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Learning the Ropes: The Protective Role of Mentoring in Correctional Police Officers' Socialization Process



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Formal mentoring is an individualized and contextualized socialization tactic to enhance newcomers' learning—acknowledged as essential in the early career stage—that can be of particular value when entering a fairly unpredictable and stressful workplace. This research aims to understand the moderating role of formal mentoring in the relationship between organizational socialization and 2 adjustment indicators, a positive 1/2 (commitment) and a negative 1/2 (turnover intention). A questionnaire was administered to 117 correctional police officer newcomers, as prisons are especially critical work contexts for newcomers. The results show a direct effect from both socialization and mentoring on commitment and turnover, and an interaction between socialization and mentoring on turnover, although not on commitment. When the socialization process progresses steadily, both socialization and mentoring contribute to good adjustment, but when traditional tactics go wrong, a different learning source (formal mentoring) exerts a protective function, limiting newcomers' intention to quit. These findings give support to the usefulness of mentoring in a law enforcement context and provide some insight into defining formal mentoring programs.

Keywords: correctional police officers, formal mentoring, socialization, affective commitment, turnover intention

Organizational socialization is the process through which a new employee adapts to the internal life of an organization, developing new skills, knowledge, and values. It can be defined as a process of learning about different domains (e.g., task, role, politics, and relationships) in order to make the environment more predictable

and to build appropriate sense-making frameworks (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Louis, 1980). In the prison context, the socialization process is especially critical for newcomers. First, this context is a professional environment closed to the outside world and characterized by strict privacy and security procedures. Consequently, new employees cannot anticipate their work or fully understand the organizational processes during the presocialization phase (related to the training program), which is not always effective at providing adequate information. Second, given prisons' mission, newcomers must face the expectation that they will have to cope with stressful work conditions, such as role problems, workload, demanding social contacts, and poor social status (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000).

This article investigates the moderating contribution of a specific learning source—formal mentoring—and assumes that mentoring can

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exert a protective role in a poor socialization process, affecting the new agents' degree of affective commitment toward the penitentiary administration and their intention to stay. This research topic is important for several reasons. First, formal mentoring has received less attention than informal practices among teammates have (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Underhill, 2006), and there is little evidence about the effectiveness of formal mentoring in military contexts (Baker, Hocevar, & Johnson, 2003; Hu, Wang, Sun, & Chen, 2008; Johnson & Andersen, 2015). Taking into account the findings of some scholars (Raabe & Beehr, 2003; Ragins et al., 2000; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003), additional research on this type of mentoring and its specific influence on the adjustment process is needed.

Second, the literature has shown that organizational socialization is the main way through which newcomers become effective members of an organization (Saks & Gruman, 2012). Within socialization tactics, theoretical and practical training are the most studied and used practices for enhancing the learning process (Saks & Gruman, 2012). When large organizations hire a large number of newcomers at one time (as happens in the military and bureaucratic organizations), the organizational support for socialization (e.g., training programs) usually takes place at an earlier stage than does entrance to work, and often in a place other than the workplace (e.g., a school or academy). In addition, in accordance with highly formalized structures and rule-based cultures, as prisons are, training is often conceived as a collective and formal tactic for socialization (Jones, 1986). Therefore, it becomes a matter of interest to understand if and how a more individualized and contextualized practice of socialization, such as formal mentoring, interacts with and enhances more standardized socialization processes (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004), particularly in formally oriented work contexts.

All of the socialization programs that organizations activate to enhance their members' learning can be considered when adopting Nonaka's dynamic model as a conceptual framework (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009). This model treats knowledge creation as a continuous dialogue between two types of knowledge—tacit and explicit—which,

through their interaction, define four modes for knowledge conversion. Traditional socialization tactics, formal and standardized, mostly promote the exchange of explicit–explicit knowledge (e.g., lessons), the internalization of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge (e.g., studying, doing protected work experiences), and sometimes the exchange of implicit–implicit knowledge (e.g., observation of work activities during this stage, knowledge sharing among coworkers). Formal mentoring can be considered a way to implement the fourth mode of knowledge creation: the externalization of implicit knowledge (from tacit to explicit) by means of reflexive practices and sense-making processes. In fact, the main function of mentoring is to connect the abstract notions acquired during preentry training to daily work practices in the new professional and relational contexts and to define the newcomer's role interpretation within the specific context. According to Nonaka (1994), new knowledge is the outcome of a dynamic, circular process that takes place when the organization activates all four modes of knowledge conversion. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate what happens when a new mode of knowledge creation is enhanced (as in the case of formal mentoring) and what role it plays in interactions with the other modes already implemented. This study intends to fill these gaps by examining the interactive effect of formal mentoring on the relation between organizational socialization and two adjustment indicators (positive indicator: affective commitment; negative indicator: turnover intent) in correctional police officers (CPOs).

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Socialization and Distal Adjustment Indicators

The organizational socialization process can be defined as a learning process motivated by curiosity and driven by exploratory behaviors (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994) through which employees proactively acquire the technical and interpersonal knowledge needed to perform well and to fit into the organization (Ghosh, Reio, & Bang, 2013; Livi, Di Santo, Lo Castro, & Lupardini, 2014; Reio & Wiswell, 2000). Organizations invest in such socialization tactics to support the adjustment

process. Literature widely recognizes that training programs are important vehicles for organizational learning when organizational socialization processes (formal and informal) start and that training programs have a significant impact on new members' organizational attitudes and behavior (e.g., commitment, turnover intent; Bauer & Erdogan, 2012).

