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Lawrence Technological University  
College of Management

A Mixed Methods Study on the Relationship among  
Strategic Human Resource Practices, SOAR, and Affective  
Commitment in the Federal Workplace

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Valerie Low DeVries



2016

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# LAWRENCE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

## A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG STRATEGIC HR PRACTICES, SOAR, AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT IN THE FEDERAL WORKPLACE.

by

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Dissertation Submitted to the

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## Abstract

Employees who remain with an organization because they *want* to, represent a positive organizational phenomenon known as affective commitment (AC). The purpose of this study is to investigate the predictive ability of strategic Human Resource (HR) practices to create AC in the context of federal knowledge workers, determine the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and the effect of AC on positive behavioral outcomes. SOAR stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results.

This mixed methods study explored the relationship among strategic HR practices, SOAR, AC, and behavioral outcomes. Data were gathered using a survey instrument containing 42 items. The population was federal knowledge workers in a science and technology field. 204 participants completed the study survey and a final sample of  $N = 188$  surveys were used for analysis.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics; qualitative analysis included thematic analysis. Results from the quantitative analysis suggested that strategic HR practices predict AC; the SOAR construct is a partial mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC; SOAR did not function as a moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC; and AC encourages the development of positive behavioral outcomes. Results from the qualitative thematic analysis suggested that there are seven prominent themes that sustain commitment in this federal organization and they are: accountability, career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission, reward/recognition, and training.

For federal organizations similar to this one, it is recommended that they engage the SOAR approach to increase the effectiveness of strategic HR practices in generating

AC; implement strategic HR practices that encompass the seven major themes; a positive proactive way of viewing employee commitment by cultivating AC as opposed to studying turnover trends; and engage in conversations about strategic change using dialogical methods based on appreciative inquiry. Future research could include studies on how the federal government communicates strategic HR practices to their employees and whether or not they choose to adopt dialogical versus diagnostic approaches.

## **Dedication**

To God for being my strength.

To my husband, Jerry for your constant love and logic.

To my children, Joshua and Jenna for all their laughs and hugs on this journey.

.

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A lifetime of thanks to my Mom and Dad, Au-Yong and Pooi Mun, for instilling a love for learning and constant emphasis on the importance of a good education. Thanks Mom, for all my Tuesday phone calls. To my in-laws, Fred and Jeannette, your Christian faith, love, encouragement, and strong family values, are what I have come to rely on.

To my Cohort 8 colleagues, it has been my privilege to embark on this journey with such worthy minds. Especially to Lori and Lihua, with whom I will always share a special friendship, thank you for companionable conversations and lengthy emails that commiserated our parallel battles to stand on the shoulders of giants.

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Thank you to the College of Management for offering a relevant practitioner-centric and academically intense doctoral program with a focus on combining theory and practice.

To my children, Joshua and Jenna who always knew just when to ask, "Mom, do you need a hug?". May you always have an opportunity to dream big and just remember, no matter how far you roam, you can always come home. I love you both.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Organizational commitment (OC), defined as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226), has been studied for the last four decades and scholars have published extensively on this topic. OC binds an individual to an organization and can possibly reduce the likelihood of turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991). Within the broad umbrella of the multidimensional construct called “commitment”, many scholars have defined or measured it in the workplace (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Meyer and Allen developed a multidimensional construct that identified three components of OC, to include, affective (AC), normative (NC), and continuance commitment (CC) (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984, 1991). AC represents the mindset of employees who are committed to stay because they want to, NC represents the mindset of employees who are committed because they ought to, and CC represents the mindset of employees who stay because they need to. This dissertation is focused on AC, which is defined as the emotional attachment that is characterized by an acceptance of the organization’s predominant culture and primary values (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). AC is easily recognizable and is the most desirable form of commitment that organizations seek to have in their employees because there are positive behavioral outcomes, such as low levels of worker intention to quit (Wasti, 2005), which organizations want to cultivate in their employees. As such, organizations are interested in finding ways to build AC in their employees so that they can benefit from the associated positive behavioral outcomes.

AC is the most widely accepted and easily identifiable component of OC (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is also the most constant and strongest predictor of positive organizational behavioral outcomes such as decreased turnover (Wasti, 2005), work engagement (Rothbard & Patil, 2012), job satisfaction (Eby, Freeman, Rush, & Lance, 1999), loyalty (Hom et al., 2009), and dedication (Lo, Ramayah, Min, & Songan, 2010). Behavioral outcomes such as these are a part of the cause and effect relationship of commitment models (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Published literature on AC has addressed some of the putative causes or antecedents (Faisal & Al-Esmael, 2014; Lok & Crawford, 2001; Steers, 1977). An antecedent is an action, occurrence, thought, or emotion that precedes the existence of an attitude or behavior. One such antecedent of AC, strategic Human Resource (HR) practices, was studied in this dissertation. Such practices have been shown to affect employee behavior and influence behavioral reactions (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Strategic HR practices in particular can give the feeling that the employee is valued and this in turn may engender AC (Lee & Corbett, 2009).

Related to AC and strategic HR concepts is the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), which studies desirable aspects of the human condition or factors that cause the “best of the human condition” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 3). SOAR which stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009), is a framework that has foundations in POS. POS is one way in which organizations can focus on what they are doing right, and what strengths could be enhanced. “SOAR focuses on the formulation and implementation of strategy through a POS lens by identifying and building strengths, feeding creativity in the form of

opportunities, encouraging individuals and groups to share aspirations, and determining results (Stavros & Wooten, 2012, p. 826). SOAR, may be helpful in explaining the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC mindset as mediating variable. SOAR may also have an effect on the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC mindset as a moderating variable. The main interest of this study is to investigate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. Additionally, by investigating the role that SOAR plays as a mediator or moderator, this study makes a connection with the field of POS since both SOAR and AC share the common objective of achieving positive behavioral outcomes.

This dissertation explored AC in the context of strategic HR practices and determined the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The long-term goal of the study is to provide an understanding of behavioral outcomes, which develop as a result of AC, such as increased intention to stay or low turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. The population for this study consisted of federal government knowledge workers in the science and technology field.

## **Background**

The first step in understanding the concept of AC is to explore the evolution of the larger construct, OC. Commitment is something that organizations value in their employees because there are many positive benefits that come out of it, such as, decreased turnover (or increased intention to stay), engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. Commitment is “a force that binds an individual to a course of action relevant to one or more targets” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 308). As a mindset, commitment has the potential to impact behavioral outcomes.

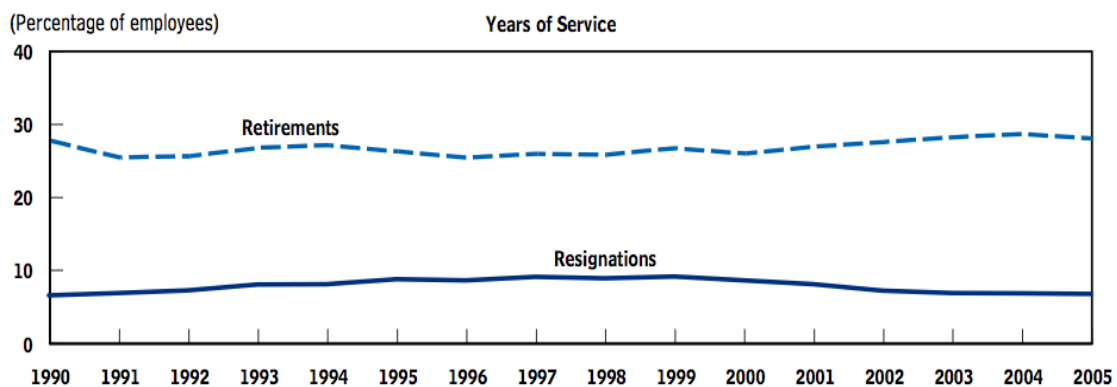
The three components in the multidimensional construct of commitment developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) are affective commitment (AC), normative commitment (NC), and continuance commitment (CC). This dissertation is focused on AC. Of the three components of organizational commitment, AC, has the largest body of research and has been found repeatedly in different contexts to have a correlation to organizational behavioral outcomes whether as a direct influencing factor (Joarder, Sharif, & Ahmmed, 2011; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009) or as a factor which contributes a mediating effect between variables (Galletta, Portoghese, & Battistelli, 2011).

When something incurs a cost to an organization, regardless of whether that cost happens to be tangible or intangible (attitudinal and/or cognitive), organizations are interested in being able to influence the trajectory of cost (McElroy, Morrow, & Rude, 2001). One long-term goal that organizations should be concerned with is turnover because it is relevant to the bottom line. Strategic HR practices, which encompass a concept known as high-commitment HR practices, have significant positive effects on worker attitudes, commitment, and satisfaction, and are negatively correlated to worker intention to quit (Gould-Williams, 2004). Research has also suggested that there are loyalty-inducing effects found in high-commitment HR practices (Hom et al., 2009).

In Boyer's (1990) book, *Scholarship Reconsidered – Priorities of the Professoriate*, he discusses the *scholarship of integration*. Boyer encouraged a collaboration of theory and practice by linking real-world problems to theoretical solutions and perpetuating the interdependent cycle of exploration and solution. One such opportunity to study an organizational phenomenon presented itself in the form of a

study commissioned by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO, 2007) on the characteristics of federal civilian employees.

An observable organizational phenomenon was mentioned in the Merit Compensation Board study, which was commissioned by the CBO. In the 2007 study, it was observed that a certain population of all federal employees resigned between 4.4 to 8 years of service. Following the eight-year length of service, the next most observable pattern distinguishing when all employees leave service is during retirement (Figure 1.1). “Employees who resigned were more likely than the average full-time permanent federal employee to hold a graduate degree” (CBO, 2007, p. 8).



*Figure 1.1.* Full time employees in all occupational categories who voluntarily resigned or retired. From “Characteristics and Pay of Federal Civilian Employees,” by the Congressional Budget Office, 2007. *CBO Publication number: 18433.* p.8.

Within the CBO study, there was no further elaboration into the cause of such midcareer resignations. There have been no other studies since 2007 commissioned by the CBO or Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which address or elaborate on this phenomenon. In the absence of an explanation or more research published by the US government, there is opportunity for future research in the area of commitment. The

CBO study cites a statistic for resignations (or turnover) but in reality, a vast number of federal employees are committed and stay with the organization for the full extent of their professional careers. The research in this dissertation studied AC mindsets in the federal government, specifically in a population of knowledge workers.

This dissertation is concerned with how strategic HR practices can act as antecedents that build AC. Both strategic HR practices and SOAR have the potential to build AC, and it is the interrelationship among these three constructs that is of great interest. Therefore, SOAR is important to this study because the SOAR framework focuses on what an organization is doing right and what strengths, opportunities, individual or group aspirations can be enhanced, all of which can be supported by meaningful measurable results (Stavros, 2013). The research in this dissertation utilized the SOAR framework to assess participants' mindset regarding strengths found in strategic HR practices.

Research or literature on government workers falls under the broader context of public administration. Public administration literature consists of works published concerning research conducted in schools, hospitals, state, city, federal organizations, or agencies, which are funded by public taxpayer dollars. In an examination of literature published over the last 10 years, there have only been five significant studies (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Lavigna, 2012; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Tang, Cunningham, Frauman, Ivy, & Perry, 2012; Ting & Grant, 2010) involving OC in public administration. Among the five, only two (Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Tang et al., 2012) were related to the federal government. These studies will be described further in the literature review. This shortage of studies involving OC in public administration

provides a compelling reason to focus on this population (workers in the federal government). The gap in knowledge concerning OC and turnover, and dearth of publications in (federal) public administration, is even more evident with regard to AC.

### **Problem Statement**

The term “turnover” is the willful act or actual behavior of leaving employment with a firm. It is a discontinuation of employment, whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Joarder et al., 2011). Turnover can result in loss of knowledge, financial costs associated with hiring a replacement, and loss of productivity. The current literature on turnover shows that turnover is costly and requires focus because people are an organization’s most important asset. Organizations invest time and resources in attracting, recruiting, and retaining talent whereas turnover ends that relationship and incurs both tangible and intangible costs (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). Turnover is important to organizations because it is relevant to the bottom line. Instead of studying turnover, which focuses on the effects to the organization after the employee leaves, it may be more beneficial to study the positive effects of commitment attitudes during the time proceeding turnover. In prevailing research, it is believed that commitment binds an individual to an organization, thereby reducing the likelihood of turnover (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) and the associated costs. While commitment is not necessarily the antithesis to turnover, it can foster an opposite behavioral outcome to turnover, which is an increased intention to stay.

A positive lens centers on life-giving fundamentals or generative processes associated with a phenomena (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Adopting a POS lens means that there is a “commemoration of successes and a spotlight on life-giving elements or

generative ideas associated with a particular organizational phenomenon” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p.2). Viewing the phenomenon of AC among federal workers through a positive lens can help in the construction of recommendations for future action because the organization can have a clear definition of what is working versus what the problems are. Solutions can be built on top of pre-existing positive perceptions of commitment.

Within the field of POS are appreciative inquiry (AI) and SOAR. AI and SOAR are part of a growing field of research, which focuses attention on the positive behavior in organizations that lead to the development of human strengths and seeks to understand, through scholarly research and theory, the best of human condition (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). AI is based on social construction assumptions with a commitment to continuous inquiry and attention to values-based organization design (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). By asking questions in a positive light and framing the idea of intervention as inquiry, there are more immediate and dramatic results when questions are asked in a positive light versus a negative emphasis (Ludema et al., 2003). SOAR, which stands for *strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results*, incorporates the foundations of AI and is meant to be a positive view towards strategic thinking, planning, leading, and ultimately, change. The SOAR framework is based on AI principles and harnesses the power of positive, generative conversations to help employees envision what possibilities are ahead. Strategic HR practices focus on building strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results in an organization and in a similar way, SOAR uses strengths (S) to transform organizations by giving “life energy to the organizations’ future” (Stavros, Cooperrider, & Kelley, 2003, p. 377), opportunities (O) that “move into the realm of locating possibilities” (Stavros & Wooten, 2012, p. 830), aspirations (A) that

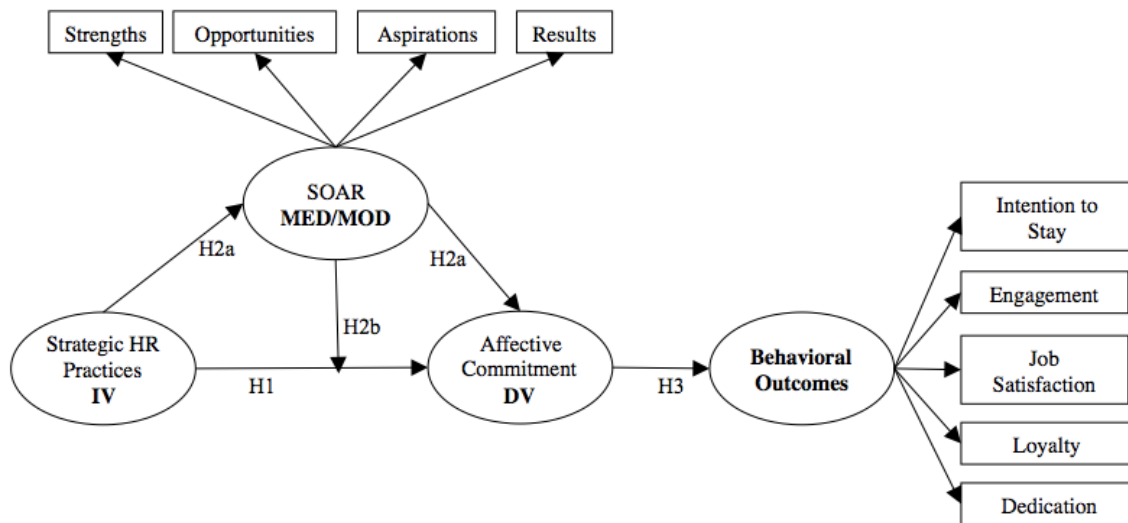
represent how organizations or individuals “envision the future and the roadmap for creating this envisioned future” (p. 832), and results (R) which are a meaningful measure of success. Both strategic HR practices and SOAR (as a moderator) have the potential to build AC, and it is the interrelationship between these three constructs that is of great interest. In addition, SOAR (as a mediator) may be a helpful construct for understanding how strategic HR practices impact AC.

In any organization there is a subset of employees who are committed to remaining with the organization, and the organization would be best served to understand why this subset of employees remains committed to the organization. Research on the relationship between OC and turnover suggests that the emotional characteristics of commitment, referred to as AC, play a prominent role in turnover. Consequently, organizations should be concerned with the likely causes or antecedents of employee AC. One potential antecedent of AC that organizations should explore is their strategic HR practices. This dissertation investigated the effect that an organization's strategic HR practices have on employee AC. Furthermore, to help characterize one of the ways in which strategic HR practices may have a positive impact on AC, SOAR was explored in this dissertation as a framework for translating strategic HR practices into AC for federal employees.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the predictive ability of strategic HR practices to create AC in the context of federal knowledge workers, determine the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and explore the effect of AC on behavioral outcomes such as increased intention to stay (or decreased turnover),

engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. Figure 1.2 presents the hypothetical model for the study. In this model, the IV, strategic HR Practices, is hypothesized to impact the DV, Affective Commitment (AC). The model also considers SOAR as a mediator/moderator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The goal is to understand employee intention to stay (decreased turnover), engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, dedication, and other similar positive benefits associated with AC.



*Figure 1.2.* Conceptual framework with hypotheses showing the mediator-moderator effect of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices, AC, and behavioral outcomes.

**Research questions.** The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?
2. What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?
3. What is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes?
4. How do strategic HR practices build AC?

**Research hypothesis.** Research questions one, two, and three were addressed using a quantitative methodology in which four hypotheses were tested; a qualitative approach probed research question three and four using open-ended questions in the survey instrument.

H1: Strategic HR practices predict AC.

H2a (mediation alternative): SOAR serves to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR)

H2b (moderation alternative): SOAR moderates the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices are greater when SOAR elements are present).

H3: AC has an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study filled an existing void in literature on public administration. Even though OC is a mature construct, it is not something that has received a lot of attention from scholars in public administration. Even less has been published with regard to federal workers and commitment. Connecting new scholarly research in public administration with a well-developed construct like AC enhances understanding and reaffirms the application of known concepts in untested environments.

This study also contributes to the discipline of POS through the discovery of links between constructs such as AC and SOAR. Findings contribute to the continued development of POS. In organizational behavior literature, strategic HR practices, which

include high-commitment HR practices, have been shown to draw out positive work-related attitudes (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005), and there were positive associations linked to the employee's perceptions of high-commitment HR practices. Connecting ideas and reaching across fields of study to do so adds to the significance of scholarly work (Boyer, 1990).

In addition to this, when Boyer introduced the *scholarship of application*, he asked the question, "How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?" (Boyer, 1990, p. 21). He defined this as *scholarly service* in which theory and practice interact and renew one another by proving its worth through service to the nation and the world. Application of scholarly research is one way to further the application of knowledge and avoid irrelevance by moving from theory into the more authentic practical and purposeful use of knowledge (Boyer, 1996). This dissertation represents an opportunity to understand AC within a consequential environment through the use of the SOAR framework. By doing so, this study can further the application of knowledge and establish bridges between theory and practice.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This study utilized a mixed methods approach to explore the relationship among strategic HR practices, SOAR, AC, and behavioral outcomes. Analysis for this research used quantitative hypothesis testing to investigate strategic HR practices as a potential predictor of AC, SOAR as a potential mediator/moderator of the relationship between HR practices and AC, and strategic HR practices and AC as potential predictors of various behavioral outcomes (see H1, H2a/H2b, and H3, respectively, in Figure 1.2). Additionally, qualitative methodology was used to investigate how strategic HR practices

impact AC, as well as investigate how behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication are impacted by the relationship among strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR.

The population for this study was federal knowledge workers in a science and technology environment because as noted in a 2007 study conducted by the Congressional Budget Office, permanent federal employees who hold a graduate degree are more likely to voluntarily resign. Since federal workers in a science and technology environment are generally knowledge workers, it would be convenient to observe the conditions documented in the CBO study. Workers who have strong AC are likely have an emotional attachment to, and enjoy membership with, the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990), thereby leading to lower turnover and an increased intention to stay. The federal facility of interest is known as the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC). The population for this study is made up of approximately 1,447 non-enlisted civilian knowledge workers (as of July 2015). A total 204 participants complete the study survey and a final sample of  $N = 188$  surveys were used for data analysis.

To ensure that all human subjects protection requirements are met, the study was approved by the Lawrence Technological University Institutional Review Board and the U.S.A. Medical Research and Materiel Command, Army Human Subjects Protection Division Office (AHRPO) at Ft. Detrick. The IRB application to AHRPO was supported by a recommendation letter from the TARDEC Chief of Staff and also a letter from the dissertation committee members certifying that proposal underwent a scientific and technical review or research proposal defense.

There was one survey instrument, containing both forced-choice Likert-scale items as well as open-ended questions that were used for data collection. The instrument was pilot-tested using the first wave of individuals recruited to participate in the study. The quantitative portion of the survey instrument contained, 12 items representing strategic HR practices, six items for AC, 24 items for measuring SOAR, and seven items for demographic information. The qualitative portion contained five open-ended questions to probe the potential impact of AC on behavioral outcomes. Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics; qualitative analysis included thematic analysis.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations, and the first had to do with the research population which was selected using purposeful sampling. Since the research was based in a federal facility, there may be limitations for applicability on to a non-federal workforce. Responses are dependent upon the culture and climate of that particular federal workforce during that point in time. Also, the focus was on knowledge workers preferably those with advanced degrees, and the results may not be applicable to a blue-collar workforce with little or no college level education.

There are also limitations to using the SOAR framework because responses could be dependent on how the researcher frames the questions, how the question is asked, and the pre-existing mindset or biases of association coming from the individual perspectives, which the participant possesses.

Another associated limitation is the HR practices (or programs), which were selected for discussion. Even though care was taken in the selection of HR practice (or

program) to be discussed, the particular program may not be the one that engenders the highest level of commitment in the employee being interviewed. Employees may also have little or no knowledge of the program in question or find that it is irrelevant to their employment.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Key terms to be used in this dissertation include the following:

**Affective commitment (AC).** Affective Commitment (AC) is defined as “an emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership within the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2). AC denotes an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). AC is a collection of attitudes combining an individual’s attitude towards the organization with a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals resulting in a readiness to put forth substantial exertion on behalf of the organization and a strong aspiration to preserve membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1979).

**Appreciative inquiry (AI).** Appreciative inquiry is the “cooperative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 3). An inquiry involves asking well-crafted unconditionally positive questions during an intervention. The four phases in an AI cycle are discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

**Strategic Human Resource (HR) practices.** Strategic HR practices are also known as *high involvement*, *high performance work systems*, or *high performance work practices*. One particular category of strategic HR practices known as high-commitment

HR practices have loyalty-inducing effects (Hom et al., 2009). High-commitment HR practices have significant positive effects on worker attitudes, commitment, satisfaction, and is negatively correlated to worker intention to quit (Gould-Williams, 2004).

**Commitment.** Many scholars have defined or measured commitment in the workplace (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Meyer and Allen developed a multidimensional construct that defined three components of commitment, to include, affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984, 1991).

**Organizational commitment (OC).** Commitment can be defined from two different angles, either as an employee attitude or a force that attaches an employee to an organization (Scholl, 1981). Commitment can be both an attitude and a behavior. Behavioral commitment is a consequence of an individual's past actions that they view to be ultimately binding (Staw & Salancik, 1977). Attitudinal commitment puts emphasis on the employee's identification with, and connection to, the organization (Iverson, 1996). The attitudinal approach scrutinizes commitment from the perspective of how people feel and think about the organizations that they belong to.

**Positive organizational scholarship (POS).** Studies that commemorate successes and put a spotlight on life-giving elements or generative ideas associated with a particular organizational phenomenon (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

**SOAR.** SOAR stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. SOAR is a "positive approach to strategic thinking and planning that allows an organization to construct its future through collaboration, shared understanding, and a commitment to action" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 3).

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter One is an introduction to this dissertation and contains the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, an overview of methodology, some possible limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms.

Chapter Two contains an in-depth literature review of relevant existing scholarly publications with a particular focus on key constructs. The literature review provides a historical review, critical assessment, and summary of theoretical work to date. It also contains an analysis and synthesis of compelling arguments, theories, and support for the purposes relevant to this dissertation.

Chapter Three is a review of the methodology conducted to collect, organize, and review data with the goal of finding answers to the research questions. This chapter also outlines the research design, research questions, procedures for sample selection, population, and unit of analysis. The research instrument is presented in detail in this chapter. There is also a discussion regarding the validity and reliability of the data and methods.

Chapter Four was written following successful completion of data collection to catalog and discuss the findings from data collection. Results for both quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented as they relate to the purpose of the research, the conceptual model, the hypotheses, and research questions.

Chapter Five, contains the summary of results, discussion of findings to include conclusions or deductions in relation to each research question. Any recommendations or

implications for practice, limitations discovered during the research, and opportunities for future research are also described.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the predictive ability of strategic HR practices to create AC in the context of federal knowledge workers, determine the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and explore the effect of AC on behavioral outcomes such as increased intention to stay or low turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. In support of the study purpose, this literature review is focused on the three constructs of the study: affective commitment (AC), strategic HR practices, and SOAR.

This literature review will begin with a review of AC and its potential effect on turnover. Next, strategic HR practices will be reviewed, with special emphasis on the prediction of AC by HR practices. Overall, strategic HR practices are not consistently defined in published literature. The objective of this section on strategic HR practices is to bring together a historical perspective of how the concept came to be, what it is today, and construct a working definition as well as scope of practices. Strategic HR practices encompass a concept known as high-commitment HR practices. This discussion revolves around evidences that high-commitment HR practices can build AC. Finally, the SOAR framework will be reviewed with a focus on its potential to serve as a mediator/moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

Literature concerning positive organizational scholarship (POS), AI, and SOAR will be examined for potential links to AC and strategic HR practices. Additionally, context for research is important and as was stated in Chapter One, the population of interest is federal workers. As such, publications in the field of public administration will

be examined to see if there are any gaps in the literature that will allow for research opportunities. Figure 2.1 is a Literature Map depicting a graphical representation of the relationships and connections between constructs and concepts.

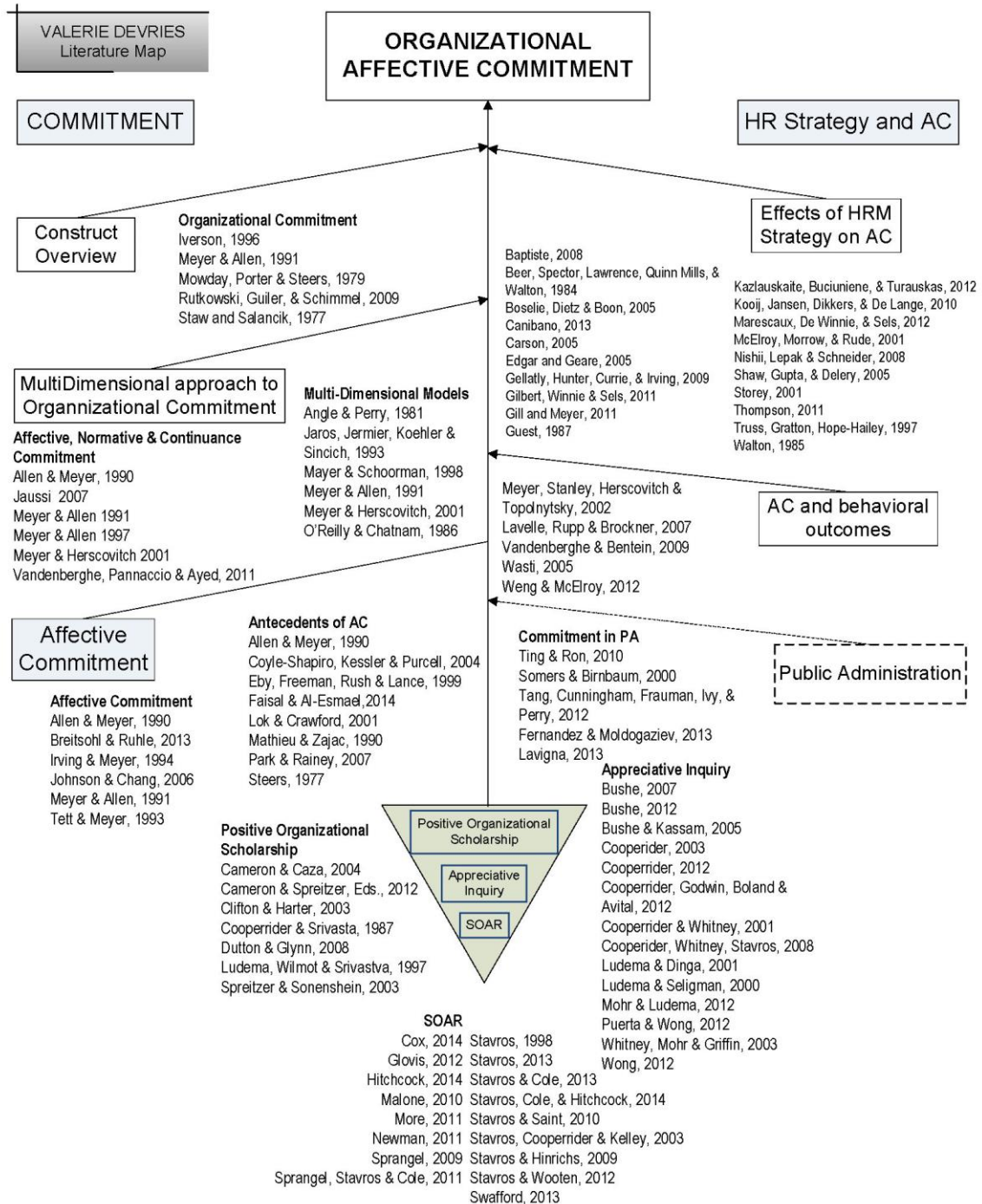


Figure 2.1. Literature map depicting a graphical representation of the relationships and connections between constructs and concepts.

## **Organizational Commitment**

OC is something that organizations value in their employees because there are many positive benefits that come out of it, such as, low turnover, job satisfaction, a sense of obligation to the organization, loyalty, and devotion. OC is “a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p 308) and behavioral outcomes are dependent on different mind-sets. The reason that this section is relevant is because a basic appreciation of OC and how the multidimensional construct came about represents the foundation to an understanding of AC and its antecedents.

OC has been a subject of interest since the early 1970s and commitment can be viewed from two different perspectives, either as an employee attitude or a force that attaches an employee to an organization (Scholl, 1981). Researchers have debated whether or not commitment is an attitude or behavior. For that reason, the bulk of the literature associated to OC can be conceptualized in terms of attitudinal or behavioral commitment (Rutowski, Guiler, & Schimmel, 2009).

**Behavioral commitment.** Behavioral commitment can be observed when the employee has an aspiration to preserve organizational membership. Interest in studying commitment has traditionally evolved around desirable outcomes in the workplace. Behavioral commitment is a consequence of an individual's past actions that they view to be ultimately binding (Staw & Salancik, 1977). Behavioral commitment describes the nature and quality of the association between an employee and an organization. Depending on the level of organization, there are implications for the employee should

they be faced with the decision to continue or discontinue membership in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

**Attitudinal commitment.** Attitudinal commitment puts emphasis on the employee's identification with and connection to the organization (Iverson, 1996). The attitudinal approach scrutinizes commitment from the perspective of how people feel and think about the organizations that they belong to. Some of the pioneering research in the area of commitment and the measuring tools used to assess attitudinal commitment were created and validated by Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982). The instrument is called the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), and it measures the relative strength of OC or the individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization.

The survey instrument was widely tested through a series of studies among 2,563 employees in nine organizations. They found that OC is an important construct to include among other determinants in modeling and researching employee behavior in organizations. The significance of the research is contained in how they managed to demonstrate relatively consistent relationships and prediction between levels of OC and employee turnover, absenteeism, tenure, and performance. One self-acknowledged shortcoming is that this piece of research is focused on measuring attitudinal commitment and not on the cause and effect relationship between attitudinal commitment and behavioral outcomes. The discussion regarding cause and effect is important to the research in this dissertation because the goal is to understand how antecedents play a part in the formation of AC.

This Mowday, Porter, and Steers article written in 1979 proved to be a major turning point in the direction that the research community decided to engage in. From

observing research that was written subsequent to this finding, it can be noted that there was a lot more interest in attitudinal commitment and its effects while behavioral commitment did not receive as much attention. The common theme that can be observed about research done over the years is that most of it relies upon methods of measurement and definitions from attitudinal commitment concepts pioneered by Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1979) and also Allen and Meyer (1990).

When Porter, Mowday, and Steers introduced the 15-item OCQ in 1979, it was a unidimensional view of commitment, but it was clear in subsequent years that there was more to be learned and that there was a need for a multidimensional view of commitment. Allen and Meyer effectively filled that gap by introducing their multidimensional construct in 1990. Much credit should be given to Allen and Meyer (1990) because over the years their research garnered more than 300 citations in articles subsequently published on the subject. However, Allen and Meyer (1990) were not the first, nor did they set the precedent for multidimensional commitment constructs.

It is important to understand that the multidimensional construct of OC was born from the study of attitudinal commitment developed in the 1970s. Between the 1970s and the late 1980s, researchers were content with a unidimensional view of OC. Attitudinal commitment revolves around social exchange processes, which is an important part of social construction. The study of social construction lends itself well to a qualitative methodology. The next section introduces multidimensional constructs of organization commitment, including the seminal work by Allen and Meyer (1990), and also the development of similar constructs published during the 80s and 90s.

**Multidimensional constructs of organizational commitment.** Research surrounding attitudinal commitment revolves around social exchange processes and the multidimensional construct developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) is by far the most cited and best tested. These researchers studied commitment from an attitudinal approach, which viewed OC as a multidimensional concept (Allen & Meyer 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch 2001) with outcomes and implications for human resource management. Allen and Meyer (1990) identified three types of OC: normative, affective, and continuance.

Affective Commitment (AC) is defined as “an emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership within the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2). These individuals remain within the organization largely because they *want* to. This definition by Allen and Meyer (1990) is the main definition of AC whenever the construct is mentioned in this dissertation.

Normative Commitment (NC) is the type of commitment that is influenced by the individual’s prior experiences within society. For example, if one’s parents have been long-term employees of an organization and have taught their children to value loyalty, then those experiences may carry over into the way employees develop their commitment mindset. Individuals who experience strong normative commitment feel that they should stay in the organization because they *ought* to.

In the case of Continuous Commitment (CC), individuals remain with the organization because it is perceived to be stressful if they should lose the advantages of

being employed. These individuals remain with the organization because they feel they *need* to.

Allen and Meyer (1990) established that these three components of attitudinal commitment are conceptually and empirically separate by conducting two studies. The first study proved that the three components of commitment were distinct psychological states and based on that, it would be possible to develop independent measures for the states. The second study set out to measure levels of these three components with more focus on AC and CC. At that time, there were more existing studies on AC and CC, and consequently a better existing understanding on the predictors or antecedents of these two components. The researchers did not neglect NC and chose to include it by using derived understanding by examining patterns based on relations to affective and continuance components. The purpose of the second study was to test the hypothesis that the three components of commitment would be related to variables assumed to be their antecedents (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

For the first study, the instrument of data collection was a questionnaire sent to 500 clerical, supervisory, and managerial employees, in nonunionized positions within three organizations (manufacturing and a university), of which 256 were returned. The instrument contained 66 components, divided into three factors. In the second study, 634 questionnaires were distributed to nonunionized employees in different organizations (retail, hospital, and university library), of which 337 were returned. The second study found that employees who felt comfortable in their roles in the competition with their jobs expressed greater AC. As for NC, the researchers had little existing literature to base predictions regarding the antecedents of NC, and they concluded that they were

unclear on how normative commitment could be formed (antecedents) and even though it was a minor component, they still managed to prove its existence but could not establish cause and effect.

The biggest controversy in the findings regarding AC and NC is that there is often overlap between NC and AC and this is demonstrated by a high correlation of results when testing for AC and NC (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). It is difficult to distinguish between NC and AC because they share a lot of the same characteristics. This controversy has caused some researchers to doubt the relevance of NC in the study of OC. In a conceptual paper, Cohen (2007) proposed a possible explanation to this dilemma by suggesting that there is propensity for NC to occur prior to entry. The implication is that the structure of the experiment would have an impact and relevance for results related to NC. This is relevant to the research in this dissertation because NC can be easily mistaken for AC, and it is important to select a survey instrument that is both valid and reliable. Or else, if using a new survey instrument, then sufficient proofs for validity and reliability must accompany the instrument. Another way to increase validity is to triangulate the results by collecting different types of data to support the inquiry, and this can be accomplished by using a mixed methods methodology.

Continuance or calculative commitment (CC) implies a reciprocal association based on an exchange between the employee and management (Park & Rainey, 2007). These exchanges that are based on the mutual contractual relationship between two parties and have organizational consequences such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions. CC is reflected in perceptions of the availability of employment alternatives

in relation to the investments employees have already made in their current organization. CC can be further divided into two sub components (Vandenberghe, Pannaccio, & Ayed, 2011), such as continuance-sacrifices and continuance-alternatives. Continuance-alternatives commitment develops as a result of a perceived lack of alternative employment. It is possible that these commitment mindsets (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) influence the cognitive context within which an individual evaluates the prospect of leaving or staying with an organization. It is based largely on the negative perception that a lack of job alternatives exists. Since it is difficult to build loyalty on negative perceptions, organizations should strive to recognize that this type of commitment does exist but cannot be relied upon as a long-term strategy.

Continuance-sacrifices commitment is based on the perception of having valuable benefits, resources, or advantages which may be lost should the person choose to leave employment. Examples of these may be health benefits, 40-hour workweek, telecommuting, prestige, title, recognition, alternate work schedules, flextime, etc. Employees perceive that they enjoy certain advantages within their organization, which cannot be found elsewhere. They do not necessarily experience stress due to continued employment but they stay mainly because they want to keep benefits or advantages. These individuals consciously assess the pros and cons of staying versus leaving (Hobfoll, 2002). Continuing sacrifices commitment encompasses logical discernment regarding the decision between costs and benefits. At the center of this process is a cognitive assessment of existing resources. Organizations can endeavor to increase the influential motives that make people stay (Vandenberghe et al., 2011). It is clear that CC represents a mindset of employees who remain committed because they need to, whereas

AC represents a mindset of employees who remain committed because they want to. Between AC and CC, it is evident that AC is the component that is closest in characteristic to the field of POS, which encourages the study of positive behaviors.

Having considered the predominate construct proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990), it would also be reasonable to reflect on the opinions of other scholars who have presented multidimensional constructs. Besides the multidimensional construct advocated by Allen and Meyer, there were other constructs proposed by different researchers in the 80s and 90s. The following section contains a brief introduction of four such multidimensional constructs. It is important to acknowledge them in the study of OC to give a more complete understanding regarding the body of knowledge. Table 2.1 summarizes the multidimensional commitment constructs discussed here.

Table 2.1

*Summary of Multidimensional Commitment Constructs*

<b>Researchers</b>	<b>Dimensions/Labels</b>	<b>Main finding</b>
Angle and Perry (1981)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value Commitment</li> <li>• Commitment to Stay</li> </ul>	Behaviors such as absenteeism and tardiness are dependent on <i>value commitment</i> or support for organizational values. Turnover behaviors are dependent on the type of commitment, which they labeled commitment to stay, or the desire to remain with the organization.
O'Reilly and Chatman (1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance</li> <li>• Identification</li> <li>• Internalization</li> </ul>	They were successful in showing that there are three forms of psychological attachment and argued that these constitute the bases for OC. The nature of attachment can vary based on individual's identification with organizational values.
Allen and Meyer (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affective Commitment</li> <li>• Normative Commitment</li> <li>• Continuance Commitment</li> </ul>	These three attitudinal components are distinct psychological states and based on that, it would be possible to develop independent measures for the states. They were also successful in measuring levels of these three components with more focus on AC and CC.
Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, and Sincich (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affective Commitment</li> <li>• Continuance Commitment</li> <li>• Moral Commitment</li> </ul>	The main finding was that researchers studying commitment and turnover (up to that point in time, had been overly reliant on the unidimensional concept of commitment. They were able to show that commitment was multidimensional and behavioral outcomes can be better explained when viewed through a multidimensional lens.
Mayer and Schoorman (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuance Commitment</li> <li>• Value Commitment</li> </ul>	The main finding is that while OCQ gives great insight into the nature of employees' commitment to the organization, it is not able to distinguish that commitment has dimensions which are distinct, can be measured separately, and have different outcomes. The practical implication from this study is that when an organization is able to encourage their employees to engage in citizenship behaviors, they are correspondingly able to increase the levels of value commitment.

*Note.* Derived from Allen and Meyer (1990); Angle and Perry (1981); Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, and Sincich (1993); Mayer and Schoorman (1998); O'Reilly and Chatman (1986).

***Relevance: AC and links to positive organizational behavior.*** The description of multidimensional constructs listed in Table 2.1 are not exhaustive, as there are others that were created by researchers. The prevalent observation when comparing these constructs is that, regardless of how it is labeled, AC consistently exists and is commonly linked to positive behavioral outcomes that are desired by the organization. Allen and Meyer (1990) and Jaros et al., (1993) labeled it AC; Angle and Perry, (1981) labeled it as value commitment; and O'Reilly and Chatman (1991) labeled it as normative commitment. AC is consistently identifiable, and it is easier to distinguish AC from NC and CC. During data collection for the research in this dissertation, this distinction should hold true and AC is expected to stand out as an identifiable characteristic in the results.

For the purpose of this study, the definition for AC will be the one that is patterned after Allen and Meyer (1990). AC is commonly acknowledged to exist in organizations and is also the type of commitment that organizations wish to see in their employees because it generates positive attitudinal and behavioral traits that ultimately benefit the organization's long-term retention strategies. This transition from AC to behavioral outcomes is the benefit that the conceptual model for this research hopes to demonstrate.

### **Affective Commitment**

AC denotes an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). AC is a collection of attitudes combining an individual's attitude towards the organization with a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals resulting in a readiness to put forth substantial exertion on behalf of the organization and a strong aspiration to preserve membership in the organization

(Mowday et al., 1979). AC is the most widely accepted and easily recognizable dimension of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is also the most consistent and strongest predictor of positive organizational outcomes. High levels of AC are commonly linked with decreased turnover intentions (Wasti, 2005). There are also connections to higher productivity and AC even produces competitive advantages for an organization (Deery & Iverson, 1996). In this section on AC, there is an overview, which discusses how an attitudinal mindset like AC when experienced in combination with self-concept, work experience, and even adverse events has certain behavioral outcomes. This section also discusses the role of AC in the cause-and-effect relationship as proposed by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001). Much has been published about the causes of AC and the subsequent sections of this chapter devote a significant portion of the discussion to how AC is linked to self-concept (or individual perceptions) and HR practices.

**Link between AC and self-concept.** Self-concept is an important and pivotal self-regulatory mechanism that results in unique associations with regard to AC. Self-concept, defined as the specific definition used to characterize oneself (Johnson & Chang, 2006), is relevant to this dissertation because in order to find out *how AC is built*, it is important to acknowledge that employees have self-constructed ideas about themselves that are based on the responses of others and also created by individual beliefs that they hold.

