



Organizational Citizenship Behavior of Special Forces in the ROK Army

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Abstract

The unconventional nature of the working environments and tasks of the ROK Army Special Forces (“Special Forces”), as compared to regular army forces, means that Special Forces’ organizational performance is largely influenced by their behavioral patterns and mindset. This study examines the organizational citizenship behavior of Special Forces to enhance their organizational performance. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate the causal path of organizational citizenship behavior and its factors, self-leadership, and trust in the supervisor. Data was collected from Special Forces based in the Seoul metropolitan area during a two-month period, from June to July 2013. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed, of which 647 were returned. Using 638 questionnaires, excluding those that were unresponsive or filled out incompletely, frequency analysis, reliability and factor analysis, correlation analysis, and path analysis were performed using the SPSS 19.0 and AMOS 19.0 software packages. The results showed that Special Forces’ self-leadership had a significant effect on trust in the supervisor and organizational citizenship behavior, and trust in the supervisor had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Accordingly, this study posits that to enhance Special Forces’ organizational citizenship behavior, it is important to strengthen their self-leadership and trust in the supervisor.

Keywords: ROK army special forces, Self-leadership, Trust in the supervisor, Organizational citizenship behavior, Mediating effect.



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1. Introduction

Changes in the domestic and international security environments and innovation in scientific technology expedited the enactment of South Korea's Defense Reform in December 2006, signaling the organization's desire to take radical steps to respond more effectively to the changing nature of warfare. Specifically, the South Korean defense organization sought to adopt a low-cost, high-efficiency defense management system and to restructure the military, from one that is manpower-heavy to a streamlined yet information-driven organization powered by cutting edge technology. Such reform measures have changed the perception of the military from an organization that demands unilateral personal commitment to a professional organization that fosters the capability and development of its personnel.

Human resources must be managed effectively to achieve these changes. Given the military's pyramid chain of command and control structure, it is especially vital to apply efficient human resources management at every phase. Unlike civilian employees, members of the armed forces have a duty to protect their country and fellow countrymen, posing extreme mental and physical challenges. For the ROK Army Special Forces (hereafter "Special Forces"), the context and the specifics of their tasks, such as workplace characteristics and isolation from society, elevate the significance of each member's behavioral patterns and mindset (Turnipseed and Murkison, 2000). Thus, interactive and multi-directional human resources management must be in operation for Special Forces to function effectively.

Recent studies have underscored the importance of organizational citizenship behavior in empowering Special Forces as well as the larger military organization (Ehrhart *et al.*, 2006; Loyd, 2011). Organizational citizenship behavior is a discretionary behavior that goes beyond the delineated job requirements, which the formal reward system does not recognize. Voluntary assistance to co-workers, courtesy and civility, and commitment to the organization are behavioral patterns that fit the definition of organization citizenship behavior (Smith *et al.*, 1983). Organizational citizenship behavior generally inspires other members of the organization to commit to the organization, benefitting the organization. The pyramidal rank structure of a military organization means that at higher levels, there are fewer available positions, creating excessive competition that negatively impacts organizational citizenship behavior, decreasing individual and overall commitment to the organization. Lee (2012) highlights the anxiety felt by long-serving military personnel who have hit a career plateau, as perceived employability based on their military experience is low.

This study examines the organizational citizenship behavior of Special Forces. It can be argued that Special Forces' unconventional warfare and missions mean that the behavioral patterns and mindset of these individuals, compared to those of regular armed forces, have a greater effect on the organization. For instance, because they must remain alert and maneuver under uncertain circumstances, the anxiety level and threat to life are extreme. More research is needed on Special Forces' behavioral patterns and how they affect the individual members and the organization itself. Demonstrating this gap in the literature, Kim (2008)'s study is the only one to date; however, the methodology used only allows a forecast of the factors. This study goes beyond his study and demonstrates the paths between the forecasted factors.