For decades, research on organizational socialization has demonstrated its important role in turning newly hired employees into effective, contributing members of their organization (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Saks & Gruman, 2012). The main purposes of organizational socialization are to alleviate emotional vulnerabilities (e.g., job uncertainty, ambiguity, anxiety, stress), strengthen social interaction among new employees and colleagues, and accelerate newcomers' learning and adjustment to the new context (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012). Two recent meta-analytic reviews (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007) and a literature overview (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012) establish that socialization is negatively related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and intention to quit; conversely, it is positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. It has also been found that the greater the effectiveness of socialization, the higher the newcomers' success at modifying their behaviors in organizational settings (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999; Yang, 2008). Socialization effectiveness has been linked to numerous outcomes for employees: learning organizational contents, feelings about job competences, interpersonal quality, job satisfaction, motivation, achievement, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. It not only facilitates newcomers' adjustment and assimilation but can also influence their long-term success and careers (Ashforth et al., 2007).

Similar results have been found in the few studies carried out in military contexts (Atzori, Lombardi, Fraccaroli, Battistelli, & Zaniboni, 2008; Rullo, Livi, & Farinacci, 2015; Spagnoli, Tanucci, & Caetano, 2007; Thomas & Anderson, 1998). In fact, its contribution is especially important in work contexts that are critical for new members' inclusion, such as prisons, which are, by definition, isolated and enclosed environments, with high emotional and human density. Working (and often living) in a prison

requires playing a twofold role that simultaneously imposes custody and control on and support for inmates. Furthermore, this kind of context can be characterized as highly demanding and as presenting stressful work conditions that could induce employees to give frequent consideration to leaving the organization. In light of this, newcomers' socialization processes permit less exposure to some specific strain factors, limiting the risk of burnout and enhancing personal accomplishment (Farnese, Barbieri, Bellò, & Bartone, 2016).

Although both commitment and intention to quit are considered adjustment indicators of the degree of acceptance by insiders (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012), some authors highlight differences between them. For instance, some scholars consider commitment to be a closer outcome that may not result in someone quitting their job (Craig, Allen, Reid, Riemenschneider, & Armstrong, 2013; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Similarly, Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) and Major, Kozlowski, Chao, and Gardner (1995) highlight that organizational commitment may be conceived of as an attitudinal antecedent, whereas turnover intention is characterized as a behavioral consequence. Thus, taking into account the suggestion from the literature that the two socialization outcomes may not be completely alike, we included both in our study.

Organizational commitment is commonly conceptualized as an affective attachment to one's organization, characterized by shared values, a desire to remain in the organization, and a willingness to exert effort on its behalf (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). It measures the relative strength of an individual's identification with, involvement in, and loyalty to a particular organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). In general, most empirical studies on organizational commitment have focused on the affective component, considering it the strongest and most consistent predictor of organizationally desired outcomes, such as employee retention (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). The literature has pointed out that the extent to which newcomers define their role and are accepted by the group influences their level of commitment to the group (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Jones, 1986). Jones (1986) hypothesized

that newcomers experiencing institutionalized tactics (i.e., socialization) were more committed than were those given individualized treatment because the former process involves more structured, information-laden experiences and so presents newcomers with few “problems in searching for situational consistency” (p. 266). Additionally, Lambert, Kelley, and Hogan (2013) have underlined that, in the prison context, effective training and socialization can further increase the correctional staff’s level of affective commitment.

Turnover intention is defined as “the last in a sequence of withdrawal cognitions, a set to which thinking of quitting and intent to search for alternative employment also belong” (Tett & Meyer, 1993, p. 262). When disillusioned, newcomers may feel that another organization could better fulfill their expectations and may consider leaving their current employer (Vandenbergh, Panaccio, Bentein, Mignonac, & Roussel, 2011). Turnover cognitions tend to increase in the months after organizational entry (e.g., Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Although not all turnover intention leads to actual turnover, intention to leave is an important outcome variable. Theoretical reviews have discussed the possibility that turnover results from poor socialization or adjustment (e.g., Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), but few studies in the socialization literature (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) have directly examined turnover (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Turnover intention has a negative effect on organizational effectiveness, because employees with unrealized turnover intentions are likely to engage in other types of withdrawal behavior (Chang, Wang, & Huang, 2013). Therefore, researchers examining the effects of realistic job previews have long emphasized intention to quit as an indicator of newcomers’ adjustment (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Bauer & Erdogan, 2012; Ford, Gibson, DeCesare, March, & Griepentrog, 2013; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Morrison, 2008).

To the best of our knowledge, no research has specifically studied the influence of socialization on commitment and turnover in CPO newcomers. Aiming to confirm the general literature’s suggestions on the relationship of socialization with both outcomes in the security forces context, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Socialization has a direct, positive influence on CPO newcomers’ affective commitment.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Socialization has a direct, negative influence on CPO newcomers’ turnover intent.

Mentoring and Distal Adjustment Indicators

In light of the evident complexity of the prison context, we consider formal mentoring to be an additional learning source capable of helping new CPOs to learn the ropes and build the competencies necessary to fulfill their duties (Gruman & Saks, 2011). In fact, a mentor acts as a socialization agent: He or she expresses organizational attention toward newly hired employees from a key stakeholder, thereby activating a higher engagement in socialization activities and the need to rebalance relationships within the organization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012). Thus, in the prison context, formal mentoring stands as a fundamental strategy for the organization to promote newcomers’ commitment to the organization and to reduce their intention to quit.

