Article

Military Veterans in Federal Agencies: Organizational Inclusion, Human Resource Practices, and Trust in Leadership as Predictors of Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

Military veterans comprise a significant demographic that is adding to the diversity of the U.S. federal workforce. Using data from the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, this study examined the relationship between organizational inclusion, human resource practices, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment among military veterans and nonveterans in federal agencies. Structural equation modeling showed the positive impact of organizational inclusion and human resource practices on organizational commitment was partially mediated by trust in leadership. Human resource practices had a greater impact than organizational inclusion on organizational commitment. Human resource practices, however, had less of an impact on organizational commitment and trust in leadership among military veterans as compared with nonveterans. Organizational inclusion had more of an impact on trust in leadership among the military veterans than the nonveterans in the study. There was no difference based on veteran status regarding the impact of trust in leadership on organizational commitment.

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Military veterans comprise a significant demographic that is adding to the diversity of U.S. federal agencies. Spread across more than 80 executive agencies, military veterans currently make up almost 27% of the workforce (U.S. Office of Personnel Management [U.S. OPM], 2016). In 2012, military veterans comprised almost 56,000, nearly 30%, of the 195,000 new employees hired by the executive branch of the federal government (U.S. OPM, 2012). While this was the highest number of military veterans hired by the executive branch in more than 20 years, the trend continued and military veterans represented 31% of the new employees hired in 2013 (U.S. OPM, 2014).

According to the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OCJCS; 2014), fomenting reintegration signals to the public that America values its military veterans as a civil asset so future generations remain willing to take the same voluntary oath of service sustaining the country's long tradition of a viable, all-volunteer military. Hiring military veterans represents a large component of the overall diversity efforts within public organizations (Choi & Rainey, 2010; Kleykamp, 2009; Ruh, Spicer, & Vaughan, 2009). All federal agencies in the United States have been directed to actively recruit and retain military veterans (Executive Order [EO] 13518, 2009). As such, various initiatives and human resource practices have been established that give special recruitment and hiring preference to military veterans pursuing federal employment after military separation (Collins et al., 2014; Lewis, 2013; Mani, 1999). With more than 200,000 military service members expected to leave the Armed Forces annually over the next 5 years (OCJCS, 2014), the number of military veterans entering the federal workforce is expected to increase.

Human resource practices vary by organization, but four practices are consistently identified in the literature; selection, performance appraisal, compensation, and training and development (Guest, Conway, & Dewe, 2004; McClean & Collins, 2011; Whitener, 2001). Research suggests using these human resource practices indicates an organization's interest in investing in and rewarding employees for their contributions and leads to desirable outcomes of commitment, productivity, and reduced turnover (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Gould-Williams (2007) found that "human resource practices and the climate in which they are introduced signal the extent to which organizations value and care for employees" (p. 1628). Kim and Ko (2014) found employee perception of human resource practices was positively related to organizational commitment in a public-sector organization.

Federal agencies have adopted a philosophy of valuing workforce diversity which has led to the active pursuit of policies and initiatives that promote and manage diversity and inclusion within the federal workforce (Soni, 2000; U.S. OPM, 2011). Described as an extension of workplace diversity, inclusion moves beyond recruitment and retention of a demographic category and places value on individual differences and creating environments where everyone feels valued and respected and can invest themselves in the organization (Sabharwal, 2014). Therefore, any increases in the number and proportion of military veteran employees within federal agencies should be considered in the context of the desire to maximize the contribution of diverse individuals within a work environment. The issuance of EO 13583 solidifies

the federal government's resolve to make diversity and inclusion within the federal workforce a strategic priority. As such, agency leadership is eager to maximize the contribution from this group while ensuring their commitment to and retention in their agencies (EO 13518, 2009).

To maximize the contribution from military veterans, both commitment and trust—two important components of military culture—must be considered (Adams, Bruyn, & Chung-Yan, 2004; Allen, 2003). Committed individuals are needed to ensure mission readiness and persevere toward success (Allen, 2003). A climate of trust is essential to group cohesion in the military and has been posited to be essential to the performance and achievement of military units (Adams et al., 2004). Dirks and Ferrin (2002) defined trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (p. 395). Service members need to trust their chain of command, other service members, and the orders they receive. Mission effectiveness requires commanders to earn the trust of their subordinates while placing their trust in their subordinates (Adams et al., 2004). As more military veterans add to the diversity of federal agencies, it becomes critical for agencies to maximize the contribution of this diverse group while ensuring their commitment and retention within the agencies. Failing to retain committed employees can lead to interruptions in services, projects, and workgroup structure and dynamics. Increased frequency of hiring and training employees also increases costs and impacts productivity (Jung, 2010; Pitts, Marvel, & Fernandez, 2011). Therefore, efforts to hire military veterans must be accompanied by efforts to foster commitment and retention to maximize the benefit from their unique skills and perspectives. This requires moving beyond simply ensuring proportional representation to ensuring individuals are fully participating members of the organization (Pless & Maak, 2004). In other words, the organizational environment needs to be more than diverse; it needs to be inclusive.

