Phenomenological Study of Military Veteran CEOs: The Transition Experience and Mentorship From the Battlefield to the Boardroom

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Phenomenological Study of Military Veteran CEOs: The Transition Experience and 
Mentorship From the Battlefield to the Boardroom

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
March 2020

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Phenomenological Study of Military Veteran CEOs: The Transition Experience and
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I would like to thank the mentors who opened the doors of opportunity, invested and exhibited unwavering patience throughout my civilian career. I’d like to thank Shawn Clark, for imparting the concepts of Servant Leadership, the value of “the plan,” helping me understand the difference between a good start, directionally correct, and a thing of beauty, and having patience even when “the sky was falling”; Major General Thomas Sharpie for his support during a critical period and personal crossroad, Dr. Bob Tarter, Brig Gen Ret, for assisting me while navigating an organization with misaligned values. Mike Pearson for teaching me the value of being a grinder, never backing down and standing up for the little guy. I owe each of you a debt of gratitude.

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenological Study of Military Veteran CEOs: The Transition Experience and Mentorship From the Battlefield to the Boardroom

by Anthony Gagliardo

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the transitional and mentoring experiences as described by veterans who achieve civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Methodology: The participants in the study were 8 former military leaders who subsequently achieved senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Participants answered questions about their experience as a military leader and mentee during the service to civilian transition, organizational enculturation, and promotion to a civilian leadership position. Interview transcripts and artifacts were reviewed for the emergence of major topics and themes.

Findings: The participants unanimously credited mentorship experiences as the primary catalyst for their success throughout each phase of professional development. The research also revealed that organizational and personal core values must align to achieve optimum success.

Conclusions: The results of this study support the conclusion that the challenges that veteran leaders experience are consistent and predicative. Additionally, mentorship aids veteran leaders in successful transition and assumption of senior leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Recommendations for Action: The researcher recommends that military and civilian organizations conduct objective assessment of their guiding core values and engage in
mentorship programs that link each organization. Veteran leaders who are preparing to separate from military service should educate themselves on Schlosberg’s 4S and Kintzle’s MTT models. Veteran leaders who are armed with this knowledge and supported by consistent mentorship programs that link military and civilian organizations will achieve significantly higher levels of success and reduce the burden on U.S. Taxpayers.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Armed Forces consist of five armed branches, including the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps. Those who serve in the armed services are characterized by their service affiliation. The three categories of service affiliation include active duty, reserve, and veteran. In 1973, during the Vietnam War, the United States adopted an “all-volunteers force” (AVF) approach for all members of the armed forces. Prior to joining one of the armed branches, service members raise their right hand and swear an oath to defend the inalienable rights granted by the U.S. Constitution. Nonetheless, patriotism is not the only motivation to join and serve. Another motivation to join the armed forces is the prospect of educational and vocational development. In addition, the military offers an opportunity to earn a fair wage while building marketable skills and knowledge. For non-U.S. citizens, military service offers professional development and a path to citizenship (McDermott, 2007).

On the other hand, the contract of employment upon separation from the service is not without its challenges. For instance, during periods of stable economic growth and absent large-scale military conflict, the U.S. economy offers adequate civilian employment opportunities for military members. However, more than a decade of international conflict has contributed to a veteran population of over 4,000,000. Each of these 4,000,000 U.S. veterans has anxiously attempted to enter the workforce (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs [VA], 2018b). Stone, Lengnick-Hall, and Muldoon (2018) argued that workplace reintegration and executive civilian opportunities are not guaranteed because the military to civilian transition is a challenging task and is not
always seamless. Thus, historically, veteran’s unemployment rates have exceeded the national average (Stone et al., 2018).

In 2014, the RAND Corporation report suggested that reintegration continues to pose a problem, with the unemployment rate of young military veterans ages 18–24 reaching 10.7% as compared to 8.0% for nonveterans between 2000 and 2008 (Loughran, 2014). Although some veterans experience reintegration challenges, many succeed in their quest for long-term employment, and some even achieve top leadership (C-suite) positions in America’s most successful companies. Given the nation’s need for seasoned technical leaders, the only surprise is how few make it to the top. Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) described an economy of opportunity and growth dependent upon innovators and technically skilled individuals; this need increases the marketability of veteran leaders.

Keeling, Kintzle, and Castro (2018) stated that service members possess valuable skills and training, which should directly contribute to postmilitary employment success. During their services, military members often participate in leadership and organizational training, which should set them apart from their civilian counterparts and help them to transition to civilian jobs. Military veterans participate in professional development activities and are generally provided opportunities to fine-tune their application of leadership while on active duty. In addition to leadership training, military veterans are generally credited with possessing both technical and soft skills such as motivation, a can-do attitude, reliability, and ability to work with others in a team (Kleykamp, 2009). In a time when well-adapted transformational leaders are needed to fuel America’s
growth, it is interesting to understand the origin stories and outcomes of this segment of the workforce that makes a workplace “American made.”