Mentoring is defined as an intense, interpersonal exchange between an experienced senior colleague (mentor) and a less experienced one (protégé), in which the mentor provides support and feedback on the protégé’s career plans (Kram, 1985). Organizations seek to encourage informal mentoring or to develop formal mentoring programs inasmuch as mentoring relationships have beneficial impacts on those involved (Ghosh, Reio, & Haynes, 2012). Specifically, formal mentoring can be defined as an organizationally established and sponsored developmental relationship in which a more experienced senior mentor and a less experienced junior protégé are matched for the specified purpose of sharing organizational knowledge and advancing the protégé’s career (Chao, 2009; Noe, 1988; Wanberg et al., 2003), encouraging inclusion and increasing the protégé’s organizational commitment, intention to stay, and job satisfaction (Hall & Smith, 2009; Ragins et al., 2000). For instance, Scandura (1997) found that, for different reasons, all three mentoring functions (career, psychosocial, and role-modeling functions) were significantly related to protégés’ affective organizational com-

mitment. Protégés receiving career development support from mentors may perceive more opportunities for career advancement and be more committed to the organization. In addition, psychosocial support enables protégés to cope better with career-related stress and maintain positive attitudes toward the work setting. Moreover, having mentors as role models helps protégés to become familiarized with organizational values and practices. Two meta-analyses (Allen et al., 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008) have synthesized the mentoring literature concerning the outcomes and benefits of being a protégé for objective and subjective career outcomes. The subjective career outcomes include a favorable affective reaction to the workplace (e.g., job satisfaction) and positive attitudes about one's career (e.g., career satisfaction and commitment). These positive attitudes toward the workplace may facilitate protégés' reciprocation in the form of organizational commitment and intentions to stay within the organization. A more recent meta-analysis (Eby et al., 2013) confirmed that having a good reciprocal relationship with a stable figure, such as a mentor, increases protégés' perceptions of major investment in their skills, which increases their commitment. However, Ragins, Cotton, and Miller (2000) found that the positive outcomes mostly depend on the degree of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, rather than the type of mentor (formal vs. informal) or even the simple presence of a mentoring relationship.

Although mentoring programs are increasingly widespread and are included in training tactics in many different army and security force contexts, research on their value in such contexts is still sparse (Baker et al., 2003). A study of formal mentorships in Taiwan's army highlights that mentoring programs help freshmen cadets adjust to military life (Hu, Wang, Sun, & Chen, 2008). Consistent with previous mentoring research (Allen et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2003), the authors provide empirical evidence indicating the critical role that formal psychosocial mentoring plays in assisting the protégés' commitment to a military career, their higher satisfaction, and reduced stress. In addition, Prevosto (2001) found that mentored army reserve nurses were more satisfied and had a higher intent to stay than did nonmentored nurses. Furthermore, two qualitative studies (Sun et al., 2003; Sun, Wang, & Yu, 2004) suggest that

the quality of the formal mentoring relationship ranks as among the most important factors in the overall adjustment of military students in Taiwan. Through career functions (such as coaching in military tasks), and through psychosocial functions (such as counseling), new cadets quickly learn the ropes and internalize military values. Conversely, in a study of informal mentoring in a naval academy, Baker, Hocevar, and Johnson (2003) found that mentored cadets were more satisfied than were those nonmentored but that they did not differ with respect to performance (grades in academic and military courses) or to military career intentions.

Formal mentors also exert their influence because of their higher position in the work hierarchy, thus representing the organization. For instance, studying turnover intentions in CPOs, Ferdik, Smith, and Applegate (2014) found that job desirability is a relevant factor in reducing the agents' intention to quit and that prison administrators could play a role in making their profession more attractive. A recent longitudinal study of more than 1,000 U.S. Army officers by Payne and Huffman (2005) supports these findings: Career and psychosocial support from mentoring improved protégés' affective and continuous organizational commitment and was negatively related to turnover behavior after 1 year. At the same time, affective commitment partially mediated the negative relationship between mentoring and actual turnover behavior 10 years later; in other words, mentoring reduced turnover by enhancing affective commitment. Payne and Huffman's (2005) results have been supported by another study confirming that psychosocial mentoring positively influenced affective organizational commitment, which, in turn, reduced employees' turnover intentions (Craig et al., 2013).

Taking into account the literature discussed, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Mentor support has a direct, positive influence on CPO newcomers' affective commitment.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Mentor support has a direct, negative influence on CPO newcomers' turnover intent.

Research evidence shows that the traditional organizational socialization tactics and mentoring operate in the same direction in determining

proximal outcomes of the socialization process, conceiving them as specific facets of the broader socialization process. For instance, in Saks and Ashforth's (1997) model, mentoring is included in organizational socialization factors, along with socialization tactics, orientation programs, and training programs. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) also count having a mentor as a learning source, and the literature suggests that these two factors (mentoring and organizational socialization) could interact in determining some outcomes: protégés who have a mentor show greater levels of socialization than do nonmentored newcomers (Bellò, 2011; Chao et al., 1994; Jones, 1986; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993; Thomas & Lankau, 2009; Zahhly & Tosi, 1989). In fact, newcomers with and without a mentor obtained different levels of learning in the six content dimensions of the socialization domain highlighted by Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994). This effect was already visible in the first phase of the organizational socialization process (Burke, 1984; Kram & Hall, 1989).

However, analysis of the general research to date (Allen et al., 2004) does not achieve a full understanding of the conditions in which protégés benefit most from mentorship or whether mentoring could interact significantly with other factors in improving benefits for newcomers. Therefore, the third aim of this article is to examine the moderating effect of formal mentoring support on the relationship between organizational socialization and the two adjustment indicators considered. Specifically, the following hypotheses are advanced.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Mentor support moderates the relation between socialization and commitment, increasing the positive effect of socialization on commitment for those perceived to have had a high level of mentoring support.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Mentor support moderates the relation between socialization and turnover, increasing the effect of socialization on turnover (reduction of the intention to quit) for those perceived to have had a high level of mentoring support.

All the hypotheses are summarized in Figures 1 and 2.