As such, this study examines Special Forces' organizational citizenship behavior in the context of self-leadership and trust in the supervisor, arguably the two most important variables of organizational citizenship behavior. This study seeks to investigate the causal path of self-leadership and trust in the supervisor.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Special Forces and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Special Forces carry out unconventional tasks that generally require a heightened alertness level. In practice, they are tasked with different missions from regular military units. In peacetime, Special Forces conduct counter-terrorism and disaster recovery operations, as well as support major national ceremonies, among other tasks. Wartime requires Special Forces to engage in missions such as infiltrating enemy rear areas and hitting strategic targets in unpredictable battlefield situations (Nam, 2009). Because Special Forces were established to carry out exceptional and uncertain tasks, the mindset and the behavioral patterns of the members may greatly affect the mission's outcome. It must be noted that the level of collaboration between special forces members increases the probability of potential problems, such as fear and a clash of values, but also enhances the probability of resolution if approached and worked through properly, thereby benefitting the organization.

Organizational citizenship behavior is defined as a discretionary individual behavior that goes beyond the job requirement and benefits the organization, without being acknowledged by the reward system (Yoon, 2012). There are many factors leading to good citizenship behavior. Ancient political philosophers posited that responsible citizenship behavior is a balance of obedience, loyalty, and participation (Cary, 1977). Smith *et al.* (1983) who first introduced the term organizational citizenship behavior, differentiated beneficial behaviors from general compliance behaviors. Organ (1988) makes a further differentiation, including altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. This study uses Organ (1988)'s five differentiations, except courtesy and civic duty. The term courtesy is not used because it overlaps with, and is a subset of, altruism. Civic duty as delineated by Organ (1988) is also not used in this study to avoid any unintended confusion, for those surveyed carry out national security-related tasks adhering strictly to military rules and regulations. Civic duty as defined by Organ (1988) is a behavior characterized by an active and voluntary participation in the organization stemming from an intense interest in the life and matters of the organization. Because Special Forces carry out their missions in accordance with orders, using civic duty in the context of Special Forces can be misleading, and yield confusing and inaccurate results.

2.2. Self-Leadership, Trust in the Supervisor and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Currently, public and private organizations seek efficient employee management through lifting morale and meeting needs based on the principle of autonomy (i.e., self-control and discretionary participation). When organization members recognize the importance of the "self," overlooked in the past, and exercise self-leadership,

external and internal motivations interact to meet the organization's goals.

In the past, organizations were fundamentally results-oriented, based on a one-dimensional perspective, which fostered a speed and results-centered organizational climate, which effectively lessened morale and job satisfaction and alienated members, (i.e., employees). However, a modern organization requires a different type of organizational structure and climate. The ability to demonstrate a high level of independence, self-reliance, and self-trust is highly regarded. As such, the principle of self-leadership was introduced and paved the way for action and cognitive strategies that allowed subordinates to take a self-leadership role.

Manz (1986) posited that self-leadership goes beyond empowerment and participatory value, and is about leading oneself by practicing self-control built on self and norm assessment. Accordingly, self-leadership can be differentiated into behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies (Prussia et al., 1998). Behavior-focused strategies develop one's behavioral patterns through a process of self-analysis. Natural reward strategies involve differentiating tasks that one can concentrate on easily from others, then making the necessary changes to enhance the performance of all tasks. Constructive thought pattern strategies (Prussia et al., 1998) involve changing one's thought patterns using self-talk, visions of success, and anchoring oneself in a belief system.

Self-leadership is related to extroversion, sincerity, and diligence. As such, one who practices self-leadership at an advanced level through constructive thinking increases positive emotions and optimism, as well as self-efficacy, resulting in an extroverted disposition. Furthermore, an extroverted member has good interpersonal relations, and displays a positive behavioral pattern even when required to perform tasks beyond the delineated job responsibilities. These displays indicate commitment to the organization, and are connected to organizational citizenship behavior (Chang, 2011).

Organ (1988) defined organizational citizenship behavior as individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes effective organizational functioning. As such, although immediate reward is not recognized for organizational citizenship behavior, repetition of such behavior could positively affect the organization in the long-term.

