1988). Interestingly, some organizations appear to succeed in the most uncertain and complex environments. The concept of 'high-reliability organizations' rose from an interest in how some organizations successfully operated in environments where minor margins differ failure from success. Weick, Suthland, & Obstfeld (1999) reviewed the literature on the subject of HROs, and noted that these organizations are characterized by five key processes; *preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and underspecification of structures*. Together, these processes give rise to collective mindfulness among the members of the organization, enabling the capability to discover and manage unexpected events, eventually assuring reliable organizational performance in the face of variation.

When shared perceptions become an antecedent for organizational success, organizational learning is a necessity for transforming individual experiences into knowledge resources and routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Routines, and subsequent improvisation, require members of an organization to undergo training to attain the knowledge and competence needed to execute such routines for avoiding failure (Shrivastava, 1983). Training is resource-intensive, requiring both time and money. This renders a "brain drain" scenario, characterized by a loss of institutional knowledge, both financially costly and operationally debilitating. From the resource-based view, HROs who face minor error margins should put the retainment of competent personnel as a primal priority to avoid costs associated with employee development (Barney, 1991). Employee retainment refers to the process of keeping members affiliated with an organization. One way of addressing this has been to increase the organizational commitment of employees (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer et al., 2002). In HROs where minor deviations from routines may lead to catastrophic outcomes, lack of experience and training can prove fatal. Retaining competent employees for a

sustained duration is therefore desirable from both a financial and an operational perspective.

Diversity has risen to become an espoused goal for many organizations worldwide. The term itself refers to individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, culture, and any idiographic factor which makes people unique (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995). Moreover, having a diverse set of decision-makers has been theorized to reduce the prevalence of groupthink, a phenomenon where conformity to a group agreement is preferred over critically assessing other outcomes (Esser, 1998). For HROs, being able to identify variations in the environment is crucial to adapt their operations. Assuring a diverse set of personnel would, therefore, contribute to organizational resources through the cognitive processing power available. Attaining diversity among employees in HROs should, therefore, be a priority to assure high organizational performance.

Affective organizational commitment

In its endeavor, the intention behind this paper is to further our understanding of why candidates stay within HROs. Inquiries into this general phenomenon of staying within an organization have been gathered under the concept of 'organizational commitment'. First conceptualized by Becker (1960), organizational commitment has later been defined as "a psychological link between the employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization" (Allen & Meyer, 1996, p. 252). Since then, this phenomenon has been widely applied within the Person-Organization research paradigm of management and organizational behavior (Cohen, 2003; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). As a measure of this intention of staying within an organization, a subdimension of organizational commitment named *affective organizational commitment* (AOC) (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1997), was used by the authors on several attributes.

First, research into AOC has deemed it to be correlated with outcomes of on-the-job behaviors, organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, employee health, employee well-being, turnover intention, and actual turnover (Meyer et al., 2002; Vandenberghe, Benstein, & Stinglhamber, 2004). Moreover, AOC has been found to strongly correlate with perceived organizational support, and even more-so in studies conducted outside of North America (Meyer et al., 2002).

Second, Rhoades et al. (2001) stated that perceived organizational support and employee turnover was mediated by AOC, indicating that this construct is a valid measure of staying power in relation to perceived organizational support, for some positions. As they state: “our [the researchers] findings are consistent with organizational support theory and other social exchange approaches holding that employees reciprocate favorable treatment with greater commitment and performance” (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

Third, several of the studies included in this paper assesses the link between public service motivation and reapplication intention. It is our understanding that reapplication intention as a dependent variable has limited practical and theoretical implications outside of a recruitment context. Moreover, reapplication intention as a dependent variable was not a feasible measure of the impact of the independent variables included in our study. Applying AOC as an outcome variable enables us to link gender differences in PSM, PSS, and PSoS to a well-established construct correlated with positive on-the-job outcomes, and these constructs’ corresponding effect on AOC. This potential link justifies inquiries into practices that could aid HROs in applying the findings of our study.

Perceived social support

Research into the general concept of ‘social support’ has been occupied with assessing its sources, types, levels, and effects (Streeter & Franklin, 1992). Social support has been defined as “the social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are provided to them by nonprofessionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships” (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010, p. 512). Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) synthesized different concepts and definitions related to PSoS, moving from a macro to a micro level. Individuals are embedded in different *social networks*, defined as “social structures composed of the individual’s social ties and the ties among them” (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010, p. 512). According to this notion, individuals will have different levels of *Social Integration* within these community-level networks, which is defined as “the extent to which an individual participates in private and public social interactions” (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010, p. 512). Indeed, it is intuitive to presume that individuals who interact extensively with a designated few people within their network will develop deep social ties with those individuals. On the other hand, individuals who interact with a broad spectrum of people will develop

a more comprehensive social network. As a result, individuals may experience varying levels of social support.

Following the definition of social support laid forth by Gottlieb and Bergen (2010), an emphasis is put on individuals' *perception* of social support or the individual's cognitive appraisal regarding supportive relationships and behaviors shared with others. Social support has been found to have a buffering effect on individuals in the face of stressors, that is any stimuli resulting in a stress response (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). There have been attempts to measure actual support through specific behaviors, although the buffering effect has mainly been attributed to perceived social support (PSoS) as opposed to actual social support (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) thus remarked that PSoS is the belief or faith that support is available from social network members, while actual social support is the mobilization and expression of those resources.