F1-2

Method

Context, Participants, and Procedure

This study is part of a wider research intervention in CPOs' socialization process, conducted by the Training Office of the Italian Ministry of Justice. In Italy, CPOs form the Penitentiary Police Corps, which was founded as a military force in 1817 but which, since 1990, has been a security force with a military order.

Nevertheless, the penitentiary police still maintains strict links with the Italian Army, using the same hierarchical structure, formal organization, and selection criteria: New hires participated in a public competition for all security forces and those selected underwent shared training for the army (see Lo Castro & Livi, 2016). In order to be hired by the penitentiary administration, CPOs must have at least 1 year of previous work experience in the army, participating in field operations (in our sample, from 1 to 7 years of previous experience in the army [mean: 2y9m; SD: 1y4m]). They must then undergo specific penitentiary police training, which is highly standardized and 12 months long.

The project was started to counteract withdrawal phenomena in newcomers (Ferdik et al., 2014; Godlewski & Kline, 2012). To this end,

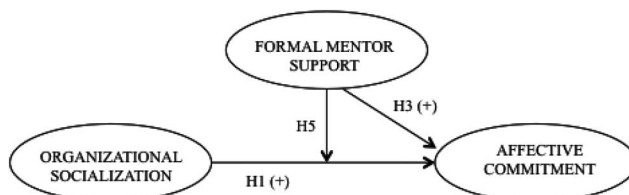


Figure 1. Hypothesized direct and moderating effects of socialization and mentoring on commitment.

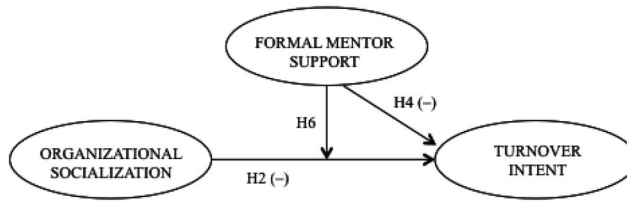


Figure 2. Hypothesized direct and moderating effects of socialization and mentoring on turnover.

the Training Office of the Italian Ministry of Justice introduced a mentoring program to facilitate newcomers' orientation and role adjustment in their early weeks of work. It was implemented in accordance with suggestions from the literature for formal mentoring programs (Chao, 2009; Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Mentors were superintendents or inspectors (but not direct supervisors) trained for the role. Each mentor was assigned to between one and five agents, depending on the newcomers' allocation institute, so no matching process was possible, although ice-breaking activities were established to promote a mutual understanding of role expectations. Mentors received several days of training designed to give them methodological skills, to share good socialization practices, and to define the standardized intervention guidelines to be followed, aimed at reducing variation in personal and contextual factors (Chao, 2009). They were asked to support the newcomers who entered their institution, mainly performing a psychosocial function, as in most mentoring programs (Chao, 2009), because the new agents had already undergone a long training period (12 months)—including both theory, in the school, and an apprenticeship phase, in a prison other than the one to which they were currently assigned and which included being followed by a trainer—and because career-related support is not so relevant for this occupation. Some examples of the activities they carried out were introducing the newcomers to superiors and colleagues in the security area and in other areas, being on call during the same shifts, and holding a supervision meeting at the end of each week. A summary of the program's main features is shown in Table 1.

Participants were 396 CPO newcomers who had assumed the role of agent within 6 months. They were administered a questionnaire in their workplaces (different prisons). To ensure ano-

nymity and avoid receiving socially desirable answers, participants received a prepaid envelope to be returned directly to the university after the research was completed. In total, 117

Table 1
Mentoring Program

Mentor's role	Not protégé's direct supervisor With a leadership role (one-two levels higher than the newcomer) A function added to the ordinary role, without formal benefits or economic rewards
Mentor selection	Volunteer Chosen by the prison director and the training office on the basis of motivation, previous experience as stage trainer, and personal characteristics (e.g., supportive)
Mentor's training	2.5 days of training 1.5 days of follow-up
Protégé assignment	Assigned (depending on the newcomer's allocated institute) One mentor for one to five new agents
Program features	Co-built, shared guidelines Actions toward newcomers: mainly a psychosocial function (support, role modeling, work environment understanding) Actions within the prison context: raising awareness among colleagues, to obtain expert colleagues' collaboration, to enhance a nonthreatening environment for learning and growth, and to spread a culture of mentoring; organizing the welcome and training activities Time: 3 weeks of planned activities with daily supervision and a weekly meeting; then, a monthly meeting for 11 months
The organization's commitment	Participation to the mentor's choice Involvement of directors and commanders in the first day of training (and request to provide mentors with time and resources to perform their function) Identification of mentors' contributions to the different mentoring activities

(29.5%) of the potential participants responded. They were all young (mean age: 25.9) and mostly male (67.0%). Approximately 68% of the sample had completed high school, while 4.6% had a university degree.

Measures

Organizational socialization. We assessed the extent to which a newcomer was socialized by using the Organizational Socialization Inventory (OSI; Taormina, 1994, 2004), a 20-item scale. It assesses different facets of the socialization process: the *training* (TR) they received to transfer knowledge and skills needed to perform their job (e.g., “This [Administration] has provided excellent training for me”); *understanding* (UND) of their role and of organizational goals and routines (e.g., “The way to do things in this [Administration] was always made clear to me”); *coworker support* (CWS), that is the acceptance and the quality of interactions between newcomers and significant others (e.g., “Most of my co-workers have accepted me as a member of this [Administration]”); and *future prospects* (FP), that is perception of rewards (career, development) on which the social exchange between the organization and its members is based (e.g., “The steps in the career ladder are clearly stated in this [Administration]”).