Johnson and Chang (2006) conducted a study, which showed that self-concept moderates the relationship between commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). They demonstrated that employees with high individual self-concept levels tend

to have more CC while those with high collective self-concept levels had more AC. Their study was based on Meyer and Herscovitch (2001)'s proposition that AC has components of identification and internalization where employees form emotional attachments and adopt organization goals and values. They hypothesized that collective self-concept levels and affective commitment are positively associated because a shared group-oriented focus is related to the internalization of group-level goals.

Johnson and Chang's (2006) study was conducted by collecting data from 243 employed non-traditional part-time students who were employed full-time. Using a 5-point Likert scale they gathered responses on OC using Meyer and Allen's (1997) revised 6-item subscales for commitment. They only collected data for AC and CC. They also collected data on levels of individual and collective self-concepts as measured using the Levels of Self-Concept Scale (LSCS) (Selenta & Lord, 2005). The final component was OCBs, and this was collected using a self-reported citizenship behavior assessment as designed by Williams and Anderson (1991).

In the discussion of findings, Johnson and Chang (2006) discovered that collective self-concept ("we" instead of "I") was distinctively connected with AC, and they attribute it to the likelihood that such individuals had a shared group-oriented focus and internalized group-level goals. They found that individual self-concept is linked to CC as such individuals may be predisposed to focusing on benefit to self rather than to organization. Employees who have a strong collective self-concept would likely develop AC because of their proclivity for defining themselves in terms of group goals and norms. In their conclusion, they recommended that organizations encourage the formation of a collective self-concept because there is likelihood that it may promote AC

among their employees. Consequently, prediction of behavioral outcomes for employees with strong AC and strong collective self-concept levels is possible.

Conclusions such as the ones found by Johnson and Chang (2006) make a strong case for strategic HR practices, which often have a role in reinforcing a collective self-concept by establishing organization group goals and norms. Johnson and Chang (2006) established that collective self-concept was important for promoting AC, but there was no mention of specific organizational practices that create a collective self-concept. Failure to identify the compilation of practices leaves a gap in knowledge that would support the research for this dissertation to find out if a specific organizational action such as strategic HR practices can reinforce collective self-concept and subsequently build AC. This gap in knowledge will be explored later on in this chapter, under the section concerning strategic HR practices, where there will be a description of a related study conducted by Edgar and Geare (2005), in which, employee perception and perspective are very important factors in accessing the success of HR practices.

**Link between AC and positive work behaviors.** In comparison to NC and CC, AC is also expected to have the strongest positive relation to desirable work behaviors such as attendance, in-role performance, and OCB (Meyer et al., 2002). After Allen and Meyer (1990) introduced their three-component construct, Meyer et al. (2002) wrote a subsequent article on the meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates, and consequences of these three components. Meyer et al. (2002) reviewed literature written over the last 15 years and assessed the relationships between AC, NC, and CC, and variables identified as their antecedents, correlates, and consequences as described in Allen and Meyer's (1990) three-component construct. To conduct this meta-analysis, Meyer, et al. (2002) began

with a literature search using the computer and manual methods. The latter involved contacting authors who published over the last 15 years and asking for additional manuscripts. As a result, they gathered 155 independent samples (99 published articles, 22 dissertations, and 34 unpublished papers or presentations at conferences). Then, they took the data from all these studies and transformed it by calculating weighted correlations for scores within each study so that they could compare the results. The meta-analysis conducted by Meyer et al. (2002) proved that basic assumptions have held true throughout 15 years of research and that there are associations between the components and subcomponents of commitment and between variables identified as antecedents, correlates, and consequences.

This meta-analysis was relevant to theory and practice because Meyer et al. (2002) affirmed that there is a very strong correlation between AC and overall job satisfaction, thereby establishing that both concepts should be considered in efforts to understand and manage employee behavior (Tett & Meyer, 1993). This same analysis also showed that in various studies, work experiences were found to have strong relations with AC and findings such as these, support the idea that employers who focus on enhancing an employee's work experience have a better chance of fostering AC (Irving & Meyer, 1994).

Meyer et al. (2002) also found a pattern of consistent evidence that organizational support in the form of HR policies and practices directly or indirectly influence the development of AC (Meyer & Smith, 2009). While it was acknowledged that these HR practices built AC, it was not specifically noted what those HR policies and practices

were and how these practices influenced AC. This omission represents an opportunity for research as outlined in this dissertation.

In the meta-analysis, Meyer et al. (2002) demonstrated that there were positive work outcomes and desirable work behaviors from AC. Stress (AC  $\rho = -.21$ , NC  $\rho =$  near zero, CC  $\rho = .24$ ) and work-family conflict (AC  $\rho = -.20$ , NC  $\rho =$  near zero, CC  $\rho = .24$ ) were both positively correlated with CC and negatively co-related to AC. AC was found to have a strong tie to positive employee-relevant outcomes such as health and well-being. AC, NC, and CC all negatively correlated with withdrawal cognition (AC  $\rho = -.56$ , NC  $\rho = -.33$  CC  $\rho = -.18$ ), and turnover (AC  $\rho = -.17$ , NC  $\rho = -.16$ , CC  $\rho = -.10$ ).

Using a weighted average corrected correlation ( $\rho$ ), Meyer et al. (2002) found that there was also compelling consistency in the finding that AC has the strongest positive correlations (in relation to NC and CC) with desirable work behaviors such as, job performance (AC  $\rho = .16$ , NC  $\rho = .06$ , CC  $\rho = -.07$ ) and OCB (AC  $\rho = .32$ , NC  $\rho = .24$ , CC  $\rho =$  near zero). Overall, Meyer, et al.'s (2002) conclusion was that AC has very positive outcomes for the employee and the organization. It was observed that AC had the strongest positive correlation (compared to NC and CC) to desirable work behaviors. The rationale that Meyer et al. (2002) supplied leads to the conclusion that there are links between AC and the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). This conclusion paves the way for the research in this dissertation to explore those links to POS using the SOAR framework.

#### **The link among AC, HR practices, and positive behavioral outcomes.**

Stressful encounters of organizational downsizing are viewed as a source of anticipated harm (Brockner, Grover, & Blonder, 1998), and stress is more commonly associated with

CC rather than positive AC. Many factors can influence the formation or sustainment of AC, and one interesting study by Lee and Corbett (2009) questions the impact of downsizing on employees' AC. The research was conducted in two Korean banks where there was a downsizing of 4,000 and 3,000 employees respectively; remaining employees took pay cuts between 20% and 30%.

The questionnaires for this quantitative study were distributed to a random sample of 1,430 employees in both banks, and they received a response rate between 70% and 72%. The questionnaire used a seven-point Likert scale measuring the following variables, consisting of HR practices: employees' AC to the organization, employees' daily work experience, distributive justice (fair amount of compensation received), formal procedural justice (in managerial decision-making), interactional justice (if the bank treated employees with politeness, dignity, and respect during the downsizing process), job complexity, and openness to new ideas and change. The study also controlled for organizational tenure and positive affectivity or negative affectivity in the respondents.

One controversial aspect of this study is that it was conducted in Korea where cultural factors could have implications on replication of the same study in a different country. Another controversial aspect has to do with the timing of the study and depending on the time elapsed between downsizing event and the survey, employees could still have reservations for being truthful in their responses for fear that the employer would read their responses and interpret them as being "disloyal". Testing for the same type of response to HR practices in a non-threatening environment could elicit a more truthful or honest response without the intimidation of losing one's job. Despite

these limitations the findings still have important implications because it leads the way in the discussion of collective self-concept and positive attitudinal outcomes in the face of adversity.

Using a hierarchical regression analysis, the result showed that downsizing directly and indirectly affected employees' AC to the organization because of perceived changes in daily work experiences. Employees also felt less AC towards the organization when they experienced severe rather than mild downsizing. With regard to daily impacts on work experiences, employees discovered that their daily work increased as the workforce was downsized, and this also had an effect on AC.

The surprising discovery in this research by Lee and Corbett (2009) is that AC to the organization can be maintained or even increased if organizational downsizing is carried out so the employees perceived positive changes in their daily work experiences. The researchers reasoned that if the employee perceived that there was increased job complexity but possible opportunities for promotion (after the downsizing event), and their manager treated them with respect and dignity, they were likely to experience an increase in AC to the organization even after the trauma of downsizing. This effect was even more pronounced when the company was perceived to be more responsive to new ideas and methods. The finding implies that in the face of stressful situations, employees are still seeking the possibility of positive outcomes and positive opportunities. HR practices that offer promotional opportunities and encourage treating employees with dignity and respect can build AC even in stressful situations such as downsizing.

This Lee and Corbett (2009) study is both important and relevant to this dissertation because regardless of how well or poorly the organization may be doing, HR

practices continue to build AC. As the research for this dissertation goes on to question how strategic HR practices can be a catalyst for building AC, the environment, organizational climate, and health, in which the HR practices are implemented should be documented and described.

**Relevance: Affective commitment.** To summarize this section regarding AC literature, it can be said that there are three main points. First, HR practices can be instrumental in reinforcing a collective self-concept by promoting AC in employees (Johnson & Chang, 2006). Second, from the meta-analysis by Meyer et al. (2002), the implication is that there are links between AC and POS. Third, as seen in Lee and Corbett (2009)'s study on the effects of downsizing on AC, there are implications that HR practices can be a catalyst for positive experiences, even in the face of stressful situations, and ultimately be an antecedent for AC.

Affective commitment occurs when there is an emotional attachment to the organization such that the individual identifies with it, is involved in, and enjoys membership within the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996). As this definition implies, individuals enjoy and attach positive emotions to an organization when they experience AC. If the organization is doing something right to create or enhance affective commitment then perhaps there is opportunity to explore AC from a positive organizational scholarship (POS) and whole system perspective, inquiring into the factors that sustain the value of AC within an organization. Specifically, this is an opportunity to demonstrate how the SOAR framework that comes from the field of POS, can be a catalyst for building AC.

The following section addresses this cause and effect relationship, with a larger emphasis on the cause or antecedents of AC.

### **Antecedents of Affective Commitment**

An antecedent is an action, occurrence, thought, or emotion that precedes or causes an attitude or behavior to exist. For the purpose of this dissertation, there are three categories for discussion: individual perceptions, work context, and HR practices. These have been specifically chosen because in the attempt to study how AC is built, it is important to consider the individual, the environment or context of the experiment, and also the catalyst that is being applied to the experiment.

To set the stage for a discussion regarding antecedents, it would be prudent to consider the cause and effect of AC and give readers a proper perspective regarding the sequence of development for attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

**Cause and effect of affective commitment.** After Allen and Meyer (1990) established definitions and measurements for AC, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) went on to develop a general model of workplace commitment (see Figure 2.2) in which they described the antecedents of affective, continuance, and normative commitment mindsets. Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) wrote a conceptual paper about the antecedents of commitment or rather, where commitment comes from and how it binds to a target. These antecedents drive a corresponding desire, cost, and obligation viewpoints in the cognitive agreement, which employees have with their place of employment. Commitment can be reflected in varying shades of intensity for these mindsets. The levels of engagement which the employee experiences, is externalized in behavioral consequences of commitment. For example, an employee who shares the values and beliefs (antecedent)

of an organization, would likely internalized that and demonstrate affective commitment (commitment mindset). Consequently, these employees may exhibit focal (discretionary target relevant) behavior that it is seen as beneficial to the organization. Conversations about shared values and beliefs are a big part of aspirations in the SOAR framework (Stavros, 2013). Similar to AC, “by using SOAR, stakeholders can have a shared understanding of the ultimate vision, mission, and goals, so that they are able to respond dynamically” (Stavros & Wooten, 2012, p. 827). Meyer and Herscovitch’s (2001) cause and effect conceptual model is important because it forms the basis for this dissertation. This dissertation examines a specific organizational action such as strategic HR practices to find out if it has an effect on *how AC is built*.

Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) recommended that research be done on the consequences of commitment mindsets, focal behavior, or discretionary behavior as behavioral outcomes. Their model (Figure 2.2) depicts bases (antecedents) and consequences, or cause and effect relationships.

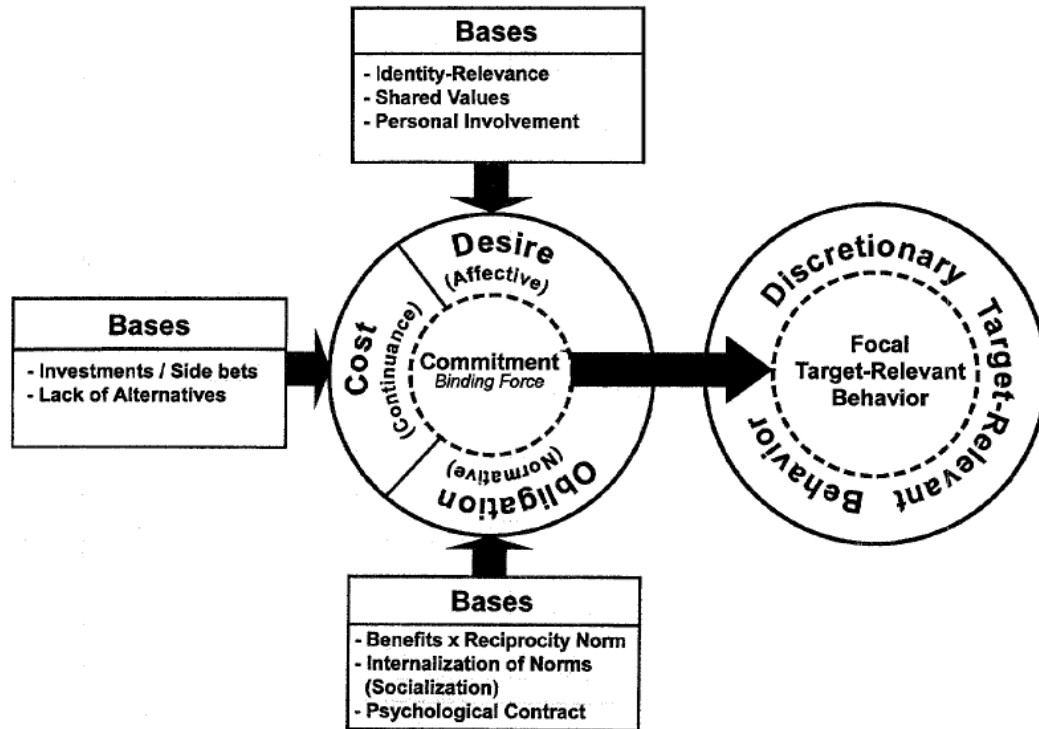


Figure 2.2. A general model of workplace commitment. From commitment in the workplace: Toward a general model,” by J.P. Meyer & L. Herscovitch, 2001, *Human Resource Management Review*, 11, 317. Copyright 2001 by Elsevier Science Inc.

The Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) conceptual model is important because subsequent sections of this chapter will revolve around the cause-and-effect model (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) using definitions of AC written by Allen and Meyer (1990). Antecedents for AC will be explored, and there will a section on how HR strategy, which can be an antecedent for commitment mindsets, drives discretionary behavioral outcomes such as reduced turnover.

It is important to note that while his model is very diligent in detailing *what builds* AC, they did not ask *how AC is built*. The Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) conceptual model attempts to answer the question of what causes AC to come into existence but does not necessarily capture *how* employees arrived at the cognitive or emotional recognition that makes up AC. A similar application of the *how* question can be made in inquiries

concerning SOAR. In fact, there were two recent dissertations that asked the question *how*: Cox (2014) addressed *how* SOAR is able to maximize the impact of emotional intelligence on collaboration; Hitchcock (2014) addressed *how* SOAR builds organizational collective motivation (OCM). In a comparable fashion, this dissertation aims to ask *how* do strategic HR practices build AC.

**Antecedents of affective commitment.** Antecedents for commitment are abundant and have been studied over the last 30 years. In existing literature, antecedents are featured as events, characteristics, or catalysts that lead to the formation of commitment attitudes, and the outcome of those attitudes are behavioral manifestations such as turnover or absenteeism. In an early example of such a model or research study, Steers (1977) described the antecedents and outcomes of OC. He studied two diverse sample populations consisting of hospital employees and also scientists and engineers. The quantitative instrument that he used measured the following sets of variables: personal characteristics, job characteristics, work experiences, OC, desire and intent to stay, and behaviors.

The model that Steers was testing hypothesized that personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences are antecedents, which lead to the development of OC. The outcome of commitment is either an increase or decrease in the following behaviors: the desire to remain, intent to remain, attendance, employee retention, and job performance. Steers (1977) found that personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences are all important influences on commitment. His study represents early opinions in the body of literature, which serves as the basis for comparison to later work. While Steers (1977) was successful in identifying what influences commitment, he was

not specific on *how* those personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences actually translated into emotional or cognitive AC. This gap in knowledge is relevant to this dissertation because this dissertation is interested in discovering *how* job characteristics such as strategic HR practices can build AC.

**Antecedents: Individual perceptions.** In 1990, after roughly a decade of relative silence on the topic of antecedents, researchers shifted their focus to individual perceptions of personal competence, perceived personal growth, and development (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). It is around the same time that Allen and Meyer (1990) wrote their seminal paper on the multidimensional construct of OC, which consists of AC, NC, and CC mindsets. There was a focus on testing the correlations or interrelationships (as it applies to commitment) and what some researchers found was that the relationships between characteristics described by Steers (1977) were neither strong nor consistent. Also, during these tests, more antecedents revealed themselves. For example, in Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) study, new findings emerged: there was a strong link between perceived competence and AC; the age of the employee had a weak but still significant link to AC; and role ambiguity or role conflict contributed to poor AC. Towards the end of their article, they recommended that future studies test complex patterns of relationships among antecedents, correlates, and consequences of OC. It is complex patterns of relationships that the research in this dissertation plans to address. While quantitative studies are efficient in identifying the presence of a relationship between variables, qualitative studies focus on the phenomenon and explore relationships or comparisons between ideas (Creswell, 2009).

Between the mid-1970s and 1990, there were over 500 publications (based on a cursory word search on ProQuest, Emerald, and Business Source Complete) on the topic of OC. Unsatisfied with settling for just causal models involving antecedents, researchers turned their attention to process oriented models of AC in the following decade.

One such process oriented model was developed and tested by Eby et al. (1999) in which they depict the motivational bases of AC and tested a version of their model using meta-analytic correlations and structural equation modeling. Their results suggested that in general, job satisfaction served to partially mediate relationships between motivation and commitment, specifically focusing on motivation-AC relationship. Skill variety, supervisory satisfaction, job satisfaction, and feedback have strong links to intrinsic motivation, which in turn became an antecedent for AC. Both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work context had incremental variants on the prediction of AC. They contend that understanding the pattern of relationships among work context, intrinsic motivation, job characteristics, and its corresponding affective reactions are important because organizations are constantly implementing policies and procedures to try and influence or enhance organizational level commitment. How people are treated and how they perceive that treatment are both important parts of this process model. Individual perception plays a very important role in the development of AC. This finding supports the research question posed by this dissertation because in an attempt to find out how SOAR can build AC, individual perceptions and work context have a lot of influence on the results. SOAR appears to be a potentially good method for finding out how individuals perceive strengths in organizational policies and practices.

**Antecedents: Work context.** Antecedents identify experiences that foster commitment and in the middle of the 21st century, AC is still recognized as the best predictor for intention to leave. Stallworth (2004) wrote about turnover in public accounting and did his study on several of the largest accounting firms, gathering responses from approximately 1000 respondents. They held true to definitions in the multidimensional construct created by Allen and Meyer (1990) when 21 antecedents of AC were tested: job challenge, role clarity, goal difficulty, management receptiveness, peer cohesion, organizational dependability, equity, personal importance, feedback, participation, overtime, training, interaction with peers, interaction with supervisors, status, opportunity, client assignments, role model, mentor, and aggressiveness. The results suggested that OC within the context of public accounting could be conceptualized in terms of affective, moral, and economic attachment to the firm.

This research by Stallworth (2004) revealed that AC was more likely to grow out of employees' attitudes when they saw that there was reasonableness in the assignment of overtime, the frequency of socializing with superiors, the status with peers, the likelihood of promotion, and when a role model or mentor also displayed AC to the organization. Employee perceptions influence the way in which AC develops, and this similar theme was found in a study published around the same time period, by Lok and Crawford (2001).

Lok and Crawford's focus was on values and beliefs of employees in the organization and how these attitudinal mindsets affected their perception of OC. Incidentally, values and beliefs play a big role in the development of aspirations in the SOAR framework (Stavros, 2013). In Lok and Crawford's (2001) study, the sample was

made up of 251 nurses employed in seven large Australian hospitals. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of organizational culture, subculture, leadership style, and job satisfaction as predictors of employee commitment (Lok & Crawford, 2001). The questionnaire assessed perceptions of cultural variations within an innovative ward versus a bureaucratic ward. The length of service, age, and leadership styles within the wards were also taken into consideration.

Similar to the process-oriented model created by Eby et al. (1999), this Lok and Crawford (2001) study found that job satisfaction is a mediating variable between culture and OC. They found that subculture, not organizational culture, had a greater influence on commitment attitudes. Innovative subcultures where people were allowed to express their new ideas had the strongest positive effects versus bureaucratic subcultures where ideas were dictated. Being able to express new ideas is also reflected in the SOAR framework, which is very inclusive in nature and “supports an intentional shift of conversations from weaknesses to strengths, and problems to possibilities” (Stavros, 2013, p. 11). Figure 2.3 features the path analytic model of commitment developed by Lok and Crawford (2001).

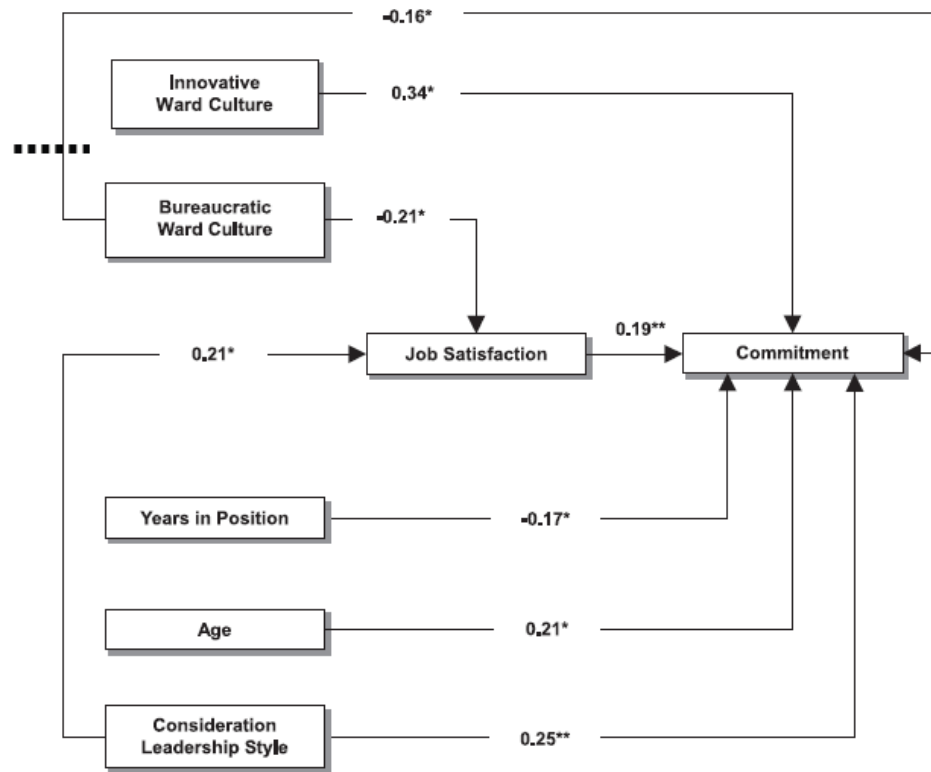


Figure 2.3. Path-analytic model of commitment showing causal effects or antecedents of commitment are mediated either partially or totally by an intermediate variable such as job satisfaction and leadership style. From “Antecedents of organizational commitment and the mediating role of job satisfaction,” by P. Lok & J. Crawford, 2001. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 16. p. 605. Copyright 2001 by MCB University Press.

The significance of this type of finding is that causal effects or antecedents of commitment are mediated either partially or totally by an intermediate variable such as job satisfaction and leadership style. Work context or cultural setting also had a great deal of influence on the relationship between job satisfaction and commitment. This type of causal model is very different from the model that was created by Steers in 1977, which did not have an intermediate or mediating factor between the antecedent and object (commitment).

The discussion and comparison of causal models are relevant to this dissertation because the studies cited here have found that OC is built within an organizational

context. For that reason, it is important to be specific regarding the description of organizational culture, context, and climate of the population being studied. The population being studied for this dissertation is made up of federal employees and they have a unique culture, leadership style, and an organizational climate that is sometimes dictated by political events.

**Antecedents: HR practices.** The next development in the body of knowledge concerning antecedents of commitment came in 2014 in the form of a publication by Faisal and Al-Esmael (2014). This study was conducted in a developing Middle East country, which employs a large migrant manpower force. The purpose of their study was to understand the dynamics between various enablers to help improve OC. The researchers hoped to provide useful tools to HR managers by differentiating between independent and dependent variables and their mutual relationships. They utilized some of those variables towards the implementation of HR policies that improve commitment within organizations.

Faisal and Al-Esmael (2014) identified 10 enablers of OC through a series of literature reviews and expert opinions from HR professionals in academia and industry. The enablers were: equity in paying salary and fringe benefits (organizational justice), perceived personal growth and development, test variety, degree of autonomy, feedback on performance, task identity, job satisfaction, acceptance of organizational changes, and turnover intentions (intent to leave). These researchers used a methodology called interpretive structural modeling (ISM) which falls into the soft operations research (OR) family of approaches. The methodology uses a systematic application of graph theory for

computation of a complex network of contextual relationships. This model leads the way for the formation of a hierarchy to categorize enablers.

The results of the study found that enablers such as job security, perceived personal growth and development, equity in paying salary and fringe benefits, test variety, and task identity had greatest ability to drive OC and had low levels of dependence upon other enablers to achieve that goal. These are known as independent enablers, and by themselves are capable of becoming antecedents of commitment. The opposite of these independent enablers are dependent enablers, which had a strong dependence on other variables before they can become antecedents of OC. These dependent enablers are degree of autonomy, feedback on performance, job satisfaction, low turnover intentions, and acceptance of organizational changes. In each variable, employee perception played a large role in the determination of commitment levels.

The independent enablers discussed in Faisal and Al-Esmael's (2014) study similar to those that would constitute strategic HR practices. This is important because strategic HR practices have not been consistently defined and studies like the one written by Faisal and Al-Esmael (2014) help to establish links to OC and ultimately, AC.

**Relevance: Antecedents.** In this review of research done on antecedents of AC, there are four significant points that support the purpose of this dissertation. First, it can be noted that while the questions, *what* and *why* have been debated at length and answered quantitatively. The question of *how* AC is built and how employees reach the cognitive or emotional acknowledgment that makes up AC remains virtually unexplored. Second, individual perceptions, of practices imposed by the organization on an employee, determine individual perceptions. How people are treated and how they perceive that

treatment is all part of the affective response. Discovering this relationship is related to the inquiry into *how AC is built*. Inherent in this gap is also an opportunity to use the SOAR framework to find out *how* SOAR can build AC. Third, work context plays an important role, particularly since the population of interest is federal workers. Public workers, especially those who work for the federal government are subject to an ever-changing organizational climate that is sometimes dictated by political events. Fourth, studies involving strategic HR practices have suffered difficulty in trying to acquire a consistent label (this will be discussed further in the section related to high-commitment HR practices). Consequently, links between strategic HR practices and AC must be made by proxy or by association in order to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The following section extends this analysis by discussing strategic HR practices, its genesis, and challenges or gaps in the literature that support the research for this dissertation.

### **Turnover**

Tett and Meyer (1993) defined turnover as a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization. Turnover can result in loss of knowledge, financial costs associated with hiring a replacement, and loss of productivity. There are also intangible costs that are associated with turnover which include, emotional costs, loss of institutional knowledge, loss of morale (especially for those employees who remain and have to pick up the additional work), and employee burnout (Rutkowski et al., 2009). Turnover can be managed by first examining the factors that influence turnover i.e. pay, training opportunities, onsite childcare, unemployment, (Selden & Moynihan, 2000), and empowerment (Bhatnagar, 2005). However, it must be noted that not all employee

turnover is necessarily bad (Meier & Hicklin, 2007) as organizations need an infusion of new personnel and ideas to be innovative, tackle difficult tasks outside of their scope of experience, and to keep from becoming rigid or *behind the times*. This is a process that should be consciously managed by first, discovering the optimal turnover rate and second, by purposeful strategic planning.

**The link between OC and turnover.** Even though the research for this dissertation is not testing for long-range outcomes and impact of AC on organizations, it is important to give credence and acknowledge that there are behavioral outcomes that benefit the organization. One such outcome is reduced turnover of valued employees. In a discussion of AC and OC, it is important to acknowledge the concept of turnover because organizations want to encourage the formation of commitment, with the hope that it will discourage turnover. Throughout this literature review, there will be some mention of turnover, but there will not be an in-depth review of associated literature. OC is an attitudinal mindset, which discourages behavioral outcomes such as turnover, or the willful act of leaving employment with a firm. It is a discontinuation of employment whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Joarder et al., 2011). Turnover can result in loss of knowledge, financial costs associated with hiring a replacement, and loss of productivity. Organizations invest time and resources in attracting, recruiting, and retaining talent because they want to keep employees committed and reduce turnover which ends that relationship and incurs both tangible and intangible costs (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000).

There is benefit from studying OC because organizational behavior research has shown that commitment is a predictor of turnover (Kidd & Green, 2006; Van Dam, 2008). There are intangible costs associated with turnover including emotional costs, loss

of institutional knowledge, loss of morale (especially for those employees who remain and have to pick up the additional work), and employee burnout (Rutkowski, Guiler, & Schimmel, 2009). It would be worthwhile to examine how commitment can help reduce negative behavioral outcomes such as turnover and consequently reduce tangible and intangible costs.

The link between OC and low turnover intent was proven sometime in the 1980s. Since then, the body of knowledge has grown; however, there is still opportunity for further research because most of the studies done in this area are quantitative in nature and relatively few works are qualitative. In fact, in many of the recommendations for future research, authors have stated that further exploration should involve a search for alternative causal interpretations (Meyer, Irving, & Allen, 1998) and synthesis of research findings (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). For example, during the interpretation of results for their longitudinal studies, Meyer et al. (1998) said that the “data were correlational and are therefore subject to alternative causal interpretations” (Meyer et al., 1998, p.50). There are two implications from this statement: first, the data can be reinterpreted using other quantitative methods to look for contributory explanations; second, a qualitative methodology could be applied to enhance the understanding of human behavior and the motivations that cause action. Such findings are relevant to this dissertation because it supports a case for qualitative methodology.

In a study involving social exchange relationships, employees offer dedication and loyalty to the organization by demonstrating high performance and reduced turnover. The more the employees feel that the organization is supporting them, the fewer acts of turnover there are. The degree of OC that an employee has is greatly influenced by

supervisors who maintained a good relationship with their subordinate (Lo et al., 2010). The primary purpose of the study was to examine how leadership styles as perceived by employees affect their degree of OC. The population of interest for this study was located in the manufacturing industry in a small Southeast Asian country. Of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 156 were returned with a response rate of 78%. The researchers used Allen and Meyer's (1996) 18-item multidimensional scale. At a 99% confidence interval ( $p < .001$ ), the leadership style called *idealized influence* was found to be positively correlated with OC ( $r = .25$ ). At 95% confidence interval ( $p < .005$ ), *intellectual stimulation* and *inspirational motivation* were also found to be positively correlated with OC ( $r = .21$  and  $r = .19$ , respectively). Their primary conclusion was that OC can be influenced by leadership styles and thereby predispose turnover rates. OC and lower turnover intention are a by-product of perceived organizational and supervisory support (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010).

In short, support engenders commitment. HR strategies and the supervisors who execute those strategies have a very active role in determining turnover. Managers can influence or manage turnover intentions by configuring HR strategies to encourage high-commitment practices. Conclusions from studies like the one done by Lo et al. (2010) pave the way for research that question how strategic HR practices can empower managers to build AC. In addition to that, by using a qualitative methodology in an application of the SOAR framework, questions can be asked to enhance the comprehension of human behavior and the incentives that result in action.

**The link between AC and turnover.** Many studies have been conducted based on the three-component construct created by Allen and Meyer (1990). All three

components of commitment relate negatively to turnover while AC (in comparison to NC and CC) has the strongest positive correlation with OCB, attendance, and performance (Meyer et al., 2002). Allen and Meyer's (1990) original multidimensional construct was further expanded in a two-part quantitative study by Wasti (2005) who created six commitment profiles, namely, highly committed, non-committed, affective dominant, continuance dominant, affective-normative dominant, and neutral. Wasti (2005) found that the combined influence of AC, CC, and NC exceeds the traditional AC profile where highly committed and AC–NC dominant groups had the lowest intention to leave.

AC can be an attribute that is demonstrated towards the organization, supervisors, and career or occupation. In the social exchange process between employee and supervisor, support and trust are built (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). Ultimately, identification with an employee-supervisor relationship results in AC. The beneficiary of the accompanying behavior can be a demonstration of commitment to the organization, to the supervisor or to one's occupation. In Vandenberghe and Bentein's (2009) study of 1,089 participants from three different industries (pharmaceutical, nursing, and university faculty), they found that AC shown towards organizations and supervisors exerted independent effects on turnover and turnover intention. In particular, AC to supervisors was associated with reduced turnover. When AC to organizations was low, AC to supervisors had a significant positive impact on retaining employees. The recommendation from this study was that supervisors and managers should strive to develop employees' commitment to both organization and supervisor as either one of these attachments can be a safeguard against turnover. AC shown towards the supervisor

can compensate for a weak link to organizational AC. When both attachments are present, there is a stronger link and reduced turnover.

Weng and McElroy (2012) did a survey in China to test the level of AC towards occupations and they unveiled yet another interesting facet of AC. Traditional AC studies have been targeted towards organizations, supervisors, or employee organizational relationships but little attention had been paid to how committed an individual is to their occupation. The researchers linked AC to turnover intentions and examined how opportunity for career growth can positively or negatively influence whether or not an individual leaves their occupation. In their study, career growth consists of four factors: career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth.

Opportunity for career growth was found to influence employee behavior and determine whether or not the employee would pursue a career in the first place. They found during this study that affective occupational commitment, which is AC directed towards an occupational career, mediates the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions. The practical application of such a study can be manifested in strategic HR practices (such as retention strategies) whereby organizations can create an environment that fosters organizational career growth and at the same time, consciously choose to hire individuals who already have high levels of AC towards their chosen careers. A combination like this would increase the organization's chances of retaining those employees with the expertise that they need.

The examples of prior research discussed in this section show that AC is linked to lower intention to quit or low turnover. From Weng and McElroy's (2012) study, it was

found that career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth contribute to the development of AC. From Vandenberghe and Bentein's (2009), it was noted that attachments to managers and/or organizations encourage the development of AC and discourage turnover. The research for this dissertation aims to link the ideas from both of these studies by consolidating organizational practices such as career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth under the broader concept of strategic HR practices and question whether managers and/or organizations can build AC when implementing these HR practices. The desired positive behavioral outcome from having more AC would be an increased intention to stay or lower turnover.

**Relevance: AC and behavioral outcomes.** The benefit of building AC (and OC) is that there is an increased intention to stay or reduced turnover. The negative relationship between AC and turnover has been repeatedly demonstrated in research. Even though behavioral outcomes such as turnover are not the main focus of the research in this dissertation, it is important to acknowledge that organizations are interested in how AC is built because they want to realize some of the positive behavioral outcomes such as increased intention to stay or reduced turnover. This is part of a larger discussion regarding the cause and effect of AC.

### **Strategic HR Practices**

Strategic HR practices have been shown to affect employee behavior and influence behavioral reactions (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). This is considered an important predictor of behavior or performance and therefore important to the organization with regard to commitment related behavioral outcomes. To further

understand the effects of strategic HR practices on AC, it is necessary to examine the literature concerning soft and hard HR models and also common models of strategic HR practices. As a construct, strategic HR practices suffer from a lack of consistency in naming convention, definitions, and construct development. In order to understand and properly construct a working definition for this dissertation, it is practical to begin with a historical account of how the construct came to be what it is today.

**Soft and hard HR models.** Among the many different models of HR, there are two schools of thought that are most relevant to the discussion of commitment and they are represented as *soft* (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills, & Walton, 1984), and *hard* (Guest, 1987) models, which were derived from Harvard and the University of Michigan, respectively. The hard perspective is a strategic approach that links workforce management to organizational strategy. A hard model encompasses policy and practices from management, which are aligned, to organizational goals and purposes (Guest, 1987). Conversely, the soft view of HR (Storey, 2001), popularized a distinctive approach to managing employees. The soft approach is rooted in the human relations school of thought, which fundamentally encourages commitment to the organization by focusing on workers' needs, values, and beliefs. The SOAR framework has a similar purpose because "stakeholders are creating a shared set of values, vision, mission statement, identifying strengths and opportunities to create strategic initiatives, strategies, and plans that achieve desired results" (Stavros & Cole, 2013, p. 24). Walton (1985) later developed a high-commitment work system (HCWS), which incorporated a simultaneous adoption of hard and soft HR models.

When employees believe in the mission, the purpose, and ultimately have buy-in, a program can be more successful and achieve the purpose that it was intended for. Gill and Meyer (2011) contend that HR policy has a role and impact in this effort. Their study focused on soft HR practices because they believed that it is more likely to result in positive organizational outcomes for organizations. Gill and Meyer's (2011) study has similarities with the SOAR framework because part of believing in mission and having buy-in involves employees identifying with strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results evident in the implementation of HR practices. Gill and Meyer (2011) did not use the SOAR framework to test their model, but their study provides opportunity for research to be done using SOAR.

The results from Gill and Meyer (2011)'s research showed that HR was strategic and even though organizations were trying to deliver "hard" strategy through hard HR practices, there was no indication that HR was Machiavellian in disguising hard reality with soft rhetoric or delivering employer outcomes at the expense of employees. "When HR was strategic and not impoverished, in terms of power, resources, and time, it was effective in implementing soft reality, which reduces the gap between rhetoric and reality thereby delivering positive outcomes" (Gill & Meyer, 2011, p. 21). This implies that as resources become scarce, and HR strategy is not given proper consideration during delivery, there is a gap between policy and practice. In this situation, HR strategy lacked power to influence positive impact on outcomes. The implications for Gill and Meyer's (2011) study in relation to the discussion of commitment are as follows: organizations can find great benefit in increasing soft HR policy and practices because there are positive outcomes and by implication, promote OC. However, organizations should take

great care in aligning both the policy rhetoric and soft HR practice because only where there is consistency will there be achievable positive results. There needs to be strategic alignment between HR policy and management practices, as well as power, time, and resources (Gill & Meyer, 2011). HR is not just an administrative function but also a strategic tool to execute business strategy, which delivers payoff in positive affective outcomes. Similar to the SOAR framework, during the results phase, organizations are asking questions like “What do we want to be known for? What are our measurable results?” (Stavros, 2013, p. 10). Questions like these are part of a strategic inquiry involving appreciative intent. Findings like the one by Gill and Meyer (2011) provide grounds and opportunity for research to be conducted to find out how strategic HR practices can deliver positive affective outcomes.

The tension between hard and soft HR practices has been long acknowledged and in one important piece of literature by Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, and Stiles (1997). They presented a paper on eight case studies done in within organizations in the U.K. where they observed broad ranging HR practices using a qualitative methodology. Members of these organizations engaged in focus group discussions, using semi-structured interviews to discuss characteristics of the soft perspective (developmental-human stance) and the hard perspective (instrumental-utilitarian stance).

When the results were cataloged into these two schools of thought, Truss et al. (1997) found that *human nature* perceived HR practices positively when employees were allowed to determine the course of their individual development. However, because most companies had to align business strategy with HR policy, employees who found that their training opportunities were curtailed by business strategy did not have a positive view of

the training or its benefit to career development. When employees were curtailed by the organizations, there were correspondingly low scores on questions concerning OC. Similarly, in *control strategies*, the soft model measured trust and discretion and where there was a *us and them* perception of strategic HR practices, there were low levels of commitment as measured by OCQ assessment developed by Mowday et al. (1979). In summary, employees perceived empty rhetoric when it is presented to them. This implied that in order to achieve positive commitment outcomes from soft (strategic) HR strategies, there has to be underlying support from organizational strategy and sincerity in execution. If employees can perceive empty rhetoric, then they are equally capable of perceiving sincerity in the form of strengths, opportunities, and aspirations. An application of the SOAR framework (which is a positive inquiry into generative thought) to the discussion of HR practices could identify where strategic HR practices could achieve positive commitment outcomes.

Edgar and Geare (2005) expanded on this same idea when they did a somewhat similar study by testing the relationship between HR practice and employee work-related attitudes. The research looked at four areas of “soft” HR practice: good and safe working conditions, training and development, equal employment opportunities, and recruitment. These were chosen because they were previously proven to have the greatest impact on employee behavior and attitudes (Guest, 2001). They also used an established method of data collection for assessing the relationship between HR practice and employee related attitudes (Guest, 1999).

Edgar and Geare (2005) discovered a strong statistically significant relationship between HR practice and employee work-related attitudes when the HR practices (good

and safe working conditions, EEO, recruitment and selection, and training and development) were viewed from the employee perspective. When analyzing results from employer assessments ( $n = 572$ ) of work-related practices, the researchers found that at a confidence interval of 95%,  $r$  ranged from 0.002 to 0.221. On the other hand, when analyzing results for employee assessments of the same work-related practices, they found that at a 99% confidence interval  $r$  ranged from 0.523 to 0.707. The difference was statistically significant. It is the employee's own assessment regarding the strength of HR practice that has the greatest correlation to attitudes (OC, job satisfaction and organizational fairness), and positive perception of organizational practices. Employee perception and perspective are very important and soft HR practices have the greatest impact when employees perceive that they are being "treated as humans" (Carson, 2005). The significance of this study in relation to the discussion regarding AC is that, much like the previous section on antecedents, employee perception plays a very large role in affecting positive outcomes for commitment and corresponding behavioral mindsets. Obtaining a positive perception of organizational practices is something that can be explored using the SOAR framework, which comes from the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (discussion regarding POS and SOAR will be detailed later in this chapter).

Edgar and Geare (2005) also acknowledged that their regression analysis did not disclose the cause-and-effect nature of the relationship between HR practice and employee attitudes. They verified the existence and strength of AC under certain conditions but did not explore how it came into existence. This omission represents an opportunity for research as outlined in this dissertation.

**Common models of HR strategy.** Within the commitment literature, there is a lot of encouragement from the scholars to link commitment with performance as established in the previous section, HR strategy is one way to encourage growth in AC mindsets among employees. From this perspective, scholars researched how to link high performance human resources practices to commitment. Since this area of study is relatively new, there is little consistency in definitions, themes, and construct conception. There is even inconsistency in labeling – here are some examples: *innovative human resource management* practices (Thompson, 2011) are also called *high-commitment*, *high involvement* or *high performance work practices* (HPWP) (Boselie et al., 2005; Canibano, 2013), or *high-performance work systems* (HPWS) (Way, 2002). For the purpose of this dissertation, these labels will be considered as part of a larger construct, strategic HR practices. Despite the inconsistencies, the studies have value and provide opportunity to consolidate definitions and practices into an appropriate *bundle*.