Self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior have a common ground, in that a discretionary behavior affects mid- to long-term organizational achievement. As such, it appears to make sense to study the two together. However, this study focuses on the members of Special Forces, and therefore, trust in the supervisor, along with self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior is examined. This organization functions as a clear hierarchical system based on loyalty to the supervisor, so the influence on the member's thought patterns and actions must be considered. Trust in the supervisor can positively affect the members' thought patterns, resulting in a boost in morale and discretionary behavior that increases the organization's effectiveness. Further, a subordinate's cognitive trust in the supervisor affects organizational citizenship behavior, with a study finding that certain causes of this trust may have a mediating effect (Organ, 1988). In this study, a causal path is used to examine the effect self-leadership has on organizational citizenship behavior, based on the hypothesis that trust in the supervisor is a mediating factor in the relationship.

According to research conducted by Koh et al. (2011) in which survey data was collected from medical institution employees similar to the one distributed to special forces in this study, the results showed that self-leadership and trust in the supervisor affected organizational citizenship behavior; and trust in the supervisor has a mediating effect on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. This study seeks to understand whether data from Special Forces differs from data from the employees of medical institutions, which are civilian organizations. Kim (2013) conducted a study on the relationship of self-leadership, trust in the supervisor, and organizational citizenship behavior with respect to Special Forces. However, the causal path in that study was investigated using multiple regression analysis, and therefore exogenous variables could not be controlled. Thus, this study seeks to address the limitations of this research method by using path analysis to examine whether the structural model is applicable.

3. Method

3.1. Hypothesis

This study seeks to investigate the causal path of the factors and variables that affect Special Forces members' organizational citizenship behavior. The research model is based on the hypothesis that trust in the supervisor has a mediating effect on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

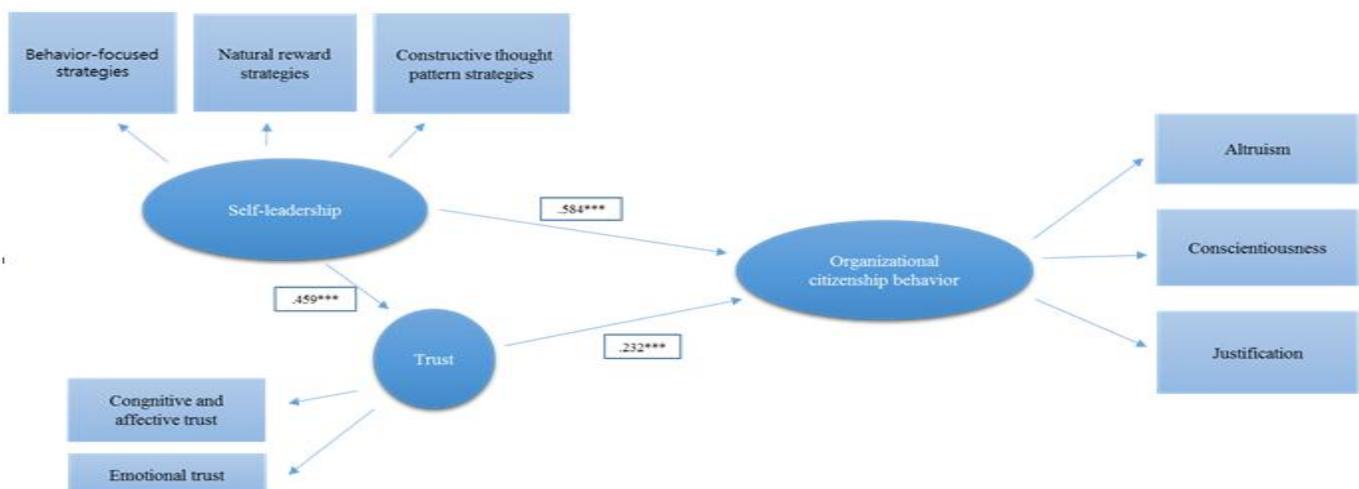


Figure-1. Route model

Hypothesis 1. Special Forces' self-leadership has a positive effect on trust in the supervisor.