**Background**

Senior leadership accounts for only 550 or so of the over 2.8 million U.S. service members currently serving on active duty (Defense Manpower Data Center [DMDC], 2004). Moreover, 550 calculates to less than 1% of the population that represents only 0.4% of the U.S. population. Therefore, making it to top leadership positions within the military is quite exclusive. By comparison, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2018) showed that 2,572,000 civilian senior executive jobs existed in 2018 and forecasts an 8% growth through 2020. In such a context, it would seem that senior military leaders would easily transition into these more corporate world leadership roles. However, the reality is quite different, and a significant number of veterans do not achieve their dream of civilian employment. Despite military veterans’ access to government transitioning resources such as educational and social benefits, the statistics do not improve for senior leaders (Loughran, 2014).

Nearly 4,000,000 Americans previously served in the armed forces, and almost 29% have experienced joblessness at one point or another upon entry into the civilian sector (Walker, 2013). However, because of the implementation of transitional programs and policies over the last decade, veteran unemployment rates have significantly improved (Lytell et al., 2015). In fact, some of the most successful businesses in America are led by former service members. For example, Polaris, the manufacturer of Indian Motorcycles; General Motors; and Johnson & Johnson are just a few of the Fortune 500 companies led by military veterans (Lockie & Akhtar, 2019). However, the
number of veterans entering executive positions within the civilian sector has significantly decreased since the 1980s (59%). As of 2015, only 6.2% of CEOs in fortune 500 companies consists of military veterans (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015). The significant drop in prevalence of veterans in CEO positions begs the question of why and warrants a further exploration of factors affecting veteran transitions.

**Transition Theories**

A transition is defined as an event that results in changes in the assumption about concepts and beliefs and requires a corresponding change in one’s relationship and behavior (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). During this time, an individual must work out new ways of handling problems. The factors influencing the transition for a person may be internal or external and have a significant impact on how a person perceives the change. Service members possess valuable skills and training, which should directly contribute to postmilitary employment success (Keeling et al., 2018). An abundance of studies exist that attest to the translation of military-gained skills and knowledge. Military members often participate in leadership and organizational training during their term of service. An additional psychological criterion is represented that speaks to a service member’s ability to lead others.

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (4S)**

Schlossberg et al. (1995) introduced a framework of self-awareness, which is especially useful in illustrating personal perceptions of change. Schlossberg and her colleagues described a self-identification framework and applied context known as Schlossberg’s transition theory (4S). The 4S offers a framework that describes the characteristics of a person experiencing change. The framework consists of the following
four elements: situation or event as seen through the lens of the individual; self in the form of personal characteristics such as age, gender, and psychological resources; supports; and strategies of dealing with change (categories and coping modes). The 4S further identifies the circumstances experienced during the transition, including aspects of support from people and networks (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg et al. identified adaptation or coping skills as particularly crucial personal attribute to possess during the transition. Adaption factors include the role, the source and timing, the degree, and the speed and scope of change as well as the environment in which the change is taking place. Essentially, Schlossberg et al.’s framework described a military veteran’s transition as a personal test of adaptation and development.

**Military Transition Theory**

Another transition theory was proposed by Kintzle and Castro (2018), which builds off Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) transition theory (4S), to specifically address the challenges faced by veterans and is termed the military transition theory (MTT). Proposed in 2018, this transition theory consists of three overlapping phases consisting of a veteran’s approach to the military transition, managing the transition, and an indication phase in which the veteran assesses the transition (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). During the second phase of the theory in which the veteran is attempting to manage the transition into the civilian sector, several factors were suggested to influence the transitions, namely, individual adjustment factors and the strength of individual, social, and community support systems. In the last phase, assessment of the transition, how well the veteran has acclimated to his or her new environment is assessed against several variables such as the attainment of work, adjustment to the family unit, assessment of individual
health factors to include the use of drugs or alcohol, general well-being, and the level of
the veteran’s integration into the community (Kintzle & Castro, 2018).

Veterans Transitional Challenges

A preliminary literature review revealed several transitional challenges faced by
newly separated veterans (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Dirani, 2017; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016;
Keeling et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2015). These challenges are specific to veterans and
present a barrier to employment and successful integration within the civilian sector.
Challenges include minimal transitional training opportunities, employer discrimination
because of social stigmas, issues with workplace integration as a result of a mismatch or
misconception about a veteran’s skill sets, and a general cultural clash that significantly
impacts a veteran’s ability to obtain and retain employment.