However, the organizational literature is void of substantial research into organizational outcomes associated with the unique characteristics and perceptions of military veterans working in federal agencies. Understanding the perceptions, attitudes, and workplace behaviors unique to military veterans and how they may differ from non-veterans is beneficial for maintaining strong, diverse, and inclusive federal workplaces (U.S. OPM, 2014). Public agencies are ideal places to investigate the relationship between human resource practices, organizational inclusion, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment in the understudied population of military veterans working in public organizations.

Evidence exists that employees' sense of inclusion is related to their commitment to the organization. Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) found that public-sector employees' perception of inclusiveness of their organizations' culture was positively related to their affective commitment. Other research has shown that perceptions of inclusion predict organizational commitment and performance (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Miller, 1998; Pless & Maak, 2004; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Shore et al., 2011; Stewart & Johnson, 2009). Organizational commitment has been widely studied and found to be positively related to work performance and

effectiveness as well as negatively related to turnover intention (Kim, 2005; Loke, 2001). Although organizational commitment has been firmly established as a consequence of trust in organizational relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ruppel & Harrington, 2000; Wong & Sohal, 2002), trust remains to be explored as a mediator between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment. No empirical studies examining the impact of organizational inclusion on trust were identified. While trust has been identified as a mediator in the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment (Gould-Williams, 2003), no studies were identified that examined this relationship in the military veteran population within organizations. These factors of commitment, trust, and human resource practices need to be considered when creating a diverse and inclusive environment that will foster success for military veterans; therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between organizational inclusion, human resource practices, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment among military veterans in U.S. federal agencies.

Theoretical Framework

To best understand this phenomenon, social exchange theory and social identity theory were integrated in the theoretical framework. While no single overarching theory exists, social exchange theory has been used to explore the concept and consequences of organizational inclusion and human resource practices in organizations (Sabharwal, 2014; Shore et al., 2011). The basic premise of the theory holds that when an organization offers something of value to its employees, the employees will reciprocate by offering to the organization something it values (Latorre et al., 2016). Reciprocity and negotiation are the rules of exchange (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002) with individuals placing value in mutually beneficial relationships. Social exchange theory has been used to explain workplace attitudes and provides a basis for making predictions about the effects of organizational inclusion (Shore et al., 2011) and human resource practices (Latorre et al., 2016). Social identity theory posits that the group with which an individual identifies provides a source of self-esteem and belonging (Hogg, 2006; Sabharwal, 2014). Individuals derive "an important definition of self through belonging to, and membership in, groups" (Mor Barak et al., 2016, p. 3). This theory suggests that employee perceptions of the actions and policies of their organization will be influenced by their membership in, and sense of belonging to, specific identity groups.

Hall (2011) explained that the military represents a unique cultural group distinct from the civilian world. Military veterans bring a unique culture of values to the civilian workforce and are often a group that is held in high regard (Braender & Andersen, 2013). While working full time in the military, service members are part of a culture that emphasizes discipline, rigid hierarchy, combat, and team over individual (Adams et al., 2004; Dunivin, 1994; MacLean, 2008). Military culture is characterized by the preparation for and conduct of combat. Veterans were trained as warfighters who follow strict etiquette and often operate in high stress and

life-threatening environments that demand teamwork. Indoctrination into such a culture can leave lasting impressions that impact the experiences of service members upon leaving the service and reentering the civilian world (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011).

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014) has stated, "inclusion holds the key to actualizing the performance potential of workplace diversity" (p. 82). While underdeveloped, some evidence suggests a relationship between inclusion and organizational commitment. In a study of public-sector employees in the Netherlands, Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) found that employees' perception of inclusiveness of their organizational culture was positively related to their affective commitment. Organizational managers and researchers have endeavored to understand how human resource practices impact the organizational commitment of employees. In fact, human resource practices have been divided into two categories; control and commitment practices (Verheul, 2007). Control practices aim to regulate employee behavior through accountability and direct supervision. Commitment practices aim to encourage employee motivation and commitment. Commitment human resource practices include "selective staffing, developmental appraisal, competitive and equitable compensation, and comprehensive training and development activities" (Whitener, 2001, p. 517). Research has found employee perception of human resource practices to be an important predictor of organizational commitment (Gould-Williams, 2004; Whitener, 2001). Therefore, it was expected that organizational inclusion and human resource practices would be positively related to organizational commitment among military veterans working in civilian agencies within the U.S. government.

> **Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment.
> **Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment.

According to social exchange theory, followers who perceive the leader with whom they have an exchange relationship as treating them fairly are more likely to develop trust and extend this trust to the organization through transference and reciprocate with commitment and lower levels of turnover intention. Researchers have found that trust predicts and is positively related to organizational commitment in employees (Aryee et al., 2002; Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2001) and specifically among employees in public organizations (Nyhan, 1999; Zeffane & Al Zarooni, 2012). Therefore, it was expected that trust in leadership would be positively related to organizational commitment. Also, according to the theory, employees who value organizational efforts and practices reciprocate through attitudes and behaviors that the employer will value. As such, a highly inclusive organizational environment with favorable human resource practices should promote the reciprocation of these efforts by employees in the form of trust, commitment, and performance (Shore et al., 2011). Employee perception of both human resource practices and inclusiveness of an organization have

been found to predict organizational commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Miller, 1998; Nishii et al., 2008; Pless & Maak, 2004). Therefore, one must consider the impact of organizational inclusion on trust in leadership as well as human resource practices and trust in leadership as antecedents of organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between trust in leadership and orgnizational commitment.
Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between organizational inclusion and trust in leadership.
Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between human resource practices and trust in leadership.
Hypothesis 6: Trust in leadership will partially mediate the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment.
**Hypothesis 7:** Trust in leadership will partially mediate the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment.

