

Locus of Control and Satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs as Predictors of Organisational Commitment in Military Cadets

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Abstract

Psychological strength is increasingly recognised as a critical psychological asset for sustaining performance and persistence within military training environments. This study examined the predictive roles of locus of control and basic psychological need satisfaction on organisational commitment among military trainee cadets at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM). Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 887 cadets undergoing structured military training. Locus of control was measured using the Work Locus of Control Scale, basic psychological needs were assessed using the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale, and organisational commitment was measured using the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire. Correlation analyses revealed that internal locus of control and all three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were positively associated with organisational commitment, whereas powerful others and chance locus of control were negatively related. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the overall model explained 46.1% of the variance in organisational commitment. Autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by relatedness, competence, and internal locus of control. In contrast, powerful others and chance locus of control did not contribute significant unique variance. These findings highlight the central role of psychological need satisfaction, particularly autonomy, in fostering organisational commitment in military training contexts, while suggesting that externalised control beliefs may hold limited explanatory power once motivational processes are accounted for.

Keywords: Basic Psychological Needs, Locus of Control, Military Cadets, Organisational Commitment, Psychological Readiness, and Self-Determination Theory

Introduction

Training is broadly acknowledged as a crucial process for strengthening individual competencies, equipping employees to meet both present and future occupational demands, and promoting employability as well as job performance (Werner & DeSimone, 2011). Well-

designed training initiatives also yield dual benefits by conferring competitive advantages to organisations while simultaneously enhancing employees' skills, motivation, and overall work effectiveness through both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999). However, the extent to which employees fully engage with and derive value from such training initiatives is not determined by training design alone, but is also shaped by deeper psychological bonds between employees and their organisations.

Organisational commitment has long been recognised as a cornerstone of workforce stability, performance, and institutional effectiveness across diverse occupational settings. Employees who exhibit a strong psychological attachment to their organisation are more likely to display persistence, discretionary effort, and alignment with organisational goals, even under demanding conditions (Dahlawi et al., 2025; Insan et al., 2025; McConnell et al., 2025). The three-component model proposed by Meyer and Allen conceptualises organisational commitment as comprising affective, continuance, and normative dimensions, reflecting emotional attachment, perceived costs of leaving, and felt obligation to remain, respectively. Studies evidence further demonstrates that organisational commitment is robustly associated with job performance, withdrawal behaviours, and employee well-being, underscoring its strategic importance for institutional effectiveness (Vuong et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2018).

Within military organisations, organisational commitment assumes even greater psychological and operational significance. Unlike civilian institutions, military systems are characterised by rigid hierarchies, collectivist identity, extreme role demands, and high-stakes consequences (Newton & Brenner-Beck, 2022; Heward et al., 2024). Commitment in this context extends beyond contractual obligation, becoming deeply intertwined with loyalty, obedience, moral duty, and identity as a service member (Connor et al., 2019). High organisational commitment among military personnel has been linked to unit cohesion, perseverance under stress, and adherence to command structures in both training and operational environments (Sherman & Lucier-Greer, 2024). In such contexts, commitment is not merely a desirable employee attitude but a foundational psychological resource that sustains performance, discipline, and resilience under sustained pressure.

Conceptually, organisational commitment reflects the degree to which individuals internalise organisational values and integrate their membership into their self-concept (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment captures emotional bonding to the institution, normative commitment reflects moral obligation to remain, while continuance commitment is shaped by perceived costs associated with leaving (Jaros, 1997). Collectively, organisational commitment refers to the extent to which individuals feel emotionally connected to, identify with, and actively participate in their organisation (Nor et al., 2025; Nor & Hazira, 2024). In military cadets, these components develop early during institutional socialisation, where identity formation, professional values, and perceptions of personal competence converge with institutional expectations. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that shape commitment at this formative stage is therefore critical for long-term force readiness and institutional sustainability.

One dispositional factor that may play a particularly important role in shaping organisational commitment is locus of control. Originally conceptualised by Julian Rotter

(1966), locus of control refers to individuals' generalised beliefs about whether life outcomes are determined by their own actions (internal locus of control) or by external forces such as fate, luck, or authority (external locus of control). Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to perceive themselves as active agents in shaping their performance and life outcomes, whereas those with an external locus of control are more likely to attribute success or failure to factors beyond personal control. In structured and demanding environments such as military training, these control beliefs may critically influence how cadets interpret responsibility, authority, success, and failure (Simonton & Garn, 2020). Cadets with a stronger internal locus of control may be more inclined to take ownership of their role, persist through difficulty, and internalise institutional values, thereby strengthening organisational commitment (Salamanca et al., 2020). Conversely, a predominantly external locus of control may foster psychological detachment, passivity, or compliance without genuine identification with the institution.