Lack of Transition Training

A significant factor contributing to the civilian–military divide is poor transition
training for veterans. While major progress has been made in the last decade, the
education and support provided to veterans for preseparation are still lacking. A recent
study conducted by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA, 2017) indicated
that two thirds of veterans received transition training prior to leaving the army, but less
than half reported practical value in the information presented. Moreover, Myers (2017)
reported that transition programs are less valuable in the transition and career success of
the veterans. The study highlighted that veterans only receive training when getting out
of the military rather than developing commercial skills throughout the military career.
Social Stigmas

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a general anxiety disorder that can develop in people after living or experiencing an event that caused serious harm or threatened an individual’s safety. The symptoms of PTSD include emotional numbness, flashbacks, intense guilt or worry, feeling on edge, and abrupt outbursts of anger when experiencing a situation that reminds the individual of the trauma. The negative perception of post-9/11 veterans has highlighted publicity surrounding mental health issues. This includes substance abuse and traumatic brain injury (TBI), high suicide rates and PTSD, and depression. In certain cases, these issues can affect a veteran’s performance and career development (Tsai, Sippel, Mota, Southwick, & Pietrzak, 2016). For instance, a survey conducted by Harrell and Berglas (2011) highlighted that one third of companies surveyed have stated the issue of PTSD among veteran employees. PTSD and other mental illnesses negatively affect the career development of veterans. In many cases, organizations have developed a negative stigma surrounding PTSD. As PTSD is often associated with veterans, a stigma has developed in commercial business environments, which hinders opportunities and limits future career advancement opportunities for veterans (Kulesza, Pedersen, Corrigan, & Marshall, 2015).

Workplace Integration

Despite possessing experience in practical leadership and the ownership of technical skills, veterans continue to struggle during workplace integration. Veterans have difficulties translating military experience into commercial job skills (Redmond et al., 2015). The transition takes a toll on the veteran and transcends more than the individual’s economic well-being. In many instances, the difficulties experienced during
the transition can also lead to disruption of personal relationships, loss of employment, and feelings of aimlessness. Veteran or not, the view of self and worth can powerfully impact personal factors such as the feeling of self-worth and self-confidence. Low self-worth and self-confidence are suggested to negatively impact personal identity and the development of healthy relationships in both the home and business environment (Herasingh, 2014).

Today’s civilian business environments require individuals to translate the skills gained through military service to narrowly defined civilian job roles as well as rapidly adapt to an ever-evolving global business environment. The unfamiliar dynamic of the civilian business space may also contribute to a sense of failure for veterans. During the tumultuous transition period, research suggests that mentorship could have a positive impact (Klauss, 1981).

**Civilian and Military Cultural Differences**

One of the key challenges faced by veterans is the difference between civilian and military cultures. Military culture is known as warrior or fortress society (Wertsch, 1991), which affects the psychological self-perception. Military personnel experience a rigid hierarchical structure with clear rules and expectations. In such context, veterans require a shift from an expected state of conformity to navigating to the corporate world where autonomy and self-direction are norms (Daly, Watkins, & Reavis, 2006). Cultural differences pose a barrier for career development such as networking as an essential part of the profession. However, veterans are not familiar with networking in the workplace and often see networking as violating “chain of command.” Further, many military occupational training specialties do not directly translate to commercial business.
requirements, and thus, it is difficult to match skills with civilian roles. The problem of skills transition is a major issue for veterans and causes them to miss opportunities that they would otherwise be qualified for in commercial business (Cappelli, 2012).

Veterans Service Skills and Training

Obtaining and succeeding in one of the top senior positions within a U.S. corporation is no easy feat. A unique set of skills and personality traits is required to obtain and succeed in these exclusive roles. Ironically, many of the rigors faced on the battlefield and while climbing through the military ranks may help weed out those unfit for corporate leadership positions and prepare would-be executives for civilian service positions. Keeling et al. (2018) described service members as possessing valuable skills and training, which should directly contribute to postmilitary employment success. Kleykamp (2009) elaborated that during active duty service, soldiers participate in organizational leadership training, which gives them advantages over their civilian counterparts. Therefore, veterans are believed to have stronger soft and technical skills such as a can-do attitude, and are highly motivated, reliable, and possess interpersonal skills (Kleykamp, 2009). Similarly, Delbourg-Delphis (2014) suggested that veterans often turn out to be great employees as a result of their leadership skills. Hence, as a result of their service, many veterans possess the leadership and technical skills necessary to succeed in top leadership positions (Delbourg-Delphis, 2014).

Leadership

Over the past 20 years, Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) has conducted a study into the elements that define leadership, and in this study, it has been determined that leadership is a trait as much as it is a learned
behavior (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012). The notion that today’s leaders must practice a set of learned skills, as well as pull from behavioral traits, supports the concept that military service could provide a pipeline of emergent civilian leaders. The pipeline of leadership is unrealized to some degree by differences in military and civilian organizations. According to Riddle et al. (2007), aside from structural and organizational differences, philosophical orientation within the military is unlike any other secular organization and occupation.

**Technical Capability**

Robertson and Brott (2013) stated that veterans develop universally recognized skills, such as law enforcement, civil service, and infrastructure maintenance, as well as niche skills specific to the performance of military functions. The U.S. Air Force and Navy are particularly well known for imparting highly technical skills within their sailors and airman. Hiring an employee with shovel-ready skills is a boon to most employers. In many cases, the transference of leadership and technical skills occurs seamlessly and to the benefit of the employer and employee alike.