A study done by Canibano (2013) is one of few qualitative studies in the field of strategic HR practices. The purpose of the study was to scrutinize how implementing innovative HR practices affects employee well being. The research was conducted in Spanish companies that were known for high technological innovations as well as innovative HR practices. The data collected consisted of 50 interviews and document analysis on three selected innovative HR practices, namely telework (working from home), communication (making virtual calls, collaboration tool set, document sharing, etc.), and participation (internal online platform to share innovative ideas). When examined for effects of health and well being upon the employees, it was discovered that innovative HR practices did have a good effect on physical, psychological, and social

well being of employees. Similar to the discussion on antecedents earlier, it is acknowledged that positive work experiences lead to higher levels of commitment (Steers, 1977). By implication, there are possible links between the earlier work by Steers and Canibano's more modern study.

HR practices referenced here help organizations to boost employee retention by increasing commitment to organizations. With increased OC, they retain human capital, decrease the intention to quit, and increase productivity by reducing voluntary employee turnover (McElroy et al., 2001; Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005). Some categories of high-commitment practices include career development, training, direct employee participation, development appraisal (Marescaux, de Winnie, & Sels, 2012), and mentoring (Arthur, 1994; Marescaux et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding inconsistencies in naming convention, the categories of strategic HR practices that are tested have roots in earlier studies such as the one described previously by Truss et al. (1997) where *human nature* and *control strategies* form the basis for HR practices. Despite the mounting volume of HR literature, there is comparatively little agreement about what constitutes the *bundle* of strategic HR practices (Baptiste, 2008).

Table 2.2 and 2.3 show the categories of HR practices tested by different researchers. When these studies are compared with each other, regardless of their label, HR practices are shown to have varying levels of positive outcomes or effects on employees. However, it is reasonable to say that a lot of it depends upon the context, in which the HR practices are implemented, as well as the perception or expectation of the employee on whom the HR practices are applied. One instance of a research project

where this is demonstrated is in the study on organizational and psychological empowerment in HR-performance linkage. Kazlauskaite, Buciuniene, and Turauskas (2012) showed that psychological empowerment is a part of the bundle of HR activities and is in employee work-related attitudes. Empowerment is positively related to psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. Empowerment is a positive work experience, and it is also a valid HR practice, representing a significant tool in enhancing positive employee work-related attitudes. This leads to the conclusion that empowerment is a strategic HR practice that causes AC to be formed and is a component that should be tested during the research phase of this dissertation to discern if there are positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes from its implementation.

Table 2.2

*Labels, Categories, and Bundles of HR practices, Labels, Main Findings, and Corresponding Researchers: Soft HR, High-commitment HR practice*

HR label & Researcher (year)	HR practices	Main finding
Soft HR  Marescaux et al. (2012)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Career development</li> <li>2. Training</li> <li>3. Direct employee participation</li> <li>4. Development appraisal</li> <li>5. Mentoring</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independence and satisfaction levels play a role in mediating interactions between HR practices and HR outcomes.</li> <li>- HR practices are connected with basic need satisfaction.</li> <li>- Implementation of soft HR practices by itself is not sufficient to influence a positive outcome but it has to be combined with employees' talents and interests, in other words, employee perceptions or employee expectations.</li> </ul>
High-commitment HR practices  Boselie et al. (2005)  Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers, & de Lange (2010)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participation: empowerment practices, suggestions/grievance schemes.</li> <li>2. Teamwork</li> <li>3. Information sharing</li> <li>4. Staffing</li> <li>5. Rewards</li> <li>6. Training and development</li> <li>7. Internal promotion (career development)</li> <li>8. Performance management</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovered positive associations between employee's perceptions high-commitment HR practices, AC, and job satisfaction. This is based on social exchange in signaling theories.</li> <li>- HR practices can draw out positive work-related attitudes.</li> <li>- In combination, high-commitment HR practices had a stronger association with AC and job satisfaction.</li> <li>- Age has a moderating effect on this relationship.</li> <li>- Tenure also had a moderating effect where more tenure made high-commitment HR practices less effective in generating AC and job satisfaction.</li> </ul>
High-commitment HR practices  Baptiste (2008)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selection practices and internal promotion</li> <li>2. Employee voice</li> <li>3. Employee involvement, information sharing</li> <li>4. High compensation contingent on performance</li> <li>5. Extensive training, learning, and development</li> <li>6. Greater involvement in decision-making and work teams</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HR practices have a significant positive impact on employee well being at work.</li> <li>- HR practices that help to maximize employee well being are not always the same as those that elicit high-performance.</li> <li>- Commitment, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and satisfaction have been shown to influence levels of engagement, performance, and intention to quit.</li> <li>- Implementation of HR practices by line managers has an impact on employee commitment, job satisfaction, and work life balance.</li> </ul>

Table 2.3

*Labels, Categories, and Bundles of HR practices, Labels, Main Findings, and Corresponding Researchers: Innovations in work practices, HR practices*

HR label & Researcher (year)	HR practices	Main finding
Innovations in work practices Thompson (2011)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Industry and production context</li> <li>2. Distributed nature of management activity</li> <li>3. Social embeddedness</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In innovative high-tech environments, there are corresponding innovative work practices.</li> <li>- Organizations are categorized as innovative according to the type of work that they do within the context of their industry and production types.</li> <li>- Managers role in shaping the context, form, and meaning of workplace innovations. Definition of innovation is also dependent upon context and adaptation to organizational change.</li> <li>- Commitment to the organization is dependent upon context.</li> </ul>
HR practices Gellatly, Hunter, Currie, & Irving (2009)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development oriented practices:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Providing meaningful, interesting, and challenging work</li> <li>b. Providing development (training) opportunities on an ongoing basis</li> <li>c. Providing increasing responsibility and autonomy</li> <li>d. Providing skill development</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Stability oriented practices:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Providing job security</li> <li>b. Providing stable over the wages</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Reward oriented:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Providing bonus pay/incentives</li> <li>b. Providing increases in salary/profit sharing</li> <li>c. Opportunities to earn a higher income</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Organizations can use HR practices in a strategic manner to shape the nature of overall employee commitment” (p. 869)</li> <li>- Development oriented practices heightened <i>emotional attachment</i> especially with AC.</li> <li>- Reward oriented practices significantly increase the likelihood of emotional attachment and decreased the <i>uncommitted</i> profile.</li> <li>- Stability oriented practices were more likely to encourage the increase of continuance commitment</li> </ul>
HR Practices Gilbert, de Winnie, & Sels (2011)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing effective performance appraisals</li> <li>2. Giving feedback</li> <li>3. Offering training to improve work performance</li> <li>4. Providing backup when there is illness</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-While the effect of the HR department on employees is significant, the line manager’s behavior had a greater influence on AC.</li> <li>-Leadership oriented behaviors (or HR practices) can substantially influence levels of OC.</li> </ul>

As a construct, high-commitment HR strategies suffer controversies such as inconsistent naming conventions, an inability to find consensus for the contents of a *bundle*, and a lack of a clear voice in conceptual definitions. Table 2.2 and 2.3 show the variances and inconsistencies in naming conventions and *bundles*. The only consistency is that the literature review for the research or conceptual papers featured in Table 2.2 and 2.3 draw from common sources or referenced common keywords such as *soft HR* and *high-commitment HR*. There are some consistent themes found in these *bundles* and these categories will represent the working description of a *bundle* for research in this dissertation. They are, empowerment, career development, training, mentoring, performance management, awards and recognition, career advancement, information sharing, and meaningful work.

Strategic HR practices have been known to mediate the relationship between Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and AC can help in the prediction of employee behavior. AC is positively correlated to job performance and OCB (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Social exchange theory has often been used to link the commitment mindset to OCB, where there is a relationship of reciprocity. Strongly committed employees feel like they want to reciprocate by displaying behaviors that advance the organization (Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, & Purcell, 2004). During the implementation and outcome of HR strategy, there is reciprocity between the employee and employer where the latter can offer (through strategic HR practices) income growth, job stability, or career advancement, and the employee reciprocates positive OCB and corresponding AC.

HR practices, especially, soft HR practices, have relationships to positive organizational outcomes and positive experiences as seen from the perception of the

employee. This is demonstrated in the findings column in Table 2.2 and 2.3. Several of the findings point to HR practices and AC, and this is a topic of discussion in the next section.

**Relevance: Strategic HR practices and the social exchange framework.**

Formal organizational relationships that have their genesis in HR and line managers can influence AC in employees. This was researched by Gilbert et al. (2011) who drew quantitative data from 1,363 employees in service organizations where they found that line managers can augment AC by the successful enactment of HR practices accompanied by effective results-oriented leadership behavior. In the study, examples of HR practices included providing effective performance appraisals, giving feedback, offering training to improve work performance and providing backup when there is illness. These practices make the employees feel that they were supported and in turn, the employees interpreted these actions as encouragement to execute the job effectively.

Gilbert et al. (2011) found that these practices, which are firmly anchored within a social exchange framework, were positively related to employees' AC. The researchers came to the conclusion that the HR department's effect on employees' AC is quite significant and are only surpassed by the line managers' behavior. Gilbert et al. (2011) managed to show that leadership oriented behaviors or (HR practices) can substantially influence levels of employee commitment. Individual HR practices when bundled together in a strategic manner can further organizational purposes and change the nature of overall employee commitment (Gellatly et al. 2009). This idea regarding change, strategic transformation, and the positive approach to strategic thinking will be discussed later in the section on POS.

So far, the review has shown that these strategic HR practices or desirable treatments from management have a positive effect on AC and consequently, researchers have linked AC to positive behavioral outcomes such as a lower intention to quit. In many of these studies, AC effects are characteristically explained in a social exchange framework (Gilbert et al., 2011) or context where employees voluntarily displayed attitudes such as commitment in exchange for desirable treatment from management. Examples of desirable treatment from management include: meaningful work, training, autonomy, job security (Gellatly et al. 2009), high compensation contingent on performance, employee voice, involvement in decision making (Baptiste, 2008), and empowerment (Kazlauskaite et al., 2012).

The literature reviewed also suggested that when strategic HR practices are implemented, the social exchange framework or organizational context is important because employees have expectations which are based on their personal experiences and interpret or perceive the impact of HR practices differently, depending on the framework or context in which they are implemented. Employee perceptions can sway the manner in which AC forms (Lok & Crawford, 2001). The conclusion from the literature is that context, social exchange framework, and employee perception are relevant in the study of AC.

When attempting to answer the question of how strategic HR practices build AC, the literature review has thus far shown that strategic HR practices do not build AC or produce positive organizational behavior in a vacuum. Building AC and positive organizational behavior involves a combination of social exchange, employee perception, manager behavior, and the *bundle* of HR practices being introduced. The implications

gathered from the literature lead to the conclusion that research for this dissertation has to include social context in order to get a full picture of the cause and effect of AC.

### **Organizational Commitment in Public Administration**

The purpose of reviewing published literature in the field of public administration is to find out if AC is (not) well represented in the research. If AC has not been a focus of research in public administration, then the lack of publications provides opportunity for the research contained in this dissertation. Traditionally, OC has been studied in the domain of organizational behavior (OB) and human resources. It has received relatively little attention in public administration journals. Using two large databases, Journal Storage (JSTOR) and Business Source Complete (EBSCO), a keyword search was conducted for *organizational commitment*. Three of the more influential and representative journals in the field of organizational behavior were selected for this analysis and they are: *International Journal of Human Resources* (1991-2014), *Journal of Applied Psychology* (1991-2014), and *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (1991-2014). For the field of Public Administration, the following journals were selected for this analysis: *Public Personnel Management* (1991-2014), *International Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (1991-2014), *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (1981-2008), *Journal of Public Policy*, *Public Administration Quarterly* (1981-2008), *Public Administration Review* (1983-2011), and *Public Performance and Management Review* (2000-2008). Table 2.4 summarizes the results of the search for keywords appearing in the abstract. OC was found in 382 OB articles and 74 public administration articles. It is evident that OC received intense focus in public administration literature when compared to OB literature.

An additional search was conducted through the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), and it was discovered that between 1972 and 2014, there were 50 documents on the subject of OC, filed by civilian and military members of all branches of service. Most of these documents were Master's level theses and reports on official workforce surveys. Again, this is not a subject that has received a lot of attention in from the US Department of Defense.

From this limited analysis and count of publications, it can be inferred that within the context of public administration, there are opportunities for research in the areas of OC. To take this idea one step further, it can be observed from this analysis that many of the public administration articles referred to schools, state, local, and municipal government. When this analysis was taken to a more finite level, and a count for articles involving the federal government was conducted, it can be observed that those articles make up only approximately a third of the total count. Roughly 20 articles were published over as many years on the topic of OC in public administration. This analysis was repeated using two different databases, JSTOR and EBSCO, and it was discovered that the results were consistent.

Table 2.4

*Comparison Between Organizational Behavior and Public Administration Journals  
Using Keywords: Organizational Commitment*

	Keyword	
	Publication years	Organizational Commitment
<b>Organizational Behavior Journals</b>		
<b>Database: EBSCO - Business Source Complete</b>		
International Journal of Human Resource Management	1991-2014	146
Journal of Applied Psychology	1991-2014	131
Journal of Organizational Behavior	1991-2014	105
TOTALS		382
<b>Public Administration Journals:</b>		
<b>Database: EBSCO - Business Source Complete</b>		
Public Personnel Management	1991-2014	25
International Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	1991-2014	16
<b>Database: JSTOR</b>		
Journal of Policy Analysis and Management	1981-2008	2
Journal of Public Policy	1981-2008	0
Public Administration Quarterly	1983-2011	3
Public Administration Review	1940-2008	14
Public Performance & Management Review	2000-2008	14
TOTALS		74
Personnel today (trade publication)	1991-2014	185

Within the collection of public administration literature published over the last 10 years, there were only five significant studies on OC in PA, and these articles addressed the following areas: internet use and OC (Ting & Grant, 2010), commitment profiles and work withdrawal (Somers & Birnbaum, 2000), a comparison of OC among Baby Boomers and Gen X (Tang et al., 2012), employee empowerment (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013), transformational leadership, and public service motivation (Lavigna, 2012). Of the five articles, only two were related to federal government, and three featured OC as the main focus of the research and not as a supporting variable.

Similar to studies in organizational behavior, it has been found that in public administration, there are positive outcomes affected by OC. One such example can be found in a study of government hospital workers who were assessed for OC (AC and CC) and career commitment. Somers and Birnbaum (2000) found that those who were committed to both organization and career demonstrated the most positive work attitudes and the strongest intention to remain within the organization. This quantitative experiment included a sample of 175 (response rate 50% with 109 useable surveys) professional employees from a teaching hospital in southeastern United States. The measurements for OC were taken using Allen and Meyer's (1990) eight-item scale. Unexpectedly, they found that these dually committed individuals also had high incidences of job search behavior, but it did not translate into higher turnover. They attribute this finding to the labor market at that time and the fewer opportunities for exit. The study could have been improved if measurements taken clearly delineated AC from CC, and career commitment from OC. This delineation seemed to be absent from their results and that could have contributed to the conflicting findings.

Another public administration study where commitment was featured as the main research variable was conducted by Tang et al. (2012) on occupational commitment among public personnel and the differences between baby boomers and Gen-Xers. In this study, they use a stratified random sample from the National Recreation and Park Association ( $n = 397$ ), and they were looking for relationships between attitudes: *love of money*, *leisure ethic*, and occupational commitment. The study revealed that *leisure ethic* is an antecedent for AC in baby boomers ( $r = 0.19$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) while the *love of money* was an antecedent to occupational commitment only in female Gen Xers ( $r = 0.04$  and  $p$

< 0.001). Career tenure was positively related to AC ( $r$  = range from 0.06 to 0.42 and  $p$  < 0.001) for both generations.

The most significant observation from reviewing the literature in public administration is that there is a dearth of studies or articles concerning AC in organizations. There are no studies involving OC, AC, and POS. The lack of publications represents an opportunity for research regarding AC in public administration.

**Relevance: Research opportunities in public administration.** Even though OC is a mature construct and has been studied repeatedly in different industries, there is a surprising lack of existing research in OC in the field of public administration. The implication is that there are opportunities in research that validate existing and seminal theoretical perspectives. There is also opportunity for this dissertation to establish (or disprove) that AC has common antecedents in public and non-public administration.

In Chapter One, under the section entitled *Background of the Study*, there was a brief discussion about a study commissioned by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) (2007). The study described a phenomenon where there was a distinguishable pattern to employee departures. Statistical studies commissioned by the CBO are common but not many focus on commitment. A search of publically available data on the CBO website showed that there were no subsequent studies on commitment produced by the CBO after this 2007 report. The scarcity of statistical reporting makes the research in this dissertation more valuable because the population is unique and the availability of data is limited.

Change in the United States Government is a constant and the administration in Washington is subject to turnover every two, four, or eight years. Federal employment is subject to different political forces, laws, or statutes enforced by Congress. Each President and accompanying administration, whether by United States Code or executive order, brings a different perspective to laws affecting the federal workforce. HR policies in the federal government change with the passing of new laws; and if HR policies are antecedents to AC, then the implication is that changing policies result in changing levels of commitment.

The United States federal government employs about 2.7 million civilian workers in more than 100 federal agencies, and this represents roughly 2% of the total US workforce (CBO, 2007). Approximately 1.4 million of these employees are full-time, salaried workers. In 2012, the Office of Personnel Management recorded that there are 4,312,000 federal employees in the United States. This represents a significant number of people and because all federal employees fall under the rules and regulations set forth by Congress and defined by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), they are subject to the same sets of basic benefits and employment conditions, and have similarities across many different agencies regardless of where the employment takes place.

However, each agency, sub-agency, or center of operations has some liberty in implementing their HR policies as long as they fall within the larger scope set out by OPM and the inference from this is that research context is important. A study conducted in the U.S. Forest Service (where there are more hourly workers) may yield different results than in a NASA research laboratory (where there are more knowledge workers)

because the population of workers is different and they view imposed HR policies using different personal perspectives and context.

As stated in Chapter One, this study intends to fill a void in public administration literature with regard to AC. Employees experience AC when they identify with it, are involved in, and enjoy membership within the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). With over four million employees in the federal workplace across the country, answers to the question, *how is AC built*, may have some value and applicability because employees enjoy membership within the organization, and it leads to positive behavioral outcomes. Researching known concepts such as AC in an environment that was not previously analyzed adds to the body of knowledge.

### **Positive Organizational Scholarship**

Commitment binds an individual to an organization and thereby reduces the likelihood of turnover (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Allen and Meyer (1990) implied in their scholarly works that, AC, in particular, has positive connotations and is linked to the concept of positive affect for the organization. This section will explore literature on Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) in an attempt to uncover links in existing literature between POS and AC. Discovery of links between strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR will contribute to the continued development of POS.

Human beings like to dream, and they have the creativity to turn those dreams into reality. Hope Theory claims that people are motivated to take action when they have a purpose that elevates them, sense that there is collective confidence to reach their goal, and a practical plan or strategy to reach their goal (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997). Having hope leads individuals to search for shared purpose, and this can include more

active listening capacity, the ability to achieve a great number of goals, increased levels of creativity, resilience, a greater sense of meaning, and employee satisfaction (Ludema et al., 2003). This section on Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) contains a brief overview of its genesis and development into constructs like Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and SOAR.

Lines of inquiry into optimal individual psychological states gave birth to the field of POS, which is “an umbrella concept used to unify a variety of approaches in organizational studies, each of which incorporates the notion of *the positive* (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). There have been misinterpretation and disparagement regarding the term *positive* with criticism that it ignores or disregards the negatives. However, this field of study does not exclude the negative, but rather it focuses on “extraordinarily positive outcomes or positively deviant performance” (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 261). Adopting a POS lens means that there is a “commemoration of successes and a spotlight on life-giving elements or generative ideas associated with a particular organizational phenomenon” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p.2). Organizations want to introduce strategic HR practices to a workforce because it has the ability to draw out positive work-related attitudes (Boselie et al., 2005). The research in this dissertation represents an attempt to establish a firm place for strategic HR practices in the field of POS by examining data for parallels, consistencies, and rationales that support the positive organizational phenomenon known as AC.

Another area of focus revolves around the examination of “virtuousness or the best of human condition” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p.3). Studying the desirable aspects of the human condition helps to catalog organizational behaviors, which are

worthy of cultivation. Earlier in this literature review, it was established that AC (in comparison to CC and NC) is also expected to have the strongest positive relation to desirable work behaviors such as attendance, in-role and performance, organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer et al., 2002). This dissertation intends to understand if the SOAR framework can help to build AC and ultimately contribute to the long-term goal of understanding employee turnover and persistence. AC is worthy of cultivation because there are possibilities for long-term benefits, and similarly, POS is “unapologetic in emphasizing affirmative attributes, capabilities, and possibilities” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p.119).

POS research promotes the position that employees wish to make positive contributions to the advancement of their organizations. An interesting and emerging area of research related to POS is the concept of high-quality connections (HQC), which is a term used to describe short-term, didactic, and positive interactions at work. Within the organizational contexts, there are many opportunities for building connections, and there are many ways to encourage them through formal processes such as strategic HR practices (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012).

The connective dynamics within an organization is a concept that focuses on emphasizing the importance of interactions in work organizations for the development of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. The connective dynamics lend well to interpretation on using a qualitative methodology because according to Creswell (2009, p. 201), qualitative research “is inductive, based on participants’ meanings, is emergent, often involving the use of a theoretical lens, is interpretive, and is holistic”. Similar to the discussions earlier in this literature review on antecedents of AC, organizations are

trying to build upon such connections with employees through formal processes such as strategic HR practices. In studying how relationships and connections change or adapt, there has to be a mechanism for inquiry and anchored firmly within the realm of POS is Appreciative Inquiry.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI).** The purpose of this section to establish a basic understanding of AI principles, on which, the SOAR framework is built. AI is based on social construction assumptions with a commitment to continuous inquiry and attention to values-based organization design (Ludema et al., 2003). AI is strongly entrenched in POS and positive psychology. It is also a strong catalyst for change management because it engages a far-reaching collection of internal and external stakeholders in the change process (Mohr & Ludema, 2012).

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva from Case Western Reserve University co-created AI as a method of change management in the 1980s. They applied the AI 4-D cycle of discovery, dream, design, and destiny, harnessing the power to transform, and took it a step further by applying the methodology in a summit. The power of the *whole* can bring out the best in human systems via a quick, consistent, and effective fashion (Cooperrider, Godwin, Boland, & Avital, 2012). Cooperrider and Srivastva discovered that an intervention was more effective when it was framed as an inquiry. They had more immediate and dramatic results when they asked questions in a positive light versus a negative emphasis (Ludema et al., 2003). These are questions that inspire knowledge sharing about positive experiences, and this line of inquiry empowers and energizes the relationships that individuals have with one another. This technique of asking question in a positive light has some great possibilities for the research in this dissertation because it

is aligned with the idea that strategic HR practices and AC have significant positive effects on worker attitudes (Hom et al., 2009).

The five principles that guide AI are deep rooted in sound action research models. Action research is “an approach to research which aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii). These are: the constructionist principle, simultaneity principle, poetic principle, anticipatory principle, and positive principle. The constructionist principle states that organizations are socially constructed whereby how we know and what we do is closely related. The principle of simultaneity believes that inquiry is the intervention. The poetic principle states that people and organizations have stories to tell, which invokes sentiments and understanding. The anticipatory principle, states that our image of the future is guided by what we do today. The positive principle states that positive emotion is the catalyst for change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). AI takes the principle of social constructivism and puts a positive twist on it (Cooperrider et al., 2008). People envision (dream) their destiny and develop plans to make it happen. Powerful positive internal narratives, when communicated to an organization, infect others in turn because organizations are centers of interconnectedness. It is through the powerful vehicle of dialogue that change occurs, and social reality is constructed.

AI aims to direct thought, action, and the inquiry towards generating positive images that result in positive action. Human beings that make up organizations are aspirational creatures because they assign meaning to experiences and communicate these to one another, as a whole thereby enabling innovation and progress (Wong, 2012). There is power in meaning, purpose, and significance, which are all pillars of the best in

life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The inquiry is intended to be applicable, provocative, and collaborative (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The way questions are asked focuses individuals in the direction of creating generative connections. When individuals make those connections with others, they start to own the conversation and the ideas take hold thereby co-creating organizations through conversations (Puerta & Wong, 2012).

When an HR practice or program is launched with the intent of building AC, positive dialogue within a social context is important because that is how social reality is constructed. The importance of social context was established earlier in this chapter, in the section on *strategic HR practices and the social exchange framework*. Connecting the concept of AI and strategic HR practices has positive connotations especially if the latter were to be introduced to an organization using AI principles. This is exactly what the research in this dissertation intends to show. By harnessing the power to transform and applying AI principles, employees can envision what destiny and possibilities await them. The value of AI is quite remarkable because when people experience the wholeness of the systems they live and work in, they develop a courage and trust to bring together people at all levels to connect to the “positive core”, thus enhancing past, present, and future capabilities (Cooperider, 2003).

**Relevance: Contribution to AI and AC literature.** In a cursory search of dissertations and theses from the *Proquest Dissertation and Theses* database, there were 427 manuscripts with AI featured in the abstract, and there were 1,043 manuscripts with AC featured in the abstract. These dissertations/theses dated between 1984 and 2013. When searched for AI (in abstract) and AC (anywhere in the text), there were 146 results.

When AC and AI were both found in the abstract, only one dissertation by Griffin (2002), of Case Western Reserve, showed up in the results. The dissertation used qualitative AI questionnaires to discern cross-generational perceptions of psychological sense of community and the impact of AC in a unionized manufacturing worksite. The constructs, AI and AC have a common goal of wanting to generate positive behavioral outcomes. Despite their similarity, there are no dissertations that have researched the connection between AI and AC, and the common goal that these two constructs have. This represents an opportunity to make a contribution to the body of knowledge by integrating these two constructs.

A similar search using human resources, HR, or human capital yielded 12 results. There were six results for AI and *federal government* with both terms in the abstract. To ultimately narrow the search to a very specific area, these were the keywords and search terms used: federal government, human resources, AC, and AI (in abstract only). Excluded from the results were: nursing, education, religious studies, and regional or county government. There were 13 results but after reading each abstract (or in some cases, looking into the study to determine context), there were only three studies that were relevant. The first is a dissertation by Bieschke (2004) who focused on AI and transgenerational organizational values within the United States Postal Service (USPS). The second dissertation, Prindle (2005) discussed AI in a mixed methods case study concerning downsizing in a Navy Reserve support organization. The third is a dissertation by Sandow (2012) and the focus was on performance management in the federal government using AI as the framework for action research. In all three dissertations, AC and HR were present but neither can be considered a key construct.

This search of dissertation topics shows that, independently, both AI and AC receive a lot of attention. However, not that many scholars have chosen to bring these two constructs together into one dissertation. The implication is that there is a lot of opportunity for new research to be performed, particularly if AI and AC are combined with strategic HR practices and also studied in a specific context, such as the federal government.

## **SOAR**

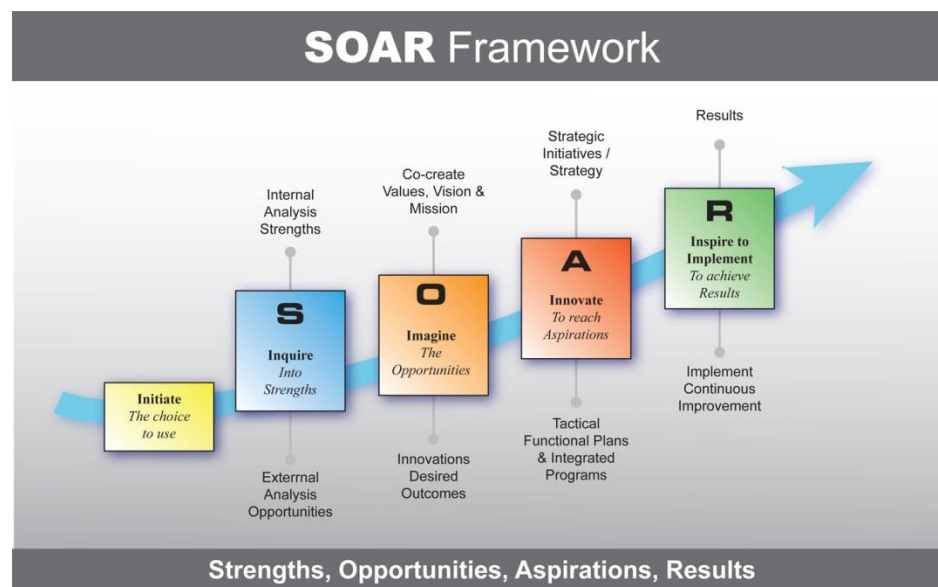
SOAR stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. SOAR, like AI has roots in organization development (OD), leadership development, and change management. It has strong theoretical research roots in many OD principles such as positive organization development, change management, and whole system change. AI and SOAR are a part of POS, a growing field of research, which focuses attention on the generative dynamics in organizations that lead to the development of human strength, and seeks to understand, through scholarly research and theory, the best of human condition (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

Focusing on and maximizing what organizations do well, SOAR creates energy and excitement, motivating individuals and organizations toward the best possible levels of productivity. The SOAR process also creates and sustains purpose and values in an organization or group, and engages employees. Like AI, SOAR leverages the positives, by focusing on what the organization does well and maximizes those strengths, which extend into discovering opportunities and aspirations.

SOAR creates conditions to enable the transformation in people and organizations. Not only do organizations uncover their own strengths, but they also see

that human beings as a collection are capable of extraordinary performance when they pool their resources, develop the capabilities of every member in service and combine their strengths. In that same way, AC is created when people have positive experiences in their organizations and when they feel that their employers are developing their capabilities and strengths. In the literature review earlier on strategic HR practices, which include high-commitment HR practices, it was repeatedly evident that HR practices can draw out positive work-related attitude (Boselie et al., 2005) and that there were positive associations among employee's perceptions of strategic HR practices, AC, and job satisfaction.

**The SOAR framework.** The SOAR framework uses a 5-I approach: initiate, inquire, imagine, innovate, and inspire (Stavros et al., 2003). Figure 2.4 shows how the SOAR framework is constructed using the 5-I process.



*Figure 2.4.* The SOAR framework is constructed using the 5-I process. From <http://www.soar-strategy.com/> by J. Stavros & G. Hinrichs, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

In the first phase of the SOAR framework, the organization or group takes the initiative and chooses to use SOAR. In the second phase, *strengths* are the focus, and the conversation centers on what the organization is doing right and what skills could be enhanced. This represents the life giving forces of the organization's existence or its positive core. In the third phase, *opportunities* take center stage and participants in a SOAR exercise are asked to talk about the positive enhancements or potentially unexplored actions and strategic innovations. In the fourth phase, *aspirations* take strengths and opportunities and direct focus into envisioning or constructing conceptual representations of what an ideal environment would look like. This phase is intended to motivate and energize the individual or the group that is working on this exercise. This fourth phase is intended to allow “the strategic team to come up with an anticipated vision statement, mission statement and set of strategic goals and objectives” (Stavros, 2013, p. 11). In the fifth segment, *results*, measurements for success are outlined and attainment of a goal is framed into tangible terms (Malone, 2010; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009; Stavros & Saint, 2010; Stavros & Wooten, 2012). “SOAR is a mechanism that produces positive strategy by “identifying and building strengths, feeding creativity in the form of opportunities, encouraging individuals and groups to share aspirations, and determining results” (Stavros & Wooten, 2012, p. 826).

Earlier in this literature review, it was shown that strategic HR practices could be used by organizations in a strategic manner to shape the nature of over employee commitment (Gellatly et al., 2009). In the same fashion, SOAR and AC have a lot in common because “employees at all levels want to engage their minds, hearts, and spirits and feel as if their aspirations and achievements connect to their work” (Stavros &

Hinrichs, 2009, p. 4). While strategic HR practices try to build AC by applying strategy to shape employee perception (Gellatly et al., 2009), “the SOAR process connects the dots between individual values and organizational efforts” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 4). Connections like this lend credibility to the SOAR framework as a viable moderator for building AC through the introduction of strategic HR practices.

**SOAR and strategic thinking.** For many strategic planners in organizations the traditional approach is to apply the SWOT analysis to a situation in order to understand the present state or “as is” situation. SWOT stands for *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*. SWOT has been traditionally taught in MBA schools to analyze case studies involving everything from economic decisions to advertising decisions, and HR practices. The SWOT analysis spends a great amount of time pinpointing weakness and threats and is focused largely on problems.

Conversely, SOAR is a “positive approach to strategic thinking and planning that allows an organization to construct its future through collaboration, shared understanding and a commitment to action” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 3). The SOAR framework allows organizations to ask generative questions to solicit generative ideas. A generative idea is one that motivates people to alter the way they imagine things to be and expose them to new possibilities or horizons. Bushe (2007) says that generative questions lead to generative conversations, generative ideas, and ultimately, generative actions. If questions are phrased in a generative manner, then generative conversations and generative actions will result.

This type of inquiry is based on AI principles. Figure 2.5 demonstrates how appreciative and strategic inquiries come together in the SOAR framework.

<i>Strategic Inquiry</i>	<b>Strengths</b> What are we doing well? What are our greatest assets?	<b>Opportunities</b> What are the best possible market opportunities?  How do we best partner with others?
<i>Appreciative Intent</i>	<b>Aspirations</b> To what do we aspire? What is our preferred future?	<b>Results</b> What do we want to be known for?  What are our measurable results?

Figure 2.5. SOAR: Strategic inquiry with appreciative intent. From “AI – The Generative Nature of SOAR.” By J. Stavros, 2013. *AI Practitioner*, 15, p. 10. Copyright 2013 by the Taos Institute.

Traditional strategic planning methods prescribes that the best way to move forward is to solve problems, looking for weaknesses and threats, strengthening defenses of the organization, and approaching change from a top down view (Mohr & Ludema, 2012) where a handful of individuals make assumptions regarding the best way to define the future. The 80/20 deficit-bias describes how 80% of the workforce feels undervalued or underutilized and only 20% agree that they have the opportunity to do their best or express their opinion everyday. It is also estimated that 80% of consulting attention is focused on "what's wrong" and only about 20% is devoted to strength analysis (Cooperrider, 2012). In a radical reversal of the 80/20 rule, the 80% should be heard using a strength-searching and solution focused set of questions. Instead of asking *what's wrong* with an HR program, the SOAR framework recommends asking *what are we doing well*. The implication is that there could be opportunities for the research as

outlined in this dissertation to build AC by asking strength-searching questions that result in positive behavioral outcomes.

**SOAR and empirical research.** Since 2009, there have been eight dissertations where SOAR has been featured as a subject of interest. Three of these empirical studies employed a qualitative methodology, two studies used a mixed methods approach, and three studies used a quantitative methodology. While there have been numerous case studies, applications by practitioners, and master's thesis written about SOAR, these eight dissertations demonstrate that there is interest in the scholarly community regarding how SOAR can support strategic conversations. Among the eight studies featuring SOAR, there are none that examine the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

The empirical studies are summarized in Table 2.5, which shows the author, title, and main finding of each dissertation. Each of these studies was well thought out, methodologically sound, and applied rigorous standards of reliability and validity (according to the requirements as imposed by methodology). More importantly, these studies have established “the use of SOAR as a strategic thinking, planning, and leading framework that creates positive momentum and sustainable change is growing both within the practitioner and scholar communities” (Stavros, Cole, & Hitchcock, 2014).

Table 2.5

*Six Empirical Studies Featuring SOAR*

Author	Title	Main Finding
Malone (2010)  Methodology: Qualitative	An appreciative exploration of strategic capacity and the impact of the SOAR framework in building strategic capacity	The SOAR framework can be applied to both large and small groups to encourage strategy generation and implementation planning. Malone found that the SOAR framework was easy to use and generative in nature.
More (2011)  Methodology: Qualitative	The effect of appreciative inquiry as organizational development intervention on organizational planning and service quality improvement in St. Frances School (ICSE)	A case study conducted in a private school in India where the researcher found that SOAR provided opportunity for school administrators to interact freely with parents, teachers, and staff to uncover each stakeholder's needs and expectations.
Glovis (2012)  Methodology: Mixed methods	A mixed methods study in the expression of flow, SOAR, and motivation: developing individual transcendence within the delivery of complex systems integration projects	SOAR is a significant predictor of how successful a project was going to be. The study explored the role of SOAR in mediating the effect of flow on project success. Flow is defined as an experience where "the self is fully functioning, but not aware of itself doing it, and it can use all attention for the task at hand" (Glovis, 2012, p. 40). Glovis found that there is a link between intrinsic motivation and SOAR.
Newman (2011)  Methodology: Mixed methods	Executive and professional coaching provided by internal coaches: Analysis of strengths and impact on clients	A mixed methods study on team and individual coaching conducted at Boeing. Newman found that use of SOAR during the coaching intervention led the participants to identify strengths, recognize accomplishments, and create new possibilities.
Sprangel (2009)  Methodology: Quantitative	A study of the direct and mediational effects of the SOAR™ framework, trust, and environmental management systems on chemical management services supplier performance at HAAS TCM group	Use of the SOAR framework builds trust and encourages collaboration. Sprangel also showed that there was a positive impact on how suppliers performed and their impact on Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Use of the SOAR framework led to increased perceptions of trust.
Swafford (2013)  Methodology: Qualitative	Applied experiences of the SOAR framework by association management and foundation executives	A case study involving association management executives. Through a series of interviews, Swafford found that SOAR-based interview questions brought forth a positive approach to progress, group dynamics, and a change in thought processes, or behaviors.

Table 2.5 summarizes six of the eight studies. The empirical studies by Cox (2014) and Hitchcock (2014) used the SOAR Profile and the discussion of these two studies will be included in the next section.

**SOAR Profile.** The SOAR Profile is a relatively new survey instrument that was developed to evaluate strategic thinking capacity (Stavros & Cole, 2013). “The SOAR Profile is a self-report, rapid assessment instrument developed from the theory and empirical research on SOAR. It is designed to help individuals learn about and understand their strategic thinking capacity to improve individual and team performance that positively impacts the organization’s performance” (Stavros, 2013, p. 25).

Since the creation of the SOAR Profile there have been two dissertations that have researched how individuals approach strategic thinking. Hitchcock (2014) used the SOAR profile in a mixed methods study, which included 16 in-depth interviews. The dissertation entitled, *An Exploration of Organizational Collective Motivation and the Influence of the SOAR Framework on Organizational Collective Motivation*, found that SOAR builds Organizational Collective Motivation during episodes of organizational transformation. Also, during organizational transformation the use of SOAR will build OCM elements of commitment and beliefs.

Cox (2014) utilized a quantitative methodology in his dissertation entitled, *An Evaluation of the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, SOAR, and Collaboration: Implications for Teams*, and found that SOAR was a mediator in the inquiry into how emotional intelligence (EI) impacts team-based collaboration. When team members engage in a project together, those who have a stronger SOAR Profile

tended to maximize the impact EI had on collaboration. This observation was especially pronounced when the collaboration effort involved a team.

The SOAR Profile has been chosen for this study to facilitate a deeper understanding of how strategic HR practices have an effect on AC (with SOAR serving as a mediator, or when strategic HR practices have their greatest effect on AC (with SOAR serving as a moderator). Based on previous research (Malone 2010; Sprangel, 2009), it is evident that SOAR provides a needed bridge from strengths-based theory to practice – highlighting key inputs, processes, and outputs. For example, Malone's (2010) dissertation, which looked at extending strategic capacity surmised that SOAR is simple to use, generative in nature, enables innovative thinking, and evokes action and accountability. Thus, it is possible that SOAR framework may enable individuals, organizations, and business units to create strategic HR practices and connect them to AC by having strengths-based generative conversations.

### **Summary**

The literature review summarized a historical perspective of how OC became a multidimensional construct of which AC is a part. There was also a comprehensive assessment of literature on AC, strategic HR practices, OC, and AC as a part of academic publications in public administration. The literature review was also concerned with turnover as a behavioral outcome of insufficient AC and the connection between OC, AC, and turnover. Throughout the chapter, there were observations regarding links between AC and aspects of SOAR. Academic publications in the field of POS, its connection to SOAR, empirical studies concerning SOAR, and a review of the SOAR profile were also included in this chapter.

**Affective commitment.** Affective Commitment (AC) is defined as “an emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership within the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2). AC is a construct that is easily distinguishable and the distinctive traits of AC as described in the literature review should be easily recognizable and is expected to have a similar manifestation in most organizations. The reason that AC is of interest in studies concerning organizational behavior is because this type of commitment generates positive attitudinal and behavioral traits that benefit organizations. The goal of the research in this dissertation is to understand positive benefits associated with AC such as, employee intention to stay or decreased turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, dedication, and other similar positive behavioral outcomes.

**Individual perception, work context, and the relationship to methodology.**

The adoption of strategic HR practices and its influence on AC, is based on individual perceptions and work context. Employees do not always perceive HR practices in the same way because of context and individual perceptions (Nishii, et al., 2008). AC as a phenomenon does not come into existence on its own but rather is linked to other constructs such as self-concept and work context. Individual self-concept and collective self-concept are two different concepts. The latter is more likely to be a result of strategic HR practices. Strategic HR practices can reinforce collective self-concept and subsequently build AC. In the study by Johnson and Chang (2006) concerning this relationship, they were not specific on which HR practices result in AC and this offers an opportunity for future research.

The implication from this is that merely testing for the existence of AC using quantitative methods is not sufficient but rather, a more in-depth understanding can be facilitated by the use of qualitative methods. Further, to support the argument for more qualitative studies, Kehoe and Wright (2013) found that in their test for organizational level antecedents of AC, results were confused by aggregated individual perceptions and reciprocal causation. It is self-admitted statements like this from commitment scholars that give credence to newer frameworks and approaches like SOAR which advocate analyzing individual employee perspective as viewed through a social construction lens. Phenomenological perspectives can help bring to the forefront how employees make sense of the complex way in which AC forms. Specifically, the SOAR framework can be utilized to understand what AC means to employees and how HR practices can be antecedents that strengthen AC.

In an examination of methodology, it is observed that many of the studies in AC have utilized quantitative methods (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Johnson & Chang, 2006; Lee & Corbett, 2009; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009; Weng & McElroy, 2012). However, if it is complex patterns of relationships that the research in this dissertation plans to address, then there may be some merit in utilizing both a quantitative and qualitative methodology in a mixed methods study. While quantitative studies are efficient in identifying the existence of a correlation between variables, qualitative studies focus on the phenomenon and explore affiliations, relationships, or associations between ideas (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative experiments are capable of producing large quantities of data but Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, and Truss (1999) recommended that qualitative methods be used to disentangle effects of HR

implementation on employees. There is power in knowing the story behind the numbers (Creswell, 2009). There is an opportunity for a mixed methods study that triangulates both dimensions in this dissertation.

**Work context and research opportunities in public administration.** One area where commitment is not often studied is in public administration. In an examination of literature published over the last 10 years, there have only been five significant studies involving OC in public administration. Among the five, only three were related to the federal government. There is a dearth of studies involving OC and that gap is even more evident with regard to a construct such as AC. There is opportunity for this study to add to the collection of literature if research is conducted in the federal workplace. With over four million employees in the federal government, there may be applicability for this study in more than one federal organization.