Military cultural identity has been found to accompany service members as they transition out of the military and into civilian life (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). As such, our nation's military veterans bring a unique culture of values and set of life experiences and perspectives with them to civilian federal agencies (Braender & Andersen, 2013; Demers, 2011). They possess both technical skills and the well-developed nontechnical skills that employers value. Skills such as "leadership, teamwork, team-building, critical thinking, and handling stress" can be a competitive advantage for veterans as many of their civilian colleagues of similar age have not received the same extensive, formal, hands-on training (Hardison et al., 2014, p.1). It was expected that veteran status would moderate the perception and impacts of organizational inclusion and human resource practices. Figure 1 illustrates the structural model of the theoretical framework and associated hypothesis of this study.

Hypothesis 8: Veteran status will moderate the effects of organizational inclusion and human resource practices on organizational commitment via trust in leadership.

Method

This quantitative, cross-sectional study used data from the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for analysis. The FEVS was a voluntary, web-based, self-administered survey designed to produce statistically reliable estimates of employees' perceptions about how effectively federal agencies are managing their workforces (U.S. OPM, 2015). Since 2002, the annual FEVS has served as the primary means and tool used to provide agencies with employee feedback in key areas that drive employee satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and ultimately, retention (U.S. OPM, 2015). The survey includes a total of 98 items, comprised of demographic questions and "84
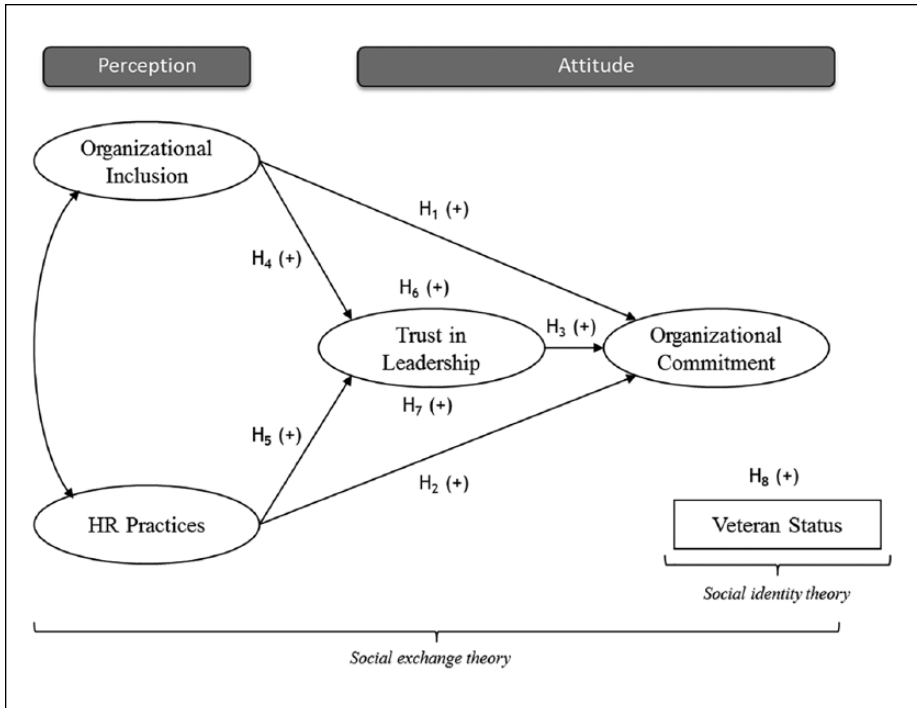
Figure 1. Theoretical structural model and hypothesis of the relationship between human resource practices, organizational inclusion, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment.
Note. HR = human resource.

items that measure federal employees' perception about how effectively agencies manage their workforce" (U.S. OPM, 2015, p. 25).

Study Subjects

The population for this study consisted of all 1,837,060 full-time, part-time, and permanent employees across 82 agencies of the executive branch of the federal government employed as of October 31, 2014. A graduated proportional sampling method was used by OPM—the agency that oversees all policy created to support federal human resources departments—to maximize the number of separate agency reports that could be generated while minimizing the size of the workforce being surveyed resulting in a sample of 848,237 employees. While 421,748 employees responded to the survey representing a response rate of 49.7% (U.S. OPM, 2015), after data cleaning the final sample was 206,321. These responses comprised 143,957 (70%) nonveterans and 62,364 (30%) veterans. Approximately 78% of veteran respondents were male while almost 43% of nonveterans were male. Females comprised nearly 20% of

the veteran population as opposed to 56% of the nonveteran population. Both veteran and nonveterans were distributed evenly between the three age groups of below 40 years, 40-59 years, and 60 years or older. The average age was older in veterans and more veterans were male. Minority status, highest degree or education level, intention to retire within 5 years, and supervisory status were also relatively equally distributed. More veterans reported having a disability; approximately 29% of veteran respondents reported having a disability as compared with 6% of nonveterans. Fewer veterans (62%) stated they were considering leaving their agency within the next year as compared with nonveterans (71%). However, of those veterans and nonveterans who expressed a consideration of leaving their agency within the next year, 23% and 15%, respectively, stated an intention to take another job within the federal government.