**Mentorship and Communities of Practice**

Although military veterans suffer many challenges in their transition to the civilian sector, they possess many desirable skills and traits necessary to succeed in top leadership roles. However, many military veterans find it difficult to obtain employment let alone the promotions necessary to reach high leadership positions. Fortunately, some empirical literature suggests that mentoring and communities of practice could be the solution to veteran’s success within the workplace. Research suggests that it is possible that peer-to-peer outreach, self-awareness, and communities may succeed where billions
of dollars invested in educational and social aid have failed. However, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of those veterans who exceeded the norm and achieved success as senior leaders within Fortune 500 companies.

In a quote frequently attributed to Mark Twain, “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so,” the author suggested that uncertainty and lack of awareness are the most detrimental success factors of all. Research has indicated that mentorship can help an individual assimilate within an unfamiliar culture. In addition to cultural adaptation, mentorship offers psychological and organizational benefits (Wenger, 2000). In the absence of external coaching, an individual must rely on personal experiences and perception. Within the context of educational and career settings, peer-oriented mentoring has been described as critically beneficial by many veterans (Eells, 2017). Taking mentorship one step further, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) explained that in the area of communities of practice, identifying the variable of coaching and finding “your tribe” is a powerful catalyst for success. With the introduction of a mentor or partnership of like-minded individuals, the prospect of success increases dramatically. Further, Klauss (1981) confirmed the notion that successful transitioning is directly attributed to formalized mentorship programs.

Summary

Millions of veterans successfully accomplish the transition from military to civilian employment (Walker, 2013). Veterans possess technical skills, exposure to real-world leadership experiences as well as the benefits of federally funded educational, social, and transitional programs. While many of these veterans fail to achieve success in their civilian transition, there are those who achieve executive leadership positions in the
corporate world (Lewis, 2011). There are numbers of factors that are linked to the success and failure of the transition of veterans. In terms of success, the skills and training and leadership and technical skills play a critical role. In contrast, factors such as a lack of transitional training, social stigma, difficulty in workplace integration, and cultural differences present challenges for veterans trying to transition into the civilian sector. Fortunately, communities of practice and mentorship could offer the tools necessary for veterans to achieve professional excellence.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Decades of international conflicts have contributed to a large population of veterans in the U.S. workforce, which has reached 4,000,000 (Walker, 2013). Of those 4,000,000 veterans, over 20% have experienced joblessness at one point or another upon entering the civilian sector (Loughran, 2014). Research findings suggest that although veterans possess in-demand technical skills, practical exposure to leadership experiences, and the benefit of federally funded educational and social support benefits, career transitioning remains challenging. While many experience failures, there are many examples of veterans who make it to the top of the corporate ladder (Schaeffler, 2015). Utilizing Schlossberg’s 4S theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) as a framework, this research explored the lived experience of veterans’ transition from military to senior leadership positions within the corporate world.

Parker (2012) suggested that an individual’s career development is an important cornerstone from which a person will base his or her status and value. Moreover, Parker suggested that employees find meaning, purpose, and motivation in a construct of self through their career. For armed forces, the culture of hierarchy allegiance, fortress
building, and top-down management are evident. Thus, for veterans, the objective of career dimensions is an externally defined status attribution and defined work role. The construct of career advancement is determined through a sequence of roles, job histories, work transition, and status acquisition. The duality of objective and subjective perspectives highlights the need to understand the impact and differences among these disparate concepts. Moreover, it encourages veteran employees and their organizations to use both perspectives to employ strategies to ensure career effectiveness (Tiller, 2007).

Tiller (2007) explained that a veteran’s transition may be further complicated when it comes to interpersonal interactions. Without the structure of a clear chain of command, military members may struggle with interpersonal interactions in the corporate world. The lack of interpersonal skills negatively impacts the work relationships and hinders performance (Tiller, 2007).