Early attempts at conceptualizing and operationalizing PSoS suffered from scattered approaches resulting in incomparable findings (House, Kahn, McLeod, & Williams, 1985). Out of these approaches, the taxonomy developed by Weiss (1974) gained mainstream acceptance, which incorporated elements of several frameworks. Weiss first included six different social functions called "provisions", where all functions are needed for individuals to feel supported (Cutrona & Russel, 1983). Cutrona & Russell (1983) reviewed all the functions and described them as follows. The first function, *Attachment*, is the emotional closeness from which one derives a sense of security. It can often be sourced back to a spouse, close friendships, or family relationships. The second function, *Social Integration*, refers to a sense of belonging to a group that shares one's interests, concerns, and recreational activities, and can often be sourced from friendships. Together, these two functions provide comfort, security, pleasure, and a sense of identity. The third function, *Reassurance of Worth*, refers to the recognition of one's competence, skills, and value by others. Having one's competence reassured can boost the belief in personal resources, and has been extensively theorized and researched by Bandura (2001; Bandura & Estes, 1977), providing evidence of self-efficacy as a predictor of actual coping behavior (Cutrona & Russell, 1983). The fourth function, *Reliable Alliance*, refers to the assurance that others can be relied upon for tangible assistance. This is closely related to the fifth function, *Guidance*, which refers to advice or information often sourced from teachers, mentors, or parents. Conversely, Reliable Alliance is often sourced from family

members. Both functions are believed to relate to problem-solving in stressful situations by aiding people to find ways to cope with stressors (Weiss, 1974). The sixth function, *Opportunity for Nurturance*, refers to the feeling of being needed by others. In contrast to the other functions which refer to what individuals receive from others, this function refers to what individuals provide to others, most commonly their children (Cutrona & Russell, 1983).

Perceived supervisor support

One type of social support that has received substantial attention in organizational research is perceived supervisor support (PSS) (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Leaders serve as interpretive filters of organizational processes and practices and thereby operate as agents of the organizations they benefit (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). As a consequence, members of an organization tend to generalize support from their supervisor as indicative of that of the organization (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberg, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Put otherwise, PSS functions as a proxy for perceived organizational support. Furthermore, PSS has been found to impact employees' affective organizational commitment, which in turn impacts cognitions regarding turnover (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007). This intensifies the necessity for leaders to connect with employees for organizations to achieve highly committed workers and reduce employee turnover.

Perceived social support in an HRO context

When organizations face increased demands, contributions among organizational members ought to be adequately intensified (Barney, 1991). However, working in an HRO may in itself be more taxing for organizational members compared to working in regular organizations. This can be exemplified through military organizations, characterized by authoritative discipline and hierarchy, which is different from a democratic civilian lifestyle founded on autonomy and equality. Accordingly, the transition from being a civilian to serving in the military can be perceived as stressing for new personnel. Stress is the result of cognitive appraisals where an external stressor is believed to exceed personal resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), and has been linked to both somatic and psychological outcomes (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988;

Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986; Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Specifically, accruing job-related stress over time has been associated with undesired work-related outcomes such as work and job withdrawal (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990), job dissatisfaction (Karasek, 1979; M. Lepine, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000), burnout and turnover intention (Scanlan & Still, 2019). For individuals in an HRO, this can be the result of hindering levels of training and other demands. However, mastering challenging stressors can result in heightened motivation (J. A. Lepine, Podsakoff, & Lepine, 2005). Given the buffering effect of PSoS on stress (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985), personnel who endure and overcome hardships together with their peers may experience increased motivation. However, once an individual experience a sufficient level of PSoS, higher levels of PSoS are believed to have diminishing effects. Conversely, personnel who do not have the individual or intraindividual resources to cope with challenging stressors may experience their motivation erode as chronic stress negatively affects both their physical and psychological well-being. Given the stressors faced during military service, employees' PSS and PSoS can be crucial for coping with stress. Based on this rationale, it is plausible that the PSoS and PSS have a substantial effect on AOC in HROs.

H₁: Perceived social support has a positive relation with affective organizational commitment.

H₂: Perceived supervisor support has a positive relation with affective organizational commitment.

Public service motivation

The concept of 'public service motivation' refers to "[...] an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions" (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990). Others have defined it differently, such as Vandenabeele (2007); "[...] the drive for public interested and altruistic behaviour", and Raluca-Marilena (2011); "specific motivations of public servants, such as employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, reward preferences, organizational and individual performance". Out of these, Perry & Wise's (1990) definition will be used for this paper, due to it being one of the more widely cited articles on the field of PSM and by large considered to be the first to coin the

term. It is also used as the foundation for other research, with Vandenabeele (2007, 2009) stating that Perry and Rainey helped “define PSM as a counterweight to the more self-interested motivation found in rational choice theories”, and Moynihan and Perry are focused on the origins of PSM (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Perry, 1996; Rainey, 1982; Vandenabeele, 2007, 2009). According to these notions, PSM can be viewed as the specific motivations within an individual that inclines service to the public good, even in the event where the public's interest is distinctly opposing one's interest. Based on this conception, it is worthwhile exploring the construct with HROs as the vessel of public service.

Perry & Wise devised many of the original concepts of the PSM theory. In Perry's hallmark article (1996), he sought to explore the measurement of the concept, as well as its six dimensions: *Attraction to Policy Making*, *Commitment to the Public Interest*, *Civic Duty*, *Social Justice*, *Self-Sacrifice*, and *Compassion* (Perry, 1996). Perry found that the original six dimensions did not hold when applying confirmatory factor analysis, thereby reducing the dimensions by omitting *Civic Duty* and *Social Justice*. These remaining four dimensions create the foundation for the PSM construct as utilized in this article.

Vandenabeele (2009) later explored the linkage between PSM and self-reported job performance, indicating a positively correlated relationship mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Vandenabeele, 2009). His research was based on a selection of Belgian civil servants. This sample could also be a methodological limitation due to the homogeneity of cultural dimensions. Still, the notion that PSM is positively related to organizational commitment is a justification for further exploration of the linkage.