Data Collection

The 2015 FEVS was administered electronically in two waves over 6 weeks (U.S. OPM, 2015). The U.S. OPM invited sampled employees to participate and included instructions for accessing the survey. To improve response rates, weekly email reminders were sent to nonrespondents. Every email link to the survey was unique and could only be used once. OPM also provided agencies with sample communications and helped develop internal communication plans. The survey took approximately 20 to 25 min to complete.

The 2015 FEVS was not explicitly created for academic inquiry; however, researchers have used the data to produce numerous publications central to public management. Research variables for this study were measured using combinations of items from the FEVS dataset and indicate high levels of reliability; Cronbach's alpha greater than .70. Each variable was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*.

Measures

Organizational inclusion. U.S. OPM (2016) defined organizational inclusion as "a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging" (p. 6). This conceptual definition of organizational inclusion was used and operationalized using four items from the New Inclusion Quotient (New IQ) developed by the OPM. The New IQ is described as capturing behaviors that "repeated over time, form the habits that create the essential building blocks of an inclusive environment" (U.S. OPM, 2014, p. 10). Two sample items include: "Creativity and innovation are rewarded" and "Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (e.g., recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring)." The Cronbach's alpha for these four items was .836.

Human resource practices. Human resource practices were measured by combining a total of three items as derived from those used by Ko and Smith-Walker (2013) and Kim and Ko (2014) in their examination of the effect of employee perception of human

resource practices on knowledge sharing, trust, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, job involvement, and performance in public-sector organizations. These items assessed the commitment-focused human resource practices of training and development. Two sample items include: "My training needs are assessed" and "Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development." The Cronbach's alpha for these items was .833.

Trust in leadership. Trust as a concept and definition is complex. Some researchers have focused on trust in a direct leader while others have focused on trust in organizational leadership (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). For the purposes of this study, three items were combined to measure trust in leadership, specifically in the direct and organizational leader. Derived from the research of Kim and Ko (2014) and the FEVS Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (U.S. OPM, 2015), these items reflected a general, noncomprehensive, measure of trust. Two sample items from this scale: "Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by the manager directly above your immediate supervisor?" and "How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?." Cronbach's alpha for these questions was .853.

Organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured by combining three items as described by Moldogaziev and Siliva (2015). Organizational commitment was conceptualized as an employee being loyal to their organization without criticism and having the willingness to sacrifice for it (Caillier, 2013). Two sample items include "My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment" and "I like the kind of work I do." Cronbach's alpha for these questions was .805.

Veteran status. Veteran status was assessed by item 97 on the FEVS. This item consists of one question with four possible unique responses of no prior military service, currently in National Guard or Reserves, retired, or separated or discharged.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, the data were cleaned. Any case with missing data for the items measured in this study were removed resulting in 206,321 (49%) responses for analysis. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23) and Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS). Correlation and regression analysis were conducted to identify the direction, strength, and significance of relationships between the variables (Hayes, 2009). The major research questions in this study necessitated the use of structural equation modeling. Convergent and discriminant validity was examined by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Cronbach's alpha was calculated in SPSS for each of the scales used for each latent variable. All Cronbach alpha values were greater than .70 (Table 1). A correlation matrix summarizing the relationships between the variables was developed using SPSS (Table 1). All variables were positively correlated and significant at the .05

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables.

Variable	M	SD	Veterans (M)	Nonveterans (M)	OI	HR practices	T	OC
OI	14.379	3.591	14.267	14.428	**0.836**			
HR	10.941	2.987	10.778	11.011	0.784**	**0.833**		
T	10.482	3.071	10.390	10.522	0.778**	0.752**	**0.853**	
OC	11.888	2.610	11.775	11.937	0.669**	0.686**	0.685**	**0.805**

Note. Coefficient alpha reliability estimates are listed in bold on the diagonal. OI = organizational inclusion; T = trust in leadership; HR = human resource; OC = organizational commitment.
**$p < .01$.

Table 2. Collinearity Diagnostics.

Parameter	Tolerance	VIF
Organizational inclusion	0.303	3.297
HR practices	0.334	2.997
Trust in leadership	0.342	2.924

Note. Dependent variable: Organizational Commitment. VIF = variance inflation factor; HR = human resource.

level. Because there was no correlation more than .9, there was no evidence of potential multicollinearity among the indicators of each latent variable. Using variance inflation factor, the parameters in this study fell well below the common cutoff threshold of 10 as presented in Table 2 (Kleinbaum et al., 1998).

Results

Given the theoretical framework, a comparison of military veterans and nonveterans across all variables was necessary. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine significant differences. Results indicate a statistically significant difference in organizational inclusion, $F(1, 206319) = 86.142, p < .01$, human resource practices, $F(1, 206319) = 266.276, p < .01$, trust in leadership, $F(1, 206319) = 80.216, p < .01$, and organizational commitment, $F(1, 206319) = 167.635, p < .01$, between veterans and nonveterans. As shown in Table 1, veterans had lower mean values across all study variables.