Cate (2014) pointed out the role of educational successes in transitioning veterans. In recent times, several veteran and student advocacy agencies have conducted a large study focused on veteran academic success. The Student Veterans of America (SVA), the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) have completed “the most comprehensive examination of student veterans’ postsecondary academic success in decades” (Cate, 2014, p. 20). The study, also known as The Million Records Project (MRP), addressed the gaps of knowledge in veteran education but did little to evaluate the factors that contributed to civilian leadership success. Empirical literature (Eells, 2017; Paylor, 2019; Walker, 2013) pointed to the unique challenges that veterans face in transition; these studies have identified challenges, which include age, self-awareness, the ability to relate to peers, as well as
challenges adapting to less hierarchal leadership structures. Therefore, the literature identifies the need to understand the experiences of those veterans who successfully transitioned to long-term civilian employment. Many studies have been conducted to explore the success criterion and experiences of military members who transition from military service into an academic environment (Gloria, 2009; Kemble, 2007; Lake, Allen, & Armstrong, 2016). However, few studies explore the experiences of military veterans’ transition into top leadership positions or the experiences of the mentor and mentee during the transition (Chisholm, 2018; Eells, 2017). In order to maximize the benefit of this segment of top talent, the interplay of mentorship and self-awareness must be better understood. Little is known about the experiences of veterans who have achieved senior leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies. A deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these individuals may identify opportunities for self-awareness, the formation of strategic mentorship programs, and organizational support strategies. Previous research by Chan (2014) and Nora and Crisp (2007) focused on a similar population in transition within an academic setting. Chan’s (2014) and Nora and Crisp’s (2007) researches contributed to greater clarity in specific elements unique to military mentors. This researcher intended to build upon and expand Chan’s (2014) and Nora and Crisp’s (2007) research. Specifically, the researcher intended to explore similar mentor–mentee relationships within the context of the civilian workforce. Research findings may inform current veteran transitional programs and potentially reduce veteran unemployment rates, thereby allowing civilian organizations to reap the benefits of these seasoned and well-trained leaders.
**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the transitional and mentoring experiences as described by veterans who achieve civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

**Research Question**

What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?

**Significance of the Problem**

This study investigated the transitional and mentorship experiences of veterans who have achieved senior leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies. This study is significant in the following four ways. First, veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces make up a large portion of the skilled workforce. This segment of the workforce has seen explosive growth following a decade of international conflict. Walker (2013) cited the number of veterans in the U.S. workforce at over 4,000,000. The current literature identifies one in five veterans as experiencing joblessness, and even more are failing to achieve higher than a frontline position in the civilian job market (Loughran, 2014). These statistics suggest the importance of identifying the transitional challenges and need for further exploration of successful veterans military–civilian transition into the corporate workforce.

Second, with the economy experiencing significant growth since 2008, skilled talent and leadership capabilities are essential to the economies continued growth. As a result, successfully transitioning qualified veterans into top leadership positions is important to the nation’s economy. Veterans undergo physical and psychological testing
prior to enlistment or commissioning. Further, they participate in leadership training at all phases of their professional development and apply their leadership skills in a variety of challenging situations (Villanueva, 2015). As a result, transitioning service members should be easily and readily employed in top leadership positions.

Third, according to the VA (2018b), the United States will spend $198.8 billion on veteran development, up $12.1 billion from 2018, which is $198.8 billion funded by every taxpaying citizen. However, most veterans describe finding employment as a significant transitional challenge. How is it that men and women who successfully serve their country in a variety of military leadership capacities, often in highly technical roles, fail to attain long-term employment or rise in the ranks of civilian leadership even with the benefit of billions of dollars of transitional and long-term aid?

Finally, experts and researchers agree that the nation does not quite understand why so many veterans are failing to achieve success. The expenditure of billions of taxpayer funds each year resulting in an elevated unemployment rate during a period of economic prosperity indicates that current practices are not working. Empirical literature (Schaeffler, 2015; Wenger et al., 2002) highlighted that mentoring and communities of practice could be solutions to the problem. Can peer-to-peer outreach, self-awareness, and communities succeed where billions of educational and social aids have failed?

**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to former service members of the United States Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps who achieved civilian leadership positions of director or of higher grade within a U.S. Fortune 500 company. The study was further delimitated to members who completed a full term of military service of at
least 4 years and achieved the minimum rank equal to a noncommissioned officer (NCO) or higher.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Career capital.** Career capital encloses a set of nonfinancial resources that a person holds and is able to translate into his or her new work. The three aspects are knowing-why (beliefs and values that shape motivation), knowing-how (occupational skills and knowledge), and knowing-whom (interpersonal relationships; Harris & Dickmann, 2004).

**Executive leadership.** Leadership involves lifting a person’s vision to a higher level, the building of a person’s personality above existing limitations, and raising a person’s performance to a higher standard. Moreover, executive leadership means an individual or team at the highest level of management in an organization who sets the vision and strategy (Cohen, 2009).

**Interprofession career transition.** Career transition is defined as a period during which a person is either changing existing roles or changing orientation to a role already held. Interprofession career transition involves past experiences, existing scenario and circumstances, and translating it to new future prospects of the individual in the new industry (Hammick, Freeth, Goodsman, & Copperman, 2009).

**Leadership skills development.** Leadership skills development encloses approaches for learning that are broader than programs of interventions or activity. It is concerned with the way in which actions are empowered, attitudes fostered, and the learning organization stimulated (Adair, 2007).
**Mentor and mentoring.** A mentor is known as a person who helps another person to develop and become what a person aspires to be. Moreover, mentoring involves providing help by one person to another person to make significant transitions in thinking, knowledge, or work (Law, Ireland, & Hussain, 2007).

**Military veteran.** A person who has served for a period of time in a particular field (e.g., an Army veteran who has long served in the army and is no longer in the Armed Forces).