**Antecedents.** An antecedent is an action, occurrence, thought, or emotion that precedes or causes an attitude or behavior to exist. There are many antecedents for AC but the one that is of greatest interest to the research in this dissertation is strategic HR practices. In a discussion concerning AC antecedents, the important thing to recognize is that antecedents can alter over time and are dependent on cultural and organizational contexts in which the experiment is conducted. Antecedents can be made up of job design (Allen & Meyer, 1990), leadership style, culture, subculture (Lok & Crawford, 2001), personal, work, job characteristics (Steers, 1977), equity in pay, and benefits (Faisal & Al-Esmael, 2014). Employees who share the same values and beliefs as the organization are more likely to develop AC and one practice that organizations can implement to gain and retain OC is through the use of strategic HR practices.

In studies that link HR practices and AC, including one by Meyer et al. (2002) where they demonstrated a pattern of consistent evidence that organizational support in the form of HR policies and practices directly or indirectly influence the development of AC. However, while they proved a positive relationship, the question of *how AC is built* is not thoroughly explored. The questions, *what* and *why* have been debated at length and answered quantitatively. The question of *how* AC is built and how employees reach the cognitive or emotional acknowledgment that makes up AC remains a virtually unexplored.

**Strategic HR practices.** Strategic HR practices tend to encompass a myriad of labels for practices that promote OC. Some of these labels include: *innovative human resource management* practices (Thompson, 2011) are also called *high-commitment*, *high involvement* or *high performance work practices* (HPWP) (Boselie et al., 2005; Canibano, 2013), *high-performance work systems* (HPWS) (Way, 2002).

Regardless of labels, it is important to note that strategic HR practices are not just a way in which organizations manage their employees, but it has been shown repeatedly to have an impact on positive organizational outcomes, (Gill & Meyer, 2011). It is not just an administrative tool and just as human beings can perceive (Truss et al., 1997) deceptive practices or insincerity, they have an equal capacity for perceiving strengths, opportunities, and aspirations. For this reason, an application of the SOAR framework may be well chosen and appropriate in a discussion of strategic practices especially one that hopes to generate AC for the ultimate goal studying cause and effect relationships (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) of producing positive organizational behavioral results.

The literature review has shown that there is a link between strategic HR practices and AC (Gilbert et al., 2011; Lok & Crawford, 2001). There is opportunity to study this relationship among a population of federal workers and the type of HR practices that are unique to the federal government to see if this relationship still holds true. Examining the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, is not something that has been studied from an academic perspective, at this point in time.

**SOAR and the connectedness of ideas.** The *Scholarship of Integration* encourages the possibility of making connections across disciplines and closing gaps between disciplines. Boyer (1990) defined the *Scholarship of Integration* as the interpretation and fitting of “one's own research or the research of others into larger intellectual patterns” by “illumination data in a revealing way” (Boyer, 1990, pp. 18-19). Looking at literature regarding POS, AI, and SOAR framework, it can be observed that there are many similarities between POS and AC. At the time that this literature review was conducted, it is not apparent that scholars have made the connection and crossed over the chasm to research a connection between these two constructs. To be fair, OC has been featured in research and conceptual papers in POS literature, as a supporting variable, possible outcome, and sometimes cited as a factor to be considered in future research. For example, in one study, it was shown that prosocial behavior externalized in the act of giving or contributing shapes OC (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). However AC has yet to take a central position as the main focus of a research paper or dissertation in the relatively new field of POS.

From the literature review, there are implications that strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR are aligned in a parallel fashion. For example, HR practices have been shown

to draw out positive work related attitudes (Boselie et al., 2005); and HR practices bundled together in a strategic manner can build AC (Gellatly et al., 2009). Connections between these three parallel fields of study may be made using the SOAR framework as a viable moderator for building AC through the introduction of strategic HR practices because “the SOAR process connects the dots between individual values and organizational efforts” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 4).

**Implications.** There is tendency for research to study a problem such as turnover in order to find out how to correct the issue. Viewing a realistic problem from a distinctive perspective has practical implications because commitment binds an individual to an organization and thereby reduces the likelihood of turnover (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) and the associated costs. By studying the strengths exhibited by an organization, there is opportunity to avoid the associated cost of negative behavior. Commitment is a study about *why people stay* (positive connotation) whereas turnover is a study about *why people leave* (negative connotation).

This literature review postulated a theory-based foundation for research done in the areas of AC, strategic HR practices, and SOAR. The review indicates that there is opportunity for research amidst gaps in knowledge, incomplete connections between fields of study, infrequent use of qualitative methodology, and a unique population of workers. Despite all of the studies regarding antecedents and enablers of commitment, evidence-based strategies for escalating and/or restoring commitment are not as abundant as one might suspect (Morrow, 2011). One hopeful practice that organizations are using to gain and retain the commitment of employees is through the use of strategic HR practices.

There is potential for investigation into the cause and effect phenomenon of antecedents caused by the relationships between strategic HR practices and AC, using the SOAR framework as a moderator. The goal is to understand how to realize some of the potential positive behavioral outcomes.

The benefit to organizations is that through the use of AI principles and SOAR, employees at all levels who want to engage their minds, hearts, and spirits, may feel as if their aspirations and achievements connect to their work (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). The research in this dissertation seeks to advance an understanding of the cause and effect relationship between AC and SOAR, the relationship between strategic HR practices and SOAR, and also the relationship between AC and strategic HR practices from a phenomenological perspective to understand how employees make sense of the complex way in which AC forms.

Based on the findings in this literature review, the research agenda for this dissertation will encompass the exploration of HR strategy as an antecedent for AC in the area of public administration. The research will use the SOAR framework to formulate potential lines of inquiry, taking the form of exploratory research based on grounded theory fabricated on the theoretical base of AI principles concerning strengths, and the “life-giving” forces of an organization’s existence, otherwise known as the positive core (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). AC is a relevant topic that has sustained the interest of both the academic and practitioner community for decades, and there is still more to learn.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methods**

### **Introduction**

This study investigated the predictive ability of strategic Human Resource (HR) practices to create affective commitment (AC) in the context of federal knowledge workers, determine the role of SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and explore the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes, such as increased intention to stay/low turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. This dissertation research contains elements of post positivism, where the research attempted to evaluate the causes that influence outcomes. This dissertation also contains elements of social construction, where the research is concerned with the shared meaning of constructs among a group or sample of people from the same context. Combining the post positivistic and social construction philosophical views into research calls for the use of a mixed methods research design. A mixed methods strategy to research approaches “a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strategies” (Brewer & Hunter, 2006, p.17).

This chapter describes the mixed methods analytical approach that was used in which both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained and analyzed. Also presented are the research questions and corresponding hypotheses. Next, the study sample is described, including human subject protection concerns. Finally, data collection, study variables, and the data analysis plan are described.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

This dissertation is concerned with the study of AC in the context of federal knowledge workers and its prediction by strategic HR practices. The study is also focused on the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The study also explored the impact of the variables on behavioral outcomes, such as increased intention to stay or low turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. The research questions (shown below) address both predictors of outcome as well as an exploration of a phenomenon or relationship that is little understood. In an attempt to match purpose to methodology, a mixed-methods approach comprised of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used. The quantitative approach is adopted when the problem calls “for (a) the identification of factors that influence an outcome, (b) the utility of an intervention, or (c) understanding the best predictor of outcomes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 18). The qualitative approach is adopted when “a phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it... and the topic has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people” (Creswell, 2009, p. 18). Table 3.1 offers a summary of how each research method addresses the research question and problem or significance as it relates to Creswell (2009).

Table 3.1

*Summary of Research Methods*

Method	Question	Problem/Significance	Considerations <sup>1</sup>
Quantitative	R1: What is the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?	This dissertation is concerned with strategic HR practices as antecedents that build AC.	(a) the identification of factors that influence an outcome
Quantitative	R2: What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?	Both strategic HR practices and SOAR have the potential to build AC and it is the interrelationship between these three constructs that is of great interest.	(b) the utility of an intervention
Quantitative	R2: What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?	The goal is to understand employee intention to stay or other similar positive benefits of AC.	(c) understanding the best predictor of outcomes
Quantitative and Qualitative	R3: What is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes?	The review of literature in public administration indicates that there are no studies involving OC, AC and POS. The lack of publications represents an opportunity for research regarding AC in the field of public administration.	The topic has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people.
Qualitative	R4: How does strategic HR practices build AC?	The study of strategic HR practices lacks a consistent definition. The goal is to contribute to the discipline through the discovery of links between strategic HR practices and AC.	A phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it.

<sup>1</sup> Consideration for use of method according to Creswell (2009, p. 18).

Mixed methods research involves a combination of both quantitative and qualitative in an effort to collect, analyze, and integrate data from both approaches in order to better understand a research problem or issue. In combining both quantitative and qualitative, the data may reveal a foundation for understanding the results as compared to when a quantitative or qualitative research approach is conducted alone. In

this case, the compelling reason for using a mixed methods study was because studies done in AC have been consistently built on the validity and reliability of quantitative surveys, thus lending credibility to the study of relationships between strategic HR practices, SOAR, and AC. In addition, considering that there is a shortage of studies in public administration involving organizational commitment (OC), AC, and positive organizational scholarship (POS), a qualitative analysis in combination with quantitative data may provide the greatest appreciation in understanding the constructs of this study within a population.

**Quantitative methodology overview.** “Quantitative methods are frequently described as deductive in nature, in the sense that inferences from tests of statistical hypotheses lead to general inferences about characteristics of a population” (Harwell, 2011, p. 149). The use of a quantitative method in this study is intended to help characterize ways in which strategic HR practices may have a positive impact on AC and behavioral outcomes, and also to quantify if SOAR can mediate or moderate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC for federal employees.

In the quantitative analysis stage, descriptive statistics were used to indicate frequency counts and proportions, mean, standard deviation, and range of scores for the variables researched. There were also reliability and validity checks for internal consistency and construct validity, respectively, of the scales. Inferential statistics were conducted to draw inferences from the sample to the population (Creswell, 2009).

**Qualitative methodology overview.** “The process of (qualitative) research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the

researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). A qualitative methodology enhances the understanding of human behavior and the motivations that cause action via inductive reasoning. As demonstrated in the literature review, there are complex patterns of relationships among antecedents, correlates, and consequences of commitment. Similarly, to fully understand the relationship among strategic HR practices, AC, SOAR, and related behavioral outcomes, complex relationships and mindsets can be honored using an “inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

Thematic analysis is the coding process by which the data accumulated in the qualitative portion of this research is interpreted. A thematic code is the guide by which the researcher interprets the data. The interpretation or conceptual phase followed the use of this thematic code (Boyatzis, 1998), which the researcher created. There are four distinct stages to the development of thematic analysis that the researcher went through: Sensing themes, doing it reliably, developing codes, and interpreting the information and themes in the context of theory or conceptual framework.

The qualitative portion of this study employed open-ended questions contained in the survey instrument. These open-ended questions were intended to complement and enhance the data gathering experience while adhering to the problem statement, research questions, and hypotheses. Table 3.2 shows the research questions and corresponding open-ended survey questions.

Table 3.2

*Research Questions and Corresponding Survey Questions*

Research Question	Open-ended survey questions
R1. What is the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?	Not Applicable. This research question is investigated using quantitative methodology.
R2. What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?	Not Applicable. This research question is investigated using quantitative methodology.
R3. What is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes?	Q1. What does employee commitment mean to you? Q3. Consider the HR programs that are currently available at TARDEC, which programs create commitment? Why? Q4. How long do you anticipate staying at TARDEC? Why? Q5. What can TARDEC do to support your intention to stay with the organization?
R4. How do strategic HR practices build AC?	Q1. What does employee commitment mean to you? Q2. What can TARDEC do to encourage commitment? Q5. What can TARDEC do to support your intention to stay with the organization?

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research questions.** The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?
2. What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?
3. What is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes?
4. How do strategic HR practices build AC?

**Research hypothesis.** Research questions one, two, and three were addressed using a quantitative methodology in which three hypotheses were tested; a qualitative

approach probed research questions three and four using open-ended questions in the survey instrument.

H1: Strategic HR practices predict AC.

H2a (mediation alternative): SOAR serves to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR)

H2b (moderation alternative): SOAR moderates the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices are greater when SOAR elements are present).

H3: AC has an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

Figure 3.1 represents the hypothetical model of the study in which the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC as mediated/moderated by SOAR were examined. As shown, H1 proposes that Strategic HR practices, the independent variable (IV), is hypothesized to impact the dependent variables, AC (DV1) and behavioral outcomes (DV2). H2 proposes that the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC was mediated/moderated by SOAR. With H2a (the mediation alternative), SOAR is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR); with H2b (the moderation alternative), SOAR is hypothesized to moderate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices is greater when SOAR elements are present). Finally, H3 proposes that Behavioral Outcomes are predicted by AC.

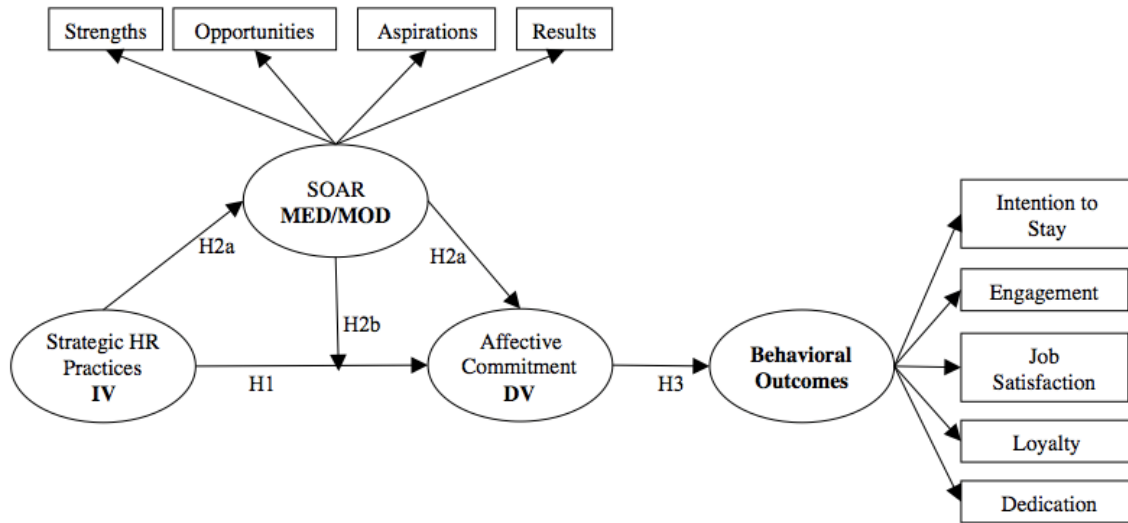


Figure 3.1. Hypothetical model of the study: Prediction of AC and behavioral outcomes by strategic HR practices as mediated/moderated by SOAR.

### Research Variables

Five quantitative variables were studied in this dissertation: strategic HR practices, SOAR, AC, behavioral outcomes, and demographic characteristics. Strategic HR practices for the federal worker consisted of a list of 12 internal and external programs available to federal workers: training, mentoring, performance management, promotion opportunities, career development, flex time, *regular day off* (RDO), telework, work life balance, meaningful work, supervisory support, and team cohesion (Baptiste, 2008; Boselie et al., 2005; Gellatly et al., 2009; Kooij et al., 2010; Marescaux et al., 2012; Thompson, 2011).

Standard strategic HR practices available to all federal workers were defined according to the regulations and program guidelines supplied by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Information regarding specific regulations can be found at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov). Examples of such programs include compensation, recognition or

awards, rules for internal promotion, telework, rules for career development, salary or employee compensation, and some aspects of training. Flexible work hours, *regular day off* (RDO), alternative schedules, and general guidelines for performance related incentives, are specific to the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) local union agreements. Strategic HR practices that can be customized by management in the unit of analysis include amounts available for performance related incentives, career development paths, some aspects of training, internal promotion opportunities, employee voice, recognition or awards, teambuilding, meaningful work, empowerment, and mentoring. Practices that can be customized must adhere to OPM guidelines and negotiated local union agreements.

SOAR was measured by items contained in the SOAR Profile, a “survey instrument that is designed to measure and understand one’s natural strategic thinking capacity” (Stavros & Cole, 2013, p. 11). The SOAR Profile serves as an index of SOAR-based strategic thinking, planning, and leading. The SOAR Profile was used to measure SOAR for the purposes of determining its role as a mediator/moderator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

AC was measured by items contained in the Three-Component Model (TCM) Employee Commitment Survey (revised version) which measures three forms of employee commitment to an organization: affective commitment (desire-based), normative commitment (obligation-based), and continuance commitment (cost-based) (Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997). The TCM Employee Commitment Survey (original and revised versions) measures employee commitment via three scales: The Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS), and the

Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS). All three scales have been well validated through empirical research (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Meyer et al., 2002, Tett & Meyer, 1993). For the purposes of this study, AC was measured using the ACS from the revised version of the TCM Employee Commitment survey (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) (see Appendix B). A questionnaire license agreement for academic researchers was obtained (see Appendix A).

Behavioral outcomes and demographic characteristics were measured by five items and seven items, respectively, created by the researcher. Behavioral outcomes were intention to stay (i.e., decreased turnover) (Wasti, 2005), engagement (Rothbard & Patil, 2012), job satisfaction (Eby et al., 1999), loyalty (Hom et al., 2009), and dedication (Lo et al., 2010). Commitment models are considered to be predictors of these behavioral outcomes (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Demographic items were assessed with the intent of examining if participants in the present study had the same characteristics as those examined in the 2007 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study.

### **Population and Sample**

**Population.** The population for this study is made up of approximately 1,447 non-enlisted civilian knowledge workers (as of July 2015) in the science and technology field who are employees in the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC). TARDEC is a research laboratory for ground vehicles, and approximately 75% of the employees at TARDEC are engineers, scientists, or technicians; the remaining 25% are business or administrative professionals. The demographic makeup of the population of 1,447 civilians is estimated as follows: 1,158 are below the age of 55; 43% have at least one Bachelors degrees, 40% have at least one

Masters degree, 6% have Doctoral degrees, and the remaining 11% have at least a high school diploma, an associates degree, or technical diploma; 1,116 males and 331 females; the average length of service is 12.36 years; and 189 are currently eligible to retire.

As stated in Chapter One, this population exhibits similar characteristics of the population from which participants in the 2007 Congressional Budget Officer (CBO) study were sampled. Many of the employees who remain employed by the organization have a long history of employment and seem to be committed to stay with the organization for the full extent of their professional careers. In addition, this particular population is very well educated—not only do they hold bachelor’s degrees, they have advanced degrees in highly technical fields, which are very much in demand. This demand may be due to the fact that TARDEC is located in Detroit, which is home to the automotive industry’s *Big Three*. The *Big Three* refers to General Motors, Ford, and Fiat Chrysler, which are the largest American automakers in the United States and Canada. Engineers and scientists from TARDEC have opportunities to work in the automotive industry should they choose to. As was established in the literature review, there are many indicators that AC is positively linked to employees’ intention to stay but relatively little has been published in the field of public administration.

**Sample.** The sample or unit of analysis consisted of randomly selected participants from the study population who provided their voluntary consent to complete the study survey. Participants were recruited via a general internal organization portal announcement, face-to-face invitations by the researcher, and individual emails from the researcher (see the recruitment letter in Appendix D). The study survey was administered electronically using Survey Monkey<sup>TM</sup>, and was administered manually using paper-and-

pencil surveys. A minimum sample size of  $N = 158$  was recommended for this study based on a power analysis using G\*Power 3.1 (Faul, Buchner, & Lang, 2009; Faul, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) under the following conditions: multiple regression with two predictors (strategic HR practices and SOAR), alpha of .05 (95% significance level),  $R^2$  of 0.1 (the effect size), and a power of 0.95 (see Figure 3.2). To achieve the target sample size, oversampling by approximately 30% was conducted, yielding a final sample of  $N = 204$  respondents who consented. The final sample for analysis was comprised of  $N = 188$  participants (see Chapter Four).

**F tests – Multiple Regression: Omnibus ( $R^2$  deviation from zero)****Analysis:** A priori: Compute required sample size

<b>Input:</b>	Effect size $f^2$	= 0.1
	$\alpha$ err prob	= 0.05
	Power ( $1-\beta$ err prob)	= 0.95
	Number of predictors	= 2
<b>Output:</b>	Noncentrality parameter $\lambda$	= 15.800000
	Critical F	= 3.054385
	Numerator df	= 2
	Denominator df	= 155
	Total sample size	= 158
	Actual power	= 0.950671

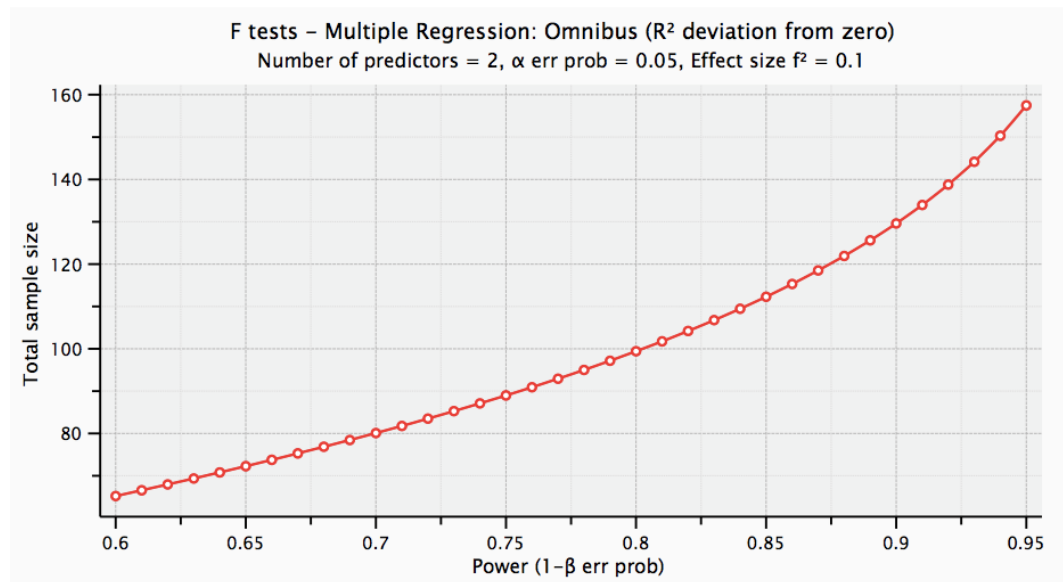
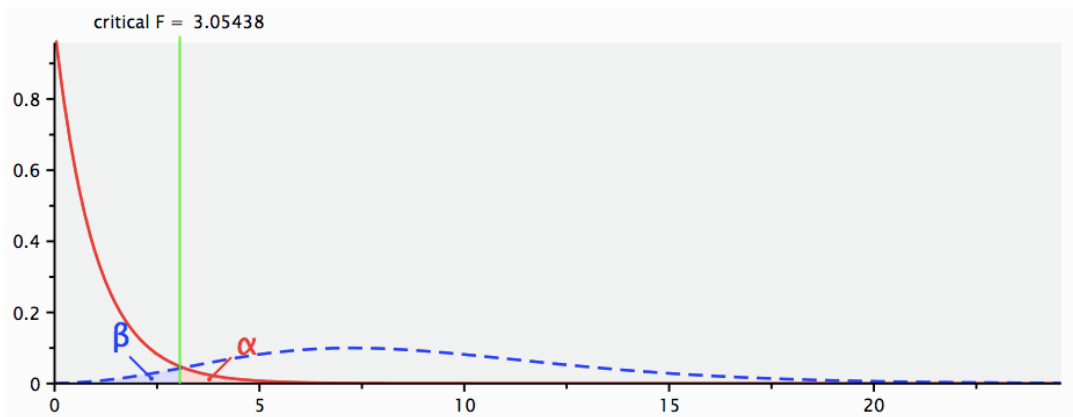


Figure 3.2. G\*Power computation of effect sizes and graphical representation of power analyses results.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Human Research Protection**

To protect the rights and welfare of the human subjects participating in research, approval from the Lawrence Technological University Institutional Review Board (LTU IRB) was obtained prior to beginning the data collection (see Appendix G). IRB approval required the researcher to complete an online training course on protection of human participants from the National Institute of Health (NIH) (see Appendix H for certificate of completion), and required participants to provide their voluntary consent to participate in the research (see Appendix E). Additionally, since the research was conducted in a federal facility by employees of the U.S. Army, approval was obtained from the Army Human Subjects Protection Division (AHRPO), Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Regulatory Compliance and Quality, U.S.A. Medical Research and Materiel Command in Ft. Detrick, Maryland (see Appendix J).

The application process to AHRPO involved many of the same considerations that LTU IRB requires; the Army IRB/AHRPO focused on issues concerning recruitment and consent. AHRPO guidelines indicate that there must be no coercion, undue influence, or any pressure from supervisors or persons in a position of power to participate in research. Compensation for participation is also carefully scrutinized, but since there was no compensation offered to survey participants in this case, there was no cause for concern. The AHRPO has a different protocol for research participants who are active enlisted military personnel, civilian employees, and contractors. The application put forth to the AHRPO specified that only civilian employees were invited to participate. The AHRPO scrutinized the survey to ensure that no discriminating characteristics were

obtained that could identify an individual by name. The privacy of the research participant had to be protected to guard against workplace discrimination.

IRB approvals for both LTU IRB and AHRPO are located in Appendix G. To protect the rights of the participant, there was an informed consent agreement at the beginning of the survey instrument. A copy of the informed consent agreement is located in Appendix E. Participants were not permitted to proceed with the survey if they did not consent to the agreement.

### **Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument for this study contained two components: close-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for qualitative analysis (see Appendix F). The closed-ended quantitative portion of the survey instrument the five study variables: Strategic HR Practices, AC, SOAR, Behavioral Outcomes, Demographic Characteristics.

**Strategic HR practices.** This variable was measured by 12 items that represent strategic HR practices available to federal workers: training, mentoring, performance management, promotion opportunities, career development, flex time, *regular day off* (RDO), telework, work life balance, meaningful work, supervisory support, and team cohesion (Baptiste, 2008; Boselie et al., 2005, Gellatly et al., 2009; Kooij et al., 2010; Marescaux et al., 2012; Thompson, 2011). Each of the 12 items asked participants to rate their active involvement with the respective strategic HR practice during the last three years on a 10-point Likert scale, 1 = never, 10 = always. A “not applicable” response option was included for each item.

**Affective commitment.** This variable was measured by the six items contained in the affective commitment scale (ACS). The ACS is contained in the TCM Employee Commitment Survey (Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997), and the ACS items used in this study were taken from the revised version of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey. Each of the six items asked participants to rate their level of agreement with respect to their feelings about their organization along a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree.

**SOAR.** This variable was measured via the SOAR profile (Stavros & Cole, 2013), a rapid assessment device that consists of 24-items presented as one-word descriptors of strategic elements designed to “understand one’s natural strategic thinking capacity” (Stavros & Cole, 2013, p. 11). Items were organized according to the four elements of SOAR (strengths, aspirations, opportunities, and results) and the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. Participants were asked to rate how often they focused on each of the items on the SOAR profile on a 10-point Likert scale, 1 = never, 10 = always.

**Behavioral outcomes.** Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on five statements about potential behavioral outcomes in their workplace along a 10-Likert scale, 1 = very strongly disagree, 10 = very strongly agree. The five behavioral outcomes were intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

**Demographic characteristics.** Participants were asked seven demographic questions addressing age, gender, education, length of federal service, length of service with TARDEC/Detroit Arsenal, number of years experience as a professional, and retirement eligibility.

### **Pilot Study**

The survey was pre-tested using a pilot study to determine if there were any detectable deficiencies, information that was potentially misinterpreted, items that required clarity, or any other potentially serious problem (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 2009). As noted by Creswell (2009), pilot testing is "...important to improve the content validity of an instrument and to improve questions, format, and scales" (p. 150). To achieve this purpose, a pilot sample of n=10 pilot participants were administered the study survey electronically. The pilot participants were comprised of the dissertation committee members, a few doctoral students, and a small number of individuals in the organization. The pilot study led to minimal changes to the structural presentation of the survey items (i.e., no changes were made to the actual survey items, rather, their presentation within the electronic survey format was modified for ease of visual presentation). Results of the pilot study were not included in the final data set.

### **Data Collection**

Following the pilot study, the survey instrument was administered to the study sample. The sample was recruited via a general internal organization portal announcement, face-to-face invitations by the researcher, and individual emails from the researcher (see the recruitment letter in Appendix D). Data were collected over a period of approximately five months. A total 204 participants provided their voluntary consent to complete the study survey. As noted in Chapter Four, a final sample of N = 188 surveys were used for data analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

All electronic data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey™ into excel for analysis; survey data from the paper-and-pencil surveys were manually entered into excel by the researcher. Only the researcher and dissertation committee members reviewed the raw data; dissertation committee members provided coaching and advice on data analysis. Raw data was stored on a password-protected laptop. All paper-and-pencil surveys were stored in a locked cabinet (surveys were not available for public view). Quantitative data were analyzed using Minitab 17.2.1 and *Mplus* 7.3; qualitative data were coded and transformed using thematic analysis in Excel.

**Quantitative data analysis.** Raw data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey™ into Excel for data coding and cleaning (e.g., cases missing large sections of responses were eliminated, surveys with no consents were eliminated, etc.). A full description of the data sets that were eliminated is available in Chapter Four. The data were then imported into Minitab for descriptive and inferential quantitative statistical analysis, and were imported into *Mplus* for confirmatory factory analysis (CFA) and mediation path models via structural equation modeling (SEM). Statistical significance of all inferential statistics was evaluated at the 95% confidence level (two-tail tests of significance).

***Descriptive statistics.*** Descriptive statistics of categorical demographic characteristics were frequency analysis with Chi-square tests of equality of distribution; descriptive statistics of continuous variables were mean and standard deviation. Descriptive statistics were created for study variables across each demographic category, e.g., AC by gender, AC by age, etc.

***Psychometric properties.*** To evaluate the reliability and validity of the survey, the psychometric properties of the survey items that measured strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR were evaluated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha test of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951), and CFA test of construct validity (Lu, 2006). Cronbach's alpha measures the intercorrelations among items in a scale, with values that vary from an alpha of 0.0 to an alpha of 1.0. The criterion value for Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.70, with values  $\geq 0.70$  as an indicator that the data were reliable (Hinkin, 1998). CFA measures the factor loadings and goodness of fit of survey items that measure a construct. Goodness of fit indices include the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the ratio of chi-square to the degrees of freedom ( $df$ ). The criterion values for these indices in this study as evidence of acceptable construct validity were as follows: CFI values of  $\geq 0.90$ , RMSEA  $\leq 0.08$ , and  $\chi^2/df$  ratio  $< 2$  to 1 (Bentler, 1990; Bentler, 2007; Loehlin, 1998).

***Inferential statistics.*** Inferential statistics aim to generalize statistically significant findings from the sample to the population through the function of generalization. "Generalizability is a powerful statistical tool that allows researchers to make predictions about patterns of behavior in a population...based on a measure of that behavior taken from a sample of the population. It is attractive to policy makers because it suggests the extent to which a particular solution will work everywhere in the population" (Harwell, 2011, p. 175). Inferential statistics in this study were comprised of chi-square tests of equality of distribution, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), multiple linear regression, and binary logistic regression. The Chi-square statistic was used to estimate the significance of the frequency distribution of categorical demographic

variables. ANOVA was used to estimate the association between demographic characteristics and study variables. When there were significant ANOVA findings, post-hoc evaluations were carried out using Tukey's honestly significant difference analysis to minimize the inflation of type I error (Shavelson, 1996). If Tukey's honestly significant difference analysis was too conservative, then a second post-hoc analysis was done using Fisher's 1935 least significant difference (LSD) test (Hayter, 1986). Hypothesis testing of H1 was carried out using linear regression. Testing of H2a was carried out using structural equation modelling (SEM) with bias corrected bootstrapping to see if there was a significant indirect effect of SOAR on the relationship between AC and strategic HR practices. Testing of H2b was carried out using hierarchical linear regression to ascertain if the inclusion of a strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term was significant. Finally, testing of H3 was carried out using binary logistic regression in which each behavioral outcome variable (scored along a 10-point Likert scale) was coded into a binary outcome variable via the method of median split (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002). For all linear and logistic regressions, regression coefficients were presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient; logistic regressions also presented the odd ratio representing the odds of the behavior outcome occurring.

**Qualitative data analysis.** Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Following the collection of the qualitative data from the survey instrument, the researcher conducted thematic analysis for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon. Creswell (2009) suggested steps or levels of analysis:

1. Consolidate and organize the data for analysis. Type up field notes and arrange it into a legible form.

2. Read through all the data and acquire a general sense of the material, survey responses, or overall meaning.
3. Begin a detailed analysis with a coding process. This involves organizing the material into categories before assigning meaning, relationships, or descriptive terms to them.
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.
6. Make interpretations concerning the meaning of the data.

Interpretation of the data was done using an inductive approach. “The strategy of inductive design is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be” (Patton, 2001, p. 56). An inductive strategy was used in the interpretation of data that was coded using thematic analysis. The purpose of the inductive approach is to see if there are relationships and empirical generalizations between elements. This is opposite of the deductive approach which begins with a hypothesis before data collection. In other words, there are no theories at the beginning of the research that guides the focus of the inductive analysis. Instead, “inductive analysis is built on a solid foundation of specific, concrete, and detailed observations, quotations, documents, and cases” (Patton, 2001, p. 57). During qualitative data analysis, the researcher regularly referred to the answers from open-ended questions and patterns from thematic analysis, working from the bottom up to see if there were any

illuminations from the original data, making sure that any conclusions stayed true to the original data.

**Reliability and validity of qualitative data.** Reliability for qualitative data is concerned with the “consistency of judgment that protects against or lessens the contamination of the project” (Boyatzis, 2007, p. 146). Consistency of judgment in this study had to do with consistency in thematic analysis and coding. The researcher had to consistently recognize moments that can be coded and apply a consistent standard to the recognition of themes and application of code. In the case of this mixed method study, the researcher had to take care that the codes are also consistent with the quantitative data being gathered.

Validity for qualitative data is not judged on the same criterion as for quantitative data. Rather, “qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the finding by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190) such as triangulation. One validity strategy that is relevant to this mixed method study is called concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009) whereby the “researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, difference, or some combination” (Creswell, 2009, p. 213).

Another important factor concerning validity has to do with researcher bias. In this study, the researcher is an insider and is an employee of the organization being researched. During the analysis of the data, it would be helpful to disclose how interpretation of the findings may be shaped by the experiences of the researcher as an insider.

**Role of the researcher.** The researcher in this study is a member of the organization that is being studied. The researcher interacts daily with members of the organization while conducting business as a Human Resource professional. She does not hold a supervisory position and does not conduct performance ratings for any of the survey subjects. Even though the researcher oversees the performance evaluation process for the organization, routine hiring, reassignments, and promotion actions, the decisions for performance and job assignments are not made by this researcher. Personnel actions are only executed following decisions from supervisors.

### **Summary**

This mixed methods study investigated quantitative and qualitative data obtained from a sample of federal knowledge workers in a science and technology environment at the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC). Ethical oversight was provided by two IRBs: The Lawrence Technological University IRB and the U.S.A. Medical Research and Materiel Command, Human Subjects Protection Division Office (AHRPO) at Ft. Detrick. IRB approval was obtained prior to the launch of a pilot study.

The data were collected and analyzed using a concurrent triangulation strategy in one survey instrument to enhance validity (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative portion of the survey contained forced-choice Likert scale questions with 12 items for strategic HR practices, 6 items for AC, 24 items for SOAR, 5 items for Behavioral Outcomes, 7 items for demographic information; the qualitative portion of the survey contained 5 open-ended questions. The data were analyzed separately using quantitative and qualitative

analysis strategies. Reliability and validity of the study data was examined prior to analysis.

Quantitative analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics conducted in Minitab 17.2.1 and *Mplus* 7.3. The General Linear Model and Structural Equation Models were employed to infer significance of quantitative data. Qualitative analysis involved coding and thematic analysis for the purpose of deriving additional results via an inductive approach.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

This is a mixed methods study that examines the relationship among strategic HR practices, SOAR, AC, and behavioral outcomes. Analysis for this research used quantitative hypothesis testing to investigate strategic HR practices as a potential predictor of AC, SOAR as a potential mediator/moderator of the relationship between HR practices and AC, and strategic HR practices and AC as potential predictors of various behavioral outcomes. Additionally, the qualitative methodology, using inductive thematic analysis, was used to investigate how strategic HR practices impact AC.

This study investigated affective commitment (AC) in the context of strategic Human Resource (HR) practices and determined the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. (Note: In the tables, figures, and calculations, strategic HR practices is represented by the letters SHRP.) The sample population for this study consisted of federal government knowledge workers in the science and technology field. The data were collected using an online survey tool, called SurveyMonkey™. Paper surveys were also used when the respondents did not have access to the online tool. Data were collected from survey respondents who were civilian employees of the organization; enlisted military personnel and contractors were told not to take the survey.

The survey instrument was administered to  $N = 205$  associates, 204 of whom provided their voluntary consent to participate in the study. One individual did not consent and no data were collected from that individual. From the raw data, eight surveys were eliminated because respondents did not answer more than 80% of the

questions. Four surveys were eliminated because they did not respond to questions in the AC section. Four more were eliminated because they did not respond to any questions in the SOAR section or the section on behavioral outcomes. A total of 17 surveys were excluded leaving a final sample size for analysis of  $N = 188$ . All available data were analyzed in Minitab 17.2.1 and *MPlus* 7.3 using general linear modeling inferential statistics, and structural equation modeling (SEM), respectively, to produce descriptive statistics, evaluate psychometric properties, and test the study hypotheses. Significance was evaluated at the 95% confidence level, two-tail, for all inferential statistics. The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Strategic HR practices predict AC.

H2a (mediation alternative): SOAR serves to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR).

H2b (moderation alternative): SOAR moderates the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices are greater when SOAR elements are present).

H3: AC has an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

Quantitative results are presented in Tables 4.1-4.19. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 contain descriptive statistics used to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample in terms of frequency analysis and chi-square tests for equivalence of distribution. Next, Table 4.3 presents the psychometric properties of the 30 survey items used to measure strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR. Psychometric properties were assessed using

Cronbach's coefficient alpha test for internal consistency of reliability, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test for construct validity. The intercorrelations between study variables are presented in Table 4.4. Tables 4.5 through 4.10 present descriptive statistics in the form of mean and standard deviation (SD) of study constructs (strategic HR practices, AC, SOAR, and behavioral outcomes) across demographic characteristics. Results of hypothesis testing begins in Table 4.11 with the results of AC regressed on strategic HR practices (H1). Next, results of regression analysis with bias corrected bootstrapping and hierarchical linear regression used to test H2a and H2b, respectively, are presented in Tables 4.12 and 4.13. Collectively, H2 examined if SOAR was a mediator or moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. Results for the mediation path analysis using structural equation modeling are presented in Tables 4.12; results for moderation testing using regression analysis are presented in Table 4.13. Results for moderation testing using regression analysis of AC regressed on strategic HR practices and SOAR are presented in Table 4.14. Hypothesis testing for H3 begins in Table 4.15 and continues through Table 4.19; H3 was tested via binary logistic regression.

### **Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

Data on gender, age, and level of education are presented in Table 4.1. As shown, 24.5% of the study sample of  $N = 188$  were females and 63.3% were males; 12.2% did not respond to the question. 4.8% of the respondents were between the ages of 23-27, 4.3% were between the ages of 28-32, 9.6% were between the ages of 33-37, 7.4% were between the ages of 38-42, 14.9% were between the ages of 43-47, 31.4% were between the ages of 48-57, 13.3% were between the ages of 58-67, 3.2% were over the age of 68,

and 11.2% did not respond. The age distribution of the sample is negatively skewed, with approximately 60% of the sample clustered in the 43-47 (15%), 48-57 (31%), and 58-67 (13%) age class intervals.

Frequency analysis of education suggests that the study sample is a highly educated workforce: 0.5% of the respondents have a high school diploma, 1.1% have some college education, 6.4% have an Associates degree, 22.3% have a Bachelors degree, 48.9% have a Masters degree, and 10.6% have a Doctoral degree. These results represent a workforce with a high number of knowledge workers.

Table 4.1

*Characteristics of Sample by Gender, Age, and Education*

Characteristic	n	%
Total Sample	188	100.0
Gender		
Female	46**	24.5
Male	119	63.3
No Response	23	12.2
Age		
23-27	9**	4.8
28-32	8	4.3
33-37	18	9.6
38-42	14	7.4
43-47	28	14.9
48-57	59	31.4
58-67	25	13.3
68+	6	3.2
No Response	21	11.2
Education		
High School Diploma	1**	0.5
Some College	2	1.1
Associate Degree	12	6.4
Bachelor Degree	42	22.3
Master Degree	92	48.9
Doctoral Degree	20	10.6
No Response	19	10.1

*Note.* Sample frequency is expressed as % of all participants, N = 188.

\*\* $p < 0.01$  Chi-square test for equality of distribution.

Descriptive statistics for length of service at the organization, length of service with the Federal Government, total years of experience as a professional, and retirement eligibility is presented in Table 4.2. For length of service at TARDEC, the respondents indicated that 0.5% had less than six months of service at TARDEC, 1.6% had six months to one year of service, 3.2% had two to three years of service, 11.7% had three to five years of service, 32.4% had five to 10 years of service, 11.7% had 10 to 15 years of service, 2.7% had 15 to 20 years of service, 7.4% had 20 to 25 years of service, 18.6% had more than 25 years of service, and 3.4% did not respond.

For total years of service with the Federal Government, the respondents indicated that 0.5% had less than six months of service with the Federal Government, 0.5% had six months to one year of service, 0.5% had one to two years of service, 2.7% had two to three years of service, 8.0% had three to five years of service, 24.5% had five to 10 years of service, 13.8% had 10 to 15 years of service, 4.3% had 15 to 20 years of service, 10.6% had 20 to 25 years of service, 22.3% had more than 25 years of service, and 12.2% did not respond.

For total years of service as a professional, the respondents indicated that 0.5% had less than six months of service with the Federal Government, 0.5% had six months to one year of service, 0.5% had two to three years of service, 4.3% had three to five years of service, 3.2% had five to 10 years of service, 12.2% had 10 to 15 years of service, 10.6% had 15 to 20 years of service, 14.4% had 20 to 25 years of service, 42.6% had more than 25 years of service, and 11.2% did not respond.

In the category of retirement eligibility, respondents were asked if they were eligible for optional retirement. Federal employees who are eligible for optional

retirement are those individuals who can retire immediately. The survey did not ask respondents if they were eligible for early retirement. From the data, 17.0% of respondents were eligible for optional retirement, 58.0% were not eligible, 14.9% were eligible within five years, and 10.1% were not eligible.