Public service motivation in a recruitment context

The values of an organization are important in acquiring personnel with higher levels of PSM. As shown by Asseburg, Homberg, & Vogel (2018), organizations should attempt to base their advertisements aimed to attract new hires on an affective dimension; the inspirational framings of organizational missions. They discovered that the relationship between rational choice systems and attraction created by marketing was weaker than the same relationship between inspirational messages. Further, Asseburg et al. (2018) discovered that the perceived Person-Job (P-J) fit mediated this relationship more strongly than Person-Organization (P-O) fit. This leads to a notion that even though a possible

candidate had their interest triggered by the instinctively based advertisement, there is a requirement for a more rational type of activation to make the candidate consider themselves a good prospect for the job. One explanation for this is found in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, where both situational and dispositional factors can influence the degree to which individuals' attitudes are formed through issue-relevant cognitions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), a dichotomy later subsumed by Kahneman & Tversky's studies on rational choice systems (2002, 2003). According to this model, people can be persuaded through a central and a peripheral route. The central route is activated when a message itself is appealing, while the peripheral route is activated when something other than the message is appealing, such as the attractiveness of the sender of the message. Due to the short nature of most marketing practices, the peripheral route would be more activated due to its intuitive nature. Put differently, the specificities of working a particular job in a given organization, more broadly referred to as the 'employee experience', can be a key for whether candidates perceive themselves and the job as a good fit. Although initial attraction is important to recruit candidates, the employee experience itself is likely to weigh heavily on employee retainment.

A Norwegian government HRO, The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF), conducted a series of reviews on their marketing material aimed at attracting new hires. Internal reviews concluded that their material was too focused on the war aspects of service, and with this, they might lose out on aspirants that focused more on other aspects such as self-development, and the feeling of contributing to their country. However, it was recommended that NAF should focus more on rational material outlining their unique selling points that would appeal to the candidate's rational choice systems. Their old material was switched out with a new series of material, mostly focused on inspirational messages and the organizational goals of the Norwegian Army, which would tie in better with the theories of Asseburg et al. (2018), Petty & Cacioppo (1986), and Kahneman & Tversky (2002; 2003). However, although a career decision may be influenced by such marketing, it would be natural to consider the central route as a part of the process as well, leading to a notion that one should have both types of material readily available. The initial contact, however, should be focused on more emotional or intuitive communication to grasp attention. This relates to PSM by how PSM moderates the relationship between inspirational messages within advertisements and P-J fit, meaning that these types of messages instigate a

perceived P-J fit in high PSM individuals more than others. Further, the PSM dimensions carrying the highest moderation effect are the dimensions of Attraction to Policy Making, Compassion, and Commitment to Public Interest, from the research of Kim et al. (2013), although Asseburg et al. (2018) consolidated two of the dimensions because they could not find distinct support for both in their model (Asseburg et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2013).

The concepts of PSM should be carefully utilized in a Norwegian context, due to most research being conducted in the U.S.A. and therefore being based on a vastly different culture (Marques, 2020). However, checking whether the same results as Asseburg et al. (2018) reported holds in Norway could be worthwhile due to the relative homogeneity of cultures in Norway and Germany. Kim et al. (2013) attempted to find an international measure, but could not identify one, leading to the notion that PSM must be somewhat adjusted for the locale it is employed in. Kim (2009) also utilized the scale in Korea, while other researches employed the same measure in other countries, reporting diverse results (Kim, 2009b).

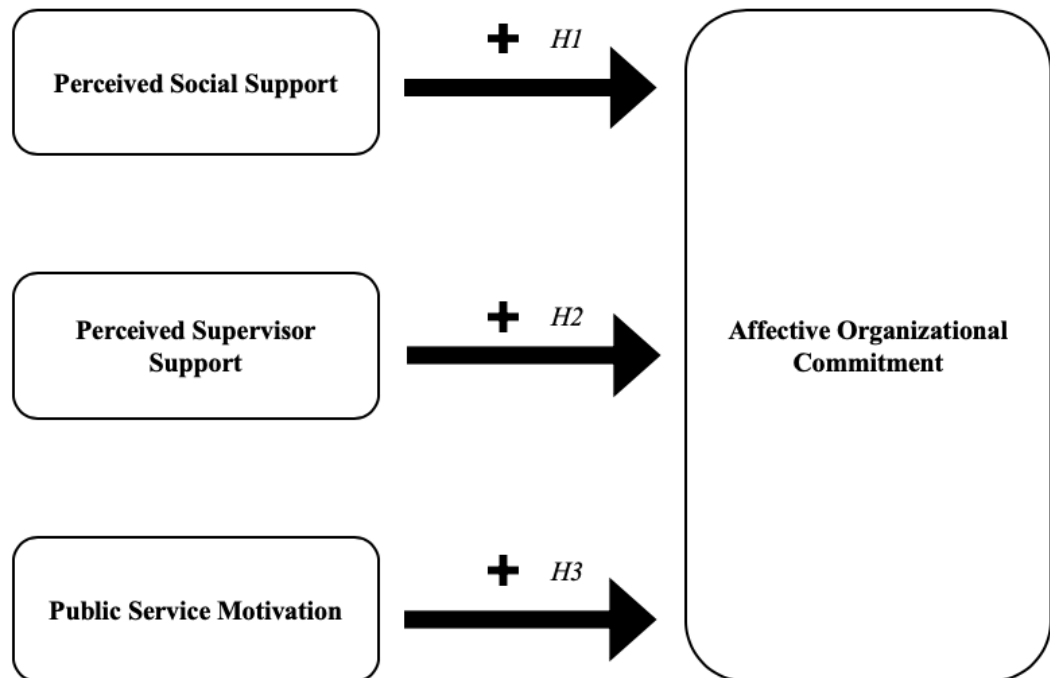
DeHart-Davis, Merlowe, & Pandey (2006) noted that there are historical aspects that may invoke gender differences in the measure of PSM. Specifically, they theorized that the dimension of Attraction to Policy Making is inherently a masculine dimension given that it appeals to individuals seeking a sense of achievement and self-importance. Furthermore, they theorized that Compassion, which entails love and concern for others, holds an affective motive and is therefore a feminine dimension. Lastly, they theorized that Commitment to Public Interest is based on a desire to fulfill a societal obligation, a norm-based motive, which historically has been more available to men who have sought to realize themselves in the public domain. Women, on the other hand, have been confined to the private domain of the home and cared for individuals whom they share emotional connections with. Consequently, men have worked with serving society and people they do not share immediate relations with, while women have served people with whom they share closer relations (DeHart-Davis et al., 2006). However, when studying these three dimensions of PSM on a sample of public managers, they only found gender differences in the dimensions of Compassion and Attraction to Policy Making. Although they found that women were more likely to score higher on the Compassion dimension, they also found women to