**Organization culture.** Organization culture encloses distinctive beliefs, norms, principles, and behaviors that combine to form organization identity and distinct character. It encloses a system of shared beliefs, values, and behaviors held by the members that distinguish it from other organizations (Schein, 2010).

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology as a method involves inquiring or investigation into the meaning of people experiences as they lived them. Epistemologically, within qualitative research, phenomenology is based on subjectivity and personal knowledge and emphasizes interpretations (Moran & Mooney, 2002).

**Professional development.** Professional development encloses a process of developing and improving staff knowledge, skills, and competencies required to deliver quality results and achieve excellence (Zepeda, 2013).

**Transcendental phenomenology.** As a descriptive or pure (Husserlian) phenomenology, it involves studying the lived experience (foundationalist approach) and allows developing the perspectives inclusive of physical, external, and isolatable stimuli, capturing the essence of phenomenon (Heinamaa, Hartimo, & Miettinen, 2014).
**Transformational leadership.** A transformational leader inspires, stimulates, and transforms followers to achieve extraordinary results. Transformational leadership involves enhancing the morale, motivation, and performance of followers through creating positive change and taking care and acting in the interest of each other and as a group (Minja & Barine, 2012).

**Organization of Study**

Each year, tens of thousands of veterans separate from the military with the goal of applying the technical and leadership skills developed during service at a civilian company. Unfortunately for many, the transition is plagued with hardship. This study explored the transitional experiences of those veterans who successfully navigated the transition from the military to a senior leadership position within Fortune 500 companies. The insight gained from this study may provide a glimpse into the executive board room and shed light on the value of transition in a military member’s transitional leadership experience. With greater awareness, both private and federally funded organizations may discover opportunities and techniques to create senior leaders at a time when the U.S. economy is growing at an all-time rate.

This study began with an overview of the situation and how it has persisted throughout decades and then focused upon recent cultural, personal, and organizational experiences. Following the overview, a presentation of the research problem, purpose statement, and significance were depicted.

Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of the literature and exploratory investigation into theories of transition, current transitional programs and policies in place, transitional challenges veterans face, and an examination of veterans as executives,
which include a discussion about veterans’ leadership abilities, the effect of mentorship on the climb to the top, and current veteran recruitment strategies into CEO positions. Chapter III introduces the study’s methodology, research design, data collection approach, population, sample, confidence, and evaluative approach.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review for this study consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published primarily within the United States. Relevant and peer-reviewed literature was primarily obtained from scholarly search engines such as the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE journals, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Data relating to employment statistics were derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The peer-reviewed articles were published in a multitude of journals such as *Armed Forces & Society*, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, and *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*. Researched terms included but were not limited to the following: *military to civilian transition, veteran transition intervention, mentoring for veterans, veteran transition barriers*, and *executive mentorship, military CEO*. A synthesis matrix was created listing the major categories found within the literature review and can be found in Appendix A. Seven major themes were found within the literature as they related to the research topic. Namely, lack of identity and purpose, lack of awareness of VA benefits and access, mental and physical health, education, employment, cultural clash, and social connectedness were major themes found within the literature review. Minimal to no scholarly research was found considering the transition of newly separated veterans into executive-level positions. Hence, independent research reports or white papers created by nonscholarly publishers were considered when reviewing the literature. Further, minimal scholarly research was found on the effectiveness of mentoring veterans within the workplace to ease their transition.

This chapter uses literature to provide a review of factors that affect the employment of newly separated service members. Specifically, this researcher was
primarily interested in the transitional challenges that veterans experience within the United States. Other topics of interest for this literature review include the prevalence of veterans in executive positions and mentorship. However, the chapter begins with a definition of transition and an overview of transitional theories pertinent to the research question, followed by a description of the programs and policies in place to assist newly separated service members in their journey toward the civilian workplace. Next is a discussion of the current transitional challenges that service members experience. These include challenges in employment and education, the military-to-civilian culture clash and loss of identity and purpose, mental and physical health and social connectedness, and awareness of and access to VA benefits (Keeling et al., 2018; Van Slyke & Armstrong, 2019). The chapter then contains a discussion of the prevalence of veterans transitioning into executive leadership positions, executive leaders’ attributes, the importance of mentoring, and current recruitment practices of junior military officers.

**Transition From Soldier to Civilian**

Transition is a process in which an individual experiences “a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Whether a prior service member experiences a transition from the military to civilian life voluntarily or through an abrupt change in circumstances significantly influences the manner in which the transition is perceived and the rate at which it is adapted (Schlossberg, 1981). Ultimately, discharge from the armed forces results in a subjective role change that is accompanied by the loss of the familiarity of a regimented military culture (Redmond et al., 2015). Reintegration into the civilian sector is a multidimensional process that is
influenced at every level of a veteran’s life, described as an ecological system consisting of “family, community, and workplace” (Elnitsky, Fisher, & Blevins, 2017, p. 369). As a result, reintegration into the civilian life poses a significant challenge for many veterans, thereby warranting a need for a deep understanding of the issues that veterans face in transitioning and the programs aimed at promoting successful and fluid integration (VA, 2018b).