Formal mentor support. All participants were assigned to a higher-ranking mentor other than the supervisor. But, as noted by Ragins et al. (2000), the simple presence of a mentor does not automatically result in positive outcomes, as it is related to the perception of a positive relationship. Thus, given that our mentors are asked to fulfill a mainly psychosocial function, we focused on newcomers’ perception of the support they received; in a single item, we asked them how supportive the assigned mentor was.

Socialization adjustment indicators. Our distal outcomes refer to important attitudinal (commitment) and behavioral (turnover intent) reactions to the workplace, which are conceptualized to be influenced by employees’ proximal learning and social integration. *Commitment* was assessed using the six items composing the affective subscale of the organizational commitment scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). This dimension refers to affective attachment to the organization which

is characterized by shared values, a desire to remain in the organization and a willingness to exert efforts on its behalf (Mowday et al., 1979). Example items include “I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to [the Administration]” (reversed) and “[The Administration] has a great deal of personal meaning for me.” *Turnover* captured intention to quit the prison administration within the past month and was measured by a three-item scale adapted from Sager, Griffeth and Hom (1998) (“I frequently think about quitting my job;” “I often seriously consider the possibility of searching for another job;” “As soon as I will have a good alternative, I will leave the [Administration]”).

Response choices for all scales ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*), with the exception of commitment, which, following the authors’ suggestion, ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

Results

To test our hypothesis, 10 moderated regression models were performed using Mod-Text routine (Kenny, 2010), assuming that the relationship between socialization (the total score and the four subscales) and our criteria (commitment and turnover intention, both standardized) are altered linearly by mentor support (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The means, standard deviations and reliability are presented in Table 2.

In the test for the interactive effect of socialization (total score) and mentor support on newcomers’ commitment, the multiple correlation for the regression equation was significant ($R = 0.524$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.275$).¹ As seen in Table 3, socialization is the stronger predictor in this case, with an overall effect of 0.662 ($p < .001$) on commitment when mentor support is equal to 0, confirming H1. As hypothesized (H3), the effect of mentor support on commitment is also significant (estimate = 0.225; $p = .027$). Thus, new agents’ feeling of attachment to the administration and their willingness to exert efforts on

¹ For the analyses of OSI total score, and the future prospect, training and coworker support, nine of the 117 participants were missing in one or more of the variables, resulting in a sample size of 108 for analysis. For the OSI understanding subscale, 11 participants were missing resulting in a total sample size of 106.

T2

Fn1
T3

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics (in Diagonal Cronbach's Alpha)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Socialization—TOTAL SCORE	3.324	.670	(.91)							
2. Socialization—UND	3.379	.686	.81	(.73)						
3. Socialization—TR	3.198	.875	.88	.69	(.86)					
4. Socialization—CWS	3.770	.846	.73	.41	.47	(.88)				
5. Socialization—FP	2.966	.827	.85	.60	.70	.46	(.74)			
6. Form. mentor support	3.661	1.138	.46	.29	.43	.37	.41	(*)		
7. Turnover intention	1.683	.931	-.33	-.21	-.30	-.28	-.30	-.48	(.84)	
8. Aff. Commitment	5.371	1.152	.48	.36	.44	.28	.48	.38	-.61	(.82)

Note. For correlation coefficients listwise deletion: $N = 106$.

* Mentor support was assessed with a single item.

its behalf increases both when the socialization process is effective and when they perceive their mentor as supportive. However, the hypothesized interaction between socialization and mentor support (H5) was -0.025 , which is not statistically significant ($p = .959$). The covariate of gender did not reach significance (0.110 ; $p = .959$) as in all the other analyses.²

Specifically considering the four OSI subscales (see Table 3), the regression models follow similar trends, conforming to H1 and H3 but not H5. For *understanding* socialization subscale model ($R = 0.468$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.219$), socialization is significant (0.455 ; $p < .001$) as well as mentor support (0.305 ; $p = .003$), however, interaction is nonsignificant (0.033 ; $p = .790$). *Training* socialization subscale model ($R = 0.507$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.257$), socialization is significant (0.454 ; $p < .001$) as well as mentor support (0.246 ; $p = .015$) while interaction is nonsignificant (-0.010 ; $p = .919$). *Future prospects* socialization subscale model ($R = 0.534$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.285$), socialization is significant (0.552 ; $p < .001$) as well as mentor support (0.242 ; $p = .016$) and, again, interaction is nonsignificant (-0.023 ; $p < .824$). Slightly different the *coworker support* socialization subscale model ($R = 0.430$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.185$): in this case socialization is not significant (0.211 ; $p = .140$) and neither is mentor support (0.347 ; $p < .001$) nor the interaction (-0.010 ; $p = .790$).

Using turnover intent as criteria, the overall picture of the results is slightly different. In the model that uses total score of socialization, the multiple correlation for the regression equation was 0.556 ($p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.30$). The results of the moderated regression analysis are sum-

marized in Table 3. The overall effect of socialization on turnover intentions was marginally significant (-0.226 ; $p = .086$), partially supporting H2. The effect of mentor support on turnover intentions was stronger and significant at -0.315 ($p < .001$), supporting H4. This means that CPO newcomers who perceive their mentor as supportive have less desire to quit their job and search for an alternative. The covariate of gender was not significant (-0.054 ; $p = .754$). More importantly, confirming H6, the interaction between socialization and mentor support was statistically significant at 0.243 ($p = .012$). Finally, the increased R-square change due to the interaction is significant ($.040$; $p = .012$).

Simple slope analysis shows that the effect of socialization on CPO newcomers 1 standard deviation less than the mean of mentor support was -0.494 ($p = .004$), while the effect of socialization on newcomers 1 standard deviation higher than the mean of mentor support was 0.043 ($p = .799$; see Figure 3). Hence, confirming H6, when the new agents' degree of socialization is high, intention to quit is low and becomes slightly less when the mentor is highly supportive. When socialization is less effective, the intention to quit remains low only if the mentor is supportive but increases greatly if the mentor is less supportive. These results highlight the protective factor of mentor support on newcomers' turnover intentions.