score higher on the Attraction to Policy Making dimension, albeit a small difference.

While the premise of our study is that those who seek to serve in a governmental HRO score highly on PSM, it is reasonable to assert that there are gender differences when it comes to why candidates are motivated to serve. Based on the findings of DeHart-Davis et al. (2006), we expect there to be differences in the specific dimensions of PSM which may influence AOC, based on contextual factors within and surrounding the organization in question.

H₃: Public service motivation has a positive relation with affective organizational commitment.

Based on the information gathered during the literature review, the theoretical framework of our paper is outlined in Model 1 below (p. 12). All three independent variables, PSoS, PSS, and PSM, are hypothesized to positively influence AOC in a linear relation.



Model 1: Perceived social support, perceived supervisor support, and public service motivation are all hypothesized to increase levels of affective organizational commitment in a linear relation.

Method

To answer our research question, we applied a descriptive research design where a quantitative methodology approach was required. Before we could gather any data for the study, we applied to and received approval by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), implying that we followed their guidelines for how to collect and handle respondent data. This approval was a contingency for applying to the Norwegian Defence University College for receiving the email addresses of applicants for our sample.

Context

The Norwegian Army, a subdivision of the Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) was chosen for the study as it fully embodies the characteristics of an HRO. NAF is the government military organization responsible for Norway's military defense. On a national level, their mission is to safeguard Norway's sovereignty and defend the nation against external military threats. On an international level, NAF is a contributor to the United Nations and is the northernmost member of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization. NAF's international contributions involve assignments in geographical areas of conflict and unrest.

The organization is divided into four service branches, which by size are the Home Guard, the Norwegian Army, the Royal Norwegian Navy, and the Royal Norwegian Air Force. The Norwegian Army is the land warfare branch of NAF. The branch consists of several departments, each dedicated to specific missions and peacekeeping operations at any given time of year. Overall, the Norwegian Army is the largest branch of NAF concerning active personnel, counting 8'232 conscripts, military employees, and civilians in 2018 (Forsvaret, n.d.).

For the Norwegian Army, maintaining a diverse recruitment pool has been a solemn priority for years. With recent changes in the personnel structure, the conscription period has become the only source for recruiting new candidates into the specialist ranks (OR). Hence, the conscription period resembles an internship where the Norwegian Army can determine a level of fit between candidate capabilities and organizational needs. It is therefore crucial that the Norwegian Army groom candidates' motivation to continue serving in the military after the conscription period.

The focus on diversity in NAF has largely been oriented towards gender-diversity, based on the expectation that more females in male-dominated areas give rise to new insights, perspectives, and solutions (Brundtland Steder, 2015). The biggest challenge has not been to recruit women, but to retain them. This challenge has been partly attributed to a lack of alignment between women's physiological dispositions and the ideals within the organizational culture of NAF, epitomized by physical strength and ruggedness for mastering the outdoors (Brundtland Steder, V Stornæs, & Stubberud, 2015; Lauritzen & Batt-Rawden, 2015). When organizational ideals are oriented towards physical strength, the genders face disproportionate demands, which are favored towards men (Lauritzen & Batt-Rawden, 2015).

Participants

The sample consisted of 634 applicants to the Norwegian Army's Squad Leader School. The nature of our study required that we included both male and female candidates. A total of 181 candidates responded to our questionnaire, whereof 139 men and 42 women. Respondent age ranged from 18 to over 25, and the average respondent was in their lower twenties. Eighty-six of the respondents had undergone the selection process and testing for Squad Leader School, whereof 36 had received an offer of acceptance. We sought to include as many qualified applicants as possible. By including both applicants which were accepted and those rejected, we had the additional opportunity of seeing if there were any differences between these two groups regarding PSoS, PSS, and PSM. However, with the current research design, we cannot causally determine if levels of PSoS, PSS, PSM, and AOC were affected by the application rejection or acceptance.

Procedure

The applicants received an electronic questionnaire on their private e-mail. Applicants were informed of the purpose of the study, that participation was both voluntary and anonymous, that they could withdraw at any stage of the study, and that they could have their data deleted upon request. The questionnaire contained questions from the SPS-10, PSM-12, three questions on PSS, eight questions on AOC, and a few control questions on demographical factors. Before distribution, the questionnaire was piloted by two individuals with relation to NAF, in order to determine the face validity and whether the questionnaire was linguistically

appropriate for the population. The questionnaire was open for 3 weeks, in which time applicants who did not respond to the questionnaire received two reminders that the questionnaire was pending.

Scales and measurements

Measure of affective organizational commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1997) *Affective Commitment Scale* was applied to measure respondents' AOC towards the Norwegian Army. With 7 items, whereas 4 are reversed, the scale has been largely applied by the research community and the underlying construct has been extensively validated (Meyer et al., 2002).