Beyond dispositional control beliefs, motivational processes grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) also offer a powerful framework for understanding how organisational commitment develops. According to SDT, optimal psychological functioning and internalisation of values are driven by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy reflects the experience of volition and psychological freedom, competence refers to feelings of effectiveness and mastery, and relatedness captures the sense of belonging and social connection (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When these needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to internalise external regulations, align personal goals with institutional values, and develop stable forms of intrinsic and integrated motivation. In contrast, chronic frustration of these needs undermines psychological integration, leading to controlled motivation, disengagement, or alienation (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Warburton et al., 2019; Tindall & Curtis, 2019).

This study engages with a central debate in contemporary social science regarding the primary drivers of institutional allegiance: dispositional factors, such as locus of control (Rotter, 1966), versus universal motivational processes outlined in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It investigates this tension within the critical, high-control context of military training, addressing the specific research problem of how these factors interact to predict organisational commitment in an environment where personal agency is formally subordinate to authority. The military academy serves as a compelling "stress test" for SDT, examining whether the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness can transcend rigid structures to foster genuine internalisation and loyalty.

In addition, current study directly engages with a growing body of research examining the psychological underpinnings of institutional commitment within high-control environments. Recent empirical work in military psychology has underscored the critical role of basic psychological need satisfaction in promoting resilience and unit cohesion (Lepinoy et al., 2021; Sherman & Lucier-Greer, 2024). Simultaneously, organisational research continues to investigate locus of control as a dispositional predictors of engagement, though with mixed results in structures settings (Rani et al., 2025; Tripathi et al., 2021). However, these lines of inquiry have remained largely parallel. This study addresses a key gap by integrating these perspective to examine whether commitment in military academics is driven more strongly

by universal motivational processes (as per SDT) or by stable dispositional traits - a tension highlighted in recent theoretical debates (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Van Den Broeck et al., 2016).

Hence, the present study investigates locus of control and satisfaction of basic psychological needs as predictors of organisational commitment among military cadets at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM). By integrating dispositional control beliefs with motivational processes derived from SDT, this study seeks to advance theoretical understanding of commitment formation in high-discipline institutional settings while offering practical insights for strengthening psychological readiness, institutional identification, and long-term retention within military training systems.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of locus of control (internal, powerful others, and chance) and satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) on organisational commitment. Data were collected from 887 trainee cadets enrolled at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure the sample consisted exclusively of individuals undergoing structured military training. The study received formal ethical approval and institutional support, including an official collaboration letter from the Ministry of Defence Malaysia granting access to the military training centre.

This study received ethical approval from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Medical Research Ethics Committee (Reference: UKM PPI/111/8/JEP-2023-100). Funding was provided by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2022/SS09/UKM/03/2).

Data collection took place in a controlled and supervised environment at the training facility. Cadets were allocated one hour to complete the self-administered questionnaires. To optimise data quality and minimise respondent fatigue, participants were explicitly assured of their right to request clarification on any questionnaire item, and short breaks were allowed when necessary.

Participant

A total 887 participants completed the questionnaire and the majority of them are male (801, 90.30%), Islam (809, 92.24%), and had Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) (879, 99.10%), that equivalent to General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level of GCSE).

Table 1

Demographic information

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	801	90.30
	Female	86	9.70
Religion	Islam	809	92.24
	Hindu	16	1.82
	Buddha	23	2.63
	Christian	29	3.31
Educational Background	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	879	99.10
	Diploma/Sijil	6	0.68
	Matrikulasi/Asasi/STPM/STAM	2	0.22

Measurements

Trainee cadets' locus of control were assessed using Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1992). This scale evaluates individual beliefs about jobs in general, and has three dimensions: internal locus of control (outcomes are contingent on one's own effort, ability, and decisions); powerful others locus of control (outcomes are determined by influential people such as supervisors or managers); and chance locus of control (outcomes depend on luck, fate, or random events). It consist of 16 items uses a 6-point Likert responses format from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Examples of this scale include "A job is what you make of it" (internal locus of control), "Promotions depend on who you know" (powerful others locus of control), and "Getting the job you want is mostly luck" (chance locus of control).