To further analyze the demographic categories, the chi-square test for equality of distribution (or chi-square goodness of fit test) was used. For all categories, i.e. gender, age and education, gender, results indicated that  $p < 0.01$  using the chi-square test for equality of distribution. Significant chi-square test results indicate that demographic characteristics of participants were not equally distributed throughout the sample. This was found to be consistent throughout all demographic categories. Table 4.1 indicates that the population had more males than females, age groups 23-27, 28-32, and 68+ had fewer respondents, and most participants had a Bachelors degree or higher. Similarly, as shown in Table 4.2, the significant chi-square results indicate that the sample was not evenly distributed across years of service at TARDEC, years federal service, and total experience. For example 5.3% of the sample reported less than three years at TARDEC, 4.2% with less a than three years federal service, and 1.5% with less than 3 years total experience. Distribution of those eligible to retire was also significant, with 72.9% of the employees reported their ineligibility to retire at the time that the survey was administered (percentage includes those not eligible to retire and those who are eligible within 5 years).

Table 4.2

*Characteristics of Sample by Length of Service at TARDEC, Length of Service with the Federal Government, Year of Experience (Total), and Retirement Eligibility*

Characteristic	n	%
Years at TARDEC		
< 6 months	1**	0.5
6 months-1 year	3	1.6
1-2 years	0	0
2-3 years	6	3.2
3-5 years	22	11.7
5-10 years	61	32.4
10-15 years	22	11.7
15-20 years	5	2.7
20-25 years	14	7.4
> 25 years	35	18.6
No Response	6	3.4
Years with Federal Government		
< 6 months	1**	0.5
6 months-1 year	1	0.5
1-2 years	1	0.5
2-3 years	5	2.7
3-5 years	15	8.0
5-10 years	46	24.5
10-15 years	26	13.8
15-20 years	8	4.3
20-25 years	20	10.6
> 25 years	42	22.3
No Response	23	12.2
Years experience (Total)		
< 6 months	1**	0.5
6 months-1 year	1	0.5
1-2 years	0	0.0
2-3 years	1	0.5
3-5 years	8	4.3
5-10 years	6	3.2
10-15 years	23	12.2
15-20 years	20	10.6
20-25 years	27	14.4
> 25 years	80	42.6
No Response	21	11.2
Retirement Eligibility		
Eligible for retirement	32**	17.0
Not eligible for retirement	109	58.0
Eligible for retirement within 5 years	28	14.9
No Response	19	10.1

*Note.* Sample frequency is expressed as % of all participants, N = 188.

\*\* $p < .01$  Chi-square test for equality of distribution.

## Reliability and Validity

The psychometric properties of strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR were evaluated statistically using Cronbach's coefficient alpha test of internal consistency (as an index of reliability), and CFA test of construct validity (as an index of validity). The criterion value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7, with values  $> 0.7$  as an indicator that the data are reliable (Hinkin, 1998). The criterion values for CFA model fit indices indicative of validity are Comparative Fit Index (CFI)  $\geq 0.90$ , Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (95% CI)  $\leq 0.08$ , and chi-square/degrees of freedom (df)  $< 2$  (Bentler, 1990; Bentler, 2007; Loehlin, 1998).

Table 4.3 presents the results of reliability and validity testing using Cronbach's alpha and CFA for the scales used in the survey: strategic HR practices, SOAR, and AC. Where appropriate, alpha is reported for each full scale and subscale, and factor loadings are reported for individual survey items loading onto their respective factor, and factors loading onto their respective construct. As shown, all alpha values were indicative of acceptable reliability, with alpha for the 12-item measure of strategic HR practices = 0.873, alpha for the 6-item measure of AC = 0.871, and alpha for the 12-item measure of SOAR = 0.901. Alphas for the constitutive factors of SOAR are Strengths = 0.704 Opportunities = 0.756, 0.664 (Aspirations of AS), and 0.845 (Results or RE). Even though the alpha for aspirations does not meet the standard (0.7), it does not stray too far below the required mark. All Cronbach's alpha scores for survey items are within satisfactory and acceptable limits for internal consistency reliability.

Table 4.3 also shows that the CFA results were indicative of construct validity. Specifically, model fit indices of the higher-order CFA were as follows: chi-square =

703.170,  $df = 394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.068 (0.059-0.076); CFI = 0.870.

Two out of the three criteria for construct validity using CFA were met: chi-square/df < 2, and RMSEA (90% CI)  $\leq 0.08$ . While results for the CFI found a value of 0.870, which was not  $\geq 0.90$ , the CFI values was high and close to 0.90. Figure 4.1 is a graphical representation of the results of confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, all factor loadings of all indicators were significant at  $p < 0.001$ , supporting the construct validity of the survey tool. In all, the results of the psychometric properties testing suggest that the study survey provided data that were reliable and valid. Having shown that the data were valid and reliable, further statistical analyses were carried out.

Table 4.3

*Reliability and Validity of Strategic HR Practices, Affective Commitment, and SOAR*

Survey Items	Mean <sup>1</sup>	SD <sup>2</sup>	Alpha <sup>3</sup>	Factor <sup>4</sup>
Strategic HR Practices (12-items)	5.59	1.81	0.873	n/a
Training	7.47	2.31		0.526
Mentoring	4.64	2.74		0.493
Performance management	5.56	2.92		0.744
Promotion opportunities	4.53	2.65		0.580
Career development	5.68	2.49		0.675
Compensation	5.33	2.85		0.568
Flex time and RDO	7.38	3.16		0.447
Telework	2.53	2.10		0.313
Work Life Balance	5.41	3.13		0.657
Meaningful work	6.43	3.02		0.738
Supervisory support	6.06	2.97		0.730
Team cohesion	6.06	3.01		0.625
Affective Commitment (6-items)	4.76	1.40	0.871	n/a
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	5.14	1.73		0.682
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	4.39	1.83		0.521
I do not feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization	4.80	1.76		0.784
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization	4.69	1.77		0.892
I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization	4.65	1.76		0.775
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me	4.96	1.66		0.719
SOAR (12-items)	7.62	1.16	0.901	n/a
Strengths (3-items)	7.59	1.32	0.704	0.980
Assets	8.05	1.49		0.773
Capabilities	6.85	1.95		0.507
Strengths	7.91	1.49		0.644
Opportunities (3-items)	7.75	1.39	0.756	0.933
Ideas	7.68	1.80		0.746
Opportunities	7.72	1.68		0.711
Possibilities	7.86	1.59		0.761
Aspirations (3-items)	7.29	1.52	0.664	1.186
Aspirations	6.90	2.08		0.460
Desires	7.05	1.93		0.393
Values	7.92	1.89		0.604
Results (3-items)	7.84	1.46	0.845	0.693
Completed Tasks	8.13	1.49		0.840
Outcomes	7.70	1.80		0.846
Results		1.72		0.727
	7.69	3		

*Note.* Tests of model fit for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA):  $\chi^2 = 703.170$ ,  $df = 394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.068 (.059-.076); CFI = 0.870. <sup>1</sup>Mean of items within scale where each strategic HR practices items measured on a 10-point Likert scale, 1=Never, 10=Always; Affective Commitment items measured on a 7-point Likert scale, 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree; SOAR items measured on a 10-point Likert scale, 1=Never, 10=Always. <sup>2</sup>Standard deviation. <sup>3</sup>Cronbach's alpha reliability measure of internal consistency. <sup>4</sup>Factor loading scores from CFA significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

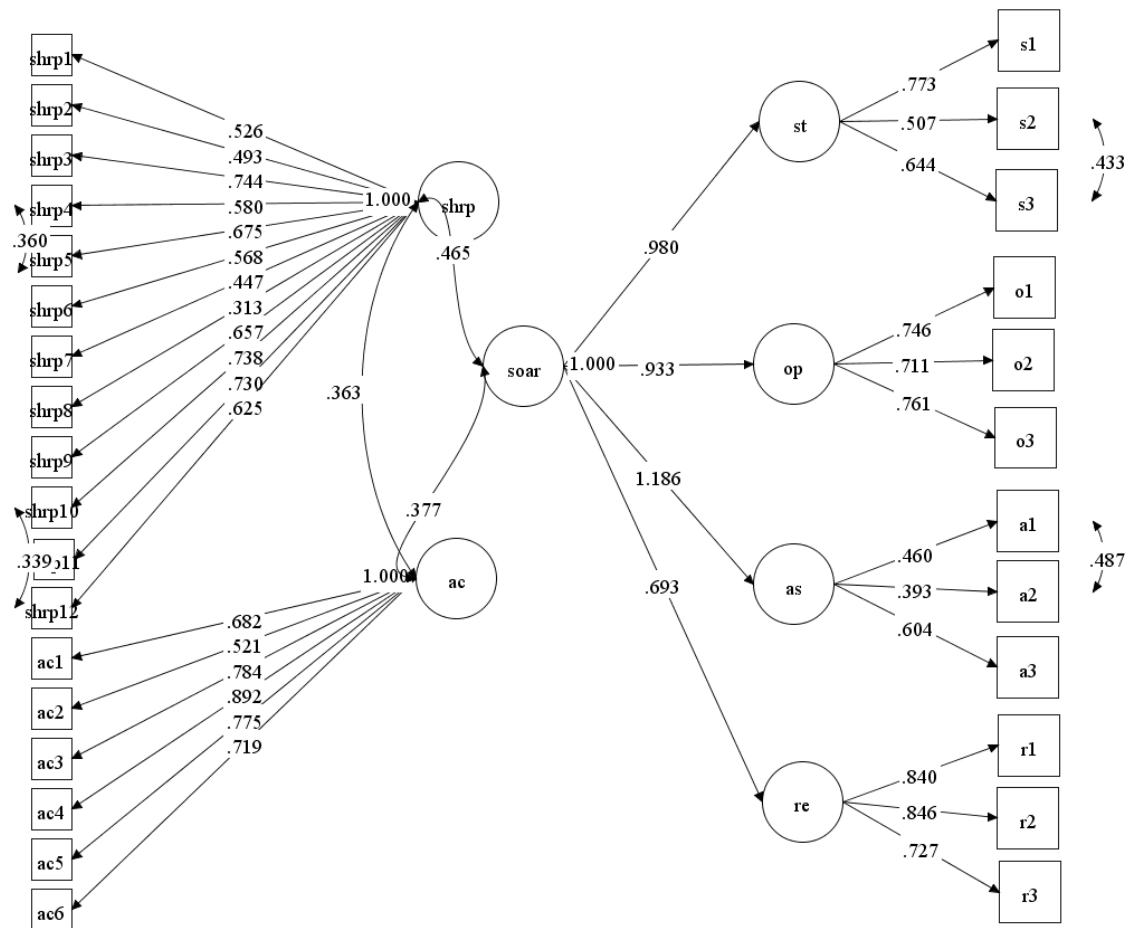


Figure 4.1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

### Intercorrelations Between Study Variables

The intercorrelations between strategic HR practices, AC, SOAR (and its constitutive factors), and the five behavioral outcomes are presented in Table 4.4. Unless noted by the superscript *ns*, all variables were significantly positively correlated with each other at  $p < 0.05$ . Specifically, strategic HR practices was found to be significantly correlated with AC and with SOAR, with correlations ranging between 0.25 and 0.43. SOAR was found to be significantly correlated with its four constitutive factors (correlations range = 0.75 to 0.86). Finally, AC was found to be significantly correlated

with the five behavioral outcomes (correlations range = 0.28 to 0.64). Taken together, these results suggest strategic HR practices may be a significant predictor of AC, SOAR may have an important relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and AC may be a significant predictor of behavioral outcomes. These predictions are tested with H1, H2, and H3, respectively.

Table 4.4

*Intercorrelations Between Study Variables*

Variable	Mean (SD)	SHRP	AC	SOAR	ST	OP	AS	RE	IS	EN	JS	LO
SHRP	5.59 (1.81)	1.00										
AC	4.76 (1.40)	0.32	1.00									
SOAR	7.62 (1.59)	0.43	0.31	1.00								
ST	7.59 (1.32)	0.38	0.25	0.84	1.00							
OP	7.75 (1.39)	0.37	0.27	0.86	0.61	1.00						
AS	2.30 (1.52)	0.41	0.26	0.81	0.57	0.70	1.00					
RE	7.84 (1.46)	0.25	0.22	0.75	0.61	0.49	0.34	1.00				
IS	7.44 (2.77)	0.30	0.52	0.28	0.24	0.28	0.29	0.11 <sup>ns</sup>	1.00			
EN	8.27 (2.12)	0.22	0.32	0.29	0.28	0.22	0.21	0.21	0.27	1.00		
JS	6.78 (2.41)	0.32	0.64	0.35	0.29	0.27	0.30	0.27	0.57	0.32	1.00	
LO	9.13 (1.24)	0.22	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.21	0.25	0.21	0.33	0.25	0.32	1.00
DE	9.47 (1.25)	0.18	0.28	0.21	0.14 <sup>ns</sup>	0.17	0.26	0.11 <sup>ns</sup>	0.20	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.28	0.35

*Note.* Pearson product moment correlation between study variables (N = 188). All correlations significant at  $p < 0.05$  unless noted with *ns* (not significant). SHRP = Strategic HR Practices, AC = Affective Commitment, ST = Strength, OP = Opportunities, AS = Aspirations, RE = Results, IS = Intention to Stay (plan to stay), EN = Engagement (enjoy co-workers), JS = Job Satisfaction, LO = Loyalty (loyal employee), DE = Dedication (dedicated employee).

## Descriptive Statistics

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 present the results of descriptive statistics in which the mean and standard deviation (SD) of strategic HR practices and AC were examined across the seven demographic characteristics in the study: gender, age, education, years at TARDEC, years with federal government, total years experience, and retirement eligibility. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 present the descriptive statistics of SOAR examined across these seven demographic characteristics, and Tables 4.9 and 4.10 present the descriptive statistics of the behavioral outcomes across these seven demographic characteristics. In all six tables, differences in the mean scores across the demographic characteristics were tested with a one-way ANOVA at the 95% level of significance. Significant ANOVA results are noted in each table with an asterisk. For demographic characteristics with  $n = 1$  case, the absence of an SD is noted in each table with a double dash.

**Strategic HR practices and AC.** Table 4.5 presents the results of descriptive statistics of strategic HR practices and AC across gender, age and education. Table 4.6 presents the results of descriptive statistics of strategic HR practices and AC across years at TARDEC, years with federal government, total years experience, and retirement eligibility. For both strategic HR practices and AC, there were no statistically significant differences in mean scores across demographic characteristics, i.e., the mean scores for strategic HR practices and AC were not found to be significantly different between females and males, between the eight age categories, between the six education categories, etc. Overall, these results suggest that strategic HR practices and AC are relatively invariant to differences in demographic characteristics.

Table 4.5

*Mean and SD of Strategic HR Practices and AC across Gender, Age, and Education*

Demographic	SHRP		AC	
Characteristic	M	SD	M	SD
Total	5.59	1.81	4.76	1.40
Gender				
Female	5.79	1.99	4.69	1.43
Male	5.62	1.80	4.74	1.41
Age				
23-27	5.05	1.40	4.30	0.94
28-32	5.85	2.10	4.77	1.21
33-37	5.63	1.81	4.97	0.99
38-42	5.79	1.65	3.83	1.34
43-47	5.41	2.06	4.86	1.27
48-57	5.88	1.85	4.85	1.51
58-67	5.47	2.09	4.83	1.61
68+	5.65	1.90	5.67	1.67
Education				
High School Diploma	6.67	--	4.67	--
Some College	6.63	4.07	6.42	0.59
Associate Degree	4.44	2.30	5.28	1.40
Bachelor Degree	5.32	1.83	4.80	1.25
Master Degree	5.82	1.84	4.59	1.52
Doctoral Degree	6.05	1.24	4.93	1.23

*Note.* No significant difference was found at  $p < 0.05$  between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA ( $N = 188$ ).

Table 4.6

*Mean and SD of Strategic HR Practices and AC Across Length of Service at TARDEC, Length of Service with the Federal Government, Year of Experience (Total), and Retirement Eligibility*

Demographic Characteristic	SHRP		AC	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Years at TARDEC</b>				
< 6 months	7.83	--	6.83	--
6 months-1 year	4.53	1.10	4.56	2.01
1-2 years	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	6.39	1.35	5.64	1.06
3-5 years	5.42	1.98	4.62	1.48
5-10 years	5.57	1.94	4.67	1.43
10-15 years	5.36	1.99	4.66	1.30
15-20 years	6.35	2.39	4.97	1.20
20-25 years	6.15	1.95	4.52	1.34
> 25 years	5.66	1.58	4.93	1.47
<b>Years with Federal Government</b>				
< 6 months	3.18	--	5.83	--
6 months-1 year	3.33	--	4.33	--
1-2 years	5.50	--	2.67	--
2-3 years	6.17	1.38	5.50	1.10
3-5 years	5.68	1.95	4.61	1.63
5-10 years	5.88	1.65	4.67	1.40
10-15 years	5.74	1.93	5.02	1.23
15-20 years	5.32	2.41	4.94	1.37
20-25 years	5.70	2.17	4.58	1.46
> 25 years	5.63	1.63	4.80	1.46
<b>Years experience (Total)</b>				
< 6 months	6.25	--	3.67	--
6 months-1 year	3.33	--	4.33	--
1-2 years	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	5.50	--	4.00	--
3-5 years	5.21	1.81	4.42	1.16
5-10 years	5.50	1.66	4.69	1.43
10-15 years	5.53	1.89	4.85	1.18
15-20 years	5.88	1.84	4.56	1.46
20-25 years	5.27	2.34	4.49	1.51
> 25 years	5.77	1.74	4.97	1.47
<b>Retirement Eligibility</b>				
Eligible for retirement	5.60	1.91	4.97	1.62
Not eligible for retirement	5.54	2.02	4.73	1.27
Eligible for retirement within 5 years	6.04	1.81	4.64	1.66

*Note.* No significant difference was found at  $p < 0.05$  between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA ( $N = 188$ ).

**SOAR.** Table 4.7 and 4.8 present the results for descriptive statistics of SOAR and its four factors across gender, age, and education (Table 4.7) and across years at TARDEC, years with federal government, total years experience, and retirement eligibility (Table 4.8). As shown in Tables 4.7 and 4.8, the mean scores for SOAR, ST, AS, and RE were not found to be significantly different across the seven demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistics results for OP, found that mean opportunity scores were significantly different across years of federal government service. Further analysis of this using Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) (Hayter, 1986) found that new hires of two years or less had significantly lower opportunity scores than individuals who had greater than two years of service. As noted in Table 4.2, there were no more than four respondents who self-reported two years of less of experience. This small number of respondents could account for the significant ANOVA result. Overall, these results suggest that with the exception of Opportunities, SOAR scores do not significantly vary across demographic characteristics.

Table 4.7

*Mean and SD of SOAR across Gender, Age, and Education*

Demographic Characteristic	SOAR		ST		OP		AS		RE	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total	7.62	1.16	7.59	1.32	7.75	1.39	7.29	1.52	7.84	1.46
Gender										
Female	7.72	1.32	7.63	1.65	7.78	1.49	7.48	1.75	8.01	1.27
Male	7.62	1.12	7.58	1.23	7.80	1.34	7.26	1.49	7.85	1.54
Age										
23-27	7.45	0.72	7.37	0.63	7.59	1.01	7.22	7.22	7.63	1.17
28-32	7.74	0.99	7.54	1.44	8.04	1.15	7.38	7.38	8.00	0.98
33-37	7.71	0.89	7.57	0.99	7.98	1.32	7.28	7.28	8.00	1.40
38-42	7.58	1.30	7.48	1.76	7.88	1.12	7.19	7.19	7.79	1.58
43-47	7.42	1.24	7.45	1.33	7.49	1.48	7.29	7.29	7.45	1.50
48-57	7.66	1.10	7.62	1.20	7.78	1.28	7.32	7.32	7.91	1.41
58-67	7.77	1.44	7.93	1.52	7.85	1.81	7.17	7.17	8.11	1.83
68+	8.67	0.67	8.33	1.25	8.72	0.85	8.78	8.78	8.75	0.71
Education										
High School Diploma	9.33	--	9.67	--	9.33	--	9.33	--	9.00	--
Some College	7.43	1.55	7.67	1.60	7.33	1.75	6.56	2.28	8.17	1.15
Associate Degree	8.08	2.24	7.83	3.06	8.00	2.36	8.17	1.65	8.33	1.89
Bachelor Degree	7.47	0.78	7.47	1.11	7.49	1.16	7.12	1.31	7.79	1.23
Master Degree	7.62	1.22	7.59	1.38	7.78	1.42	7.31	1.52	7.81	1.52
Doctoral Degree	8.05	1.25	7.73	1.35	8.42	1.27	7.78	1.57	8.25	1.66

*Note.* No significant difference was found at  $p < 0.05$  between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA ( $N = 188$ ).

Table 4.8

*Mean and SD of SOAR across Length of Service at TARDEC, Length of Service with the Federal Government, Year of Experience (Total), and Retirement Eligibility*

Demographic Characteristic	SOAR		ST		OP		AS		RE	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Years at TARDEC										
< 6 months	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--
6 months-1 year	6.86	0.75	6.22	1.35	6.89	1.17	6.33	0.58	8.00	0.88
1-2 years	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	8.60	1.12	8.33	1.61	9.00	1.27	8.22	1.88	8.83	1.03
3-5 years	7.76	1.07	7.70	1.28	7.89	1.10	7.38	1.66	8.08	1.55
5-10 years	7.67	1.17	7.62	1.22	7.86	1.39	7.40	1.45	7.81	1.36
10-15 years	7.72	1.22	7.75	1.45	7.94	1.72	7.08	2.01	8.11	1.49
15-20 years	7.81	0.14	7.67	0.86	7.50	0.43	7.67	1.19	8.42	1.52
20-25 years	7.12	1.11	7.19	1.22	7.21	0.92	6.91	1.40	7.14	1.56
> 25 years	7.54	1.12	7.55	1.35	7.60	1.40	7.25	1.35	7.76	1.53
Years with Federal Govt										
< 6 months	6.17	--	6.67	--	6.67*	--	3.00	--	8.33	--
6 months-1 year	7.58	--	7.00	--	8.00	--	6.67	--	8.67	--
1-2 years	6.08	--	4.67	--	5.67	--	5.67	--	8.33	--
2-3 years	8.35	1.05	8.00	1.55	8.80	1.30	7.93	1.95	8.67	1.05
3-5 years	7.87	1.15	7.80	1.29	8.13	1.17	7.73	1.50	7.82	1.69
5-10 years	7.73	1.16	7.64	1.27	8.00	1.30	7.51	1.41	7.76	1.40
10-15 years	7.99	1.31	7.87	1.37	8.28	1.51	7.60	1.77	8.21	1.43
15-20 years	7.55	0.49	8.00	0.90	7.43	0.42	6.62	1.72	8.14	1.83
20-25 years	7.43	1.16	7.52	1.25	7.47	1.11	7.12	1.44	7.60	1.51
> 25 years	7.47	1.05	7.48	1.34	7.41	1.43	7.12	1.36	7.87	1.53
Years experience (Total)										
< 6 months	8.08	--	8.67	--	8.00	--	8.00	--	7.67	--
6 months-1 year	7.58	--	7.00	--	8.00	--	6.67	--	8.67	--
1-2 years	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	7.17	--	7.33	--	6.67	--	6.00	--	8.67	--
3-5 years	7.19	0.97	7.08	0.96	7.58	1.17	6.67	1.11	7.42	1.70
5-10 years	7.11	0.71	7.00	0.97	7.22	0.40	7.00	1.71	7.22	0.78
10-15 years	7.55	0.98	7.44	1.20	7.74	1.46	7.18	1.53	7.82	1.20
15-20 years	7.87	1.06	7.67	1.36	8.09	1.15	7.67	1.25	8.05	1.41
20-25 years	7.47	1.41	7.51	1.45	7.61	1.53	7.24	1.70	7.53	1.72
> 25 years	7.80	1.17	7.82	1.31	7.91	1.43	7.42	1.61	8.05	1.49
Retirement Eligibility										
Eligible for ret.	7.63	1.32	7.73	1.51	7.72	1.66	6.98	1.96	8.08	1.62
Not eligible for ret.	7.61	1.07	7.57	1.23	7.77	1.28	7.29	1.44	7.79	1.40
Eligible for ret. within 5 years	7.86	1.25	7.63	1.40	7.98	1.39	7.80	1.32	8.02	1.53

Note. \* $p < 0.05$  significant difference between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA (N = 188).

**Behavioral Outcomes.** Table 4.9 and 4.10 present the results of the behavioral outcomes across each demographic characteristic: intention to stay (plan to stay), engagement (enjoy co-workers), job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. Table 4.9 details the mean and standard deviation scores of behavioral outcomes across gender, age, and education. Table 4.10 details the mean and standard deviation scores of behavioral outcomes across years at TARDEC, years with federal government, total years experience, and retirement eligibility. As shown in both tables, the mean scores for Enjoy Co-Workers varied significantly across age and years experience, and mean scores for Loyal Employee varied significantly across gender and years at TARDEC. All other behavioral outcomes did not vary across the demographic characteristics.

Table 4.9

*Mean and SD of Behavioral Outcomes across Gender, Age, and Education*

Demographic Characteristic	Plan to Stay		Enjoy Co-Workers		Job Satisfaction		Loyal Employee		Dedicated Employee	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total	7.44	2.77	8.27	2.12	6.78	2.41	9.13	1.24	9.47	1.25
Gender										
Female	7.82	2.53	8.50	2.20	6.96	2.36	9.52*	0.78	9.57	1.41
Male	7.27	2.92	8.16	2.14	6.65	2.49	8.99	1.32	9.40	1.22
Age										
23-27	6.33	3.46	7.00*	1.58	6.56	2.70	8.33	2.60	9.67	0.50
28-32	8.38	1.06	8.88	1.13	6.75	1.39	8.63	1.77	9.25	0.89
33-37	8.17	1.92	7.72	2.65	6.33	2.20	9.06	1.00	9.67	0.69
38-42	5.64	3.43	7.36	3.00	5.93	2.97	8.79	1.37	9.29	1.54
43-47	7.86	2.70	8.64	1.59	6.96	2.05	9.18	0.91	9.14	2.01
48-57	7.64	2.37	8.34	2.22	6.83	2.49	9.29	0.98	9.48	1.18
58-67	7.52	3.26	8.88	1.74	6.84	2.67	9.28	1.31	9.64	0.91
68+	6.83	4.54	9.50	0.84	9.50	0.84	10.00	--	10.00	--
Education										
HS Diploma	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--
Some College	8.00	--	9.50	0.71	8.50	0.71	10.00	--	10.00	--
Associates	8.58	2.31	8.58	2.61	7.42	2.35	9.92	0.29	9.25	2.60
Bachelors	7.36	2.89	8.21	1.79	6.88	2.17	8.79	1.55	9.43	0.97
Masters	7.47	2.72	8.25	2.24	6.60	2.61	9.14	1.02	9.41	1.26
Doctoral	6.55	3.19	8.40	2.04	6.70	2.13	9.10	1.65	9.75	0.55

Note. \* $p < 0.05$  significant difference between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA (N = 188).

Table 4.10

*Mean and SD of Behavioral Outcomes across Length of Service at TARDEC, Length of Service with the Federal Government, Year of Experience (Total), and Retirement Eligibility*

Demographic Characteristic	Plan to Stay		Enjoy Co-Workers		Job Satisfaction		Loyal Employee		Dedicated Employee	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Years at TARDEC</b>										
< 6 months	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--	10.00*	--	10.00	--
6 months-1 year	6.67	3.21	7.00	2.00	5.67	2.08	7.00	2.00	8.67	0.58
1-2 years	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	8.17	3.60	8.33	1.86	7.67	2.34	8.50	3.21	9.83	0.41
3-5 years	7.46	2.94	7.59	2.74	6.59	2.38	9.09	1.07	9.32	1.99
5-10 years	7.56	2.53	8.59	1.91	6.82	2.29	9.26	0.93	9.43	1.24
10-15 years	7.23	3.04	7.96	2.10	5.64	2.79	9.27	0.99	9.50	1.01
15-20 years	9.20	1.10	9.00	1.73	7.80	1.10	9.40	0.89	9.80	0.45
20-25 years	7.64	2.53	7.93	2.73	6.79	2.05	8.43	1.45	8.86	1.83
> 25 years	6.94	3.14	8.51	1.95	7.26	2.59	9.37	1.14	9.80	0.47
<b>Years with Federal Government</b>										
< 6 months	7.00	--	10.00	--	6.00	--	10.00	--	1.00	--
6 months-1 year	8.00	--	7.00	--	5.00	--	5.00	--	8.00	--
1-2 years	3.00	--	5.00	--	4.00	--	7.00	--	9.00	--
2-3 years	7.80	3.90	8.00	1.87	8.00	2.45	8.20	3.49	9.80	0.45
3-5 years	7.27	3.08	7.73	2.63	6.87	2.67	8.87	1.19	9.67	0.82
5-10 years	7.67	2.71	8.30	2.26	6.96	2.20	9.33	0.97	9.63	0.88
10-15 years	7.92	2.43	8.12	2.09	6.23	2.63	9.46	0.86	9.62	0.94
15-20 years	7.38	3.42	9.25	1.04	6.63	1.85	9.00	0.93	9.38	0.74
20-25 years	7.60	2.37	8.35	2.41	6.80	2.35	8.60	1.35	8.60	2.11
> 25 years	6.93	3.04	8.57	1.86	7.02	2.56	9.31	1.07	9.76	0.53
<b>Years experience (Total)</b>										
< 6 months	10.00	--	9.00*	--	6.00	--	10.00	--	10.00	--
6 months-1 year	8.00	--	7.00	--	5.00	--	5.00	--	8.00	--
1-2 years	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2-3 years	1.00	--	5.00	--	4.00	--	2.00	--	9.00	--
3-5 years	7.38	3.20	7.25	1.49	6.50	2.73	8.75	1.04	9.50	0.76
5-10 years	8.17	1.17	9.00	0.63	7.00	1.27	9.33	1.21	9.17	0.75
10-15 years	7.26	2.70	7.48	2.39	6.30	2.38	9.04	1.07	9.44	1.20
15-20 years	7.50	2.84	8.55	2.06	6.65	2.46	9.40	0.82	9.80	0.70
20-25 years	7.81	2.32	7.82	2.82	7.07	2.04	8.82	1.33	9.15	1.63
> 25 years	7.43	2.96	8.76	1.81	6.95	2.62	9.39	0.97	9.54	1.32
<b>Retirement Eligibility</b>										
Eligible for ret.	6.97	3.58	8.81	1.87	7.19	2.93	9.56	0.91	9.56	1.63
Not eligible for ret.	7.52	2.63	8.07	2.25	6.58	2.34	9.03	1.32	9.46	1.11
Eligible for ret. within 5 years	7.71	2.39	8.54	1.88	7.11	2.04	9.07	1.18	9.39	1.34

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$  significant difference between mean variable scores within demographic characteristic according to one-way ANOVA (N = 188)

### **Hypotheses Testing Results for H1: Strategic HR Practices Predicts AC**

H1 tested the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices by regressing AC on strategic HR practices. The results of the linear regression for H1 are shown in Table 4.11. As shown in Table 4.11, AC regressed on strategic HR practices was found to have  $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with strategic HR practices accounting for approximately 10% of the variance in AC (i.e., R-square = 9.93%). These results suggest that a one-unit change in strategic HR practices is estimated to predict an increase in AC of 0.24, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.14-0.35. Since AC was scored along a 1-7 Likert-scale, the one-unit increase in strategic HR practices is predicted to increase AC by approximately 25%. The graphical representation of the linear relationship between strategic HR practices and AC can be seen in the fitted line plot (see Figure 4.2). Given the relatively even distribution of strategic HR practices across demographic characteristics of the sample (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6), there was no need to include demographic characteristics as a covariate in the hypothesis testing for H1 (i.e., there was no need to control for variation in strategic HR practices that can be attributed to the demographic characteristics). In practical terms, the strategic practices put in place by the organization's HR department, appear to positively impact an employee's emotional commitment to that organization.

Table 4.11

*AC Regressed on Strategic HR Practices*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p
Constant	3.40 (2.78, 4.02)	0.32	10.770	<0.001
SHRP	0.24 (0.14, 0.35)	0.05	4.530	<0.001
<i>R-square</i>	9.93%			

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the linear regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

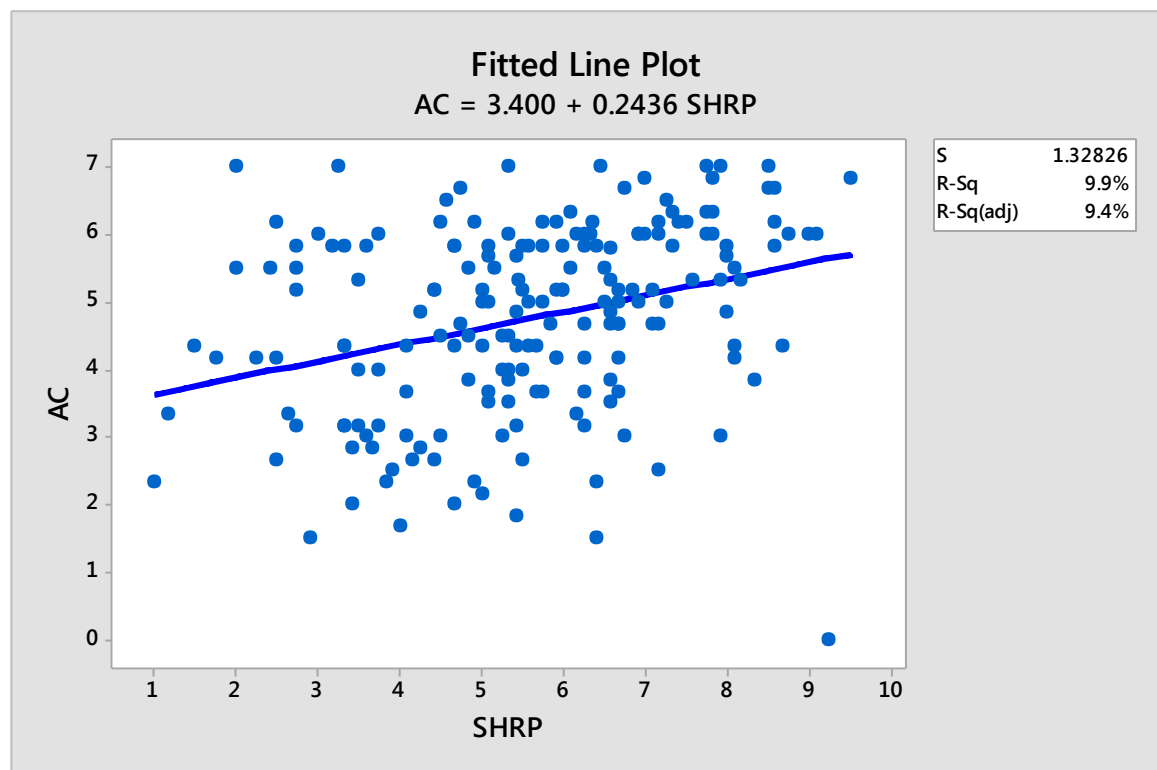


Figure 4.2. Linear plot of AC regressed on strategic HR practices.

**Hypotheses Testing Results for H2: SOAR Mediates the Prediction of AC**

Hypothesis two tested SOAR as a mediator/moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. To test for mediation (H2a), structural equation modeling was used to examine the indirect effect of strategic HR practices predicting AC through SOAR; to test for moderation (H2b), hierarchical linear regression was used to examine if

a strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term was a significant predictor of AC. Mediation analysis results are shown in Tables 4.12-4.13 and Figures 4.3-4.4; moderation analysis results are shown in Table 4.14 and Figure 4.5. As shown in Table 4.12 and Figure 4.3, SOAR was found to be a significant mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. In contrast, Table 4.14 and Figure 4.5 shows that SOAR did not moderate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

**H2a: Mediation analysis.** Using structural equation modeling (SEM) with bias corrected bootstrapping at a 95% CI, two tests of mediation were conducted. The first test examined SOAR as a mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (see Table 4.12 and Figure 4.3), and the second test examined the SOAR elements as multiple mediators of the strategic HR practices-AC relationship (see Table 4.13 and Figure 4.4). Mediation analysis using the SOAR construct as the mediator found the indirect effect of strategic HR practices impacting AC through SOAR was significant ( $\beta_1\beta_2 = 0.138, p = 0.011$ ). The analysis also found that strategic HR practices also had a significant direct effect on AC ( $c' = 0.400, p < 0.001$ ). Taken together, these results suggest that the SOAR construct is a partial mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. Partial mediation implies that there may be other constructs that mediate the strategic HR practices -AC relationship (i.e., there may be other explanations for how strategic HR practices impacts AC). Mediation analysis using the SOAR elements as mediators found that while each element of SOAR was not a significant mediator, the total indirect effect of SOAR remained significant (Beta = 0.172,  $p = 0.018$ ). Similar to the first mediation test, the direct effect of strategic HR practices on AC was significant. The overall results from both mediation tests suggest

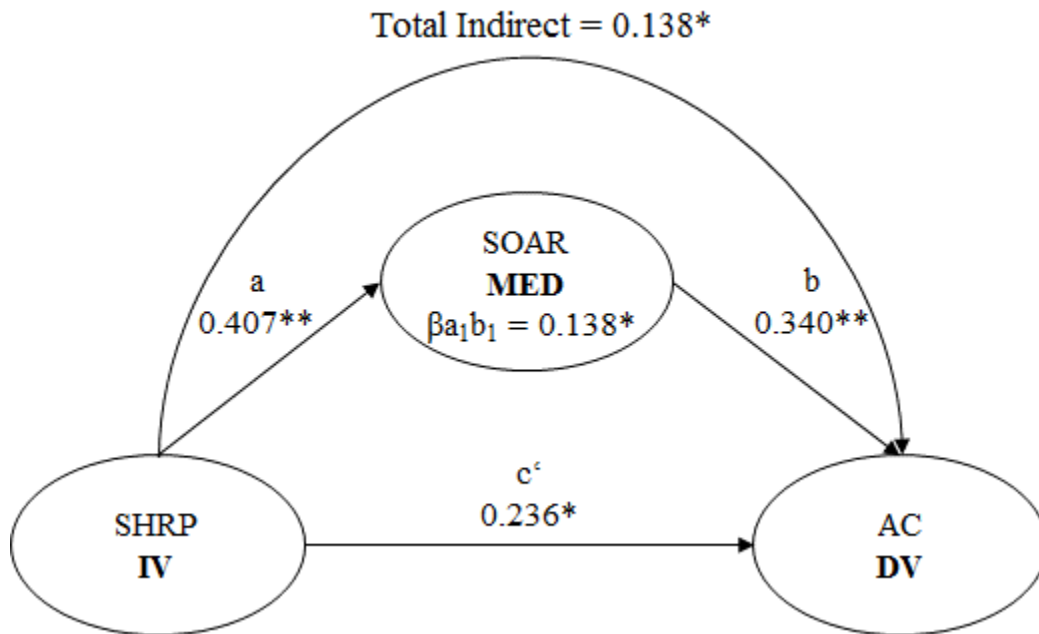
SOAR is a partial mediator of the strategic HR practices-AC relationship. In practical terms, SOAR may be considered as the mechanism of action for how strategic HR practices have significant impact on AC.

Table 4.12

*Mediation of the Indirect Effect of Strategic HR Practices on AC Through SOAR*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Bootstrapping (BC) 95%CI
	<u>Path c</u>				
SHRP	0.400 (0.199,0.601)	0.103	3.895	<0.001	0.205,0.719
	<u>Path a</u>				
SOAR	0.407 (0.215,0.598)	0.098	4.156	<0.001	0.198,0.654
	<u>Paths b and c'</u>				
SOAR	0.340 (0.105,0.574)	0.120	2.834	0.005	0.093,0.882
SHRP	0.236 (0.034,0.438)	0.103	2.290	0.022	0.028,0.527
	<u>Indirect effects</u>				
SOAR	0.138 (0.032,0.244)	0.054	2.556	0.011	0.046,0.284
Total	0.138 (0.032,0.244)	0.054	2.556	0.011	0.046,0.284

*Note.* Tests of model fit for mediation analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM):  $\chi^2 = 771.001$ ,  $df = 396$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.074 (0.066-0.082); CFI = 0.842. Beta coefficients and CI are unstandardized as determined by SEM with 5,000 bootstrapping samples. BC = bias-corrected, CI = confidence interval.



*Figure 4.3.* SOAR mediating the indirect effect of strategic HR practices on AC.

*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  unstandardized Beta coefficients from SEM with 5,000 bootstrapping samples (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.13

*Mediation of the Indirect Effect of strategic HR practices on AC through Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Bootstrapping (BC) 95% CI
<u>Path c</u>					
SHRP	0.400 (0.199,0.601)	0.103	3.895	<0.001	0.205,0.719
<u>Path a</u>					
ST	0.369 (0.180,0.559)	0.097	3.824	<0.001	0.143,0.676
OP	0.510 (0.268,0.752)	0.124	4.124	<0.001	0.255,0.897
AS	0.674 (0.365,0.982)	0.157	4.284	<0.001	0.329,1.170
RE	0.386 (0.186,0.586)	0.102	3.786	<0.001	0.192,0.647
<u>Paths b and c'</u>					
ST	-0.034 (-0.375,0.308)	0.174	-0.193	0.847	-0.458,0.503
OP	0.031 (-0.201,0.263)	0.118	0.262	0.794	-0.206,0.293
AS	0.158 (-0.032,0.349)	0.097	1.628	0.103	-0.034,0.511
RE	0.160 (-0.048,0.367)	0.106	1.508	0.132	-0.066,0.373
SHRP	0.226 ( 0.006,0.446)	0.112	2.014	0.044	-0.027,0.568
<u>Indirect effects</u>					
ST	-0.012 (-0.138,0.114)	0.064	-0.193	0.847	-0.197,0.195
OP	0.016 (-0.102,0.134)	0.060	0.262	0.793	-0.117,0.169
AS	0.107 (-0.029,0.242)	0.069	1.543	0.123	-0.014,0.406
RE	0.062 (-0.023,0.147)	0.043	1.421	0.155	-0.018,0.178
Total	0.172 ( 0.006,0.313)	0.072	2.372	0.018	0.015,0.384

*Note.* Tests of model fit for mediation analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM):  $\chi^2 = 951.329$ ,  $df = 394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.091 (0.083-0.098); CFI = 0.766. Beta coefficients and CI are unstandardized as determined by SEM with 5,000 bootstrapping samples. BC = bias-corrected, CI = confidence interval.