Measure of perceived social support

SPS-10 is a short version of the *Social Provisions Scale*, which originally contained 24 items. It was devised based on Weiss' theory of social provisions and further developed by Cutrona and Russel (1983). Out of the original 24 items, the 10 items with the highest factor loadings were later selected for the short version. The scale has been validated in several studies and been translated into several languages (Caron, 2013; Cutrona & Russell, 1983; Steigen & Bergh, 2019). We found no publicly available Norwegian translation of the scale, so we followed the established procedure of translating the scale from English to Norwegian, then a back-translation from Norwegian to English (Brislin, 1970). Afterward, we had 5 individuals whose native language is Norwegian, and who practice English at a university level, to verify our translations. We were mindful of any cultural differences which could impact the comprehension of the questions of the scale but only made minor changes during the translation.

Measure of supervisor support

Eisenberger et al. (2002) reported a lack of consensus on how to measure leader support. However, they noted that a common way of doing so has been to adapt items for measuring organizational support by changing the word "organization" with "supervisor" (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). We followed this procedure by adopting three items from the *Survey of Perceived Organizational Support* and changing the word "organization" with "supervisor". Following Eisenberger et al. (2002), we selected items 10, 27, and 35, based on their high factor loadings (.72, .76, and .80).

Measure of public service motivation

For measuring the construct of public service motivation, we applied the *PSM-12*, a shortened version of Perry's original 44-item measure (Perry, 1996). The scale has been validated in several countries (Kim, 2009a; Kim et al., 2013). We did not succeed in identifying a Norwegian translation of the *PSM-12*, so we followed the same procedure of translation as outlined above.

Ethical considerations

The discretion of the participants was our principal priority. Therefore, the participants were informed about their right to anonymity, that the researchers were bound to confidentiality, the purpose of the study was made clear, and that all participants could withdraw during any stage of the study and request to have their data erased. The understanding of and consent to these terms was a contingency for participating in the study.

Results

To investigate our hypotheses, we first needed to combine our items into dimensions. To do so we had to carry out a series of reliability tests to ensure that the items measured the same phenomenon, or else the dimensions would be inaccurate. This was accomplished utilizing Cronbach's Alpha as the measurement tool. Further, we tested our hypotheses using correlation tests to see the relationships between dimensions we considered relevant. Lastly, to facilitate a more thorough discussion and gain insight into the mechanisms of HROs, we employed linear regression as our chosen modeling technique to create models we then used as the foundation for discussion.

Data quality and preparation

Before conducting our analyses, we surveyed our data to find any possible error-inducing responses. We did not have any empty responses, incomplete responses, nor responses with extreme values. Further, we attempted to observe if any responses were delivered within a brief period using similar responses, without identifying any such cases. This would have been a ground for consideration for any possible errors induced by respondents not completing the questionnaire and exiting due to external factors. However, we gained approximately a 29% response rate among 634 candidates who did not willingly apply to complete a questionnaire but were rather approached by NAF and asked if they could complete one at their discretion. This, together with the fact that our data did not give any indication of homogenous distribution aside from the fact that all responses were collected within one organization, we chose to continue with all the collected responses. In the future, it may prove worthwhile to collect acceptance for participation before sending out the questionnaire or have someone from within the organization to present the questionnaire to facilitate higher response rates, and also gain more control over the respondent profiles to ensure even higher randomization.

Reliability testing

Before our analysis, we conducted a series of reliability tests on our data. This was to validate that the items measured the same construct. The results of these tests indicated that PSS was reliable by a Cronbach's Alpha score of .833. The dimensions measured somewhat differently, however, for Social Integration

($\alpha=.52$), Reassurance of Worth ($\alpha=.65$), Reliable Alliance ($\alpha=.77$), and Guidance ($\alpha=.85$). Attachment was not tested due to a routing error in the platform employed for administering the questionnaires, where one item of this dimension was not available to the respondents. These values indicate an acceptable level of fit for most subdimensions, except for Social Integration. This was again tested with only female respondents selected after building our model, showing a Cronbach's Alpha of .77, showing a considerably higher level of reliability. The source of this discrepancy was not identified, although it might be sourced from the relatively low number of female respondents.

Further, we tested the items and dimensions of PSM. The construct showed a high level of reliability ($\alpha=.75$), with the dimensions showcasing a similar variance as with PSoS; Attraction to Policy Making ($\alpha=.65$), Commitment to Public Interest ($\alpha=.58$), Compassion ($\alpha=.62$) and Self-Sacrifice ($\alpha=.72$). Once more, we tested Commitment to Public Interest after the model construction to see if the female respondents scored differently. This score was .55, indicating comparable reliability. The source of this relatively low reliability was found to be item Q17 (*"I consider public service to be my civil duty"*).

Lastly, we tested the reliability of AOC and PSS, scoring .62 and .89, respectively. The lower reliability of AOC was found to be somewhat due to the items Q27 (*"I enjoy to discuss my organization with people outside my organization"*), Q28 (*"I feel like this organization's problems are my own."*) and Q30 (*"I don't feel like I am a "part of the family" within my organization."*). When testing this construct for the separate groups, to consider the reliability for this outcome variable, we got these scores for females ($\alpha=.78$) and males ($\alpha=.54$). This shows that the higher number of male respondents skew this reliability somewhat. The source of this reduced reliability among male respondents was shown to be Q27 and Q28.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1: Perceived social support

The construct of PSoS reports a correlation of .38. This shows that PSoS has a positive correlation with AOC, indicating that PSoS as a construct positively influences AOC. The null hypothesis is therefore discarded. The correlation is not particularly high, although it is significant at the .01 level.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived supervisor support

The construct of PSS reports a correlation of .33. This shows that PSS has a positive correlation with AOC, indicating that PSS as a construct positively influences AOC. The null hypothesis is therefore discarded. The correlation is not particularly high, although it is significant at the .01 level.