Cadets' basic psychological needs were measured using the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015). This scale assesses both the satisfaction and frustration of the three fundamental psychological needs outlined in Self-Determination Theory: autonomy (feeling volitional and authentic in actions), competence (feeling capable and effective), and relatedness (feeling connected and cared for). In consist of 24 items rated on 5-Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (completely true). Examples of satisfaction items include "I feel confident that I can do things well" (competence satisfaction) and "I feel that my decisions reflect what I really want" (autonomy satisfaction). Frustration items include "I feel pressured to do too many things" (autonomy frustration) and "I feel excluded from the group I want to belong to" (relatedness frustration).

Trainee cadets' levels of organisational commitment were assessed using the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). This instrument evaluates the extent to which individuals are psychologically attached to and involved with their organisation. It consists of 15 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Sample items include "I feel very little loyalty to this organization" (reverse-scored) and "I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined".

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data, while inferential analyses examined relationships and predictive effects

among variables. Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to assess bivariate associations. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive influence of basic psychological needs and organisational commitment on training self-efficacy and motivation to learn. The criterion for statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Result

The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of locus of control (internal, powerful others and chance) and basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) on organisational commitment among military trainee cadets at UPNM. Correlation analyses will be presented first, followed by multiple regression.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the three dimensions of locus of control, the three basic psychological needs, and organisational commitment. All independent variables were significantly associated with organisational commitment ($p < .001$). Specifically, internal locus of control was positively correlated with organisational commitment ($r(885) = .27, p < .001$), whereas powerful others locus of control ($r(885) = -.19, p < .001$) and chance locus of control ($r(885) = -.18, p < .001$) showed significant negative correlations. Regarding basic psychological needs, all three dimensions exhibited strong positive correlations with organisational commitment: autonomy ($r(885) = .61, p < .001$), competence ($r(885) = .52, p < .001$), and relatedness ($r(885) = .56, p < .001$). Complete intercorrelation results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation analysis between locus of control, basic psychological needs and organisational commitment

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Locus of Control						
Internal (1)	1					
Powerful Others (2)	.424**	1				
Chance (3)	.390**	.754**	1			
Basic Psychology Need						
Autonomy (4)	.251**	-.288**	-.279**	1		
Competence (5)	.233**	-.219**	-.284**	.561**	1	
Relatedness (6)	.327**	-.222**	-.240**	.592**	.559**	1
Organisational Commitment (7)	.296**	-.190**	-.184**	.609**	.523**	.555**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the three dimensions of locus of control (internal, powerful others, and chance) and the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) predicted organisational commitment among trainee cadets. The full model was statistically significant, $F(6, 880) = 125.38, p < .001$, and explained 46.1% of the variance in organisational commitment ($R^2 = .461$, adjusted $R^2 = .457$). In the final model, autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .34, p < .001$), followed by relatedness ($\beta = .20, p < .001$), competence ($\beta = .18, p < .001$), and internal locus of control ($\beta = .13, p < .001$). Neither powerful others nor chance locus of

control contributed significant unique variance ($p > .05$). Detailed results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Results Predicting Organisational Commitment

Variable	Organisational Commitment		
	SE β	t	p
Locus of Control			
Internal	.130	3.953	.000
Powerful Others	-.076	-1.896	.058
Chance	.016	.404	.686
Basic Psychology Need			
Autonomy	.342	10.125	.000
Competence	.180	5.541	.000
Relatedness	.196	5.747	.000
R ²	0.461		
F (df)	F (6, 880) = 125.379		.000

Discussion

This study examined the roles of locus of control and basic psychological need satisfaction in shaping organisational commitment among military trainee cadets. The findings provide both theoretically consistent and contextually nuanced insights into how psychological attachment to the military institution develops within a rigid, high-discipline training environment.

The most robust predictors of organisational commitment were the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. This pattern reinforces the central position of need satisfaction proposed by Self-Determination Theory, which posits that commitment and value internalisation emerge when individuals experience psychological ownership over their actions, a sense of effectiveness, and meaningful social connection (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Sánchez-Oliva et al., 2020); Van Den Broeck et al., 2016). Among these needs, autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor of commitment. Although military training is structurally restrictive, this finding suggests that autonomy in this context is not defined by freedom of choice in behaviour, but rather by the experience of internal endorsement of externally imposed demands. When cadets perceive that their training goals align with their personal values and identity as future officers, discipline becomes internalised rather than merely endured (Blagin et al., 2022). This form of internalised regulation echoes the process of integrated motivation described by Deci and Ryan, whereby external expectations are experienced as self-relevant and self-endorsed.