Hypothesis 2. Special Forces' self-leadership has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

Hypothesis 3. Special Forces' self-leadership and trust in the supervisor have a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

3.2. Sample

To conduct this study, data were obtained from Special Forces members working in the Seoul metropolitan area during a two-month period, from June 1 to July 31, 2013. For this study, existing research and expert advice shaped the questions in the survey and judgment sampling was used to select the respondents. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed, of which 647 were returned, and 638 questionnaires were analyzed, excluding those that were unresponsive or filled out incompletely.

The characteristics of the sample deserving the most attention are that the respondents' years of service were relatively low, and they were low-ranking, mirroring the organization's pyramid structure. Years of service was grouped into two sections, more than five years and less than five years, as most of the members served four years and 3 months on average. Data show that 473 respondents (68.5%) served less than 5 years, and 201 respondents (31.5%) served more than 5 years. As for the military ranking, most were staff sergeants (47.6%); the higher the rank, the lower the frequency among the respondents, further reflecting the organization structure. There was correlation between rank and income.

3.3. Measures

Organizational citizenship behavior was measured based on a 16-item scale developed by Bateman and Organ (1983), Podsakoff *et al.* (1997), and MacKenzie *et al.* (1991), using details from studies by Kim (2007). This study takes altruism, when one helps fellow members facing hardship; conscientiousness, when one voluntarily carries out the minimum level of tasks required by the organization; and justification, when one carries out the tasks of the organization without complaint as the subset of organizational citizenship behavior.

Self-leadership was measured using a method based on Manz and Sims (1991) and Prussia *et al.* (1998). In this study, the subset of self-leadership includes behavior-focused strategies, making changes through self-observation and self-analysis; natural reward strategies, exercising discretionary control and respect toward oneself; and constructive thought pattern strategies, solidifying and drawing from effective thought patterns.

Trust in the supervisor was measured using a method based on a survey influenced by Lewis and Weigert (1985). Depending on situations and conditions, trust in the supervisor was classified as cognitive trust, relating to the issue of reliability; or emotional trust, relating to the emotional interaction with the supervisors.

The responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale. For every subset variable, the respondents could choose between five choices: "strongly disagree" (1 point); "somewhat disagree" (2 points); "neutral" (3 points); "somewhat agree" (4 points); "strongly agree" (5 points).

In general, the higher the Cronbach's α coefficient value, the higher the reliability of the measuring instrument. While there is no agreement as to the minimum value required to pass the reliability test, 0.6 is generally accepted in the social sciences (Lin *et al.*, 2006), and hence in this study as well. Upon completion of the reliability test, the validity of the factors was assessed to test their theoretical and empirical properties.

The reliability of survey questions on organizational citizenship behavior, self-leadership, and trust in the supervisor all had a Cronbach's α value greater than 0.7. Factor analysis yielded a factor loading greater than 0.4, demonstrating that their respective subsets are all good fits for this study.

3.4. Analysis

The SPSS 19.0 and AMOS 19.0 software packages were used to analyze the collected data. A reliability test was used to calculate Cronbach's α , which measures the reliability of the variable. Then, factor analysis was used to evaluate the validity. Subsequently, a correlation analysis examined the correlation between the variables, and path analysis used to study the causation path.

4. Results

Prior to conducting the hypothesis test, descriptive statistics were compiled and a correlation analysis carried out to assess the classification of and the relationship between the variables. Descriptive statistics show that the average values for altruism and validity were greater than 4.0, indicating that Special Forces exhibited a high level of organizational citizenship behavior. Special Forces' conscientiousness yielded a value of 3.74, higher than the 3.0 median, but lower than the values for altruism and justification. For the self-leadership variables, both behavior-focused strategies and natural reward strategies had a value greater than 4.0, though the value for constructive thought pattern strategies was comparatively lower, at 3.94. For trust in the supervisor, the value for cognitive and affective trust was 3.91, and the value for emotional trust was 3.76, both of which were above the 3.0 median. The values of the trust in the supervisor variables were lower than the values of the variables for both organizational citizenship behavior and self-leadership.

A Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between ± 1.0 and ± 0.7 indicates a strong linear relationship; r between ± 0.3 and ± 0.7 indicates a moderate linear relationship; and r between ± 0.1 and ± 0.3 indicates a weak linear relationship. If r falls between -0.1 and $+0.1$, then this linear relationship is deemed unusable. Further, if the correlation is greater than ± 8 , then multicollinearity may be a factor. The findings in this study show that the correlation coefficient does not indicate a correlation exceeding 0.7, satisfying the discriminatory validity.

Table-1. Bivariate correlation matrix for variables

| Variable | Self-leadership | | | Trust in the supervisor | | Organizational Citizenship Behavior | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1. Behavior-focused strategies | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 2. Natural reward strategies | .559* | 1 | | | | | | |
| 3. Const thought pattern strat | .569* | .534* | 1 | | | | | |
| 4. Cog and aff trust | .272* | .248* | .223* | 1 | | | | |
| 5. Emotional trust | .247* | .248* | .234* | .674* | 1 | | | |
| 6. Altruism | .452* | .458* | .416* | .384* | .351* | 1 | | |
| 7. Conscientiousness | .308* | .348* | .301* | .213* | .178* | .443* | 1 | |
| 8. Justification | .299* | .411* | .288* | .327* | .269* | .463* | .543* | 1 |

* p<.05, two-tailed.

Path analysis was used to test the hypothesis, using the variables that passed the reliability and validity tests. The results of the route model based on the research model, which examined the mediating effect trust in the supervisor had on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, are as follows.

The goodness-of-fit of the research model (Chi-square = (76.904), $p = 0.000$, GFI = (.969), NFI = (.957), IFI = (.966), TLI = (.943), CFI = (.966), RMSEA = (.074)) indicates that the goodness-of-fit of the route model is reasonable. Though the CMIN value rejected the null hypothesis because it is a value that is highly sensitive to the sample size, the model was tested with the RMSEA value, developed to overcome the limitations of large sample sizes. The result was less than .08, and therefore sufficient to assess the model by other fit indexes.

First, the path coefficients show that self-leadership (coefficient = .459, $t=7.342$, $p<0.001$) has a significant effect on trust in the supervisor. Self-leadership also has a statistically significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior (coefficient = .584, $t = 10.723$, $p = 0.001$). Second, trust in the supervisor (coefficient = .232, $t = 5.772$, $p < 0.001$) has a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

Finally, a comparison of the independent and dependent variables within the direct effect model and the mediated effect model shows a decline in the explanatory power of the mediated effect model, indicating a partial mediated effect.

Table-2. Route coefficient

| Route | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R.(t) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|------|-----------|
| Trust | <- Self-leadership | .459 | .063 | 7.342*** |
| Org citizenship behavior | <- Self-leadership | .584 | .054 | 10.723*** |
| Org citizenship behavior | <- Trust | .232 | .040 | 5.772*** |

*** p<.001, two-tailed.

To test the mediated effect of trust in the supervisor, direct and indirect effects were analyzed. The results showed a reliability value of .106 ($p<0.001$), indicating that trust in the supervisor has a mediating effect on self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. The bootstrap method was used to test the significance of this indirect effect, yielding a value less than .05, indicating that the value was significant. Trust in the supervisor has a partial mediated effect on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

Table-3. Effects of variable

| Route | | Direct effect | Indirect effect | Total effect |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Self-leadership | Trust | .459*** | | .459*** |
| Self-leadership | Org citizenship behavior | .584*** | .106*** | .690*** |
| Trust | Org citizenship behavior | .232*** | | .232*** |

*** p<.001, two-tailed.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned above, the unconventional nature of the Special Forces' environment and missions means that their behavioral patterns and mindset have a bigger effect on the organization, compared to those of regular armed forces. This study examines Special Forces' organizational citizenship behavior, a discretionary behavioral pattern, toward other members of the organization and the organization itself. Causal path was used to examine the variables of self-leadership and trust in the supervisor, providing the following results.