Hypothesis 3: Public service motivation

In testing, this was found to be correlated at a correlation measuring .37. This shows that PSM has a positive correlation with AOC, indicating that PSM as a construct positively influences AOC. The null hypothesis is therefore discarded. The correlation is not particularly high, however, indicating that other factors are worth exploring.

Modeling

After reliability testing, we constructed the dimensions of PSM and PSoS for use within our models. These models were created using backward stepwise regression including all the dimensions and demographic variables. The reason for choosing linear regression, and especially the backward stepwise regression technique in constructing the model, is due to how we sought to explain the dependent variable with a subset of items which was, at the time, unknown in strength and composition. Linear regression is excellent at explaining these types of relationships. Backward stepwise regression was used as the modeling technique to do our unknowingness as to what items were relevant for the respondents, and especially due to earlier research's implications, we sought to avoid clouding our judgments. This is especially relevant when comparing backward versus forwards stepwise regression, where the latter is more likely to be influenced by the author's judgment. By using this technique, we found three models, one universal and a separate model for each of the genders.

The male model

Table 1 & 2 (p. 20) shows that the male statistical model carries a low R-square, but high significance among its coefficients. The low r-squared value is not considered problematic due to the normality of this occurrence within psychological studies.

Table 1.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.529 ^a	.280	.264	.71219

a. Predictors: (Constant), PSoS attachment, (PSM) selfsacrifice, (PSoS) perceived supervisor support

Table 2.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	1.631	.511		3.192	.002
	selfsacrifice	.343	.069	.373	5.002	.000
	PSS	.122	.049	.191	2.510	.013
	attachment	.173	.052	.250	3.352	.001

a. Dependent Variable: affective organizational commitment

The female model

The female statistical model is shown in Table 3 & 4 (p. 21) carries a somewhat higher R-square value compared to the male model in Table 1 & 2, likely due to the lower number of female respondents and subsequent lower variance within the data.

Table 3.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.704 ^a	.495	.455	.72353

a. Predictors: (Constant), PSoS social integration, (PSoS) perceived supervisor support, (PSM) commitment to public interest

b. Dependent Variable: affective organizational commitment

Table 4.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	-.948	1.047		-.905	.371
	PSS	.170	.084	.241	2.034	.049
	commitmentpublicinter est	.425	.141	.369	3.009	.005
	socialintegration	.484	.160	.378	3.021	.004

a. Dependent Variable: affective organizational commitment

The universal model

By utilizing a box plot graph, we tested the subdimensions of PSM and PSoS on gender, to see if there were significant differences between the genders. We could not identify any significant differences on a construct level, albeit a few minor differences on the dimension level already included in the models for each gender, as shown in Table 5 & 6 (p. 22).

Table 5.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.528 ^a	.279	.262	.74262

a. Predictors: (Constant), PSoS attachment, (PSM) selfsacrifice, (PSoS) perceived supervisor support, (PSM) commitment to public interest

b. Dependent Variable: affective organizational commitment

Table 6.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.165	.515		2.260	.025
	commitmentpublicinte rest	.192	.078	.185	2.455	.015
	selfsacrifice	.243	.073	.245	3.326	.001
	PSS	.157	.043	.237	3.617	.000
	attachment	.131	.051	.174	2.578	.011

a. Dependent Variable: affective organizational commitment

Discussion

This paper explores the relationship between a set of constructs presumed to influence talent retention and recruitment in HROs. The population of the questionnaire was chosen to be soldiers who applied to the Norwegian Army's Squad Leader School. This population was chosen due to NAF being a traditional HRO, with studies of PSM and AOC from foreign countries being deployed in similar environments. In our study, AOC was chosen as the dependent variable due to AOC being commonly linked to lower levels of turnover and higher levels of job satisfaction.

Hypotheses

Our study had three hypotheses, each testing for the positive correlation between AOC and PSoS, PSS, and PSM. Our study shows that all three of the independent variables are positively correlated to AOC, with all of them being correlated at comparable levels. The lowest correlation is that of AOC and PSS ($r=.33$), PSM ($r=.37$), and PSoS ($r=.38$). These correlations are not strong; however, their statistical significance shows that they should not be discredited. We interpret the low correlations to indicate that there are additional factors that influence AOC which we have not included in our study. Conversely, the three independent variables may influence other phenomena than AOC as well.

Nonetheless, we believe the correlational strength to be related to separate items or dimensions of the constructs we have applied that are more positively correlated while others are more negatively correlated, not considering PSS due to its unidimensional nature. It is also possible that the correlations in our findings only partially answer for the data in AOC, indicating a more complex model. Further testing of the items and construct dimensions discredited this assumption, however, with every separate test reporting lower levels of correlation. This leads us to the assumption that the separate constructs are only partially able to predict the reported levels of AOC, and therefore creating a more complex image of the constructs that contribute to the reported levels of AOC. This falls in line with theory and reported measurements of other countries, especially in western countries, which states that PSM is commonly moderated by both culture and other factors, with some researches finding that PSM mediates other constructs such as PSoS to application intention (Vandenabeele et al., 2009). This led us to the construction of the models in Table 1-6 (p. 20-22).

Model construction

By utilizing linear regression through backward stepwise regression, three models were identified. The universal model that was constructed was based on the entire sample, with no separation of genders. This model reported low R^2 values, which is common for psychological testing, although with high beta and p-values values. The most interesting concept was the finding that none of the constructs were found to be relevant for the model, excluding PSS which is unidimensional. Nonetheless, each construct was represented with one or more dimensions; PSoS (Attachment) and PSM (Commitment to Public Interest & Self-sacrifice). Attachment is an important finding due to the notion that a feeling of security derived from close relationships appears to be important for obtaining higher levels of AOC. This is also in line with the belief that PSoS may buffer individuals from stressors, thus increasing their motivation for serving. The reason why Attachment is the only significant dimension of PSoS is possibly due to the similarity towards other dimensions, meaning that the reliability between them is too high, or that the respondents' cultural and demographical backgrounds were somewhat homogenous, boosting the familiarity of the questions measuring this dimension.