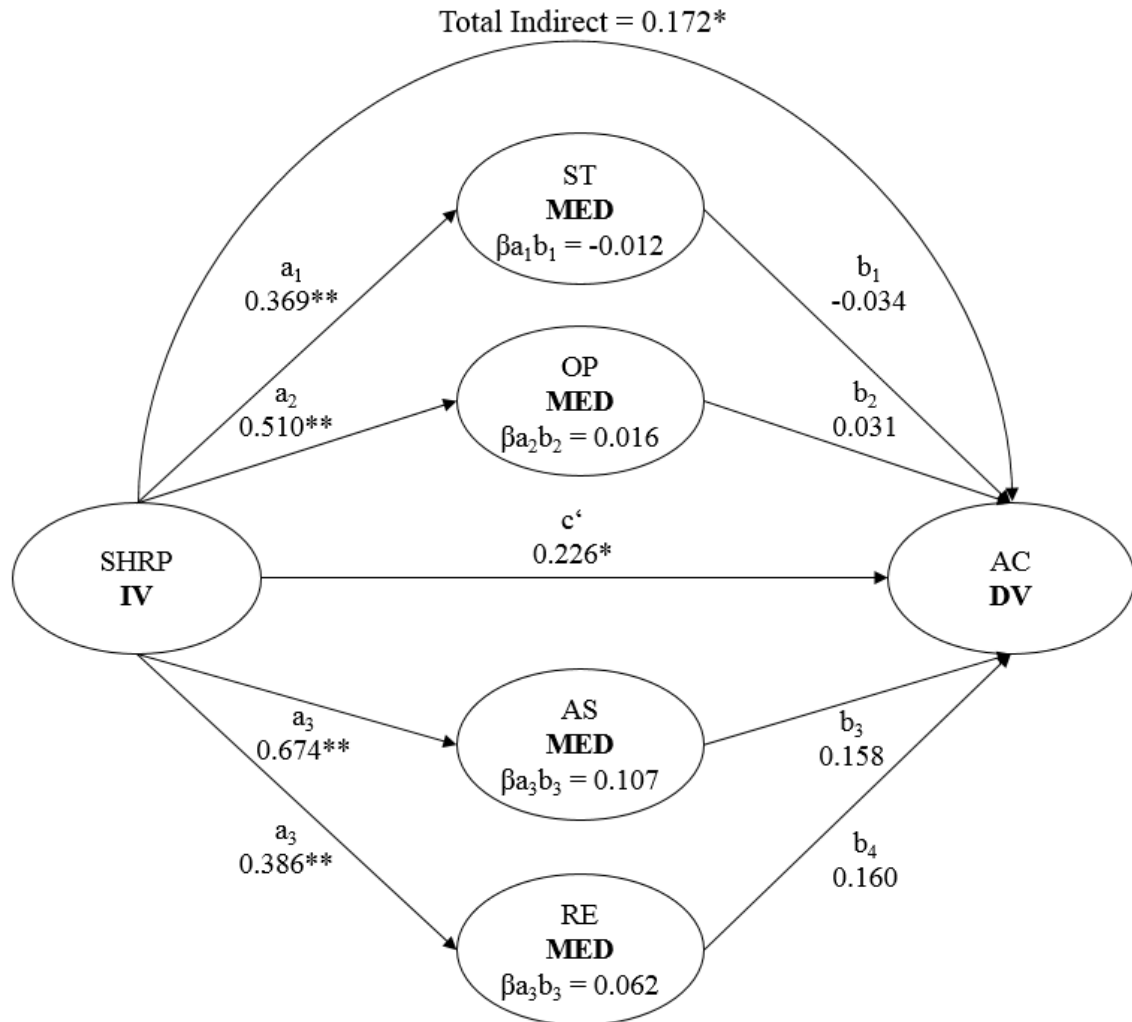


Figure 4.4. Strengths (ST), opportunities (OP), aspirations (AS), and results (RE) mediating the indirect effect of strategic HR practices on AC.

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  unstandardized Beta coefficients from SEM with 5,000 bootstrapping samples (see Table 4.13).

**H2b: Moderation.** SOAR was tested as a moderator of strategic HR practices predicting AC in employees. Moderation by SOAR was tested by conducting a hierarchical linear regression that culminated with the inclusion of a strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term in the regression. The hierarchical regression was

comprised of three steps. In step one, strategic HR practices was tested as a predictor of AC, and as seen in Table 4.14, strategic HR practices was found to predict AC with  $\beta = 0.244$ ,  $Z = 4.519$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and R-square = 9.93% at a 95% CI (similar to what was found in support of H1).

In step two of the hierarchical regression, SOAR was added as a second predictor in the regression, and results indicated that strategic HR practices and SOAR predicted AC (strategic HR practices:  $\beta = 0.167$ ,  $Z = 2.831$ ,  $p = 0.005$ , SOAR:  $\beta = 0.260$ ,  $Z = 2.826$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ; R-square = 13.30%). This finding is similar to the significant path b in Figure 4.3 in which SOAR was found to be a significant predictor of AC. The change in R-Square from 9.93% to 13.30% represents a significant increase of 3.37%.

In the final step of the hierarchical regression, inclusion of the strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term found the interaction term was not significant ( $\beta = -0.014$ ,  $Z = -0.315$ ,  $p = 0.751$ ), and the change in R-square from 13.30% to 13.35% was also not significant. Results of the hierarchical regression suggest SOAR did not function as a moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC in the sample. In practical terms, the effect that strategic HR practices have on the emotional commitment to the organization among federal knowledge workers does not change when the employees think strategically according to the SOAR framework. Figure 4.5 shows an interaction plot for AC. The figure shows that there is no interaction between the two lines, and therefore, SOAR is not a moderator of the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices.

Taken together, the results of H2a and H2b support a model in which strategic HR practices impact the AC of federal knowledge workers as explained by SOAR.

Specifically, the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC is mediated rather than moderated by SOAR. Furthermore, results suggest SOAR functions as a partial mediator, thereby providing opportunities for continued research to investigate additional constructs that may explain how strategic HR practices impact AC.

Table 4.14

*Regression Analysis of AC Regressed on Strategic HR Practices and SOAR—Moderation by SOAR*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	<i>p</i>	R-square	Change in R-square
Constant	3.400 ( 2.777, 4.023)	0.316	10.759	<0.001	9.93%	
SHRP	0.244 ( 0.137, 0.350)	0.054	4.519	<0.001		
Constant	1.852 ( 0.588, 3.116)	0.641	2.889	0.004	13.30%	3.37%*
SHRP	0.167 ( 0.051, 0.284)	0.059	2.831	0.005		
SOAR	0.260 ( 0.079, 0.442)	0.092	2.826	0.005		
Constant	1.250 (-2.720, 5.210)	2.010	0.622	0.535	13.35%	0.05%
SHRP	0.275 (-0.407, 0.958)	0.346	0.795	0.427		
SOAR	0.341 (-0.194, 0.877)	0.271	1.258	0.210		
SHRP*SOAR	-0.014 (-0.102, 0.074)	0.445	-0.315	0.751		

*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$  significance of change in R-square. Beta (95% confidence interval) of the linear regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = standard error of Beta. Moderation by SOAR was tested by including a strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term in the regression. N = 188.

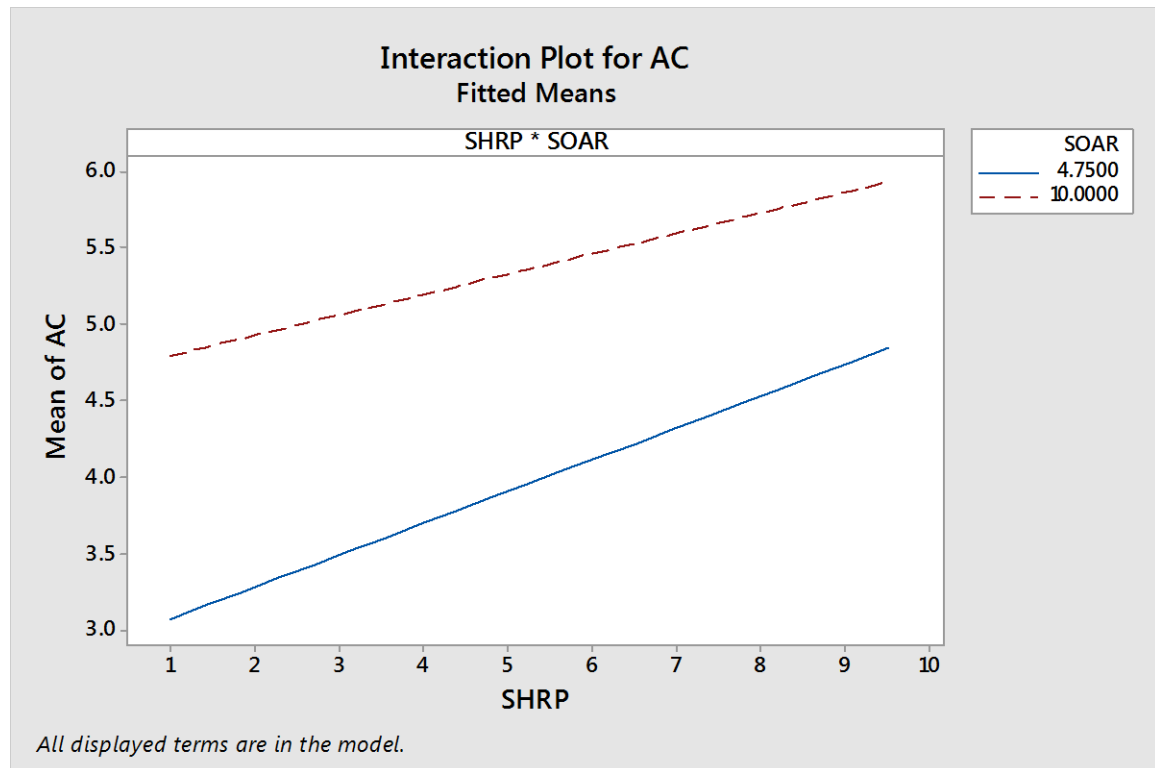


Figure 4.5. SOAR as a moderator of the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices.

### Hypotheses Testing Results for H3: AC Predicts Behavioral Outcomes

H3: AC has an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, work engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

H3 tested for the impact of AC on five behavioral outcomes: plan to stay, enjoy co-workers, job satisfaction, loyal employee, and dedicated employee. Tables 4.15-4.19 present the results of logistic regressions that estimated the odds ratios of AC predicting the five behavioral outcomes. The analysis for H3 was conducted using a binary outcome variable determined via median split. Each binary behavioral outcome variable was regressed on AC, and the binary logistic regression results were presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient (at 95% CI) and the corresponding odds ratios. For

each logistic regression, the behavioral outcome was first transformed from a continuous variable into a binary categorical variable using a median split (cf. MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002).

Table 4.15 presents the results of the binary behavioral outcome “plan to stay” regressed on AC. Results indicate that  $\beta = 0.96$ ,  $Z = 6.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with the odds ratio (calculated at a 95% CI) = 2.61 (1.91, 3.56). This results suggest AC is a significant predictor of an employee’s plan to stay with the regression such that for each unit increase in AC, an employee is 2.61 times more likely to plan to stay employed with the organization.

Table 4.15

*Plan to Stay Regressed on AC*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio (95%CI)
Constant	-3.77 (-5.21, -2.33)	0.73	-5.14	<0.001	
AC	0.96 ( 0.65, 1.27)	0.16	6.03	<0.001	2.61 (1.91, 3.56)

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the binary logistic regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. Binary outcome variable determined via median split (1-7 = 0, 8-10 = 1). SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

Table 4.16 presents the results of regression at 95% CI of behavioral outcome two (engagement) on AC. Results indicate that  $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $Z = 3.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and the odds ration calculated at a 95% CI, is 1.58 (1.25, 2.01). AC is a significant predictor of behavioral outcome two (engagement). Also, the odds ratio indicated that for each unit increase in AC, an employee is 1.6 times more likely to become progressively more engaged with other members of the organization.

Table 4.16

*Enjoy Co-workers Regressed on AC*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio (95%CI)
Constant	-1.69 (-2.82, -0.55)	0.58	-2.90	0.004	
AC	0.46 ( 0.22, 0.70)	0.12	3.79	<0.001	1.58 (1.25, 2.01)

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the binary logistic regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. Binary outcome variable determined via median split (1-8 = 0, 9-10 = 1). SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

Table 4.17 presents the results of regression at 95% CI of behavioral outcome three (job satisfaction) on AC. Results indicate that  $\beta = 0.88$ ,  $Z = 5.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and the odds ratio (95% CI), was 2.40 (1.79, 3.22). These results suggest AC is a significant predictor of behavioral outcome three (job satisfaction). Also, the odds ratio indicated that for each unit increase in AC, an employee is 2.4 times more likely to become progressively more satisfied with the job.

Table 4.17

*Job Satisfaction Regressed on AC*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio (95%CI)
Constant	-3.63 (-5.03, -2.24)	0.71	-5.10	<0.001	
AC	0.88 ( 0.58, 1.17)	0.15	5.85	<0.001	2.40 (1.79, 3.22)

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the binary logistic regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. Binary outcome variable determined via median split (1-7 = 0, 8-10 = 1). SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

Table 4.18 presents the results of regression at 95% CI of behavioral outcome four (loyalty) on AC. Results indicate that  $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $Z = 6.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and the odds ratio calculated at a 95% CI, is 1.31 (1.05, 1.63). AC is a significant predictor of behavioral outcome four (loyalty). Also, the odds ratio indicated that for each unit

increase in AC, an employee is 1.3 times more likely to become progressively loyal to the organization.

Table 4.18

*Loyal Employee Regressed on AC*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio (95%CI)
Constant	-1.20 (-2.29, -0.11)	0.56	-2.16	0.031	
AC	0.27 ( 0.05, 0.49)	0.11	2.40	0.016	1.31 (1.05, 1.63)

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the binary logistic regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. Binary outcome variable determined via median split (1-7 = 0, 8-10 = 1). SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

Table 4.19 presents the results of regression at 95% CI of behavioral outcome five (dedication) on AC. Results indicate that  $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $Z = 3.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and the odds ratio calculated at a 95% CI, is 1.60 (1.24, 2.05). AC is a significant predictor of behavioral outcome five (dedication). Also, the odds ratio indicated that for each unit increase in AC, an employee is 1.6 times more likely to become progressively more dedicated to the organization.

Table 4.19

*Dedicated Employee Regressed on AC*

Term	Beta (95% CI)	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio (95%CI)
Constant	-1.14 (-2.30, 0.01)	0.59	-1.94	0.053	
AC	0.47 ( 0.22, 0.72)	0.13	3.66	<0.001	1.60 (1.24, 2.05)

*Note.* Beta (95% confidence interval) of the binary logistic regression is presented as the unstandardized regression coefficient. Binary outcome variable determined via median split (1-7 = 0, 8-10 = 1). SE = standard error of Beta. N = 188.

In summary, the results of the five binary logistic regressions that were conducted to test H3, support AC as a significant predictor of an employee's planning to stay, enjoying co-workers, job satisfaction, loyalty to the organization, and dedication to the organization. Given than the results of H1 support strategic HR practices as a significant predictor of AC, the results of H1 and H3 support an organization's strategic HR practices as predicting not only the employee's emotional commitment to the organization (i.e., their AC), but also the employee's intention to stay, intention for engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication to the organization.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis was patterned after Boyatzis' (1998) framework, which consists of five elements. Boyatzis considered a thematic analysis framework to be acceptable when it had the following five elements, a label or theme, a definition of the theme, a description of how to recognize that theme, a description of any exclusions to the theme, and positive and negative examples of the theme. An inductive approach was used to identify patterns or themes that emerged from the responses to the open-ended questions.

There were five open-ended questions in the survey and they are as follows:

1. What does employee commitment mean to you?
2. What can TARDEC do to encourage commitment?
3. Consider the HR programs that are currently available at TARDEC, which programs create commitment? Why?
4. How long do you anticipate staying at TARDEC? Why?
5. What can TARDEC do to support your intention to stay with the organization?

Responses to these five questions were analyzed using the Boyatzis (1998) framework and the data were reviewed four times. Prior to the beginning of a review, the data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey<sup>TM</sup>. There were 205 survey respondents and one survey was excluded because the respondent did not provide consent. Non responses or blank fields were eliminated and as a result, question one had 149 responses, question two had 148 responses, question three had 134 responses, question four had 145 responses, and question five had 136 responses. In all, there were 791 responses to the five questions. The reviews, as described below, were conducted sequentially, and data were analyzed and stored in Microsoft Excel.

The first review was an intentional search for keywords that could generate themes. The review was done twice; the first was a manual reading of the 791 responses to look for keywords and the second was done electronically using macros and pivot tables in Excel, which identified the frequency of keywords. These steps gave the researcher an idea of where the themes were congregating.

The second review began with using the keywords to develop labels or theme names and their corresponding definitions. Each response was coded methodically beginning with question one and proceeding all the way through to the last response for question five. Some responses had more than one code. A code was applied to a response when a theme could be identified regardless of whether the response carried a positive or negative connotation. Notes were kept on consistency of coding, definition, indicators, and examples. Examples for both positive and negative statements were noted.

The third review consisted of sorting the results from the second review by code so that all responses with the same code are reviewed again, this time careful attention was paid to consistency of coding across questions. The end of the third review had applied 19 codes, 863 times to the 791 responses. Similar to the second review, notes were kept on consistency of coding, definition, indicators, and examples. Examples for both positive and negative statements were noted. A total of 68 coding changes or additions were made during the third review.

The fourth review was similar to the second review except that in this instance, the data were stacked such that all responses and their corresponding codes could be reviewed to eliminate any duplicate code applications and to examine for reliability of code application. The primary purpose of this last review is to ensure that there is consistency in code application. Five duplicate entries were removed during the fourth review. A total of 19 different codes were used with varying frequency, depending on question.

**Question One.** The first question posed to survey respondent was: What does employee commitment mean to you? 149 responses were received for question one, 15 of the 19 available codes were used, and codes were applied 180 times. Figure 4.6 displays the results by code and percentage of responses. The codes that were applied more than 10 times were accountability (12.8%), dedication (21.1%), loyalty (7.2%), and mission (37.2%). Together, these four codes totaled 78.3% of the responses for this question. Table 4.20 presents the label name or code, definition, and indicators for each code. Table 4.21 presents the label name and examples for each code.

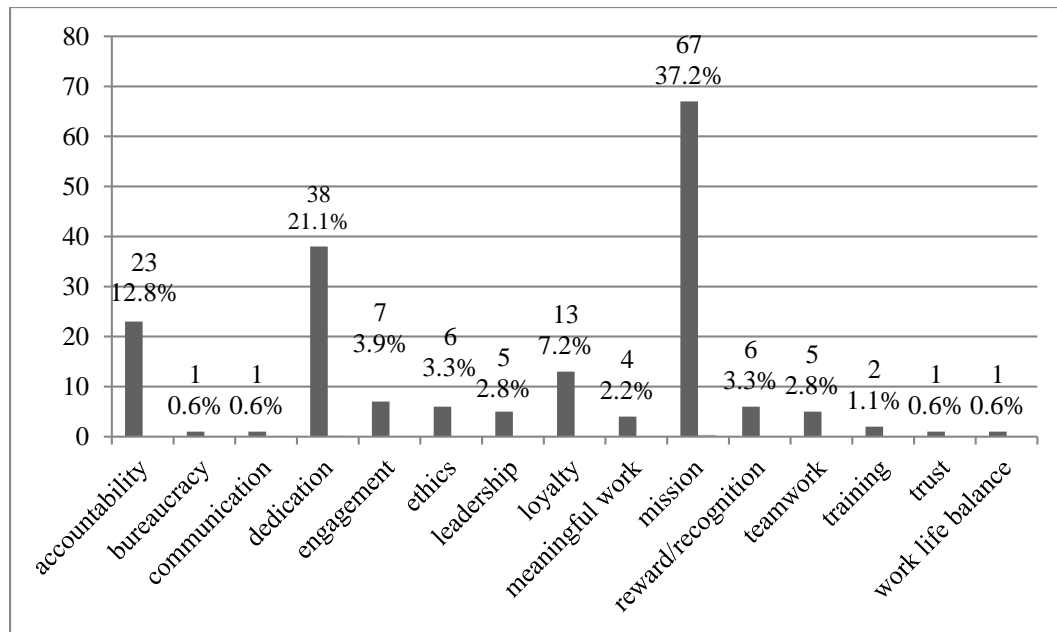


Figure 4.6. Frequency histogram of codes applied to survey question one.

Table 4.20

*Label Name or Code, Definition, and Indicators for Question One*

Code	Definition	Indicator
Accountability	Taking ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame.	ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, correctly completed
Bureaucracy	Presence of governmental rules, regulations, compliance requirements, and corresponding pressures set by the organization or headquarters to structure work around the resulting red tape.	bureaucracy, layers of management, taskers
Communication	A ready exchange of information.	share, communicate
Dedication	Devoted to a cause, mission or team.	dedicated, go the extra mile
Engagement	Getting along with and enjoying the company of coworkers.	camaraderie with coworkers.
Ethics	Abiding by principles of honesty and integrity.	honesty, ethics, integrity
Leadership	A function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion.	leadership, layers of management.
Loyalty	Faithful to the cause, person, mission, or team.	loyalty.
Meaningful work	Work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task.	challenging work, employee feels that the work makes a difference in their lives or their mission.
Mission	Strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower.	soldier, mission, warfighter, service to country.
Reward/recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements.	salary, recognition, awards, reward for accomplishments
Teamwork	Willing to help others and work cooperatively with coworkers.	team, helping others, together as a group
Training	Variety of learning opportunities to include classroom, college classes, informal and formal learning, seminars, and hands-on experiences.	training, academic long term training, college tuition, LOE, learning
Trust	Faith in others' actions or decision-making abilities.	trust, rely upon others
Work life balance	A meaningful balance between the amounts of time spent at work and personal life.	work life balance, RDO, CWS, Flex schedule, spending time with family.

Table 4.21

*Label Name or Code and Examples for Question One*

Code	Examples
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coming into work on scheduled times and working issues, no matter how trivial, to the needs of the customer.</li> <li>Desiring to get the job done in a professional manner.</li> <li>Work in a manner that you will always be responsible for the results.</li> <li>You can encourage commitment all you want, there are some that put in the least amount of work that they can.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The organization should also restructure the technical work so that the number of official (top-level) projects is greatly reduced. This would provide much-needed relief from the bureaucratic burdens placed on too employees who could better use the time to be creative and innovative.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Honesty with employees. Share information. Fairness to all employees. Ending of back door deals.</li> </ul>
Dedication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Never give up, never surrender.</li> <li>Work extra hours when needed to complete a task. Go that extra mile for your customers.</li> </ul>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My coworkers are fabulous people.</li> <li>Mutual trust and respect in the work and knowledge provided by individuals.</li> </ul>
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It means that I do not have to question ones integrity.</li> <li>I will be honest when I see things that aren't being done right, and make suggestions to improve them.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The organization needs to stop creating new middle management positions that do not add value to the organization.</li> </ul>
Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That the employee is motivated and dedicated to doing the best they can for their employer even at some personal sacrifice. They like the job that much, or have that level of loyalty.</li> </ul>
Meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meaningful life and work.</li> </ul>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A sense of purpose with the willingness to execute your mission in spite of obstacles.</li> <li>Each employee should know how they are making difference to war fighter's life. Employee's takes ownership of organization's mission and vision.</li> <li>Understanding organization's vision &amp; mission and aligning with those elements in terms of execution &amp; delivery of results to add value!</li> </ul>
Reward/recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It means that an employee feels that their work is significant and appreciated, and that they feel like an essential part of the team.</li> <li>Show me the money.</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be willing /committed to your job but also willing and committed to helping others.</li> <li>It means that an employee feels that their work is significant and appreciated, and that they feel like an essential part of the team.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational opportunities.</li> <li>Innovation talks.</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mutual trust and respect in the work and knowledge provided by individuals.</li> </ul>
Work life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work life balance.</li> </ul>

**Question Two.** The second question posed to survey respondent was: What can TARDEC do to encourage commitment? 148 responses were received for question two, 18 of the 19 available codes were used, and codes were applied 238 times. Figure 4.7 displays the results by code and percentage of responses. The codes that were applied more than 10 times were accountability (8.4%), career advancement (13.1%), communication (5.1%), leadership (18.6%), mission (9.7%), reward/recognition (17.7%), and work environment (7.2%). Together, these seven codes totaled 79.7% of the responses for this question. Table 4.22 presents the label name or code, definition, and indicators for each code. Table 4.23 and 4.24 presents the label name and examples for each code.

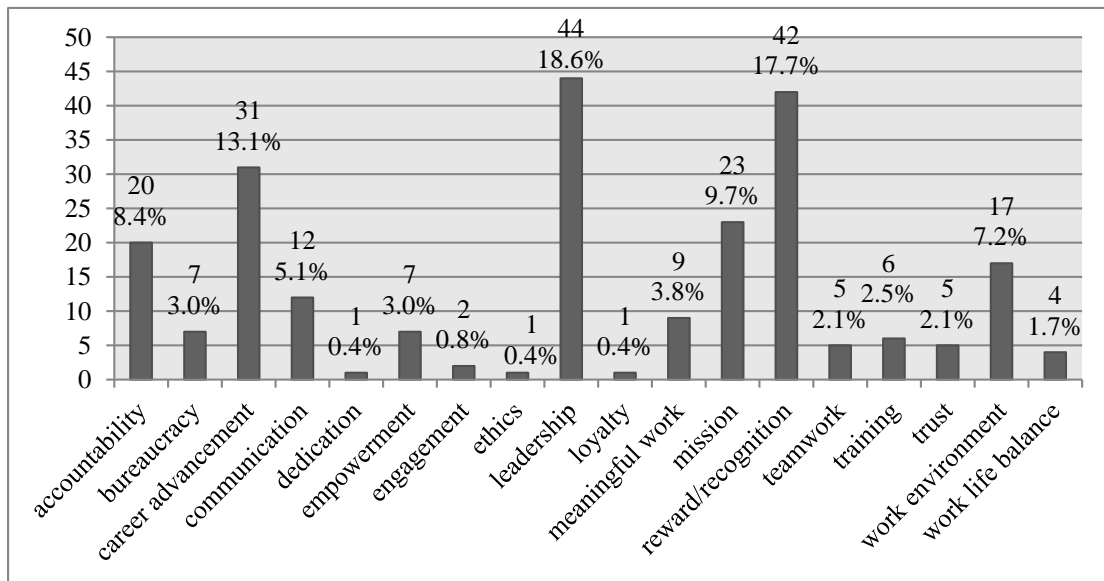


Figure 4.7. Frequency histogram of codes applied to survey question two.

Table 4.22

*Label Name or Code, Definition, and Indicators for Question Two*

Code	Definition	Indicator
Accountability	Taking ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame.	ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, correctly completed
Bureaucracy	Presence of governmental rules, regulations, compliance requirements, and corresponding pressures set by the organization or headquarters to structure work around the resulting red tape.	bureaucracy, layers of management, taskers
Career advancement	The opportunity to be promoted or to move into a position that the employee is interested in.	career advancement, career path, mentoring, technical path, rotation, professional growth,
Communication	A ready exchange of information.	share, communicate
Dedication	Devoted to a cause, mission, or team.	dedicated, go the extra mile
Empowerment	Giving the employee decision-making authority.	empower, reduce barriers
Engagement	Getting along with and enjoying the company of coworkers.	camaraderie with coworkers
Ethics	Abiding by principles of honesty and integrity.	honesty, ethics, integrity
Leadership	A function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion.	leadership, layers of management, walk the walk
Loyalty	Faithful to the cause, person, mission, or team.	loyalty
Meaningful work	Work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task.	challenging work, employee feels that the work makes a difference in their lives or their mission
Mission	Strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower.	soldier, mission, warfighter, service to country
Reward/recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements.	salary, recognition, awards, paypool, performance
Teamwork	Willing to help others and work cooperatively with coworkers.	team, helping others, together as a group
Training	Variety of learning opportunities to include classroom, college classes, informal and formal learning, seminars, and hands-on experiences.	training, academic long term training, college tuition, LOE, learning
Trust	Faith in others' actions or decision-making abilities.	trust, rely upon others
Work environment	Related to tools, office setting, physical or psychological enablers that allow the employee to successfully perform their job.	resources, tools, quiet, noise, work area
Work life balance	A meaningful balance between the amounts of time spent at work and personal life.	work life balance, RDO, CWS, flex schedule, spending time with family

Table 4.23

*Label Name or Code and Examples for Question Two (Codes Beginning with Letters A-L)*

Code	Examples
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set the vision by providing clear expectations for success (i.e., defining a goal or objective for the year, clarifying what success looks like). Then trusting their leads (i.e., ADs/DADs) to make the decisions they need to execute, but holding them accountable.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management failing to hold employees to attendance/annual leave.</li> <li>Dramatically reduce extraneous overhead associated with numerous cumbersome processes of which many bring zero value to the Army.</li> <li>Increase emphasis and reduce barriers for in-house research, development, engineering, and testing at all levels within the organization.</li> </ul>
Career advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee commitment is affected by numerous aspects in the workplace, some of which include one's interest in his/her work; one's team/co-workers; compensation; opportunities for development and advancement; benefits; etc. There are many things the employer can do to increase or decrease each employee's level of commitment.</li> <li>Professional growth opportunities. Support to Associates. Advancement opportunities, salary increase, on the spot awards for hard working dedicated Employees.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop unprecedented raises given based off personal relationships.</li> <li>Better and more open lines of communication.</li> <li>More open communication. Sharing some reasoning in decision-making. Open dialogue. Welcoming dissent and out of the box thinking.</li> </ul>
Dedication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It means doing whatever it takes to get the mission accomplished, including personal sacrifice. Doing whatever it takes to better the organization.</li> </ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower employees and give them a sense of ownership by increasing their involvement and situational awareness regarding the organization's direction.</li> </ul>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower but don't abandon them.</li> <li>Employee commitment is affected by numerous aspects in the workplace, some of which include one's interest in his/her work; one's team/co-workers.</li> </ul>
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be open, honest, and fair; treat employees with dignity and respect.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage employee involvement in cross-enterprise activities by demonstrating that it is valued by all levels of leadership.</li> <li>Greater information sharing, less management through fear or punishment.</li> </ul>
Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desire, trust, loyalty, morality and ethics.</li> </ul>

Table 4.24

*Label Name or Code and Examples Question Two (Codes Beginning with Letters M-W)*

Code	Examples
Meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximize, as often as possible, employees working on things they find both interesting and challenging and minimize, when possible, sticking employees on projects that do not interest them.</li> <li>Provide meaningful work, a good organizational vision and a positive work environment.</li> </ul>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate Associates on the results of what they do as impacts to the life or mission success of Soldiers. Communication down to all Associates on the TARDEC Vision, Mission and Strategic - newer and younger folks need to hear the message repeatedly not just once assuming they got it or bought in to it.</li> <li>Each of us has a role in the ultimate defense of this country. Our daily efforts are important in providing and supporting the best equipment for the finest military in the world. Emphasize each link in the chain is important.</li> </ul>
Reward/ recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actually exercise the compensation system of performance based compensation rather than an "average".</li> <li>Practice what it preaches, specifically the 5 Cultural Identities. There need to be more employee incentives awarded to deserving employees more frequently throughout the year, not just at Pay Pool time.</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on interdepartmental relationships and collaboration.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide funding for continuing education and support personnel who wish to take advantage of training and developmental opportunities.</li> <li>Put trained people into a position or train them.</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust and respect more.</li> <li>Currently do not feel like there is any support or trust from mid-high levels of management.</li> </ul>
Work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain good people and invest in the tools for me to perform my job and continue to learn.</li> <li>Give us the tools to do our jobs properly. Many times our computer systems are not efficient.</li> </ul>
Work life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work life balance. This is very important to me and valued by my supervisor. In conversations with other employees at TARDEC, this is not always the case.</li> <li>Telework. More trust in the employees that produce results and give them more liberties with schedules to accommodate family obligations.</li> </ul>

**Question Three.** The third question posed to survey respondent was: Consider the HR programs that are currently available at TARDEC, which programs create commitment? Why? 134 responses were received for question three, 15 of the 19 available codes were used, and codes were applied 175 times. Figure 4.8 displays the

results by code and percentage of responses. The codes that were applied more than 10 times were career advancement (8.6%), did not identify with any HR program (25.7%), training (33.1%), and work life balance (5.7%). Together, these four codes totaled 73.1% of the responses for this question. Table 4.25 presents the label name or code, definition, and indicators for each code. Table 4.26 and 4.27 presents the label name and examples for each code.

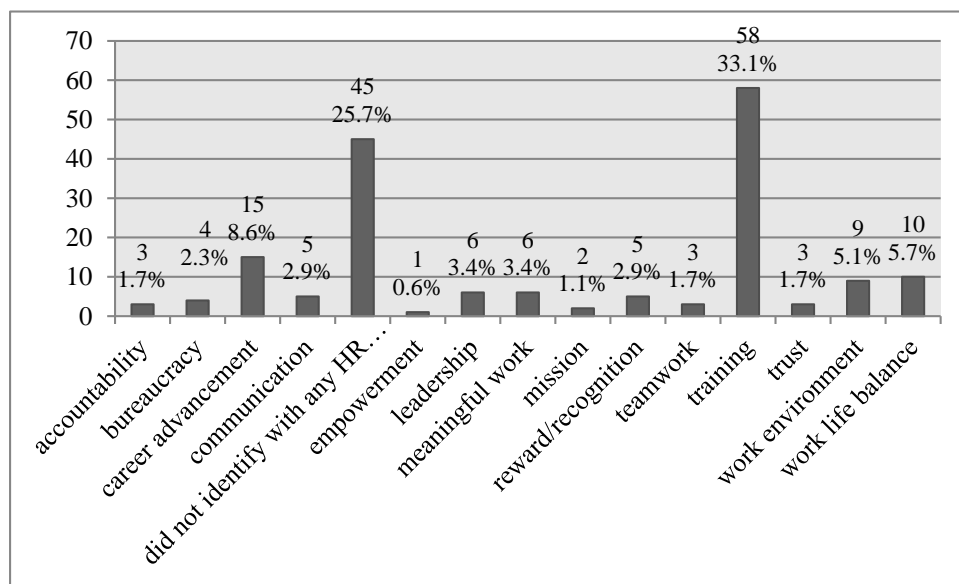


Figure 4.8. Frequency histogram of codes applied to survey question three.

Table 4.25

*Label Name or Code, Definition, and Indicators for Question Three*

Code	Definition	Indicator
Accountability	Taking ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame.	ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, correctly completed
Bureaucracy	Presence of governmental rules, regulations, compliance requirements, and corresponding pressures set by the organization or headquarters to structure work around the resulting red tape.	bureaucracy, layers of management, taskers
Career advancement	The opportunity to be promoted or to move into a position that the employee is interested in.	career advancement, career path, mentoring, technical path, rotation, professional growth
Communication	A ready exchange of information.	share, communicate
Did not identify with any HR programs	Did not identify with any HR programs.	none, unknown, "could not think of any"
Empowerment	Giving the employee decision-making authority.	empower, reduce barriers
Leadership	A function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion.	leadership, layers of management, walk the walk
Meaningful work	Work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task.	challenging work, employee feels that the work makes a difference in their lives or their mission
Mission	Strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower.	soldier, mission, warfighter, service to country
Reward/recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements.	salary, recognition, awards, paypool, performance
Teamwork	Willing to help others and work cooperatively with coworkers.	team, helping others, together as a group
Training	Variety of learning opportunities to include classroom, college classes, informal and formal learning, seminars, and hands-on experiences.	training, academic long term training, college tuition, LOE, learning
Trust	Faith in others' actions or decision-making abilities.	trust, rely upon others
Work environment	Related to tools, office setting, physical or psychological enablers that allow the employee to successfully perform jobs.	resources, tools, quiet, noise, work area
Work life balance	A meaningful balance between the amounts of time spent at work and personal life.	work life balance, RDO, CWS, flex schedule, spending time with family

Table 4.26

*Label Name or Code and Examples Question Three (Codes Beginning with Letters A-L)*

Code	Examples
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need HR to work with poor performers and demand results since this drags down the complete workforce.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speed the contracting process. Free engineering to do engineering versus chase a dysfunctional contracting process (opportunity for a 30% improvement in productivity and greater reduction in cycle time to completion. Maintain steady lines of funding so that teams can stay focused on the mission versus defending funding on a routine basis.</li> </ul>
Career advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs which offer the opportunity for further advancement in one's career help increase commitment. These include being assigned to intriguing projects, promotion and award opportunities, training courses, conference attendance, etc.</li> <li>• Mentoring and developmental programs that help an employee grow in a position or be able to transfer to another position. Those are the things that help an employee commitment to his work better.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not really sure what is meant by HR programs. Open communication encourages commitment as well as management recognition.</li> <li>• Transparency in management, and internal communication is key to encouraging commitment as well.</li> <li>• We need more communication and team building training. I think people avoid communication in TARDEC and that causes a blind eye to missed opportunities and errors.</li> </ul>
Did not identify with any HR programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't know of any.</li> <li>• I don't feel any HR programs create commitment.</li> </ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The training programs increase commitment because they enable employees to improve their skills in areas that interest them and empower them to better shape their own careers.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not sure any promote commitment. There is only so much that is able to be taught. Unless leadership/management put into action, there will be no commitment.</li> <li>• I'm not sure HR can do much about a leadership issue.</li> </ul>

Table 4.27

*Label Name or Code and Examples Question Three (Codes Beginning with Letters M-W)*

Code	Examples
Meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get employees to feel like they matter by giving meaningful jobs.</li> <li>• I don't see any program here at TARDEC that creates commitment. I don't think "programs" create commitment. I think meaningful work and good hiring practices that look beyond credentials do.</li> </ul>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have made some suggestions as to creating new training programs based on my needs / understanding, such as soldier mission stories/planning to better understand how our vehicles are used.</li> <li>• It seems at first thought that most of the HR programs promote self-interest vice commitment. The purpose that is created by supporting the soldier and financial payment generates the most commitment.</li> </ul>
Reward/recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance based appraisals create commitment, although TARDEC has much to improve in doing that.</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't feel any HR programs create commitment, I think that comes from teams you work on.</li> <li>• Continue to build teams.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The intern program and long term training programs used to generate commitment.</li> <li>• I think the intern and college funding programs create commitment. It shows a commitment in my future and I am willing to return the favor.</li> <li>• Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (LOE) because the principles taught are focused on commitment, teamwork, communication, but these principles are sometimes forgotten when returning to TARDEC after the training and not put into practice.</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telework and RDO or CWS schedules but unfortunately, telework is not something that is liberally given because there are too many managerial controls and lack of trust.</li> </ul>
Work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for our personnel records - that is our livelihood and if our personnel records are kept accurate it affects many portions of our life.</li> <li>• Workforce wellness programs (maybe work hours allocated for exercise) and pilot programs for standing desks or more ergonomic supplies could increase commitment as well, as I feel that our current work environment does not promote activity or health.</li> </ul>
Work life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flex time, CWS - show interest in employee work-life balance.</li> <li>• TARDEC's work/life balance programs are effective at creating commitment, since that type of balance can be difficult to obtain in industry.</li> </ul>

**Question Four.** The fourth question posed to survey respondent was: How long do you anticipate staying at TARDEC? Why? 145 responses were received for question four, 12 of the 19 available codes were used, and codes were applied 153 times. In

response to the first part of this two-part question, the respondents gave varied answers in the form of numbers, a range of years (for example, 5-10 years), and sometimes a text-based answer (for example, “unknown”, “until retirement”, “until my service obligation is completed”, etc.). There was no distinguishable pattern that could be derived from the responses to the first part of the question. However, the second part of the question revealed a lot of responses that could be coded. Figure 4.9 displays the results by code and percentage of responses. The codes that were applied more than 10 times were career advancement (13.4%), meaningful work (38.1%), and mission (14.4%). Together, these three codes totaled 66.0% of the responses for this question. Table 4.28 presents the label name or code, definition, and indicators for each code. Table 4.29 presents the label name and examples for each code.

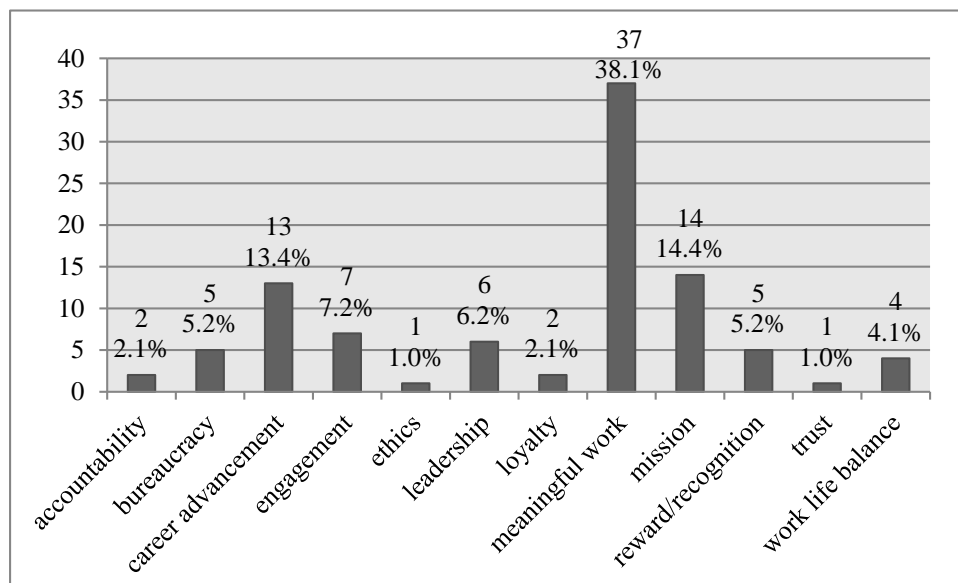


Figure 4.9. Frequency histogram of codes applied to survey question four.

Table 4.28

*Label Name or Code, Definition, and Indicators for Question Four*

Code	Definition	Indicator
Accountability	Taking ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame.	ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, correctly completed
Bureaucracy	Presence of governmental rules, regulations, compliance requirements, and corresponding pressures set by the organization or headquarters to structure work around the resulting red tape.	bureaucracy, layers of management, taskers
Career advancement	The opportunity to be promoted or to move into a position that the employee is interested in.	career advancement, career path, mentoring, technical path, rotation, professional growth
Engagement	Getting along with and enjoying the company of coworkers.	camaraderie with coworkers
Ethics	Abiding by principles of honesty and integrity.	honesty, ethics, integrity
Leadership	A function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion.	leadership, layers of management, walk the walk
Loyalty	Faithful to the cause, person, mission, or team.	loyalty
Meaningful work	Work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task.	challenging work, employee feels that the work makes a difference in their lives or their mission
Mission	Strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower.	soldier, mission, warfighter, service to country
Reward/recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements.	salary, recognition, awards, paypool, performance
Trust	Faith in others' actions or decision-making abilities.	trust, rely upon others
Work life balance	A meaningful balance between the amounts of time spent at work and personal life.	work life balance, RDO, CWS, flex schedule, spending time with family

Table 4.29

*Label Name or Code and Examples for Question Four*

Code	Examples
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I want to stay, but the lack of repercussions for violent behavior has led me to begin a job search.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt like industry does rather than hold on to old/inept processes.</li> <li>Perhaps 5 years at the max, I can't take it anymore past that. The Army bureaucracy and infighting among RDECs and ARL is pathetic, and worse than corporate America. It is difficult to believe that we all work for the same cause.</li> </ul>
Career Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I anticipate finishing my career in TARDEC. TARDEC has shown a commitment to my career and I will return the favor. I wish the opportunities I was fortunate enough to be a part of were more readily available for high performers.</li> <li>Rest of my career because of the flexibility for new opportunities for career growth and development.</li> </ul>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I like my job, coworkers, believe in supporting the soldier.</li> <li>I enjoy the work I'm doing and the people I work with.</li> <li>My coworkers are fabulous people.</li> </ul>
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desire, trust, loyalty, morality and ethics.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It depends on how TARDEC utilizes my talents and whether leadership is supportive or directive. I need to enjoy the environment I am working in and specifically the people I work with, including leadership.</li> <li>Push more authority down to lower levels to prevent micromanagement and improve productivity.</li> </ul>
Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I do not feel they value my experience or education. However I am loyal and I do like the organization.</li> </ul>
Meaningful Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work is challenging, rewarding, and very worthwhile.</li> <li>I would stay longer if we get back to doing more technical work in-house and thus start having a little more technical fun.</li> <li>I'd love to stay for the rest of my career, but sadly, I don't see TARDEC providing meaningful work for me. Without meaningful, engaging, interesting work, I'll have to leave.</li> </ul>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My intention is to retire from TARDEC. I enjoy what I do and feel that we can make a difference for the warfighter.</li> <li>Until I retire. TARDEC has a wealth of talented people that try to better the Soldier's safety.</li> <li>The mission "calls to me", these are some of the greatest people to work with ever.</li> </ul>
Reward/recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until retirement. This is the first civilian organization which promotes self worth for an organization regardless of what education level you have.</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rotational assignments, they offer versatility, professional growth and build trust in an employee.</li> </ul>
Work life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indefinitely. Good place to work and allows for a great work and family balance.</li> <li>Likely my whole career. Meaningful work, flexibility, pension.</li> </ul>

**Question Five.** The fifth question posed to survey respondent was: What can TARDEC do to support your intention to stay with the organization? 136 responses were received for question five, 14 of the 19 available codes were used, and codes were applied 173 times. The codes that were applied more than 10 times were career advancement (20.2%), leadership (12.1%), meaningful work (16.2%), mission (8.7%), and reward/recognition (9.8%). Together, these five codes totaled 79.8% of the responses for this question. Figure 4.10 displays the results by code and percentage of responses. Table 4.30 presents the label name or code, definition, and indicators for each code. Table 4.31 presents the label name and examples for each code.