² For the turnover intention model using OSI total score and the OSI subscales, five cases were missing for one or more of the variables, resulting in a sample size of 112 for analysis, except for the understanding subscale where the total sample size was 111.



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Table 3
Moderated Regression Coefficients for Commitment and Turnover Intentions

Predictors	Commitment		Turnover intentions	
	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>
Model 1				
Intercept	5.622	<.001	1.652	<.001
Socialization—total score	.662	<.001	-.226	.086
Mentor support	.225	.027	-.315	<.001
Socialization × Mentor support	-.025	.840	.243	.012
Gender	.110	.959	-.054	.754
Model 2				
Intercept	5.552	<.001	1.583	<.001
Socialization—understanding	.455	.004	-.097	.419
Mentor support	.305	.003	-.384	<.001
Socialization × Mentor support	.033	.790	.017	.862
Gender	-.124	.594	.050	.777
Model 3				
Intercept	5.533	<.001	1.597	<.001
Socialization—training	.454	<.001	-.122	.229
Mentor support	.246	.015	-.367	<.001
Socialization × Mentor support	-.010	.919	.052	.484
Gender	-.118	.594	.037	.834
Model 4				
Intercept	5.431	<.001	1.702	<.001
Socialization—coworker support	.211	.140	-.035	.725
Mentor support	.347	<.001	-.358	<.001
Socialization × Mentor support	-.010	.915	.256	<.001
Gender	-.041	.864	-.096	.570
Model 5				
Intercept	5.298	<.001	1.658	<.001
Socialization—future prospects	.552	<.001	-.187	.073
Mentor support	.242	.016	-.316	<.001
Socialization × Mentor support	-.023	.824	.204	.013
Gender	-.053	.772	-.054	.759

Note. Gender was coded 1 for male and 2 for female.

The regression model of the other four subscales of OSI for turnover intentions have similar but not overlapping results, compared to the general OSI scale. For *future prospects* subscale model ($R = 0.552$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.305$), the pattern is almost identical to the OSI total score results, with socialization marginally significant (-0.187 ; $p = .073$), partially supporting H2; mentor support is significant (-0.316 ; $p < .001$), confirming H4 hypothesis; and, most importantly, interaction is significant (0.204 ; $p = .013$) thus confirming H6. Simple slope analysis shows again that the effect of socialization on newcomers 1 standard deviation less than the mean of mentor support was negative (-0.412 ; $p = .005$), while the effect of socialization on newcomers 1 standard deviation higher than the mean of mentor support was

nonsignificant (0.037 ; $p = .773$; see Figure 4). Hence, as in the total score and confirming H6, when the new agents' degree of future prospect is high, intention to quit is low and becomes slightly less when the mentor is highly supportive. Nevertheless, when future prospect is low, the protective factor of mentors becomes apparent, with low intention to quit when the mentor support is high and high intention to quit when mentor support is perceived ineffective.

A similar pattern emerges also for *coworker support* model ($R = 0.592$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.350$), but in this case socialization is not significant (-0.035 ; $p = .725$), thus not supporting H2, mentor support significant (-0.358 ; $p < .001$), confirming H4 hypothesis; and interaction is significant (0.256 ; $p < .001$) confirming H6. Simple slope analysis shows a similar pat-

F4

PROTECTIVE ROLE OF MENTORING ON TURNOVER

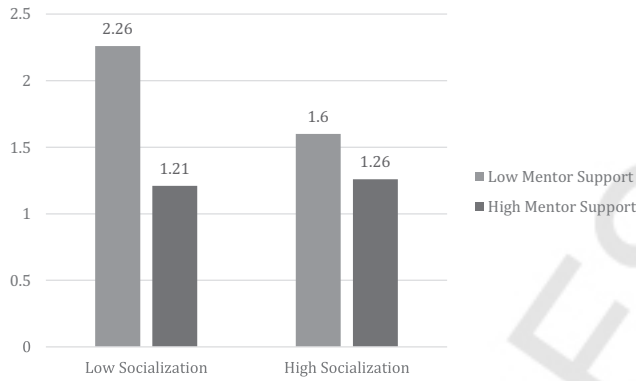


Figure 3. Predicted means for mentor support (-1 and +1 SD) and organizational socialization TOTAL SCORE (-1 and +1 SD) for turnover intentions.

F5

tern with the effect of socialization on newcomers 1 standard deviation less than the mean of mentor support was negative (-0.317; $p = .004$), and the effect of socialization on newcomers 1 standard deviation higher than the mean of mentor support nonsignificant (0.247; $p = .077$; see Figure 5). Hence, as in the total score and confirming H6, when the new agents' degree of coworker support is high but the mentor is not supportive, intention to quit is low and becomes slightly lower when the mentor is highly supportive. Nevertheless, when agents perceived that they didn't have the support of their coworkers, the protective factor of mentors becomes clear, with very low intention to quit when the mentor support is high, but also high

intention to quit when mentor support is perceived ineffective.

Training and understanding socialization subscales have a similar pattern of coworker support subscale, but with no interaction, hence confirming only H4. For *understanding* subscale model ($R = 0.490$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.240$), socialization is not significant (-0.097; $p = .419$) as well as interaction (0.017; $p = .862$) but not mentor support, which is significant (-0.384; $p < .001$). In the *training* socialization subscale model ($R = 0.512$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.262$) socialization is not significant (-0.122; $p = .229$) and neither is the interaction (-0.052; $p = .484$) while mentor support is significant (-0.367; $p < .001$).