Measurement Model Analysis

CFA. Together, CFA (Somers, 2017) and maximum likelihood were used to evaluate the overall model fit and to assess convergent and discriminate validity. To verify the discriminate validity of the conceptual framework, a series of CFA was performed. As presented in Table 3, multiple fit indices were used to assess model fit. Results indicated that Model D, the four-factor hypothesized model, fit the data best, $\chi^2(174, N =$

Table 3. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Models	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	SRMR
Model A: One factor	401843.841**	195	—	0.071	0.888	0.887	0.0520
Model B: Two factor	364395.514**	192	37448.327*	0.068	0.898	0.898	0.0495
Model C: Three factor	307794.717**	186	56600.797*	0.063	0.914	0.914	0.0468
Model D: Four factor	242982.988**	174	64811.729*	0.058	0.932	0.932	0.0419

Note. N = 206,321; Model A refers to a one-factor model where all constructs load to the same factor. Model B refers to a two-factor measurement model consisting of inclusion and human resources as one factor and trust and commitment as the other factor. Model C refers to a three-factor measurement model consisting of organizational inclusion and human resource practices as a combined latent factor, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment. Model D refers to the hypothesized model containing the four latent variables of organizational inclusion, human resource practices, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment. Model D is the best fit among the four models. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Table 4. Standardized Direct, Indirect, Total Effects.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
T ← OI	0.769	0.013	0.769**	—	0.769**
OC ← OI	0.042	0.029	0.042*	0.292**	0.334**
T ← HR practices	0.159	0.012	0.159**	—	0.159**
OC ← HR practices	0.487	0.007	0.487**	0.061*	0.547**
OC ← T	0.380	0.004	0.380**	—	0.380**

Note. Significance of indirect effect computed using bootstrapping bias-corrected percentile method in AMOS. OI = organizational inclusion; — = not applicable; T = trust in leadership; HR = human resource; OC = organizational commitment; AMOS = Analysis of a Moment Structures.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

206,321) = 242982.988, $p < .01$, root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.932, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.932, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.0419. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) indicated that items loading significantly on their underlying construct indicate convergent validity.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the first hypotheses, results from the structural equation model were examined. As shown in Table 4 and summarized in Table 5, results showed a significant positive relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment ($b = .042$; $p < .05$); therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 was also supported, as results showed a significant positive relationship between human

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results of the Hypothesized Model.

Hypothesis	Path	Proposed effect	Result
H1	Organizational Commitment ← Organizational Inclusion	+	+*
H2	Organizational Commitment ← HR Practices	+	+**
H3	Organizational Commitment ← Trust in Leadership	+	+**
H4	Trust in Leadership ← Organizational Inclusion	+	+**
H5	Trust in Leadership ← HR Practices	+	+**

Note. + indicates a positive relationship. HR = human resource.
* $p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

resource practices and organizational commitment ($b = .487; p < .01$). Results showed a significant positive relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment ($b = .380; p < .01$) and thus Hypothesis 3 was supported. Hypothesis 4 was supported, as results showed a significant positive relationship between organizational inclusion and trust in leadership ($b = .769; p < .01$). Hypothesis 5 was supported as results showed a significant positive relationship between human resource practices and trust in leadership ($b = .159; p < .01$). Table 5 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing for Hypotheses 1 through 5.

Mediation

The mediating effects of trust in leadership was tested using bootstrapping procedures in AMOS. As expected, Hypothesis 6 was supported. As shown in Table 4, the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment was partially mediated by trust in leadership. The direct and the indirect effects of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment were significant. The standardized regression coefficient between organizational inclusion and trust in leadership was statistically significant ($b = .769; p < .01$) as was the standardized regression coefficient between trust in leadership and organizational commitment ($b = .380; p < .01$).

There was a significant direct effect of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment absent of trust that was reduced but it remained significant when trust was added to the model. This indicated partial mediation and supported Hypothesis 6. The small significantly positive direct effect of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment ($b = .042; p < .05$) increased to a total effect of $b = .334; p < .01$ when trust in leadership was included as a mediator. In addition, the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment was partially mediated by trust in leadership, as expected. Hypothesis 7 was supported. As shown in Table 4, the standardized regression coefficient between human resource practices and trust in leadership was statistically significant ($b = .487; p < .01$), as was the standardized regression coefficient between

Table 6. Mediation Analysis by Veteran Status (Standardized Coefficients).

Hypothesis	Direct without mediator	Indirect effect	Result
H_6: OC ← T ← OI (*Veterans*)	0.301**	0.052*	Partial mediation
H_6: OC ← T ← OI (*Nonveterans*)	0.193**	0.033*	Partial mediation
H_7: OC ← T ← HR Practices (*Veterans*)	0.587**	0.457**	Partial mediation
H_7: OC ← T ← HR Practices (*Nonveterans*)	0.656**	0.500**	Partial mediation

Note. Significance of indirect effect computed using bootstrapping bias-corrected percentile method in AMOS. OI = organizational inclusion; T = trust in leadership; HR = human resource; OC = organizational commitment; AMOS = Analysis of a Moment Structures.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

**Table 7.** Path-by-Path Analysis of Chi-Square (χ^2) and Chi-Square Difference ($\Delta\chi^2$).

Path-by-path analysis	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Significance of difference between groups ($p \leq .05$)
T ← OI	148572.504	119	6.238	Significant
OC ← OI	148566.510	119	0.244	Not significant
T ← HR Practices	148570.911	119	4.645	Significant
OC ← HR Practices	148583.746	119	17.48	Significant
OC ← T	148567.176	119	0.91	Not significant

Note. OI = organizational inclusion; T = trust in leadership; HR = human resource; OC = organizational commitment.

trust in leadership and organizational commitment ($b = .380$; $p < .01$). Table 6 summarizes the mediation analysis results.