First, the examination of key variables showed that most lie above the median, yielding a high value. However, conscientiousness yielded a lower value than altruism and validity, indicating that the framework of the Special Forces command chain leaves little room for carrying out voluntary actions. Regarding self-leadership, the value for constructive thought pattern strategies was lower than values for behavior focused strategies and natural reward strategies, demonstrating that the chain of command restrains the members' constructive thought pattern and behavior focused strategies. In a study by Ro (2013), the degree of difference between the variables of organizational citizenship behavior and other variables was limited. Such findings highlight the difference between the mindset and behavioral patterns of Special Forces and those of regular military forces, which are rooted in the differences in the working environments and characteristics of tasks involved. These findings demonstrate the need for separate studies on Special Forces and regular military forces.

Second, the route coefficient showed that self-leadership had a significant effect on both trust in the supervisor

and organizational citizenship behavior. Further, trust in the supervisor had a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior, signifying that all route coefficients used to test the hypothesis were statistically significant. In other words, self-leadership positively affects trust in the supervisor and organizational citizenship behavior, and trust in the supervisor had a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior. As such, strengthening the self-leadership factors would positively affect Special Forces' mindset toward the organization and have a significant effect on trust in the supervisor. Such findings reinforce results from previous studies (Choi, 2012) on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as confirming that the factors affecting organizational citizenship behavior are self-leadership and trust in the supervisor. These studies shared a common ground in that they examined organizations driven and operated by human resources, making the differences in the type of organization, i.e., private or public, less relevant in examining this subject matter. Further, Kim (2013)'s study, also based on data from Special Forces, offers partial support, which strengthens the case that self-leadership and trust in the supervisor play a significant role in enhancing Special Forces' organizational citizenship behavior.

Third, trust in the supervisor has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. In fact, self-leadership has a direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior and affects organizational citizenship behavior through trust in the relationship. This means that as the level of self-leadership increases, the level of trust in the supervisor increases, effectively enhancing the discretionary behavioral pattern toward the organization. Koh *et al.* (2011) studied the same subject matter, though focused on medical institution employees, finding that self-leadership had a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior through trust in the supervisor. The study also found that trust in the supervisor had a partial mediating effect on organizational citizenship behavior, which is supported by this study. Further, Jeong (2009)'s study, which focused on employees of private institutions, showed that trust in the supervisor had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between the interplay between supervisor and subordinates and their job satisfaction, which highlighted the significant effect trust in the supervisor had on the mindset and attitude of the members of the organization. Though this study takes place within a different context and has unique characteristics, the fact that it is an organization powered by human resources means that trust in the supervisor has a significant effect on discretionary mindset and behavioral patterns, such as self-leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

In conclusion, the unique demands placed on Special Forces is immense, including elevated awareness and concentration when responding to unforeseen situations, so their organizational citizenship behavior and mindset play a pivotal role. A multi-layered approach to nurturing the factors that enhance organizational citizenship behavior will empower Special Forces to effectively demonstrate discretionary behavioral patterns and a positive attitude. Furthermore, trust in the supervisor leads to mid-to long-term job satisfaction (Chon and Kim, 2006) which positively affects the organization's operations.

Furthermore, to continuously enhance organizational citizenship behavior, a military-wide effort must be made to establish a systematic human resources management system. Special Forces require investments in developing self-leadership and trust in the supervisor. Given the unconventionally demanding nature of their duties, a distinctive and tailored management system is required.

Finally, collecting data on Special Forces posed challenges because they are tasked with carrying out missions to uphold national security. To overcome these challenges, hypotheses pertaining to corporate structures were adapted to examine the Special Forces organization, as their organizational structure shares certain characteristics of corporate structure. This study is also significant in that the exploratory examination showed that the corporate model of human resources management can be applied to a considerable degree to examine the human resources management of the Special Forces organization.

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