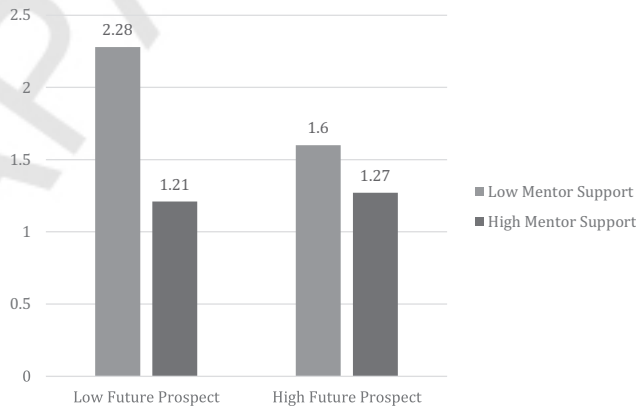


Figure 4. Predicted means for mentor support (-1 and +1 SD) and OSI-FP subscale (-1 and +1 SD) for turnover intentions.

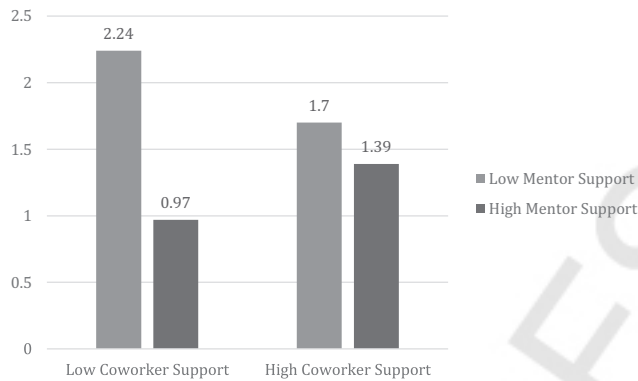


Figure 5. Predicted means for mentor support (-1 and $+1$ *SD*) and OSI-CWS subscale (-1 and $+1$ *SD*) for turnover intentions.

Discussion

General Results

Our results support previous findings in the literature that both organizational socialization (Bauer et al., 2007) and mentoring (Payne & Huffman, 2005) are related to affective commitment and turnover intent, confirming also for CPO newcomers the importance of learning processes for acquiring the knowledge needed to carry out their new role and to integrate socially into the new workplace. Overall, in accordance with the literature's suggestions (Saks et al., 2007), collective and standardized tactics are powerful means to promote newcomers' attachment to an organization and their willingness to exert effort on its behalf. Although the literature considers them to be less effective (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Saks et al., 2007), tactics that are more individualized and contextualized, such as formal mentoring, are shown in the present study to be fruitful, especially in reducing intention to search for another job. This result further contributes to reducing the literature gap on empirical support for formal mentoring effectiveness in security force contexts.

Taking into account the different facets composing the socialization process, an exception is "coworker support," which does not influence commitment directly. This result should be further investigated, but we can suppose that this lack of direct influence may be related to the nature of commitment, that is, a feeling toward the organization as a whole; in fact, the other

three dimensions of the organizational socialization scale (i.e., "understanding," "future prospects," and "training") are characterized more by the contribution provided by the organization in a broad sense.

More importantly, we found the hypothesized interactive effect of mentoring and socialization (total score) on turnover intention, but no significant effect for the same interaction on commitment. Thus, when the socialization process progresses steadily, both factors seem to contribute to good adjustment, but when traditional tactics go wrong, a different learning source (mentoring) exerts a protective function, reducing newcomers' intention to quit. A possible explanation for this may lie in the specific characteristics of the two outcomes we chose: Commitment is a short-term outcome, whereas turnover concerns individual appraisal of several work factors that can lead in the long term to the decision to quit (see Raabe & Beehr, 2003). For instance, some scholars consider affective commitment to be an intermediate step that may lead to turnover if it fails (Craig et al., 2013; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Therefore, mentoring support may play a different role in influencing the socialization process depending on the stage at which it is introduced. In our case, participants were new to the work context but had undergone a 1-year tenure in the penitentiary administration, spent in training (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Further research is recommended to gain a deeper understanding, considering, for instance, a possible mediating role for commit-

ment in the relationship between mentoring and turnover.

Considering more specifically the different facets of the organizational socialization process, we found the expected interactive effect of mentoring and socialization on turnover intention when the subdimensions of “coworker support” and “future prospects” are involved, that is, when newcomers do not receive the emotional sustenance that is provided by their colleagues or do not feel they will have a rewarding career or development within the penitentiary administration. These two facets are related to the social aspects of the integration process into the new social system and the degree of acceptance in the social group (Taormina, 1994). So, not surprisingly, it is in these situations that mentors—who were asked to have a mainly psychosocial function—exert a protective function, reducing newcomers’ intention to quit.

Taking into account both results, we found that, when the socialization process proceeds smoothly, both socialization and mentoring contribute to good adjustment for new prison agents, strengthening their affective commitment to the administration. On the other hand, when traditional tactics (socialization) go wrong—especially when newcomers do not receive emotional sustenance from their colleagues or do not perceive the possibility of having a rewarding development within the organization—a different learning source (mentoring) exerts a protective function, reducing newcomers’ intention to quit.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study, although only an initial exploration, give insight into socialization as a learning process. We can highlight some points of reflection concerning the way organizations implement learning among their members, referring to Nonaka’s (1994) dynamic model of knowledge generation. For instance, if, as Nonaka emphasizes, knowledge generation is a process that needs actors’ active participation, it is important to understand the specific contribution of formal mentorship as an expression of organizational willingness to steer and support new members (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Furthermore, it is useful to focus on the influences that formal

mentoring exerts on newcomers’ socialization when accompanied by socialization programs that are more tailored. Overall, we can confirm Nonaka’s (1994) suggestion of the need to enable all the different modes of knowledge generation in order to support a deep, disseminated learning. We believe that a socialization program that includes mentoring during early entrance to work will enhance the spiral of knowledge, activating a mode for knowledge creation other than those activated by traditional socialization.