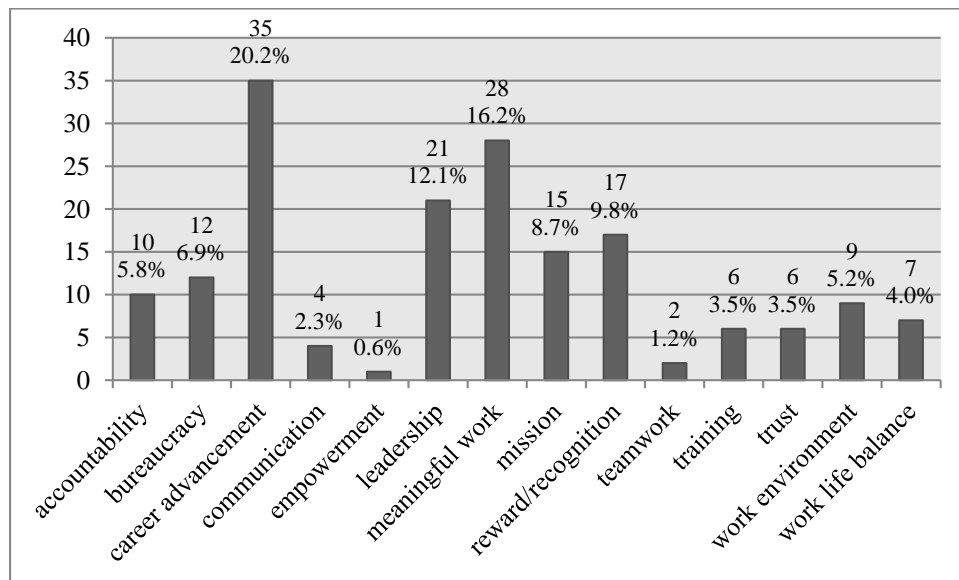


Figure 4.10. Frequency histogram of codes applied to survey question five.

Table 4.30

*Label Name or Code, Definition, and Indicators for Question Five*

Code	Definition	Indicator
Accountability	Taking ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame.	ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, correctly completed
Bureaucracy	Presence of governmental rules, regulations, compliance requirements, and corresponding pressures set by the organization or headquarters to structure work around the resulting red tape.	bureaucracy, layers of management, taskers
Career advancement	The opportunity to be promoted or to move into a position that the employee is interested in.	career advancement, career path, mentoring, technical path, rotation, professional growth
Communication	A ready exchange of information.	share, communicate
Empowerment	Giving the employee decision-making authority.	empower, reduce barriers
Leadership	A function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion.	leadership, layers of management, walk the walk
Meaningful work	Work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task.	challenging work, employee feels that the work makes a difference in their lives or their mission
Mission	Strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower.	soldier, mission, warfighter, service to country
Reward/recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements.	salary, recognition, awards, paypool, performance
Teamwork	Willing to help others and work cooperatively with coworkers.	team, helping others, together as a group
Training	Variety of learning opportunities to include classroom, college classes, informal and formal learning, seminars, and hands-on experiences.	training, academic long term training, college tuition, LOE, learning
Trust	Faith in others' actions or decision-making abilities.	trust, rely upon others
Work environment	Related to tools, office setting, physical or psychological enablers that allow the employee to successfully perform jobs.	resources, tools, quiet, noise, work area
Work life balance	A meaningful balance between the amounts of time spent at work and personal life.	work life balance, RDO, CWS, flex schedule, spending time with family

Table 4.31

*Label Name or Code and Examples for Question Five*

Code	Examples
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop focusing on the 5% that won't ever be performers and start focusing on the 20% that are very motivated and figure out how to "give them wings". Then and only then will we truly excel. If we could figure this out. I would work here until I died at my desk - heck with retirement.</li> <li>Have to hold individuals accountable and responsible. Give a sense of fairness. Why should I maintain my commitment when I see others taking advantage of the system? Teach me to telework.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage/reward meaningful work and innovation that quickly helps our Soldiers. We are way too far removed from this and stuck in bureaucracy.</li> <li>Keep associates engaged in meaningful projects. Less bureaucracy, more about the warfighter.</li> <li>Increase technical focus for engineers. Decrease contract, budget, administrative burden for engineers.</li> </ul>
Career advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer opportunities for high performing employees for career growth.</li> <li>Provide opportunity to move even if it is just lateral.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear communication, stop focusing on hurdles.</li> <li>Follow the leadership principles taught in LOE; be open and honest (candid) about the changes being made in the organization.</li> </ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower the leadership.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership needs to focus on leading or managing their people and stop trying to manage up. Define common processes, put meat on a real strategy, and figure out how to sustain organizational knowledge (thru technology and by developing its people). Actions speak louder than words.</li> </ul>
Meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide me with a say on where my next assignment will be.</li> </ul>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be mission-focused, continue to develop the workforce, and offer upward mobility paths.</li> <li>Act as an Army enterprise team player divest of self interest, mission, and funding that is no longer adding value.</li> </ul>
Reward/recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have a 4-year commitment. I will stay longer if the work is meaningful, engaging, and competitively paying.</li> <li>Continue to give recognition when earned (i.e. monetary as well as non-monetary).</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to allow me work with current teams and expand the knowledge gained and shared with other teams. Common goals to a common vision.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer additional training opportunities for performers (like Sabbaticals).</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TARDEC does a good job of creating a workplace of choice. If I had to pick something, it would be to allow employees to Telework. Provide trust in their employees.</li> </ul>
Work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure I have a project with enough resources to do a good job.</li> </ul>
Work life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institute phased retirement.</li> <li>Telework.</li> </ul>

**Composite results.** In a composite look at responses to all five questions, there are seven codes that were applied most often. Those codes are: accountability (6.7%), career advancement (10.9%), leadership (9.5%), meaningful work (9.7%), mission (14.0%), reward/recognition (8.7%), and training (8.3%). Together, these seven codes totaled 67.9% of the responses for all questions. Table 4.32 shows the data for the number of times each code was used, the number of times the codes were applied and the number of responses that were usable for each question. Figure 4.11 displays the results by code and percentage of codes applied.

Table 4.32

*Frequency of Code Application*

Question	No. of codes used	No. of times codes were applied	No. of responses used
Q1	15	180	149
Q2	18	237	148
Q3	15	175	134
Q4	12	97	145
Q5	14	173	136
Totals		863	791

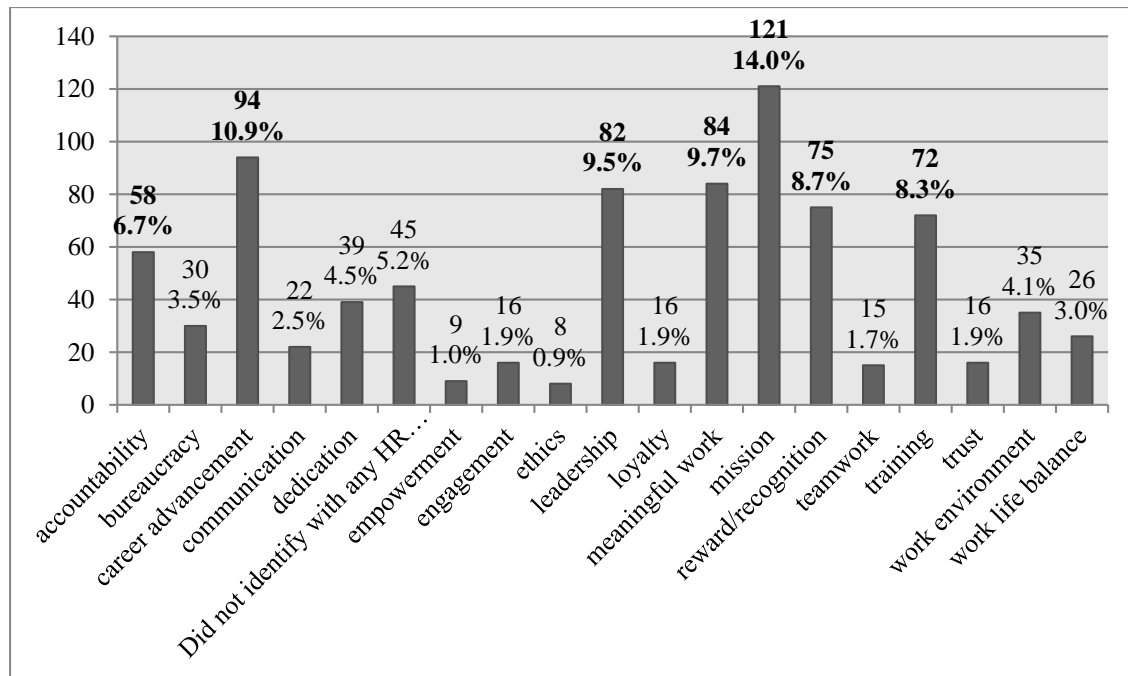


Figure 4.11. Frequency histogram of codes applied to all survey questions.

## Summary

Results of the quantitative analysis of the survey data found that all three hypotheses were supported (H1-H3). In particular, results from H1 found a linear relationship exists between strategic HR practices and AC such that a 1-unit increase in strategic HR practices predicts a 25% increase in AC. Results from H2 found SOAR appears to function as a mediator rather than moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC such that the full SOAR construct is a partial mediator. Finally, results from H3 found that an employee is approximately 2 times more likely to intend to stay, intend to be engaged, be satisfied, be loyal, and be dedicated to the organization.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data using an inductive approach found the following seven themes that appeared most frequently: accountability, career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission, reward/recognition, and training. Many of these themes are strategic HR practices that are currently in place in the organization. As demonstrated in the examples, the respondents discussed these themes in relation to commitment to the organization.

Consistent with the quantitative results, there is qualitative evidence to support the predictive ability of strategic HR practices to create AC in the context of federal knowledge workers. The qualitative results also provide in depth support of the quantitative evidence of the links between strategic HR practices and AC. Specifically, that SOAR has a mediating role in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and that AC has an effect on behavioral outcomes such as increased intention to stay or low turnover, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. Chapter Five presents a detailed discussion of the results, implications for practice, limitations of the study, recommendations for researchers and practitioners, and implications for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This dissertation examined affective commitment (AC) in the context of strategic Human Resource (HR) practices and determined the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The literature review has shown that it is common to study turnover with its corresponding antecedents and effects; however, this study is focused on the positive effects of strategic HR practices, its effects on AC, and how that translates to positive behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay (or decreased turnover), engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. This study investigated the predictive ability of strategic HR practices to create AC in the context of federal knowledge workers, determined the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, and explored the effect of AC on behavioral outcomes.

The population for this study consists of federal government knowledge workers in the science and technology field. The population consists of approximately 1,447 non-enlisted civilian knowledge workers (as of July 2015) in the science and technology field who are employees in the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC). A total of 204 surveys were collected and after eliminating the surveys that could not be used, a final sample size for analysis was  $N = 188$ . TARDEC is a research laboratory for ground vehicles, and approximately 75% of the employees at TARDEC are engineers, scientists, or technicians; the remaining 25% are business or administrative professionals.

The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?

2. What is the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC?
3. How do strategic HR practices build AC?
4. What is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes?

Research questions one, two, and three were addressed using a quantitative methodology in which three hypotheses were tested; a qualitative approach investigated research questions three and four using open-ended questions in the survey instrument.

In this chapter, the study results from the mixed methods research are summarized and discussed in two corresponding sections, quantitative and qualitative. This chapter discusses the implications for practice, recommendations, and implications for future research. This is followed by limitations of the study and a summary.

### **Summary of Results from Quantitative Analysis and Discussion**

Three hypotheses were tested and they are as follows:

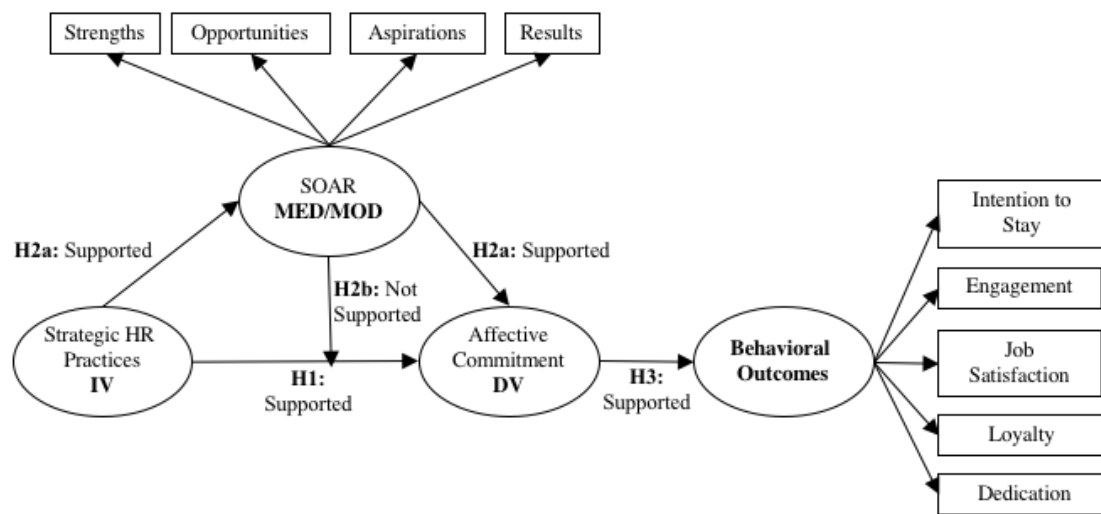
H1: Strategic HR practices predict AC.

H2a (mediation alternative): SOAR serves to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR)

H2b (moderation alternative): SOAR moderates the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices are greater when SOAR elements are present).

H3: AC has an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication.

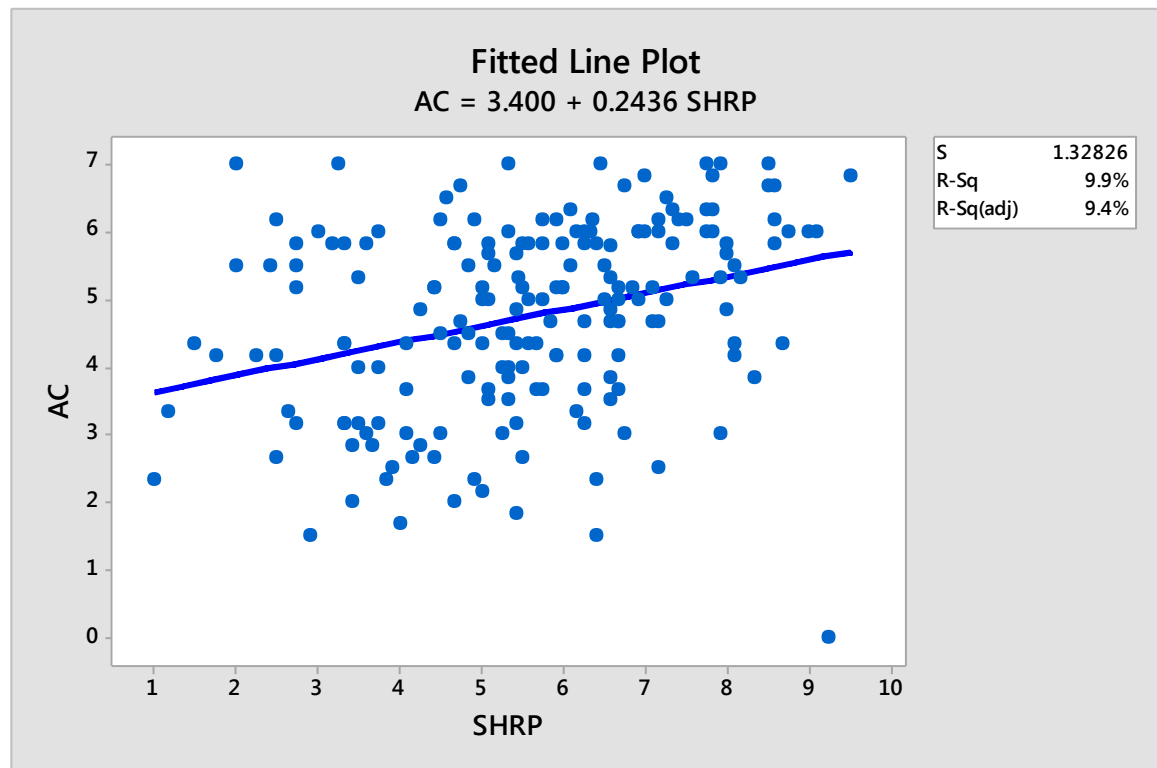
With exception of H2b, all the hypotheses were supported. Figure 5.1 presents the hypothetical model for the study. In this model, the independent variable (IV), strategic HR Practices, was hypothesized to impact the dependent variable (DV), affective commitment (AC). The model also considered SOAR as a mediator/moderator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.



*Figure 5.1.* Hypothetical model showing the mediator-moderator effect of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices, AC, and behavioral outcomes.

**Hypothesis One (H1).** H1 addressed the first research question, by proposing that strategic HR practices can predict AC. Hypothesis testing of H1 was carried out using linear regression. The literature review in Chapter Two showed that leadership oriented behaviors or (HR practices) can substantially influence levels of employee commitment (Gilbert et al., 2011). Also, from the literature review, it was also shown by

Gellatly, Hunter, Currie, and Irving (2009) that HR development oriented practices heightened emotional attachment especially with AC. Similarly, in H1, it was shown that strategic HR practices predict AC. The results revealed an unstandardized regression coefficient, which suggest that a one-unit change in strategic HR practices is estimated to predict an increase in AC of 0.24, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.14-0.35. Figure 5.2 shows that when results are charted on a fitted line plot there is a positive, upward slope. The significant positive prediction of AC by strategic HR practices is also supported by the effect size of 9.9%. This finding is addressed below in the section on future research with regards to considering other positive predictors of AC in an organization.



*Figure 5.2.* Linear plot of AC regressed on strategic HR practices.

Since H1 is supported, it can be concluded that when strategic HR practices are created with a focused intent to benefit the employee, there is a corresponding positive reaction where the employee develops more AC. This finding supports existing literature as outlined in Chapter Two. AC is an assembly of attitudes combining an individual's attitude towards the organization with a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals resulting in a readiness to put forth substantial exertion on behalf of the organization and a strong aspiration to preserve membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1979). When AC is strong in employees, they display a stronger intention to stay. Focusing on positive elements like AC puts the spotlight on life-giving elements or generative ideas associated with a particular organizational phenomenon (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

**Hypothesis Two (H2a and H2b).** H2 addressed the second research question and the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. H2 tested if SOAR acted as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

With H2a (the mediation alternative), SOAR was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming there is an indirect effect between strategic HR practices and AC through SOAR); with H2b (the moderation alternative), SOAR was hypothesized to moderate the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC (assuming the prediction of AC by strategic HR practices is greater when SOAR elements are present).

Testing of H2a was carried out using structural equation modelling (SEM) with bias corrected bootstrapping to see if there was a significant indirect effect of SOAR on

the relationship between AC and strategic HR practices. Mediation analysis using the SOAR construct as the mediator found that the indirect effect of strategic HR practices impacting AC through SOAR was significant. The analysis also found that strategic HR practices also had a significant direct effect on AC. These results suggest that the SOAR construct is a partial mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. Partial mediation implies that there could be other constructs that mediate the strategic HR practices-AC relationship (i.e., there may be other explanations for how strategic HR practices impacts AC).

Testing of H2b was carried out using hierarchical linear regression to ascertain if the inclusion of a strategic HR practices x SOAR interaction term was statistically significant. Results of the hierarchical regression suggest SOAR did not function as a moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC in the sample.

From the literature review, there are indications that the three variables, strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR are affiliated in a parallel manner. For example, HR practices have been shown to encourage positive work related mindsets (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005); and HR practices bundled together in a strategic manner can augment AC (Gellatly et al., 2009). Associations among these three parallel variables may be connected using the SOAR framework as a viable mediator for building AC through the introduction of strategic HR practices because “the SOAR process connects the dots between individual values and organizational efforts” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 4).

H2a was supported while H2b was not supported. This suggests that the role of SOAR is as a mediator between strategic HR practices and AC. Results infer that there is partial mediation. The conclusion from H2a points to a connection between the field of

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) and AC by inferring that there is a significant relationship between SOAR and AC. During the literature review stage, it was observed that there could be affiliations among strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR. H2a not only affirms that there is a link, it also defines what that link is by proving that SOAR has a role as mediator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.

As a mediator, SOAR served as a mechanism of action such that the more engaged employees are in SOAR-based strategic thinking, the more likely strategic HR practices are going to increase AC in an organization. In considering SOAR as a potential partial mediator, SOAR is conceptualized as the mechanism of action for how strategic HR practices have an impact on AC in an organization. Specifically, an approach to strategic thinking that involves a focus on dialogue, collaboration, shared understanding, and commitment to action, is proposed as explaining how strategic HR practices increase AC.

**Hypothesis Three (H3).** H3 investigated if AC had an impact on behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and dedication. H3 addresses the third research question, what is the effect of strategic HR practices and AC on behavioral outcomes? Testing of H3 was carried out using binary logistic regression in which each behavioral outcome variable (scored along a 10-point Likert scale) was coded into a binary outcome variable via the method of median split (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002).

The odds ratio suggests that for each unit increase in AC, an employee is 2.61 times more likely to plan to stay employed with the organization, 1.6 times more likely to become progressively more engaged with other members of the organization, 2.4 times

more likely to become progressively more satisfied with the job, 1.3 times more likely to become progressively loyal to the organization, and 1.6 times more likely to become progressively more dedicated to the organization. These results contribute to the body of knowledge because they suggest that certain positive behavioral outcomes may increase in intensity due to the implementation of strategic HR practices.

This set of findings support the literature found in Chapter Two which suggests that AC is worthy of cultivation because there are connections to long-term positive behavioral outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Similarly, the field of Positive Organization Scholarship (POS) is focused on the examination of “virtuousness or the best of human condition” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p.3). As indicated in Chapter Two under the introductory section on Positive Organizational Scholarship, AC and POS have many similarities. The findings of H3 infer that there are similarities between AC and POS in that they encourage the development of positive behavioral outcomes that result from the best of human condition.

This study is important because POS as a field of study is relatively new compared to AC and to date, there have been no publications directly linking a POS construct such as SOAR to AC, especially in the context of a federal organization. To the best of our knowledge, to date, there are no published studies that specifically link SOAR to AC.

AC is the most constant and strongest predictor of positive organizational behavioral outcomes such as decreased turnover (Wasti, 2005), work engagement (Rothbard & Patil, 2012), job satisfaction (Eby, Freeman, Rush, & Lance, 1999), loyalty

(Hom et al., 2009), and dedication (Lo, Ramayah, Min, & Songan, 2010). While this has been repeatedly tested in non-government facilities, the conclusions from this study now support similar findings in a federal government workplace. The conclusion is that with an increase in AC, there is a greater likelihood of positive behavioral outcomes that benefit the organization. If the goal of an organization is to promote positive behavioral outcomes, there is benefit in encouraging the growth of AC.

During the analysis, an interesting pattern emerged for a 38-42 age group. The mean scores for the age group 38-42 across construct variables, SOAR and behavioral outcomes were either the lowest or second lowest for more than 50% of the time. In Table 4.5, employees in this age group had the lowest mean AC score. In Table 4.7, this same age group had the second lowest mean score for three of the four calculations of SOAR as a higher order construct and the corresponding second order constructs. The three low scores were means calculated across SOAR, Strengths (ST), and Aspirations (AS). In Table 4.9, this same 38-42 age group had three mean scores that were second lowest and one that was the lowest. Mean scores in Table 4.9 were calculated across behavioral outcomes and this group of employees scored low on all behavioral outcomes except loyalty. In short, this age group within this specific population of federal employees possesses low SOAR scores. Low scores could suggest that this group lacks a positive mindset towards strategic-thinking. It is important to note that this finding is very specific to this federal organization and its employees. Considering that this group of employees are anywhere between 12 to 15 years away from retirement, it is recommended that this organization considers cultivating a SOAR-based mindset among the members of this organization and focus specifically on this age group because the

SOAR framework, which is very inclusive in nature “supports an intentional shift of conversations from weaknesses to strengths, and problems to possibilities” (Stavros, 2013, p. 11).

### **Summary of Results from Qualitative Analysis and Discussion**

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the results of five open-ended questions, was conducted using an inductive approach to answer the third and fourth research questions. Refer to Table 3.2 for details on the exact survey question(s) which support each research question. Themes which emerge during data analysis were identified when linked or had similar meanings. Boyatzis (1998) refers to codes as “a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms” (p. vii). The inductive approach is derived from bottom-up analysis of the data as opposed to the deductive approach which is driven by pre-existing models or theory.

Each theme was identified by a definition, and the data were analyzed repeatedly to ensure that the codes were consistently applied. Indicators, which consisted of key words or phrases, were documented and used as markers to identify a theme. Examples for each theme were taken from each of the survey questions and were documented.

A total of 19 recognizable themes or codes were identified and applied to 791 responses for five open-ended questions. Across the five open-ended questions, there were seven themes that appeared most frequently. Figure 5.3 is a composite histogram of all the themes, frequency of application, and percentages in relation to the total number of applications. The seven most prominent themes are accountability, career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission, reward/recognition, and training.

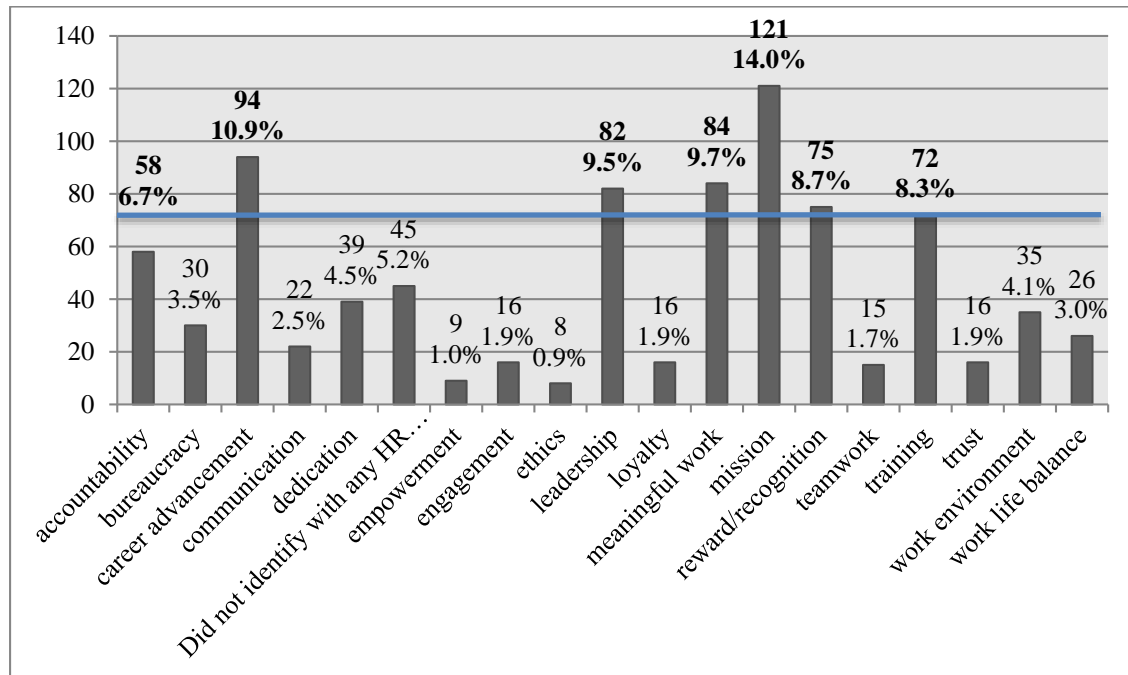


Figure 5.3. Histogram of all themes and frequency of application.

Each of those seven themes, along with their definitions, indicators, and examples are discussed in the following section. The discussion will summarize the findings and includes a conclusion. Following the discussion of each theme, there is a composite table to concisely outline the results from both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and conclusions in relation to each research question.

**Accountability.** Accountability was seen to occur when employees took ownership for the completion of assigned tasks within a set time frame. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included ownership, responsible for results, get the job done, and correctly completed. Accountability consisted of 6.7% or 58 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Accountability, as a theme, ranks as seventh

highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- Coming into work on scheduled times and working issues, no matter how trivial, to the needs of the customer. (Q1)
- Set the vision by providing clear expectations for success (i.e., defining a goal or objective for the year, clarifying what success looks like). Then trusting their leads (i.e., ADs/DADs) to make the decisions they need to execute, but holding them accountable. (Q2)
- Need HR to work with poor performers and demand results since this drags down the complete workforce. (Q3)
- I want to stay, but the lack of repercussions for violent behavior has led me to begin a job search. (Q4)
- Stop focusing on the 5% that won't ever be performers and start focusing on the 20% that are very motivated and figure out how to "give them wings". Then and only then will we truly excel. If we could figure this out. I would work here until I died at my desk - heck with retirement. (Q5)

One of the more unique features of this population is that federal workplaces are largely unionized, and it is difficult to release an employee based on performance alone. The United States Code (U.S.C. 5) that supports performance appraisals, hiring or release of the federal employee is complex. Even if a supervisor is able to adequately document performance issues based on the Merit Systems Protection Board's (MSPB) adjudicatory standards, there are many layers of appeal and the process to release an employee for performance is long and arduous. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was designed to

correct this problem. At the time that congress enacted the Act, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, II (House Committee, 1978), a member of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service said that the 1978 act needed to be put in place because the federal workplace had become a refuge of the incompetent employee and that when such incompetence and inefficiencies are allowed to stay employed on the rolls, it is the dedicated and competent employee who must add to his workload so that the public may be benefited.

The MPSB (MPSB, 1995, 1999, 2009); and the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2005, 2015) has collectively published at least five reports addressed to the three branches of government in the last 20 years on this issue and some examples of these reports include: Removing Poor Performers in the Federal Service; Perspectives: Federal Supervisors and Poor Performers; Issues Related to Poor Performers in the Federal Workplace; Addressing Poor Performers and the Law; and Federal workforce: Improved Supervision and Better Use of Probationary Periods are Needed to Address Substandard Employee Performance. There is an observable pattern that Congress has ordered similar reports on the ongoing issue of poor performance over a 20-year period and that resolution for accountability is not within reach.

The responses from the survey questions suggested that employees would like to see the issue of poor performance addressed by their leaders. It is also evident that Ribikoff's statement to the House Committee in 1978 still holds true where the dedicated and competent employee finds that he has to add to his workload so that the public may be benefited and mission is supported. Employees realize how important their mission is and accountability is a big part of mission accomplishment for public benefit. Employees

also expressed that they need their leaders to support them in holding their co-workers accountable. Incidentally, all three themes, accountability, leadership, and mission were ranked among the top seven most frequently coded. The results demonstrated that while employees are proud of delivering results and willing take ownership for assigned tasks and the completion of mission, they are disillusioned by the lack of accountability, repercussions for poor performance and the corresponding effects to morale.

**Career advancement.** Career advancement, as a theme, was identified as the opportunity to be promoted or to move into a position that the employee is interested in. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included career advancement, career path, mentoring, technical path, rotation, and professional growth. Career advancement consisted of 10.9% or 94 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Career advancement, as a theme, ranks as second highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- Employee commitment is affected by numerous aspects in the workplace, some of which include one's interest in his/her work; one's team/co-workers; compensation; opportunities for development and advancement; benefits; etc.  
(Q2)
- Programs which offer the opportunity for further advancement in one's career help increase commitment. These include being assigned to intriguing projects, promotion and award opportunities, training courses, conference attendance, etc.  
(Q3)

- I anticipate finishing my career in TARDEC. TARDEC has shown a commitment to my career and I will return the favor. I wish the opportunities I was fortunate enough to be a part of were more readily available for high performers. (Q4)
- Offer opportunities for high performing employees for career growth. (Q5)

The findings from this study recognized career advancement as something that can build employee commitment. Career advancement was not a concept discussed in literature reviewed, however, a review of existing literature on the concepts: organizational commitment and career advancement, found that “drivers of commitment were found to be: job satisfaction, a career path that offers opportunities for advancement, a positive perception of senior management and the perception of the company providing good value to customers” (Heintzman & Marson 2005, p.561). Like any organization, TARDEC struggles with being able to offer promotion opportunities to everyone as there are limits to funding, positions, and the authority that is granted by higher headquarters.

Promotion opportunities in the federal government are often based on merit or past performance with an emphasis on open and fair competition. However, there are other considerations because there are also privileges which are assigned to employees (due to base closure, reduction in force, military spouses, veterans, and other similar priority placements programs). Every promotion opportunity has to be competed on USAJobs.gov. The positions are open to every qualified federal employee across the entire system, giving them an opportunity to compete for the position. Selection has to be fair and unbiased with no evidence of pre-selection. Interviews are conducted with a fixed set of questions and there is no opportunity for the interviewer to ask additional

questions to uncover issues or strengths. As a result, the candidate can only be judged solely on what was said during the interview and information contained in the resume. If the candidate does not perform well during the interview or fails to detail enough information on their resume, the interviewer cannot give them any credit for past performance not mentioned in the interview or resume. There is a possibility that the employee who has been performing as an *Acting Manager*, or who is being mentored locally for the promotion opportunity ends up not getting the job.

Federal organizations need to recognize that career advancement is a prevailing motivator for commitment and that employees want to be recognized and rewarded with promotions or accolades. A similar observation was found by Hickey and Bennett (2012) who were testing for factors which have the greatest effect on employee satisfaction (and correspondingly, on commitment) among Canadian public sector employees. They found eight important predictors of employee satisfaction, among which are belief in opportunities for promotion and recognition by immediate supervisors. Other predictors included: fair classification, adherence to client service standards, life balance, team relationships with colleagues, how well information is shared, and finally, belief in the abilities of senior management to make use of feedback.

The results demonstrated that employees are looking for career advancement, but simultaneously, they are also looking for meaningful work. Career advancement ranked second among all the themes in this study while meaningful work ranked third highest among the 19 codes applied to all 791 responses. Where career advancement is not possible for every employee, the results suggest that employees may be open to other factors that could increase their levels of commitment.

**Leadership.** Leadership, as a theme, was identified as a function designated upon a person in which the incumbent is charged with the task of guiding the group towards task completion. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included leader, layers of management, and *walk the walk*. Leadership consisted of 9.5% or 82 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Leadership, as a theme, ranks as fourth highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- The organization needs to stop creating new middle management positions that do not add value to the organization. (Q1)
- Encourage employee involvement in cross-enterprise activities by demonstrating that it is valued by all levels of leadership. (Q2)
- I am not sure any promote commitment. There is only so much that is able to be taught. Unless leadership/management put into action, there will be no commitment. (Q3)
- It depends on how TARDEC utilizes my talents and whether leadership is supportive or directive. I need to enjoy the environment I am working in and specifically the people I work with, including leadership. (Q4)
- Leadership needs to focus on leading or managing their people and stop trying to manage up. Define common processes, put meat on a real strategy, and figure out how to sustain organizational knowledge (thru technology and by developing its people). Actions speak louder than words. (Q5)

The results from this study support existing literature on whether or not leadership is a factor that encourages the development of employee commitment. “When employees

and managers have a good relationship (i.e., high leader-management exchange (LMX), this positively affects employees' perceptions of making a difference in their work and seeing the relationship of their work to the larger organization. It may be that in such situations, leaders provide employees with greater insight into how the organization works and give them more responsibility. In return, this results in higher organization commitment" (Tummers & Knies, 2013, p.860).

The results demonstrated that employees are looking for leaders to be enablers, enforcers, or examples, and when not needed, to get out of their own way. "Leadership is not simply about meeting performance standards of individuals' being merely satisfied at work. Leadership is also about enabling individuals, groups, and organization to thrive, be the best they can be, and dramatically exceed expectations" (DeRue & Workman, 2012, p. 784). Employees want good relationships with leaders who can help them thrive and surpass expectations. Kim Cameron (2008) published a number of academic articles and practitioner books on how positive leadership behaviors can lead to organizational change. To further illustrate this point, Cameron and Plews (2012) published an interview with CEO, Jim Mallozzi, and centered the discussion on how positive leadership helped to turn a company around and involved everyone from employee to management in *positive deviance*. Positive deviance is a set of "intentional behaviors that depart from the norm of a reference group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209).

**Meaningful work.** Meaningful work, as a theme, was identified as work that is interesting and significant to the individual performing the task. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included challenging work, employee feels that the work makes

a difference in their lives or their mission. Meaningful work consisted of 9.7% or 84 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Meaningful work, as a theme, ranks as third highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- Meaningful life and work. (Q1)
- Maximize, as often as possible, employees working on things they find both interesting and challenging and minimize, when possible, sticking employees on projects that do not interest them. (Q2)
- Get employees to feel like they matter by giving meaningful jobs. (Q3)
- I would stay longer if we get back to doing more technical work in-house and thus start having a little more technical fun. (Q4)
- Provide me with a say on where my next assignment will be. (Q5)

The sample population for this study consists of knowledge workers in a research facility and meaningful work is an important contributor to employee commitment. According to survey responses, meaningful work has to be technical, challenging, interesting, and even fun.

There is a direct correlation between the mission for public good and meaningful work. Meaningful work is similar to the concept of *calling* and those who “view their work as a calling understand their work to be an end in itself rather than a means to some other end” (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997, p. 22). People with a calling gain deep fulfillment while working, they view rewards as less significant, and place a high value on the meaning that doing the work itself brings to the person (Wrzesniewski, 2002). Meaningful work has a close relation to the mission of the

organization and is particularly important for this federal organization whose mission is to serve the public. Coincidentally, the theme mission, is also among the seven highly ranked themes resulting from the qualitative analysis of this study.

Employees typically opt to work in the public sector because they want to contribute to society, that is, to do meaningful work” (Tummers & Knies, 2013, p.866). The Tummers and Knies study focuses on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) among Public Sector employees and they found that meaningfulness of work is an important mediator between leadership and outcomes. There was also a correlation between the role of leaders and meaningful work. “Research findings highlight the importance of studying and improving leadership in the public sector and, especially the need to relate leadership with meaningful work” (Tummers & Knies, 2013, p.866).

Similarly, the results of this research for this dissertation demonstrated that employees in this federal facility are looking to their leaders to permit them to occupy in, or help them find meaningful work to engage their minds. Employee responses also suggested that there is a relationship among meaningful work, mission, and commitment.

**Mission.** Mission, as a theme, was identified as strategic direction of the organization. The purpose that the organization is charged with, the reason for its existence, and the goal towards which they commit funds, ideas, and manpower. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included soldier, mission, warfighter, and service to country. Mission consisted of 14.0% or 121 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Mission, as a theme, ranks as highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- Each employee should know how they are making difference to war fighter's life. Employee's takes ownership of organization's mission and vision. (Q1)
- Each of us has a role in the ultimate defense of this country. Our daily efforts are important in providing and supporting the best equipment for the finest military in the world. Emphasize each link in the chain is important. (Q2)
- I have made some suggestions as to creating new training programs based on my needs / understanding, such as soldier mission stories/planning to better understand how our vehicles are used. (Q3)
- My intention is to retire from TARDEC. I enjoy what I do and feel that we can make a difference for the warfighter. (Q4)
- Be mission-focused, continue to develop the workforce, and offer upward mobility paths. (Q5)

In almost all responses, the employees had a positive and supportive view of the mission that they were engaged in. Employees expressed strong positive feelings about their role in service to the warfighter. That may be an indication that they identified more with the mission of the Army versus the mission of the organization. Further research would be needed to decipher the difference.

The findings support existing literature in that "mission contribution; that is, employees who directly contributed to the mission of the agency reported higher performance" (Caillier 2010, p.160). In the state government study that Caillier conducted, he first created a theoretical research model and then tested it on 169,403 New York state government employees. The study focused largely on job performance but relevant to this dissertation is the public service aspect of the population. The study

verified that “public employees will put forth extra effort to increase their output when they perceive that their duties contribute directly to their employing agency’s mission because they place a high value on performing work that benefits society” (Caillier 2010, p.156). Findings in this dissertation support currently available literature.

It can be concluded that the employees at TARDEC identified strongly with the mission of the Army, felt that they could contribute to the warfighter, and that adds to their levels of commitment. Some employees also expressed that mission and vision needed to be communicated to all employees.

In connection to SOAR and specifically, aspirations, the mission theme is very relevant because just as aspirations involve the organization’s strategic intent (Stavros & Wooten, 2012), so does an organization’s mission and vision. As mentioned in Chapter Two, SOAR can help stakeholders acquire a shared “understanding of the ultimate vision, mission, and goals, so that they are able to respond dynamically” (p. 827).

This study demonstrated that employees who identified with mission, felt that they could make a difference, and that contributed to their intention to stay. Mission is by far the strongest and most consistently positive theme in this study. It is possible that the organization has many veterans working there who were once warfighters and have benefitted from using TARDEC’s product. The conclusion is that there is a need to inform and align all employees to the mission of the organization because an alignment with mission contributes to an employee’s level of commitment and intention to stay.

**Reward/recognition.** Reward/recognition, as a theme, was identified as monetary and non-monetary rewards for achievements. Indicators or keywords that identified the theme included salary, recognition, awards, paypool, and performance.