A military-civilian transition process model was proposed for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and suggests that four phases occur in the transition process (Figure 1). Phase I is referred to as the prerelease phase and starts at the time of awareness that separation is going to occur. Separation could be the cause of voluntarily deciding not to re-enlist, mandatory retirement, Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) action, or due to a medical discharge. During the prerelease phase, variables such as the service members’ physical and mental health, military occupation skill (MOS), level of education, familial and marital status, and projected occupation should be considered.

Figure 1. Military to civilian transition process model. From “Transitioning From Military to Civilian Life: Examining the Final Step in a Military Career,” by D. Blackburn, 2016, Canadian Military Journal, 16, p. 57.
During this phase and phase 2-A, the service member will meet with a social worker (SW) to ease the transition. The CAF acknowledges that a majority of transitional challenges are psychological and a SW, through a systematic approach, can identify and address these psychological challenges with the service member in these phases (J. M. Thompson et al., 2017). Phase 1 ends and Phases 2-A and 2-B begin when the service member receives his or her official letter of release. Phase 2-A lasts anywhere from a few days to several weeks and consists of several administrative procedures such as returning military-issued equipment, debriefing service members on their benefits to include pensions and transitional benefits, and the steps to departure. During Phase 2-A the service member is still considered on active duty service. However, in Phase 2-B, the service member is now considered a veteran and a civilian-to-be as he or she is released from active duty service (Blackburn, 2016). This phase is considered to last anywhere from several hours to several years and consists of meeting with a VA case manager to determine available resources and delivery of transitional services. During this phase of the military to civilian process, the transition plan should be implemented. Finally Phase 3 is considered the postrelease phase and does not begin until the veteran feels he or she has adapted to civilian life. In this phase, it is important to consider the veteran’s integration into society, the community, his or her sense of belonging to the community, “social and sports activities, and the person’s occupational plan and health” (Blackburn, 2016, p. 58). Although there is no unanimously accepted military transition model, scholars agree that the military-to-civilian transition is complex and occurs in several phases or steps (Blackburn, 2016; Castro & Dursun, 2019). As a result, there are several military-to-civilian transition frameworks and theories (Castro & Dursun, 2019).
Theories of Transition

Developmental theorists sought to explain the various transitional factors that affect an individual over the course of a lifespan (Van Geert, 1988). Although the primary purpose of all transitional theories is to explain how adults experience and respond to change, there are a multitude of transitional events within an individual’s lifespan warranting theories specific to those events (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For this research study, Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S transition theory and Kintzle and Castro’s (2018) military transition theory (MTT) are best suited and are therefore explored. Ultimately, Kintzle and Castro’s MTT was used as the theoretical framework for the study because it is derived from Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S theory but is curtailed to the specific transitional challenges experienced by service members.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (4S)

Developed by Nancy Schlossberg (1981), the 4S transition theory described transitioning as a process that takes place on a continuum, which is directly affected by the circumstances of the transition and the individual’s perceptions of that particular transition (situation), characteristics of the pretransition and posttransition environments (support), the individual’s characteristics (self), and his or her ability to adapt (strategies). The transition can be the result of an event or disposition that results in a change of social networks leading to either deterioration or growth. Factors that influence whether the transition will result in a successful transition or deterioration include the individual’s perceptions of it, which are based on the perceived role change (gain or loss), affect (positive or negative), source of the transition (internal/chosen or external/forced), timing (on/expected or off-time/unexpected), onset (gradual or sudden), and duration.
Variables that affect the pretransition and posttransition environments include internal support systems such as spouse, family, friends, institutional support, and physical setting in which the transition is taking place. Characteristics of the individual also significantly impact progression of the transition and include variables such as demographics of the individual (age, sex, ethnicity), socioeconomic status (SES), value orientation, and experience with transitioning. The interaction of these variables significantly impacts an individual’s ability to adapt and successfully transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Schlossberg, 1981; see Figure 2).

Military Transition Theory

Proposed by Kintzle and Castro (2018), the MTT describes the progression and factors that affect newly separated service members transition into the civilian sector and workforce. Composed of three overlapping and interacting segments, the MTT describes transition as “moving from the military culture to the civilian culture, producing changes in relationships, assumptions, work context, and personal and social identity” (Kintzle & Castro, 2018, p. 118). The three phases of the MTT (see Figure 3) include approaching the military transition, managing the transition, and an indication phase, which is assessing the transition (Castro & Kintzle, 2017). Approaching the military phase includes three interconnected segments, namely, military cultural factors (e.g., discharge status and combat history), personal characteristics (e.g., health, expectations, and personal preparedness), and nature of the transition (predicted or unpredicted, perceived as positive or negative). The managing of the transition phase consists of four variables: (a) individual adjustment factors such as coping styles, attitudes, and beliefs; (b) social support networks such as family, friends, and community; (c) military transition management such as navigating the VA; and (d) extent of community and civilian transition support such as civilian services targeted at helping service members transition. The final phase, called assessing the transition, is an indicator to how successful a newly separated service member has transitioned. This last phase consists of variables that are interconnected; therefore, failure to achieve one outcome does not mean the service member has failed overall in his or her transition to the civilian sector. Phase 3 indicators include the acquisition of work, acclimation to family and new family roles, proper management of physical and mental health needs, extent of adaptation to new social
networks also termed general well-being, and the extent to which the new veteran is engaging with his or her community (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Kintzle & Castro, 2018).