Moderation

To examine potential differences between veterans and nonveterans, path-by-path analysis and multigroup moderation were conducted. If the chi-square for a specific path was more than the threshold for the 95% confidence interval of 148570.11 (χ^2), *df* of 119, then there was significant difference between the models for veterans and nonveterans. Results of the path-by-path analysis are presented in Table 7. To test for multigroup moderation, the model was drawn to consist of two groups: nonveterans, or unconstrained model ($\chi^2 = 148566.266$, *df* = 118), and veterans, or fully constrained model ($\chi^2 = 148889.957$, *df* = 132). The difference between these models was found to be significant ($p < .01$). This indicated that the model was different between veterans and nonveterans, which supported Hypothesis 8. Multigroup moderation showed a significant difference in the model based on veteran status. Therefore, the impact of veteran status on each relationship in the model was examined using path-by-path
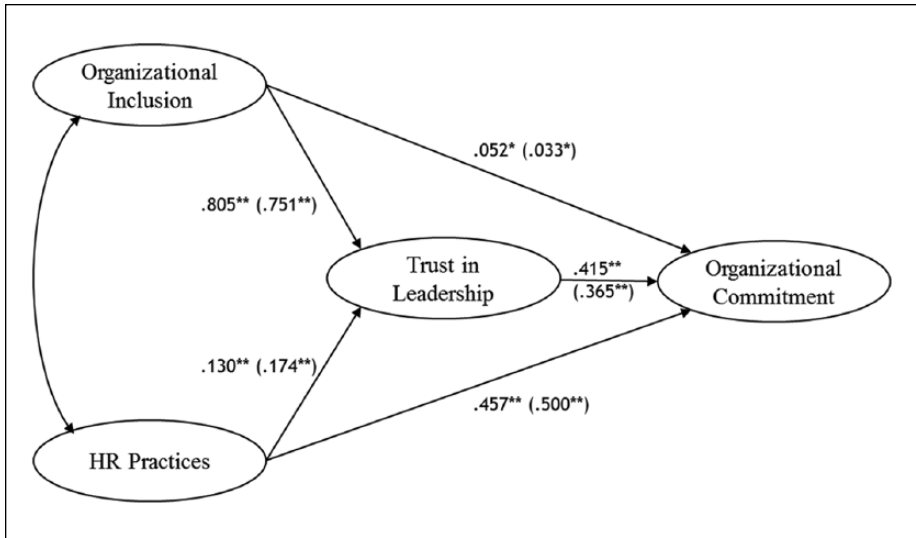
Figure 2. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between organizational inclusion, human resource practices, and organizational commitment as mediated by trust in leadership among veterans.
Note. The standardized regression coefficients for nonveterans are in parenthesis. HR = human resource.

analysis. Standardized regression coefficients for both military veterans and nonveterans are shown in Figure 2.

There was a significant difference between groups in the effect of organizational inclusion on trust in leadership ($\chi^2 = 148572.504$, $df = 119$). Therefore, veteran status moderated the relationship between organizational inclusion and trust in leadership. Organizational inclusion had a bigger positive impact on trust in veterans ($b = .805$; $p < .01$) as opposed to nonveterans ($b = .751$; $p < .01$). There was no significant difference between groups in the effect of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment ($\chi^2 = 148566.510$, $df = 119$). Therefore, veteran status did not moderate the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment. There was a significant difference between groups in the effect of human resource practices on organizational commitment ($\chi^2 = 148583.746$, $df = 119$). Therefore, veteran status moderated the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment. Human resource practices had a smaller positive impact on organizational commitment in veterans ($b = .457$; $p < .01$) than in nonveterans ($b = .500$; $p < .01$). There was a significant difference between groups in the effect of human resource practices on trust ($\chi^2 = 148570.911$, $df = 119$). Therefore, veteran status did not moderate the relationship between human resource practices and trust in leadership. Human resource practices had a smaller positive impact on trust in veterans ($b = .130$; $p < .01$) as compared with nonveterans ($b = .174$; $p < .01$).

There was no significant difference between groups in the effect of trust in leadership on organizational commitment ($\chi^2 = 148567.176$, *df* = 119). Therefore, veteran status did not moderate the relationship between trust in leadership and organizational commitment.

Discussion

The U.S Armed Forces have a long history of diversity efforts (Moskos, 2007; Segal & Segal, 2004) and military veterans may view diversity and inclusion through the lens of their military service. It is unclear whether the rank structure and regimented discipline of those in the military fosters a level of inclusiveness different from that in the federal civilian workforce. The results in this study indicate that veterans had lower mean scores across all study variables in the study (organizational inclusion, human resource practices, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment) as compared with nonveterans. These findings were both surprising and informative. The consistency in veterans as a group viewing the study variables differently from nonveterans appears to substantiate the use of the social identity theory as a framework for investigating veteran status as a moderator in this study. However, lower mean values across all variables for military veterans were unexpected. While there are several factors that may affect an individual's perception of organizational factors, it may be that military veterans have higher expectations of how individuals and organizations should make diverse groups feel included and how human resource practices should be instituted.