For PSM, the finding that the dimensions Commitment to Public Interest and Self-sacrifice were significantly predictive of AOC may have several causes. One is their apparent similar nature, although their Cronbach's alpha measure of .679 discredits the notion that they are overlapping excessively. They are similar, but not to a point of methodological concern. The similarity may, therefore, be due to attitudes based on selflessness, although this is naught but a suggestion. However, the apparent prevalence of positive attitudes towards self-sacrifice indicates that the ability to view oneself as a part of a larger entity is an important aspect in considering a role within an HRO.

Lastly, the finding that PSS is an important predictor of AOC for both men and women lends further credibility to the notion that PSS is generalized as support from the organization, a perception which in turn increases individuals' emotional affiliation with the targeted organization.

No interaction or mediating effects were identified. This leads us to the suggestion of a more complex relationship of AOC and contributing constructs in an HRO setting. Further, due to notions of gender differences being posited in by some researchers (DeHart-Davis et al., 2006) as well as by the organization within

which this study was conducted (Brundtland Steder, 2015), modeling was attempted with filters applied for the genders *male*, *female*, and *rather not say*. The latter option was omitted due to no respondents choosing this alternative.

When constructing the gender-dependent models, we found gender differences on the dimension level of both PSoS and PSM. The models differed slightly, although these differences mainly nuanced them rather than indicating the models to be radically different. Both the male and female models carried a dimension of the two constructs measured across several dimensions, and both included PSS. The latter indicates that PSS is important for the levels of AOC for both genders in an HRO. The male population, however, included Self-sacrifice and Attachment as dimensions of PSM and PSoS, respectively. When applying the description of this dimension by Weiss (1974), this finding indicates that males prefer deeper, more individual connections to others within this HRO. This might be explained by the significance of Self-sacrifice. One can argue that Self-sacrifice is a more radical form of selflessness, as opposed to Commitment to Public Interest. Following this premise, it is feasible that the deeper connections towards other members of the HRO are a reason for the high levels of Self-sacrifice. On the other hand, Attachment might be of importance as the result of cognitive dissonance, where men justify their attitudes by reasoning that their peers are emotionally close to themselves. This potential dissonance might be even more pressing in an HRO such as NAF where the worst possible outcome of a critical situation is fatal for the individual member and their peers.

In the female population, two different dimensions of PSM and PSoS is included than those in the male population; Commitment to Public Interest and Social Integration, respectively. Previously, several dimensions linked to PSM has been attempted to be linked to gender stereotypes, such as Compassion being the most prevalent female dimension (DeHart-Davis et al., 2006). However, our findings indicate that this is not true when assessing gender and PSM dimensions towards AOC within this particular context and population. However, Commitment to Public Interest can arguably be said to be a more selfless form for selflessness when compared to self-sacrifice. With the latter being a more radical form, albeit more egocentric, Commitment to Public Interest can be interpreted as more related to one's impact, or contribution, onto others. Commitment to Public Interest is arguably more practically oriented than Compassion, with a higher focus on performance on behalf of the public. Different from the male population,

where the dimensions of PSoS and PSM are somewhat related, it is possibly more of a distinct, and historically based reason for the inclusion of Social Integration in the model for the female population, NAF has a tradition of being male-dominated (Lauritzen & Batt-Rawden, 2015). This may lead to a higher focus on finding a social role and being included in the group you feel belonging to. For men, this Social Integration might be taken for granted, enabling them to seek more profound relationships. However, the female model may also simply be a different version of the male model, with more emphasis being placed on finding a role in the intragroup and being a contributing factor to the public, therein indicating a desire to be a contributing member of a group. This is opposed to focusing on the more intense nature of Attachment and Self-Sacrifice, indicating a focus on smaller, more exclusive groups and being a more selfless member of the group. An aspect lending further support to the latter arguments is the coefficient levels reported in the statistical models. Males report a higher practical significance of Self-Sacrifice when compared to the other dimensions, especially PSS which is significant at half the beta-value of Self-Sacrifice. Females report matching levels of all constructs, indicating a heavier emphasis on a multifaceted nature of their reported AOC.

Based on the profiles of the respondents, we see that they may apply to HROs to gain a sense of direction, or to feel that they are contributing to society at a greater level. This is observable in the models through the differing needs for being a part of a greater entity. Further, the social support needs of being an accepted member of a group is crucial for producing committed members of an HRO. This, however, may be due to the nature of NAF; operating in a more uncertain and complex environment than other HROs, as well as candidates having little to no control over whom you end up serving your time with, the insecurity experienced by candidates may be higher. This could further lead to an increased need for PSoS and PSS, while their purpose for choosing the HRO in the first place is based on their desire for service the public. This profile implies that either individuals with high levels of PSM or high needs for social and supervisor support are potential candidates for HROs, although the former is more firmly supported by our data.

Another possible explanation for this profile is the concept that the individuals that are in HROs require high amounts of support from their peers and supervisors to face the risks and pressure in the environment of which they

belong. Further, since these risks often are related to the common good, such as health care, military forces, and law enforcement, it may be possible to explain the need for differing levels of the Self-sacrifice and Commitment to Public Interest dimensions of PSM by looking at the motivation for doing these tasks. Some positions within the aforementioned sectors, such as surgeons, are traditionally highly paid, although most are not, leading to the notion of a different motivator. The feeling of contribution may be the keystone to understanding the willingness of said risk, while the support is merely the support to be able to focus one's capabilities on the task.