It is worth noting that formal mentoring programs help to increase organizational knowledge, thanks, for instance, to the preliminary training of mentors: to perform this function, they reflected on their professional experience, collaborated with colleagues to create temporary communities of practice, perceived their organization’s investment in them and in newcomers, and felt more committed. Furthermore, mentored newcomers tend to mentor others in their turn, thus instituting a culture of training (Baker et al., 2003). Thus, organizations that carefully nurture socialization processes and choose simultaneously to use tactics related to different knowledge-generation modes, can trigger a virtuous spiral that transforms them into learning organizations (Ghosh et al., 2012).

Practical Implications

Reviews of formal mentoring show that its effectiveness depends on the program design (Chao, 2009; Inzer & Crawford, 2005; Ragins et al., 2000). Our study is a research intervention, based on a specific mentoring program (see Table 1) in a specific organizational setting. We believe that it offers several practical implications for developing appropriate mentoring programs in similar organizational contexts, because all security forces have a number of similar traits (they are based on a military culture characterized by high formalization, hire of a large number of newcomers at one time, and use standardized training), share similar issues, and are increasingly blurred and integrated in field operations (Bartone et al., 2010; Easton et al., 2010).

In these contexts, newcomers often have to cope with the problem of connecting theory and practice: Organizational socialization tactics are

mostly standardized (similar for each newcomer and for whatever future task) and mainly developed in the preentry stage (that is, training in the school or academy, when newcomers have entered the organization but are still far from the operative context). Usually, this intermediate “limbo” stage raises several issues, such as the difficulty of anticipating the future context (with growing feelings of uncertainty), a tendency to idealize the future work and the consequent frustration when the operative reality is met, and a gap between the theoretical knowledge taught in the school and the work routines (with devaluation of the former). We believe that the main mentor function is to help newcomers to bridge this gap, offering them a space for reflection embedded in the work context and in a sensitive moment for learning the new role. Mentoring being a tailored, focused expression of organizational support, it provides a customized relationship for every newcomer and gives them the tools to understand their context and professional practices grounded in the real-life workplace.

Furthermore, given the strong interaction between the socialization process and mentoring on turnover intent, we can argue that efforts to introduce and stabilize the mentoring function in the early phases of work life are especially important to organizations whose employees are most at risk of strain and dropout, as prisons or complex operative contexts are. In fact, although during the training period (school or academy), freshmen are involved in a mentorship program (Offstein & Dufresne, 2007) that helps them “to learn the ropes” and internalize military values quickly, often this is not sufficient to counter the effect of the “reality shock” that appears in the early stage of career development, as the results of some research have shown (Griffeth & Hom, 2001; Hu et al., 2008; Porter & Steers, 1973; Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). As one recent publication concerning the U.S. Navy (Johnson & Andersen, 2015) has underlined, having a mentor while in uniform tends to bolster satisfaction with one’s military career, provides a range of important career and psychosocial advantages, and heightens the probability that mentored service members will in turn mentor others themselves.

Limitations and Future Research

We are aware that this research has many limitations. For instance, the number of participants is limited, even if, rather than select a sample, we involved the whole population of newcomers participating in the research intervention project. We think that a larger sample would allow further controls. In addition, given that this involved a trial project, mentors may have perceived their organization as being concerned about them and the new CPOs, possibly leading to mentors’ higher commitment in carrying out their support function. Moreover, we relied on a single-item self-report measure for formal mentoring support, which in principle reduces reliability and limits content validity. Future research could focus on additional behavioral indicators of mentoring support or, alternatively, on multiitem and even multidimensional representations of mentoring function. Furthermore, considering the specific effects that emerged for the different socialization facets, future studies could explore whether other functions provided by a mentor (psychosocial or other) can affect results differently.

Another critical issue concerns the nature of our data. Its cross-sectional nature makes it more difficult for us to infer causal relations among the variables considered, although the tested influences are strongly grounded in theory and previous research. Nevertheless, future longitudinal research should be conducted to confirm and strengthen the effects shown in this study. In addition, the use of self-reported measures to detect both independent and dependent variables may result in biased (usually inflated) correlations between variables (common method bias). Although the literature has confirmed that turnover intention is the best predictor of actual turnover behavior (Godlewski & Kline, 2012; Griffeth et al., 2000), some objective measures may be added in future research in order to reduce common method bias. For instance, considering the CPOs’ long-term contracts, which render the decision to leave unlikely, some withdrawal proximal indicators (such as absences) could be used.

Even when taking into account all of these limitations, this study points to directions for future research focused on the interactive effects of different organizational tactics aimed at enhancing newcomers’ adjustment. This re-

search makes the first attempt to consider the simultaneous effect of different methods aimed at supporting newcomers' socialization. These methods proved to be complementary. We speculate that a possible explanation is that mentoring is a learning source capable of protecting newcomers from disengagement when some specific dimensions of organizational socialization are not achieved. Although it does not boost commitment when newcomers are adjusted to an organization, a mentor's support serves as an important social interface that allows links with the organization to be maintained, especially for newcomers who feel disconnected. Our results suggest that a mentor's support can increase commitment regardless of newcomers' socialization level. Therefore, future studies should seek to understand the relationship between mentoring and newcomers' coping in order to provide effective support in the socialization process. Future research could also investigate whether specific types of mentor intervention (e.g., more relation- or task-oriented) similarly affect the adjustment indicators.

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