The results of this study point to a potential difference in vantage point between veterans and nonveterans. If organizational inclusion efforts are focused on specific groups, then consistent with social identity theory, that group will interpret those efforts through the lens of their group affiliation. That also means their perception is influenced by how the organizational inclusion and human resource efforts are impacting their specific group. Groups that may already feel included or to whom organizational inclusion efforts are not specifically targeted may look to how others are impacted by such efforts to shape their own perception of organizational inclusion and human resource efforts. Their perceptions may reflect how they think these efforts are impacting others instead of their own group. This may lead to a tendency for nonveterans to think more highly of those efforts because it is an evaluation of how another group is being impacted instead of their own. It should also be mentioned that while it was unexpected that veterans would have mean scores across all variables that were lower than nonveterans, the relationships between the variables were positive and moderated by veteran status.

Veterans may also have higher expectations when it comes to the attitudes of trust in leadership and organizational commitment. These are two important values and attitudes of military culture that military scholars have long understood play a central role in the military and military culture (Adams et al., 2004). Committed individuals are needed to ensure mission readiness and perseverance toward success (Allen, 2003). Members of the military must be able to trust their supervisors,

other personnel, and the orders they receive (Adams & Webb, 2002). Trust within military units has been associated with team cohesion, morale, and performance (Siebold, 2007; Skelton, 1999). A sense of military cultural identity can accompany individuals as they transition out of the military and into civilian life (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Therefore, trust and commitment may be important to veterans in their civilian life.

Organizational Inclusion, Human Resource Practices, and Organizational Commitment

The finding that organizational inclusion and human resource practices had significant positive impacts on organizational commitment was consistent with prior research (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Gould-Williams, 2004; Whitener, 2001). While positive and significant, the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment was not moderated by veteran status; however, the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment was moderated by veteran status. Organizational inclusion is a nascent concept, and this study adds to the existing literature by investigating the relationship between this variable and organizational outcomes in a population not yet considered. The finding, however, that veteran status did not moderate the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment was surprising. It was expected that military veterans, a group that is the target of organizational inclusion efforts, would perceive these efforts more favorably, which would result in greater organizational commitment than in nonveterans. This contrary finding may be due to the measurement of organizational commitment in this study. The scale used to measure organizational commitment in this study is described by Moldogaziev and Siliva (2015) as representative of affective commitment. Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It may be that organizational inclusion has a greater direct effect on normative commitment (feelings of obligation to remain in the organization) or continuance commitment (commitment based on cost associated with leaving the organization).

Organizational Inclusion, Human Resource Practices, and Trust in Leadership

The results finding that human resource practices had a significant positive impact on trust in leadership was consistent with previous research by Gould-Williams (2003), which found that human resource practices signal to employees that the organization values and cares for employees and positively impacts employee trust. Federal agencies have instituted several programs and initiatives designed to hire and retain military veterans and to make their organizations inclusive to their diverse populations. It was expected that these efforts would be reflected in outcomes associated with the veteran population. The results of this study add to the existing literature by showing

support for the positive relationship between human resource practices on trust among military veteran employees in large public agencies.

This study found veteran status to moderate the relationship between organizational inclusion and trust in leadership as well as the relationship between human resource practices and trust in leadership. It was expected that the results would show, as they did, that the impact of organizational inclusion on trust in leadership would be greater in veterans due to the important role trust plays in military culture. These findings suggest that favorable perceptions of organizational inclusion have a strong positive influence on the trust in leadership held by employees in federal agencies in general and by military veterans specifically.

Trust in Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Because trust is essential to the development of relationships between individuals and within organizations, the expectation was that there would be a positive relationship between trust in leadership and organizational commitment. Military veterans reported lower levels of trust in leadership as compared with nonveterans. However, the impact of trust in leadership upon organizational commitment did not differ between veterans and nonveterans.

Previous studies have firmly established organizational commitment as a consequence of trust in organizational relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ruppel & Harrington, 2000; Wong & Sohal, 2002). The findings in this study are consistent with these previous studies and support the prior work that established a link between trust and commitment in public agencies. Previous research has also shown trust to be an important aspect of military life, so it was expected that trust would play a greater role in impacting organizational commitment among veterans. While the impact of trust in leadership on organizational commitment was not moderated by veteran status, results show that trust in leadership played a role in positively influencing the organizational commitment of employees in federal agencies. Nevertheless, these findings that veteran status did not moderate the relationship between trust in leadership on organizational commitment may indicate that regardless of the factors that influence trust, once trust in leadership is established it is equally important in influencing organizational commitment among employees.

Trust in Leadership as an Intervening Variable

Organizational commitment has been firmly established as a consequence of trust in organizational relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ruppel & Harrington, 2000; Wong & Sohal, 2002); however, trust as a mediator between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment had gone unexplored prior to this study. The findings of this study go beyond what other studies have done and show that the relationship between organizational inclusion and organizational commitment is not necessarily a strong direct one. This is not, however, an indication that the importance of organizational inclusion should be ignored. None of the research on public agencies that was

identified as part of this study investigated the impact of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment in military veterans. Moreover, organizational inclusion as conceptualized in this study has not been extensively studied as an organizational factor in research related to employee attitudes and work-related outcomes.