These needs and wishes could be a basis on which the profiles of possible candidates could be built to gain higher amounts of candidates that are likely to stay if the same needs are fulfilled. However, this may also be due to the type of population within our study, all being candidates in NAF. To be able to generalize our findings more widely, it would be worthwhile to test for different types of HROs, and possibly at different personnel levels within such organizations.

Conclusion

When considering traditional constructs related to AOC, this study has shown that although there exist cultural differences in measurements, there are general lines to be observed. Especially the importance of PSM, PSS, and PSoS is supported, even though local inclinations are present. Further, when controlling for varying importance of the constructs, it was shown that some dimensions are more significant than others, indicating that by only assessing entire constructs one might overlook important nuances. This is especially important when controlling for genders, as shown by the final models which show that there are significant differences in which dimensions are of statistical and practical significance among the genders. Females report a higher significance of Social Integration and Commitment to Public Interest, while males report higher levels of Attachment and Self-sacrifice. Both report high levels of PSS, indicating a high reliance on the perceived support from the organization. The difference in significance within the constructs PSM and PSoS are likely due to differences in how the genders perceive roles in service of the public and group roles within HROs.

Implications

Theoretical implications

When comparing these findings to prevalent theory within the field of HROs and employee retention we see a distinct departure from previous beliefs that men are more interested in the performance-related aspects of HROs, while females are more likely to be based on Compassion-dimension of PSM to be interested in a position. Concerning the notion that PSM relays P-J fit, and higher stress fosters a higher need for PSoS, we see that males and females share similarities in how they value HROs. Both genders need a dimension from both PSoS and PSM to feel adequately supported and interested in the job, albeit different dimensions of said constructs. This difference might prove vital to facilitate higher retention after an initial period, in which a part of the population leaves the HRO such as females in the case of NAF, due to lower perceived P-J fit. By crafting and facilitating an organizational environment that caters to different personnel groups, HROs such as NAF may gain more diverse populations. Some differences may be attributed to the cultural background of the respondents, but the research of Kim (2009) does not indicate how this may affect our research, only that there is a difference that might be of relevance. Further research must be performed to explore this notion.

Practical implications

This study helps showcase that the selection of leaders may to a great practical extent influence talent retainment and recruitment in HROs. Further, by the results of this study, it is worthwhile to focus on the similarities and nuances of the gender-specific models to attain higher levels of AOC for both genders by considering nuanced needs and motivations. This can lead to higher employee retainment and more precise recruitment. Any reduction in employee turnover and subsequent costs related to reduced recruitment needs will directly impact the financial performance of HROs. This potentially creates more slack resources to allocate into training and development of personnel, a tenet of HRO performance.

Moreover, the finding that males and females score differently in PSoS and PSM as related to AOC is a step forward in the direction of modifying the HRM systems in HROs to the needs of both genders. This is especially important for HROs which have historically been favored by either gender, by accessing a broader recruitment pool within the population: such as military organizations and

law enforcement for recruiting and retaining more females; many care-related organizations for recruiting and retaining more males.

Suggestions for further research

Our study used personnel from the Norwegian Army to represent employees in an HRO. It would be worthwhile to replicate our study in other contexts as well, such as in law enforcement or a healthcare organization. This would help in understanding how employees in HROs score on the dimension level of PSM and PSoS in different occupational sectors. Such findings can result in valuable insights for modifying HRM systems to deliver higher organizational commitment among employees, potentially increasing employee retainment. For instance, DeHart-Davis et al. (2006) posited that Compassion is a more female-oriented dimension, possibly created by earlier social roles and would dictate which interests and job positions women consider, such as healthcare. We were not able to prove statistical significance within this dimension. Further research may want to consider a control group outside of a military setting, to explore whether female employees in military HROs undergo a masculinization process as compared to other HROs.

Limitations

Using NAF as a case for HROs is not without its limitations. Different organizations will attract different candidates with different characteristics, which may impact the particular dimensions of PSM and PSoS that contribute to increased AOC. Moreover, contextual factors within an organization may add to this effect as well, as discussed previously regarding ideals embedded in organizational culture. For instance, it is plausible that the Compassion dimension of PSM might be a significant predictor of AOC in a hospital setting, as postulated by DeHart-Davis et al. (2006). Indeed, NAF can be viewed as a masculine organization as opposed to more femininely inclined organizations within the healthcare sector. This justifies the necessity for assessing the context of which studies of this nature are executed within, and the potential impact said context may have on the subsequent results.

Candidates for the Norwegian Army's Squad Leader School go through extensive selection tests to improve the accuracy of hiring the best candidates. We planned to distribute the questionnaire before this selection phase, but due to the

pandemic outbreak of COVID-19, NAF could not execute the selection procedures in compliance with governmental health regulations. Local selection procedures were executed instead and at a later date. It is plausible that this uncertainty regarding the selection procedures may have been a cause of numerous emotional reactions among the respondents. We do not, however, know whether these potential reactions had any impact on the self-reported support and motivations we sought to measure. Moreover, our population was based on candidates which applied for further service in NAF after serving their one-year conscription period. We cannot control for the impact of this one-year service on the responses. During conscription, many candidates are assigned to mixed-gender rooms to facilitate higher amounts of camaraderie. However, this can make our respondents value the perceived support levels higher. Even though this may not necessarily devalue the importance of our findings for similar HROs, it may not be as valid for other types of HROs.

The notion of PSoS as consisting of several provisions, where PSoS levels above a subjective threshold will not yield a higher effect or diminishing returns, implies a curvilinear relation (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Weiss, 1974). Although this was outside of the scope of our study, a potential curvilinear effect might have impacted the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Due to a routing error in the platform applied for distributing the questionnaire, one item from the Attachment dimensions of PSoS was not available for the respondents. This may have inflated the weighting of other items within the same dimension. However, after comparing the items against each other, the omitted item was deemed to be adequately represented through a highly similarly phrased item.

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