Relatedness also emerged as a strong predictor of organisational commitment, reflecting the deeply collective nature of military socialisation. Cadets train in tightly bonded units, rely on peer cohesion for endurance under stress, and form shared identities through hardship (Khoronko et al., 2020; Orme & Kehoe, 2019). In such contexts, the institution is experienced not merely as an organisation, but as a social system of belonging. Commitment

thus becomes embedded in interpersonal loyalty as much as in institutional loyalty. This finding aligns with the collectivist structure of military culture, where shared identity and group cohesion are critical psychological resources for perseverance (Schofield, 2023; Miller et al., 2021).

Competence further contributed significantly to organisational commitment, highlighting that cadets who perceive themselves as effective and capable are more likely to internalise their military role and future professional identity (Van Den Brink & Loyens, 2024; Markeliené, 2016). In training environments where performance is highly visible and continuously evaluated, competence functions not only as a psychological need but also as a marker of legitimacy and future status within the military hierarchy (Salomé & Thomas, 2024; Lepinoy et al., 2021; Schnüriger, 2013). Successful performance affirms one's place in the system, reinforcing both personal confidence and institutional identification.

Beyond motivational processes, internal locus of control retained a smaller but significant predictive role. This suggests that cadets who believe they can influence outcomes through their own effort are more likely to assume psychological ownership of their training trajectory and future career (Rani et al., 2025). However, the comparatively weaker contribution of internal locus of control relative to psychological needs indicates that control beliefs alone are insufficient to sustain commitment without concurrent motivational fulfilment (Rosari & Mujib, 2023; Matias et al., 2025). In this sense, dispositional control appears to operate through, rather than independently of, need-based internalisation processes.

In contrast, powerful others and chance locus of control did not emerge as significant predictors of organisational commitment. While both were negatively correlated with commitment at the bivariate level, their effects disappeared in the multivariate model. This non-significance is theoretically meaningful rather than anomalous. In military institutions, external control by authority figures is structurally normative and inescapable (Ducheine et al., 2010). Cadets are trained to operate under directive command and Multiple power. As a result, attributing outcomes to superiors does not necessarily undermine psychological attachment, because such power structures are already expected and legitimised (Ahn et al., 2025; Fedoseeva et al., 2019). Similarly, chance beliefs lose psychological relevance in highly rule-governed, performance-contingent environments where outcomes are systematically linked to discipline, endurance, and compliance rather than randomness (Hefer & Dreisbach, 2019). Once psychological need satisfaction is accounted for, these externalised control beliefs no longer explain unique variance in commitment, underscoring the dominance of motivational internalisation over attributional style.

Taken together, these findings suggest that organisational commitment in military cadets is not primarily sustained through fear of authority, rigid discipline, or perceived lack of alternatives, but through the internalisation of military values via fulfilled psychological needs. Commitment in this context is therefore not merely compliance-based but motivationally grounded. This interpretation is consistent with the three-component framework of commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen, particularly the affective and normative dimensions, which are shaped through emotional bonding and internalised obligation rather than external constraint.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the predictive roles of locus of control and basic psychological need satisfaction on organisational commitment among military trainee cadets. The findings provide clear evidence that motivational processes grounded in Self-Determination Theory play a substantially stronger role in shaping organisational commitment than dispositional control beliefs alone. Specifically, autonomy, relatedness, and competence emerged as the most robust predictors of commitment, jointly explaining a large proportion of variance in cadets' psychological attachment to their institution. Among the locus of control dimensions, only internal locus of control contributed unique explanatory power, while powerful others and chance did not retain significance once psychological needs were accounted for.

These results underscore that organisational commitment in military training is not merely a function of external discipline, structural authority, or perceived constraints, but is deeply rooted in the extent to which cadets experience psychological ownership over their actions, feel competent in their developing roles, and perceive strong social bonds within their unit. Even within a rigid and Multiple system, autonomy remains a central psychological driver of internalisation and sustained institutional identification.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the application of Self-Determination Theory in high-control organisational environments by demonstrating that basic psychological needs remain foundational mechanisms of commitment formation even under strict authority and standardised training regimens. Dispositional beliefs about control appear to exert their influence on commitment primarily through these motivational processes rather than operating as independent determinants.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that efforts to strengthen organisational commitment among military cadets should prioritise autonomy-supportive leadership practices, structured competence feedback, and deliberate cultivation of peer cohesion. Such approaches may enhance not only short-term engagement during training but also long-term psychological attachment to the institution, with implications for performance, resilience, and retention.

In sum, the present study highlights that sustainable organisational commitment in military training is best understood as a product of motivational internalisation rather than mere compliance with authority. By centring psychological need satisfaction as the core driver of commitment, this research offers a more nuanced and developmentally grounded pathway for strengthening institutional capacity in demanding high-discipline contexts.

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