The positive statistically significant impact of organizational inclusion on organizational commitment identified among military veterans in this study is consistent with research that has found public sector employee's perception of organizational inclusion was positively related to and predicts their affective commitment (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). Given that this study found that greater perceptions of organizational inclusion lead to greater organizational commitment among military veterans, federal agencies should continue efforts to create and promote inclusive workplaces. It becomes important to understand how organizational inclusion works to impact organizational commitment. The results suggest organizational inclusion leads to trust which in turn leads to organizational commitment. These findings suggest that organizational inclusion is important to organizational commitment and acts indirectly through trust in leadership. Furthermore, both human resource practices and trust in leadership played an important role in influencing organizational commitment of employees. Although partial mediation existed the contribution of trust in leadership to the relationship between human resource practices and organizational commitment was small.

Implications

This study showed that the nascent area of organizational inclusion and the long-standing area of human resource practices influence trust in leadership and organizational commitment among military veterans. The hypothesized model, however, is likely missing other important causal elements impacting the trust in leadership and organizational commitment of military veterans. As such, there are several opportunities for future research including the replication of this research investigating whether there is a within-group difference among veterans based on gender, disability, and agency, a qualitative study to understand how military veterans and nonveterans recognize and perceive organizational inclusion efforts and HR practices in their respective agencies, and an examination of the relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intention, with differentiation between intention to leave the agency and the Federal Government.

These findings provide valuable insight into how perceptions of organizational efforts may be influenced, and vary in their impact on attitudes, based on group affiliation. Given that employee commitment impacts productivity and turnover (Gould-Williams, 2004; Pitts et al., 2011), understanding that the impact of organizational inclusion, human resource practices, and trust in leadership on organizational commitment varies between veterans and nonveterans is important to agency recruitment goals and mission. Federal agencies are at the forefront of instituting initiatives, human resource practices, and incentives that promote the hiring, training, contribution, and commitment of military veterans (Hardison et al., 2014; OCJCS, 2014). Federal

agencies can use this information to develop and maintain more targeted policies and programs that support and promote trust and commitment among federal employees. Leaders in federal agencies can use the results of this study to develop and maintain more targeted inclusion and human resource policies and programs that support and promote the commitment of military veterans. Leaders within federal agencies must learn and implement appropriate strategies for instituting policies and practices that account for the varied perspectives of diverse groups as well as individuals. Agencies who fail in balancing self-interest with existing perspectives and concerns of military veteran employees might find themselves unable to maximize the contribution and commitment of this increasingly significant demographic.

Study Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be considered. First, this study used a secondary data set that used self-reported data which could lead to common method bias. Second, the original survey instrument was not designed to measure the variables in this study. As such, the multi-item scales used to conceptualize the variables were not comprehensive and represent only a general, noncomprehensive, measure of the constructs, which could impact the robustness of the theoretical framework. Third, as a cross-sectional design data from the 2015 survey represented responses at one point in time and makes determination of temporal relationships difficult. Finally, this study looked at employees and military veterans in federal agencies; the findings may not translate to state or local public agencies or even private organizations. However, the results may still find wide applicability, as they show that veteran employees perceptions of organizational efforts and policies differ from nonveteran employees.

Conclusion

The U.S. government stands as the nation's largest employer and has touted an effort to be a model employer in regard to the diversity and inclusion of its workforce (U.S. OPM, 2011). In fact, existing federal law requires agencies within the executive branch of government to strive for diversity within the workforce. This study is the first to investigate the relationship between organizational inclusion, human resource practices, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment among military veterans. The results showed support for organizational efforts designed to improve human resource practices and organizational inclusion to support the organizational commitment of both military veterans and nonveterans in federal agencies. The results of this study expand our understanding of how human resource practices and inclusion efforts impact the trust in leadership and organizational commitment of military veterans and nonveterans in federal agencies. This is of particular significance because military veterans currently comprise a significant proportion of the civilian federal workforce and are expected to increase over the next 5 years.

Widely studied, organizational commitment has been found to be positively related to work performance and effectiveness as well as negatively related to turnover

intention (Kim, 2005; Loke, 2001). The research findings suggest that organizational efforts toward a more inclusive work environment and human resource practices contribute to the trust in leadership and organizational commitment held by military veteran employees. The results also suggest that organizational actions and policies surrounding inclusion and human resource practices can be viewed differently by various groups and vary in the degree to which they may impact the desirable outcomes of trust in leadership and organizational commitment. Such information becomes important to sustaining a diverse workforce that is representative of this growing population of employees.

Limited research has shown organizational inclusion to positively impact organizational commitment. The findings of this study add to previous research by showing that both human resource practices and organizational inclusion positively impact organizational commitment among military veteran employees in public agencies. Furthermore, we add to the existing body of knowledge with the finding that human resource practices have more influence on organizational commitment than does organizational inclusion. Moreover, trust was shown to be a mediator in the effect that both organizational inclusion and human resource practices had on organizational commitment. This study also contributes to the organizational literature by expanding our current application of both social identity theory and social exchange theory to the areas of organizational inclusion and organizational commitment among the military veteran employee population.

Authors' Note

This article is an excerpt from Girvin Liggans' Doctoral Thesis.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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