Reward/recognition consisted of 8.7% or 75 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Reward/recognition, as a theme, ranks as fifth highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- It means that an employee feels that their work is significant and appreciated, and that they feel like an essential part of the team. (Q1)
- Actually exercise the compensation system of performance based compensation rather than an "average". (Q2)
- Performance based appraisals create commitment, although TARDEC has much to improve in doing that. (Q3)
- Until retirement. This is the first civilian organization which promotes self worth for an organization regardless of what education level you have. (Q4)
- I have a 4-year commitment. I will stay longer if the work is meaningful, engaging, and competitively paying. (Q5)

The responses indicted that employees were conscious of both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Federal employees are subject to the decisions of lawmakers and “since the 1970s, government policies on performance rewards continue to fall short of employees’ expectations because of lack of adequate resources, lack of a relevant strategy, and conflicting political decision-making processes” (Lee, Cayer, & Lan, 2006. p. 41). Lee et al. (2006) uncovered similar frustrations that are reflected in the results of this study. “Despite continued reforms, many employees do not feel that they get the rewards they deserve. Although federal employees can be motivated by the pride to do a public job, this does not mean they do not need rewards. Repeated failure to get

appropriate rewards likely leads to considerable negative impacts on government performance” (Lee et al., 2006, p. 31). Lee et al. (2006) discovered through an examination of historical data from employee surveys conducted by OPM from 1979 to 2002 that despite the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, employees were still disillusioned by federal performance management systems.

With regard to POS literature, there is a lot of opportunity for future research as the construct has not been fully defined. Rewards/recognition has been discussed as part of reciprocity in the context of moral sentiments, eliciting prosocial behavior such as, *pay it forward*, and positive emotions such as gratitude (Baker, 2012). Rewards/recognition in the context of organizational pay, salary, or awards system does not stand out as a concept that had been fully explore in the field of POS.

This study demonstrated that employees were very conscious of both monetary and non-monetary rewards or recognition, and rewards contribute to their intention to stay with an organization. This is consistent with the Lee et al. (2006) study mentioned earlier which used OPM survey results collected over a 23-year span.

**Training.** Training, as a theme, was identified as a variety of learning opportunities to include classroom, college classes, informal and formal learning, seminars, and hands-on experiences. Indicators of keywords that identified the theme included training, academic long-term training, college tuition, LOE, and learning. Training consisted of 8.3% or 72 of the 863 total codes applied to 791 responses. Training, as a theme, ranks as sixth highest for number of codes applied to all qualitative responses. Examples of responses that reflected this theme and corresponding survey question included:

- Educational opportunities. (Q1)
- Provide funding for continuing education and support personnel who wish to take advantage of training and developmental opportunities. (Q2)
- I think the intern and college funding programs create commitment. It shows a commitment in my future and I am willing to return the favor. (Q3)
- Offer additional training opportunities for performers (like Sabbaticals). (Q5)

Consistent with existing literature, training positively affects employee commitment (Bulut & Culha, 2010). The research behind this statement was based on 298 responses collected from the hotel and tourism industry in Turkey. The primary purpose of the study was to examine if training is an essential antecedent of organizational commitment. It was found that “Consequently, organizational training should be considered as an antecedent to enhance employees’ commitment to their organization in order to use organizational training as a motivator of organizational commitment” (p. 319).

The Bulut and Culha study did not have a POS emphasis but instead took a more traditional view of training, in part, as way to eliminate possible mishaps and mistakes. This viewpoint can be contrasted with the POS concept of strengths-based employee development. “Traditional employee development approaches focus on fixing the employee’s areas of weaknesses, instead of focusing on improving on the already positive aspects of the employee” (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2012, p. 355). The research findings from this dissertation identify training as major theme that encourages employee commitment to grow, but it does not explore the method by which that training is dispensed or the philosophy behind it. Opportunities for research with specific ties to

POS are possible especially as it relates to how employees can effectively improve or enhance their natural talents, as opposed to fixing errant traits.

This study demonstrated that employees want training to both enhance their skills and prepare them for their everyday jobs. The employee also sees training as a sign of the organization's willingness to invest in their future. In return, the employee is willing to stay committed to the organization.

**Results and conclusions in relation to research questions.** From the literature review in Chapter Two, it was concluded that there are opportunities for research and this resulted in four research questions. The quantitative methodology was used to investigate research questions one, two, and three. Questions three and four were addressed using a qualitative design, specifically, thematic analysis. The link among research, questions, hypotheses, findings, and conclusions are listed in Table 5.1 which serves as a concise overview of the connections. The section following Table 5.1 will expand upon the conclusions into a discussion of implications for practice and recommendations.

Table 5.1

*Results and Conclusions in Relation to Research Questions*

Research Question	Test	Result/Finding	Conclusion
R1	H1	Strategic HR practices predict AC	When strategic HR practices are created with a focused intent to benefit the employee, there is a corresponding positive reaction where the employee develops AC.
R2	H2a	H2a: The SOAR construct is a partial mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.	As a mediator, SOAR served as a mechanism of action such that the more engaged employees are in SOAR-based strategic thinking, the more likely strategic HR practices are going to increase AC in an organization. This test also addresses <i>how</i> SOAR affects the relationship.
R2	H2b	H2b: SOAR did not function as a moderator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC	Unable to determine when SOAR affects the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC.
R3	H3	In this government facility, AC encourages the development of positive behavioral outcomes.	Established connections between AC and the field of POC because it was demonstrated that AC encourages the development of positive outcomes that result from the best of human condition.
R3 & R4	Thematic Analysis	<p>Resulted in 7 major themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accountability:</li> <li>2. Career Advancement:</li> <li>3. Leadership:</li> <li>4. Meaningful work:</li> <li>5. Mission:</li> <li>6. Reward/recognition:</li> <li>7. Training:</li> </ol>	<p>While employees are proud of delivering results and willing take ownership for assigned tasks and the completion of mission, they are disillusioned by the lack of accountability.</p> <p>Employees want to be recognized and rewarded with promotions or accolades.</p> <p>Employees are looking for leaders to be enablers, enforcers, or examples, and when not needed, to get out of their own way.</p> <p>Employees are looking to their leaders to permit them to occupy in, or help them find meaningful work to engage their minds.</p> <p>Need to inform and align all employees on the mission of the organization because this contributes to the employee's level of commitment.</p> <p>Employees are very conscious of both monetary and non-monetary rewards or recognition, which contribute to their intention to stay.</p> <p>Employees want training to enhance skills and view it as a sign of the organization's willingness to invest in their future.</p>

### **Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

Since H1 and H3 are supported, it can be concluded that strategic HR practices lead to an increase in AC, which in turn generates positive behavioral outcomes such as intention to stay, engagement, job satisfaction, dedication, and loyalty. In organizational behavior literature, strategic HR practices, which include high-commitment HR practices, have been shown to draw out positive work-related attitudes (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005), and there were positive associations associated with an employee's perceptions of high-commitment HR practices. These findings were also consistent with existing literature on how leadership oriented behaviors in conjunction with HR practices can substantially influence levels of organizational commitment (Gilbert, deWinnie, & Sels, 2011).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, this study supports existing literature by expanding on the relationship among strategic HR practices, AC, and behavioral outcomes. However, this is the first time that these concepts have been studied in a federal facility and documented academically. Literature review in Chapter Two suggested that there are currently no publications during the last 10 years in the field of public administration that explore the relationship among strategic HR practices, AC, and behavioral outcomes.

This study also provides new evidence of a link in the relationship among strategic HR practices, AC, SOAR, and positive behavioral outcomes. Results from H2a suggested that the SOAR construct is a partial mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The role of SOAR as a mediator is a new finding. In addition, using thematic analysis, seven prominent themes were derived: accountability,

career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission, reward/recognition, and training. Each one of these themes can be linked to a SOAR-based strategic thinking mindset. For example, the theme of accountability, has direct connections to Results (R) because results are measurements for success which are outlined by a goal and framed in tangible terms (Stavros & Wooten, 2012). Part of being successful stems from being accountable. In a similar fashion, there are links to SOAR for the other 6 themes: career advancement-Opportunity (O), leadership-Strengths (S), meaningful work-Aspirations (A), mission-SOAR, reward/recognition-Results (R), and training-Strengths (S) and also Aspirations (A). Table 5.2 details the relationship between each theme and the SOAR construct along with the definition for each of the SOAR sub-constructs.

Table 5.2

*Relationship between Themes and SOAR Sub-Constructs*

Theme	References	SOAR sub-construct	Definition of SOAR sub-construct (Stavros & Wooten, 2012).
Accountability	House Committee, 1978 MPSB, 1995, 1999, 2009 GAO, 2005, 2015	Results	Results are measurements for success which are outlined by a goal and framed in tangible terms
Career Advancement	Heintzman & Marson, 2005 Hickey & Bennett, 2012	Opportunity	Positive enhancements or potentially unexplored actions and strategic innovations.
Leadership	Tummers & Knies, 2013 DeRue & Workman, 2012 Cameron, 2008 Cameron & Plews, 2012	Strengths	What an organization or members are doing right and what skills could be enhanced.
Meaningful Work	Wrzesniewski et al., 1997 Wrzesniewski, 2002 Tummers & Knies, 2013	Aspirations	Taking strengths & opportunities and directing focus into envisioning or constructing conceptual representation of the ideal environment.
Mission	Caillier 2010 Stavros & Wooten, 2012	SOAR	All 4 SOAR sub-constructs
Reward	Lee, Cayer, & Lan, 2006 Baker, 2012	Results	Results are measurements for success which are outlined by a goal and framed in tangible terms
Training	Bulut & Culha, 2010 Asplund & Blacksmith, 2012	Strengths, Opportunity	What an organization or members are doing right and what skills could be enhanced; Positive enhancements or potentially unexplored actions and strategic innovations.

Employers should develop approaches to increase strategic HR practices. It is also important that HR practices be recognized as a strategic part of the organization's mission. From the literature reviewed, it was found that SOAR and AC have a lot in common because "employees at all levels want to engage their minds, hearts, and spirits and feel as if their aspirations and achievements connect to their work" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 4). While strategic HR practices try to build AC by applying strategy

to shape employee perception (Gellatly et al., 2009), the SOAR process encourages stakeholders to create “a shared set of values, vision, mission statement, identifying strengths and opportunities to create strategic initiatives, strategies, and plans that achieve desired results” (Stavros & Cole, 2013, p. 24). Connections like this lend credibility to the SOAR framework as a viable approach for building AC through the introduction of strategic HR practices.

The first recommendation is that organizations engage the SOAR framework to increase the effectiveness of strategic HR practices in generating AC. Organizations should adopt the SOAR framework (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) and its 5-I approach to initiative, inquire, imagine, innovate, and inspire to implement (Stavros et. al, 2003) through the process of creating and implementing strategic HR practices. The SOAR framework allows organizations to ask generative questions to solicit ideas and innovations, which lead ultimately to generative actions (Bushe, 2007). For strategic HR practices to be successful, it is important to use a whole systems approach to engage all stakeholders who will be involved in the implementation of strategic HR practices. H2a provides support for the role of SOAR in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. SOAR-based strategic thinking is a “positive approach to strategic thinking and planning that allows an organization to construct its future through collaboration, shared understanding, and a commitment to action” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 3). Specifically, by using SOAR to identify and implement strategic HR practices, employers in this federal organization can hope to strengthen AC.

The second recommendation supports the first because from the major themes uncovered during thematic analysis, results inferred that this sample of federal workers

values accountability, career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission, reward/recognition, and training as strategic HR practices that enhance AC. It is recommended that this organization implements strategic HR practices that encompass these themes which are known to enhance AC. Increased AC could lead to positive behavioral outcomes, as supported by H3. As shown in Table 5.2, there are relationships between the themes and SOAR sub-constructs.

The results of this study support the findings in the CBO study for the sample of federal workers that was surveyed in this research. The CBO study mentions a statistic for resignations but by comparison, the majority of federal employees stay committed to the organization for the full time frame of their professional careers. *Why do they stay* is a more important proactive question than *why do they leave* because turnover is a retrospective study. It may be more beneficial to study the positive effects of commitment attitudes during the time proceeding turnover rather than studying turnover, which focuses on the effects to the organization after the employee leaves. After an employee tenders their resignation, it is likely too late to begin building commitment. While turnover is hindsight, commitment is proactive strategic thinking. Proactivity is a “future-focused, self-starting, and change-oriented” (Wu & Parker, 2012) construct within the larger field of POS. An organization can be proactive by looking at the issue of employee commitment, especially AC which can foster an opposite behavioral outcome to turnover thereby eliciting an increased intention to stay. This is one desired outcome that was demonstrated in H3. In prevailing research, it is believed that commitment binds an individual to an organization, thereby reducing the likelihood of turnover (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) and the associated costs. The third

recommendation is that this government organization focuses on building AC as opposed to studying turnover trends. The organization can do so by cultivating AC through the implementation of strategic HR practices as inferred by results from H1.

As discussed above in the section, Summary of Results from Quantitative Analysis, for the sample participants in the age group 38-42, this age group consistently had the lowest or second lowest scores for each of the SOAR elements. The organization should be concerned that employees in this age group, who have between 12 to 15 years left prior to retirement, may lack SOAR-based strategic thinking mindset. Results from H2a suggest that SOAR contributes to the development of AC. Now that this study has made a contribution by making the connection between SOAR and AC, the fourth recommendation would be to encourage this federal organization to start having SOAR-based discussions or dialogues in an effort to create a sustainable organization that self-generates AC. Doing so would constitute an application of SOAR, AI, and POS linking the theory of these constructs to practice. This is different from the first recommendation which addresses strategic HR practices. The final recommendation specifically addresses employees in the age group 38-42 within this federal organization. While it is beneficial for all members of the organization to engage in SOAR-based discussions, it may be particularly meaningful to the 38-42 age group in this organization because this group appears to be lacking a SOAR-based mindset. As discussed in Chapter Two, the SOAR framework is based on appreciative inquiry Appreciative Inquiry (AI) principles harness the power of positive, generative conversations to help employees envision what possibilities are ahead.

The 38-42 age group is significant because this mid-career group is likely to have a number of leaders, managers, and supervisors. It is recommended that as organizations engage in conversations about strategic change, led by some of these leaders, they should learn to care less about “diagnosis and fact finding and more about creating the enabling conditions for successful conversations to take place” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p.360).

Dialogical methods used in organizational change include AI and SOAR, among others. Since this group has low SOAR element scores, it is possible that this population lacks a dialogical organization development (OD) mindset. “In Dialogic OD, change comes from changes in meaning making and new, associated decisions and actions people can and will take as a result of those changes in meaning” (p.356).

This is opposed to the diagnostic OD mindset which is defined as “the attempt to gather data to compare a given team or organization against a prescriptive model or desired future state” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p.351). Diagnostic methods towards organizational change include the SWOT analysis among others. “Diagnosis entails a problem-centric approach to action research, where the assumption is that the organization is broken and needs fixing” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p.354). A focus on Dialogic OD is the main theme throughout all four recommendations.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study focused on AC and established a link to the field of POS. However, in the qualitative responses, there are signs of normative commitment (NC) and calculative commitment (CC). While, AC represents the mindset of employees who are committed to stay because they want to, NC represents the mindset of employees who are committed because they ought to, and CC represents the mindset of employees who stay because

they need to. NC is the type of commitment that is influenced by the individual's prior experiences within society. CC individuals remain with the organization because it is perceived to be stressful if they should lose the advantages of being employed. These individuals remain with the organization because they feel they need to (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984, 1991). An example of a response containing elements of NC in the sample population is, "Each of us has a role in the ultimate defense of this country." An example of a response containing elements of CC is, "Financially could not afford to retire early." The first recommendation for future research could include an expansion of this study to include NC and CC.

The population that was surveyed is made up of civilian, non-enlisted federal knowledge workers. Federal government workplaces tend to be unionized environments. The second recommendation for future research would be to have this repeated in any of the following populations, state government, local government, non-union, non-profit, or non-government population. Certain results may be different. For example, in thematic analysis, mission stood out as the most frequently applied code. Would it be the same in a non-government organization where profit is emphasized?

As indicated in the CBO study, employees were likely to resign between 4-7 years of service but beyond that time frame, federal employees tended to stay employed until retirement. Over a lifetime, or roughly 30-year employment period, a federal employee could serve under as many as five presidents. The third recommendation could be to conduct a longitudinal research study on the changes of commitment attitudes over time.

The data which was derived from surveys were self reported, primarily consisting of the opinion or self-concept of the survey respondent. Self-concept, defined as the

specific definition used to characterize oneself (Johnson & Chang, 2006), is relevant to this dissertation because in order to find out *how AC is built*, it is important to acknowledge that employees have self-constructed ideas. However, while it is prudent to acknowledge that self-concept is important, there is also value in conducting research where data can be collected from independent observations. The fourth recommendation is that future research should also involve a 360° evaluation or other opportunities for independent observations of AC and behavioral outcomes.

H2a was tested using two different tests. The first test examined the SOAR construct as a mediator of the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC; the second test examined the SOAR elements as mediators. The former found that the indirect effect of strategic HR practices impacting AC through SOAR was significant. The latter found that when the SOAR elements were tested as mediators, each element of SOAR was not a significant mediator. However, the total indirect effect of the SOAR construct remained significant. Similar to the first mediation test, the direct effect of strategic HR practices impact on AC was significant. Both of these tests point out that while SOAR can be acknowledged as a mediator for the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC, it is only a partial mediator. The final recommendation for future research would be to find out what other constructs could be a mediator for this relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. From Chapter Two, examples of other mediators could include (but are not limited to), perceptions or organizational support and procedural justice (Meyer & Smith, 2009), job satisfaction (Eby, 1999; Lok & Crawford, 2001), and independence and satisfaction levels (Marescaux et al., 2012).

## Limitations

This study focused only on the population in one federal facility. The extent to which these results can be generalized to other organizations, federal or otherwise, is unknown. While the research population was specifically chosen because it closely resembles that which was described in the CBO study, it may not be reflective of other industries. A theme like meaningful work could have different connotations for a blue-collar organization, a sales organization, different countries, or cultures.

In Question Three of the open-ended survey questions, respondents were asked to consider the HR programs that are currently available at TARDEC, which programs create commitment? Why? There were 134 questions and 25.7% or 45 responses were coded as “did not identify with any HR program”. Examples of responses included:

- There are HR programs geared towards commitment?
- TARDEC has HR programs?? If they do they are non-existent in my view.

TARDEC needs to study HR practices and the cultures of high tech Silicon valley companies - for ideas. HR currently here is only about processing pay changes or retirements [Yawn]

- None. The HR programs are base benefits that the employee expects.

Employees do not perceive HR practices as strategic nor did they see that the programs are intended to increase commitment. Strategic relevance of HR in the context of the organization and the extent to which employees perceive HR to be strategic has an implication on the way that responses are provided. Over time, HR departments have tried to transition into a strategically significant role in organizations. “We can see that tensions emerge as HR practitioners attempt to become strategic partners” (Pritchard,

2010, p. 185).

Since the independent and dependent variables come from the same source, it is necessary to address common-method bias as a limitation. Common-method bias refers to the degree to which correlations are altered, i.e. inflated, due to a methods effect (Meade, Watson, & Kroustalis, 2007). One way to overcome this type of limitation would be to have AC or behavioral outcomes measured by independent observers.

The researcher is also a member of the organization and membership bias may exist. While it is likely impossible to eliminate bias, the researcher has made conscious attempts to guard against bias by being aware of actions and preferences in each situation and interaction, whether it is data collection, interpretation, or analysis.

### **Summary**

This mixed methods study examined the relationships among three large constructs, namely, strategic HR practices, AC, and SOAR within a federal workplace. Results from the research inferred that the interaction among these constructs lead to positive behavioral outcomes. Strategic HR practices, as the independent variable, encourages the development of AC, the dependent variable, and when SOAR-based strategic thinking is present, as a mediating variable, it serves to clarify the nature of the relationships between strategic HR practices and AC.

One key contribution from the research includes recognizing that HR practices should be recognized as strategic. It is recommended that employers develop strategic HR practices because they lead to increased AC. In an effort to develop attitudes of commitment, seven themes emerged as a result of thematic analysis and they are: accountability, career advancement, leadership, meaningful work, mission,

reward/recognition, and training. As employers develop strategic HR practices, it is recommended that these themes be taken into consideration.

This study was conducted in one specific population of federal workers, and it was observed that while SOAR-based strategic thinking could exist in an organization, as a whole, there were pockets or groups of employees who do not inherently possess SOAR sub-elements in their consciousness. Future research could include studies on how the federal government develops their leaders and whether those developments embrace a dialogical OD approach. This future research could also investigate if diagnostic OD tendencies naturally fill the void in an employee's strategic thinking if dialogical OD discussions are absent.

Since results of this study suggest that strategic HR practices may increase AC, and corresponding behavioral outcomes, it is recommended that organizations study AC as opposed to turnover trends. Studying AC focuses on the dialogical discussion of positive reasons why employees stay, while turnover is a retrospective diagnostic view on why employees leave. This is a move towards POS which encourages the study of "extraordinary positive outcomes or positively deviant performance" (Sprietzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p.261).

This study appears to be the first to show a distinct connection among strategic HR practices, AC, SOAR, and positive behavioral outcomes. Specifically, within a population of federal knowledge workers, the study was also able to demonstrate the role of SOAR as a mediator in the relationship between strategic HR practices and AC. The positive behavioral outcomes that are a result of AC have established a link between the field of POS and AC.

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## Appendix A

### TCM Commitment Survey: Questionnaire License Agreement for Academic Researcher/Student Use.

TCM Employee Commitment Survey

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## TCM Employee Commitment Survey

Based on the Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997), the TCM Employee Commitment Survey measures three forms of employee commitment to an organization: desire-based, obligation-based and cost-based.

**FREE EVALUATION**

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"Inventors" indicate the authors, Dr. John Meyer and Dr. Natalie Allen, in the Faculty of Social Science at WESTERN.

"Questionnaire" indicates the TCM Employee Commitment Survey, Academic Version 2004 developed by the Inventors. The Questionnaire includes the Users Guide and the Organizational Commitment Survey which is available in two versions; the "Original" which contains 24 questions and the "Revised" which contains 18 questions. The license granted under this Agreement includes both versions of the survey and the Users Guide and can be downloaded from this website as a single PDF file.

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10. USE: YOU represent and warrant that YOU possess the legal authority to enter into this Agreement. YOU agree to be responsible for any License Fees, costs, charges and taxes arising out of your use of the Questionnaire. YOU are responsible for supplying any hardware or software necessary to use the Questionnaire pursuant to this Agreement.

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(d) This Agreement is the entire agreement between YOU and WESTERN relating to this subject matter. YOU shall not contest the validity of this Agreement merely because it is in electronic form.

TCM Employee Commitment Survey

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- (e) No modification of this Agreement shall be binding, unless in writing and accepted by an authorized representative of each party.
- (f) The provisions of this Agreement are severable in that if any provision in the Agreement is determined to be invalid or unenforceable under any controlling body of law that shall not affect the validity or enforceability of the remaining provisions of the Agreement.
- (g) All prices are in CA dollars and prices are subject to change without notice. WESTERN shall not be liable for any typographical errors, including errors resulting in improperly quoted prices on the Download Summary screen.
- (h) YOU should print out or download a copy of this Agreement and retain it for your records.
- (i) YOU consent to the use of the English language in this Agreement.

### Complete Your Information to Download...

Please complete the following information to obtain your copy of the Academic version of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey

Full Name:

Valerie DeVries

Email:

vdevries@tu.edu

How did you hear about us:

Other Website

☒ I agree to the terms of this Academic License outlined above.

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Have a question?

Please contact us via email:

[info@employeecommitment.com](mailto:info@employeecommitment.com)

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## Appendix B

### TCM Commitment Survey: Affective Commitment Scale

#### TCM Employee Commitment Survey Academic Users Guide

Based on the Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997), the *TCM Employee Commitment Survey* measures three forms of employee commitment to an organization: desire-based (affective commitment), obligation-based (normative commitment) and cost-based (continuance commitment). The survey includes three well-validated scales, the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS) and the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS). Each is scored separately and can be used to identify the "commitment profile" of employees within an organization.

This academic version of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey was prepared for those who intend to use the commitment scales for academic research purposes. Original and revised versions of the scales are provided in Appendix A. This guide provides background information on the development of the commitment scales and addresses general issues pertaining to their use. Appendix B provides a list of references that you can consult for more information.

#### ***Instructions***

Listed below is a series of statements that represent feelings that individuals might have about the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working, please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling a number from 1 to 7 using the scale below.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = undecided
- 5 = slightly agree
- 6 = agree
- 7 = strongly agree

***Revised Version*** (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993)

***Affective Commitment Scale***

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
3. I do not feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization. (R)
4. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization. (R)
5. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization. (R)
6. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

## Appendix C

### Permission to use the SOAR Profile



Valerie DeVries <[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)>

---

#### Latest version of SOAR profile

3 messages

---

**LTU** <[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)>

Sun, Oct 12, 2014 at 5:09 PM

To: Matthew Cole <[mcole@ltu.edu](mailto:mcole@ltu.edu)>, Jacqueline Stavros <[jstavros@ltu.edu](mailto:jstavros@ltu.edu)>

Dr. Cole, on Friday, you mentioned that you would send me the latest version of the SOAR profile. Could you please send it to me by email?

Dr. Cole & Dr. Stavros, with your permission, I would like to use it to build the survey instrument to support research for my dissertation.

Thank you. Valerie DeVries

---

**Jackie Stavros** <[jstavros@ltu.edu](mailto:jstavros@ltu.edu)>

Sun, Oct 12, 2014 at 5:20 PM

To: LTU <[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)>

Cc: Matthew Cole <[mcole@ltu.edu](mailto:mcole@ltu.edu)>

Absolutely - you have our permission

Jackie

Sent from my iPhone

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Matthew L. Cole** <[mcole@ltu.edu](mailto:mcole@ltu.edu)>

Tue, Oct 14, 2014 at 5:39 AM

To: LTU <[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)>, Jacqueline Stavros <[jstavros@ltu.edu](mailto:jstavros@ltu.edu)>

Yes, please use the survey in your dissertation--thanks for asking.

Attached is the pdf of the SOAR Profile.


Let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks, Matt

.....  
Matthew Cole, PhD  
Lawrence Technological University  
Department of Management and Marketing  
o. 248.204.3096 f. 248.204.3099 [mcole@ltu.edu](mailto:mcole@ltu.edu)  
[www.ltu.edu/management/cole.asp](http://www.ltu.edu/management/cole.asp)

[Quoted text hidden]

---

 **SOAR Profile\_101414\_SurveyGizmo.pdf**  
176K

## **Appendix D**

### **Survey Participant Recruitment Letter (sent by email)**

My name is Valerie DeVries and I am a doctoral student in the College of Management at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, MI and a TARDEC DA Civilian employee. I do not hold a supervisory position nor do I rate any employees. It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in this dissertation research study which aims to understand more about the relationship between strategic HR practices, affective commitment, and a strategic thinking framework called SOAR (SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results). Participation is voluntary.

You have been solicited to take part in this survey because you are a non-enlisted civilian member of the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC).

I am very interested in learning about your experiences as an employee of TARDEC in relation to organizational commitment. Your participation is valuable to further understand employee commitment and whether or not HR practices can be helpful during your career. This survey should take you no more than 20 minutes to complete.

The survey can be completed on paper or online. You will have the opportunity to provide your voluntary consent to participate in this study. Online link:

<https://surveymonkey.com.com> *[complete link to be included in actual solicitation]*.

Sincerely,

Valerie DeVries

## **Appendix E**

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Dear survey participant,

My name is Valerie DeVries and I am a doctoral student in the College of Management at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, MI and a U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC) DA Civilian employee. I do not hold a supervisory position nor do I rate any employees. It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in this dissertation research study which aims to understand more about the relationship between strategic HR practices, affective commitment, and a strategic thinking framework called SOAR (SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results). Participation is voluntary.

I am very interested in learning about your experiences as a non-enlisted civilian employee of TARDEC in relation to organizational commitment. Please do not take the survey if you are currently an enlisted military member or contractor working in TARDEC. Your participation is valuable to further understand employee commitment and whether or not HR practices can be helpful during your career. This is not a test and there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. The only answer that I encourage you to input is an honest one; go with your first instinct. This survey should take you no more than 20 minutes to complete.

You will have the opportunity to provide your voluntary consent to participate in this study. At any time during the survey, you may choose not to answer a question and can “skip” questions. In the electronic version, you may click “next” at the bottom of the page.

There is no compensation for this study. This survey instrument will not collect any personally identifiable information including your name, email address, and any information that will identify you as a participant. Results are confidential, participants will remain anonymous, individual responses will not be disclosed, and only the aggregate results will be available in the publication of the dissertation. There is a very slight, but unlikely, possibility that your unique combination of responses could identify you. Several questions in this survey involve your written responses to open-ended questions. Do not provide any information in these responses that would easily lead to your identification.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Lawrence Technological University Institutional review Board, 21000 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48075, (248) 204-3096, [irb@ltu.edu](mailto:irb@ltu.edu).

If you are at least 18 years of age and have read this informed consent form, understand the information contained in this form, and agree to participate in this study, please check the box below "I agree to participate". If you do not wish to participate, please check the box "I do not agree to participate" or you may just exit. There is no penalty for non-participation. You may print/retain a copy of this informed consent.

Thank you.

Valerie Devries [vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)

Your voluntary consent to participate (select one):

☐ I agree to participate

☐ I do not agree to participate

## Appendix F

### Survey Instrument

#### Organizational Affective Commitment

##### Informed Consent Statement

**\*Dear survey participant,**

**My name is Valerie DeVries and I am a doctoral student in the College of Management at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, MI and a U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC) DA Civilian employee. I do not hold a supervisory position nor do I rate any employees. It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in this dissertation research study which aims to understand more about the relationship between strategic HR practices, affective commitment, and a strategic thinking framework called SOAR (SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results). Participation is voluntary.**

**I am very interested in learning about your experiences as a non-enlisted civilian employee of TARDEC in relation to organizational commitment. Please do not take the survey if you are currently an enlisted military member or contractor working in TARDEC. Your participation is valuable to further understand employee commitment and whether or not HR practices can be helpful during your career. This is not a test and there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The only answer that I encourage you to input is an honest one; go with your first instinct. This survey should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete.**

**You will have the opportunity to provide your voluntary consent to participate in this study. At any time during the survey, you may choose not to answer a question and can "skip" questions. In the electronic version, you may click "next" at the bottom of the page.**

**There is no compensation for this study. This survey instrument will not collect any personally identifiable information including your name, email address, and any information that will identify you as a participant. Results are confidential, participants will remain anonymous, individual responses will not be disclosed, and only the aggregate results will be available in the publication of the dissertation. There is a very slight, but unlikely, possibility that your unique combination of responses could identify you. Several questions in this survey involve your written responses to open ended questions. Do not provide any information in these responses that would easily lead to your identification.**

### **Organizational Affective Commitment**

**If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Lawrence Technological University Institutional review Board, 21000 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48075, (248) 204-3096, [irb@ltu.edu](mailto:irb@ltu.edu).**

**If you are at least 18 years of age and have read this informed consent form, understand the information contained in this form, and agree to participate in this study, please check the box below "I agree to participate". If you do not wish to participate, please check the box "I do not agree to participate" or you may just exit. There is no penalty for non-participation. You may print/retain a copy of this informed consent.**

**Thank you.**

**Valerie Devries**

**[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)**

**Your voluntary consent to participate (select one):**

- ☐ I agree to participate
- ☐ I do not agree to participate

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Section A: Strategic HR Practices

**Consider the strategic HR practices for federal workers available at your organization. How often have you used or been actively involved with each of the following strategic HR practices over the last three years:**

	Never	Rarely			Often			Always			N/A
Training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mentoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promotion Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compensation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flex Time and Regular Day Off (RDO)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Telework	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work Life Balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meaningful Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supervisory Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Cohesion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Section B: Affective Commitment Scale

Listed below is a series of statements that represent your feelings about your organization. With respect to your feelings, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Section C: SOAR Profile

Listed below is a series of words that help describe how you approach strategic thinking, planning, and leading to improve individual and team performance that positively impacts your organization's performance.

**How often do you focus on each of the following words when you approach strategy in your life, team, and organization?**

	Never			Rarely			Often			Always
Aspirations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Completed Tasks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desires	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ideas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Possibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Separate Parts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Solutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strengths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whole System	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Section C: SOAR Profile

Listed below is a series of words that help describe how you approach strategic thinking, planning, and leading to improve individual and team performance that positively impacts your organization's performance.

**When you approach strategy, what is the likelihood that you will focus on each of the following strategic elements from the broadest sense as applied to your life, team, and organization?**

	Never			Rarely			Often			Always
Aspirations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborative Relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Core Values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dynamic Capabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indifference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mission (purpose)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistakes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positive Change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Continued ~ Section C: SOAR Profile

[Continued] Listed below is a series words that help describe how you approach strategic thinking, planning, and leading to improve individual and team performance that positively impacts your organization's performance.

**When you approach strategy, what is the likelihood that you will focus on each of the following strategic elements from the broadest sense as applied to your life, team, and organization?**

	Never			Rarely			Often			Always
Separate Parts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shareholders' Needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Solutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stakeholders' Needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategic Initiatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategic Position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strengths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threats	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trust Building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vision (future direction)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weaknesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whole System	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Organizational Affective Commitment

### Section D: Outcomes

**On a scale of 1-10, rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:**

	1. Very Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Very Strongly Agree
I will stay with this organization for the next several years	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I <u>avoid</u> my coworkers and keep to myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a loyal employee	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am <u>not</u> a dedicated employee	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Organizational Affective Commitment	
Section E: Demographic Information	
Each of your responses will remain confidential	
<p><b>Please tell us your age group</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> 18-22</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 23-27</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 28-32</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 33-37</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 38-42</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 43-47</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 48-57</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 58-67</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 68+</p>	<p><b>Please tell us your gender</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Male</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Female</p>
<p><b>Length of service with any branch of the federal government</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> &lt; 6 months</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 6 months - 1 year</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 1-2 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 2-3 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 3-5 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 5-10 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 10-15 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 15-20 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 20-25 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> &gt; 25 years</p>	
<p><b>Length of service with TARDEC and/or the Detroit Arsenal</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> &lt; 6 months</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 6 months - 1 year</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 1-2 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 2-3 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 3-5 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 5-10 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 10-15 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 15-20 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 20-25 years</p> <p><input type="radio"/> &gt; 25 years</p>	

Organizational Affective Commitment
<b>Section E: Demographic Information</b>
<i>Each of your responses will remain confidential</i>
<b>Level of Education</b>
<input type="radio"/> Some High School
<input type="radio"/> High School Diploma
<input type="radio"/> Some College
<input type="radio"/> Associates Degree
<input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree
<input type="radio"/> Masters Degree
<input type="radio"/> Doctoral Degree
<b>Retirement Eligibility</b>
<input type="radio"/> Eligible for Optional Retirement
<input type="radio"/> NOT Eligible for optional retirement
<input type="radio"/> Eligible for optional retirement within 5-years
<b>Number of years experience as a professional</b>
<input type="radio"/> < 6 months
<input type="radio"/> 6 months - 1 year
<input type="radio"/> 1-2 years
<input type="radio"/> 2-3 years
<input type="radio"/> 3-5 years
<input type="radio"/> 5-10 years
<input type="radio"/> 10-15 years
<input type="radio"/> 15-20 years
<input type="radio"/> 20-25 years
<input type="radio"/> > 25 years

Organizational Affective Commitment
<b>Section F</b>
<p>This portion of the survey involves your written responses to open ended questions. Do not provide any information in these responses that would easily lead to your identification.</p>
<p><b>What does employee commitment mean to you?</b></p>
<p><b>What can TARDEC do to encourage commitment?</b></p>
<p><b>Consider the HR Programs that are currently available at TARDEC, which programs create commitment? Why?</b></p>
<p><b>How long do you anticipate staying with TARDEC? Why?</b></p>
<p><b>What can TARDEC do to support your intention to stay?</b></p>

## Appendix G

### Lawrence Technological University Institutional Review Board – Letter of Approval



Institutional Review Board  
Office of the Provost  
[research.ltu.edu](http://research.ltu.edu) [irb@ltu.edu](mailto:irb@ltu.edu)

December 1, 2014

Valerie Devries  
Lawrence Technological University  
College of Management  
[vdevries@ltu.edu](mailto:vdevries@ltu.edu)

Dear Ms. Devries,

I am pleased to report that the IRB application to conduct research with human participants for your DBA dissertation "A Mixed Methods Study on the Relationship among Strategic Human Resource Practices, SOAR, and Affective Commitment in the Federal Workplace" has been approved under the Expedited review path for a period of one year, December 1, 2014 – December 1, 2015.

The IRB is satisfied that the following three ethical concerns regarding the treatment of your human participants have been addressed in your research protocol: (1) The research involves administering a paper and pencil or web-based survey to all employees in the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC) in such a way that assessments of strategic HR practices, affective commitment, work engagement, loyalty, and strategic thinking style can be obtained; (2) Participants who will voluntarily consent to complete the survey are free to withdraw from the study at any time; (3) You have identified potential risks to you and the participants; and (4) You have assured that a balance exists between potential benefits of the research to the participants and/or society and the risk assumed by the participants.

Please contact the IRB if you require an extension to your project after one year. Please note you must contact the IRB if you make a change to your research protocol that impacts the ethical treatment of your research participants. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRB if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Matthew Cole, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Lawrence Technological University  
[irb@ltu.edu](mailto:irb@ltu.edu) o: 248.204.3096 f: 248.204.3099

The Lawrence Tech IRB is organized and operated according to guidelines of the United States Office for Human Research Protections and the United States Code of Federal Regulations and operates under Federal Wide Assurance No. FWA00010997 that expires 02/10/2017.

**Lawrence Technological University**  
College of Architecture and Design | College of Arts and Sciences | College of Engineering | College of Management  
21000 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48075-1058 | 248.204.4000 p | 248.204.3727 f | [ltu.edu](http://ltu.edu)

## Appendix H

### Online Training certificate from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

#### COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI) HUMAN RESEARCH CURRICULUM COMPLETION REPORT Printed on 11/07/2014

LEARNER	Valerie DeVries (ID: 4500414) U.S. Army TARDEC 6501 E 11 Mile Road Warren MI 48397-5000 USA
PHONE	5862820772
EMAIL	valerie.devries.cit@mail.mil
INSTITUTION	U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (JPRMC)
EXPIRATION DATE	11/05/2017

#### GROUP 2 SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH INVESTIGATORS

COURSE/S TAG E:	Basic Course/1
PASS ED ON:	11/05/2014
REFERENCE ID:	14494507

REQUIRED MODULES	DATE COMPLETED
Introduction	11/05/14
History and Ethical Principles - SBE	11/05/14
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE	11/05/14
The Federal Regulations - SBE	11/05/14
Assessing Risk - SBE	11/05/14
Informed Consent - SBE	11/05/14
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE	11/05/14
Records-Based Research	11/05/14
Research With Protected Populations - Vulnerable Subjects: An Overview	11/05/14
Research with Prisoners - SBE	11/05/14
Research with Children - SBE	11/05/14
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE	11/05/14
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Pregnant Women, Human Fetuses, and Neonates	11/05/14
International Research - SBE	11/05/14
Internet-Based Research - SBE	11/05/14
Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections	11/05/14
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees	11/05/14
Hot Topics	11/05/14
Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects	11/05/14
The IRB Member Model - What Every New IRB Member Needs to Know	11/05/14
Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives	11/05/14
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research	11/05/14
U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command	11/05/14

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI Program participating institution or be a paid independent learner. Fabricated information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course site is unethical, and may be considered research misconduct by your institution.

Paul B. Benschel, Ph.D.  
Professor, University of Miami  
Director Office of Research Education  
CITI Program Course Coordinator

## Appendix I

### Letter of Approval to Conduct Research from TARDEC



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
US ARMY RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND ENGINEERING COMMAND  
TANK AUTOMOTIVE RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND ENGINEERING CENTER  
6501 E. 11 MILE ROAD  
WARREN, MI 48397-5000

REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

RDIA- COS

17 November 2014

To whom it may concern.

This letter serves as approval for Valerie DeVries, a doctoral student at Lawrence Technological University College of Management, to conduct research with my organization. Ms. DeVries is authorized to initiate surveys that explore the strategic HR practices, affective commitment, and strategic thinking styles of our employees.

Ms. DeVries is required to protect the confidentiality of all participants in the study as well as ensure that disclosure of personal identifying information is prevented. Additionally, Ms. DeVries is not authorized to disclose the raw data to anyone with the exception of her dissertation committee members. All data will be stored securely.

All data published in the doctoral dissertation or in subsequent papers must be consolidated and presented in aggregate/summary form.

Sincerely,

  
David Taylor  
Chief of Staff

## Appendix J

### Approval to Conduct Research from AHRPO - Email

Devries, [REDACTED] USARMY RDECOM (US)

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**From:** Kline [REDACTED] V USARMY MEDCOM USAMRMC (US)  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 14, 2015 10:42 AM  
**To:** Devries, [REDACTED] USARMY TARDEC (US); 'vdevries@ltu.edu'  
**Cc:** Green, [REDACTED] USARMY TARDEC (US); Gravelly, [REDACTED] CIV USARMY RDECOM (US); Cancel, [REDACTED] USARMY MEDCOM (US); Spensley, [REDACTED] USARMY MEDCOM USAMRMC (US)  
**Subject:** M-10427, Headquarters-level Administrative Review Approval Memorandum (UNCLASSIFIED)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
Caveats: NONE

**SUBJECT:** Headquarters-level Administrative Review Approval for the Protocol, "A Mixed Methods Study on the Relationship among Strategic Human Resources Practices, SOAR, and Affective Commitment in the Federal Workplace," Principal Investigator: Valerie DeVries, Doctoral Candidate at Lawrence Technological University, Southfield, MI; Lead Human Capital Analyst, Tank Automotive Research and Development Center (TARDEC), Warren, MI; IRB 2014-943, Log Number M-10427

1. The above-referenced protocol was approved as minimal risk research by the Lawrence Technological University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 23 December 2014. This protocol was also reviewed by the US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, Office of Research Protections (ORP), Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) on behalf of TARDEC, and found to comply with applicable DOD and US Army human subjects protection requirements.
2. TARDEC is providing support for this study by means of allowing the recruitment of TARDEC civilian employees for the accrual of 205 completed surveys.
3. The Principal Investigator should inform the TARDEC Human Protections Administrator (HPA) of the following:
  - a. Any substantive modifications to the research protocol and any modifications that could potentially increase risk to subjects (the ORP HRPO defines a substantive modification as a change in Principal Investigator, change or addition of an institution, elimination or alteration of the consent process, change to the study population that has regulatory implications (e.g. adding children, adding active duty population, etc.), significant change in study design, or a change that could potentially increase risks to subjects).
  - b. All unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others.
  - c. Suspensions or terminations of this research by the Lawrence Technological University IRB.
4. Provide a copy of the continuing review approval notification by the Lawrence Technological University IRB to the TARDEC HPA as soon as possible after receipt of approval. It appears the next continuing review by the Lawrence Technological University IRB is due no later than 23 December 2015.
5. Provide the final study report submitted to the Lawrence Technological University IRB, including a copy of any acknowledgement documentation, to the TARDEC HPA as soon as all documents become available.
6. The TARDEC HPA will communicate with ORP HRPO if any of the events in paragraph 3 above occur, and inform the ORP HRPO of the protocol's continued approval and its closure.

7. The point of contact for this action is [REDACTED] Spensley, MS, General Dynamics Information Technology Corporation, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@mail.mil> .

ANDREA J. KLINE, MS, CIP  
Office of Research Protections  
US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command

Note: The official copy of this email memorandum is housed with the protocol file at the Office of Research Protections, Human Research Protection Office, 504 Scott Street, Fort Detrick, MD 21702. Signed copies will be provided upon request.

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
Caveats: NONE