Like Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S theory, the MTT describes the progression of transitioning as a dynamic process significantly affected by the context of the newly separated service member’s situation, self, and strategies of coping (approaching the military transition) and support systems (managing the transition). Although not outlined by the 4S transition theory, variables such as employment rates, general well-being, and health status are evident indicators of transition success or failure in newly separated service members. However, the MTT is specifically modeled after the environment that
service members are transitioning through; therefore, it was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

**Transition Programs and Policies**

Support services and programs for military personnel’s transition to civilian life have grown exponentially. Initially, transition assistance consisted of pensions and incidental medical care prior to World War I (VA, 2018b). Twelve years after the massive transition of World War I veterans into the civilian sector, the VA was created in 1930 by integrating the Veterans’ Bureau, the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, and the Bureau of Pensions (VA, 2007) as an initial step to better handle the needs of transitioning soldiers. In 1944, the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, the initial GI Bill, was signed by President Roosevelt to augment the negative impact that a large unemployable veteran population would have on the labor market. Although the initial GI Bill expired in 1956, its inception spurred a multitude of programs and legislation aimed at improving the employability of transitioning veterans (VA, 2018b). Eventually, the Montgomery GI Bill was established in 1984 with the objective of increasing recruitment and retention of volunteer service members, an objective that inadvertently and significantly contributed to the “American middle class” through home ownership and educational opportunities (Dortch, 2017; VA, 2018b, p. 5). Over the years, the federal government has continued to increase and modify its services and programs to reflect the needs of its transitioning veterans (see Table 1). In addition, many stakeholders within the community have attempted to ease the military-to-civilian transition by offering varying resources to newly separated service veterans.
Table 1

Government Transitional Programs and Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of inception</th>
<th>Program/service name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Transition Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Transition GPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>I Vow to Hire Hero’s Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>DoD Skillsbridge Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Forever GI Bill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Transition Assistance Program

In 1991, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was created under the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with the aim of easing transition of involuntarily separated service members into the civilian sector as a result of the post-Cold War drawdown in which the military lost nearly 37% of its personnel (Lytell et al., 2015). The program encompasses a transition plan for veterans that covers “education, training, employment, and financial objectives for the member and spouse” (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2018, p. 1). The program also includes an overview of the benefits and services available to the veteran to include health, financial planning, career and employment, and available services for spouses and caregivers. In addition, the program addresses the availability of relocation, vocational rehabilitation, and VA compensation. Health-related topics covered include healthcare coverage (dental, medical, and mental health) and the affects that transitioning may have on the member and his or her family. Financial planning through the TAP program covers VA home loan services, counseling on how to budget money, and information on taxes, credit, and savings (CRS, 2018).
Transition GPS

In 2009, as the result of a steady climb in unemployment rates among Gulf War Era II veterans (see Figure 4 on p. 43), the Obama administration created the Veterans’ Employment Initiative Task Force consisting of the VA and the Department of Defense (DOD; CRS, 2018). Obama instructed the task force to redevelop the TAP into the transition goals, plans, success (GPS) program in which the employment of military veterans upon expiration term of service (ETS) is at the forefront. The new program requires transition assistance to start at the beginning of a service member’s military career. This new proactive strategy is referred to as a military life cycle (MLC) component and ensures service members are aware of Career Readiness Standards throughout their military career (CRS, 2018). Additional services of the new program include a preseparation counseling requirement, core curriculum that includes 8-10 hours in a workshop covering topics such as an overview of transition, resilience, military occupational code crosswalk, personal financial planning, individual transition planning, and a 6-hour VA benefits brief. In addition, a capstone in which the service member is required to ensure that he or she meets the Career Readiness Standards is held to ensure employment readiness. Finally, an optional 2-day transition track is offered (CRS, 2018).

I Vow to Hire Heroes Act

In 2011, the I Vow to Hire Heroes Act was signed mandating separating service members to participate in the transition GPS or TAP (Democratic Policy and Communications Center [DPCC], 2011). The act also established an employment assistance component and early access to the transition GPS or TAP a year before ETS or 2 years prior for retiring service members. Key provisions of the act included tax credits
from $5,600 to $9,600 to employers who hire veterans and service-connected disabled veterans looking for employment over a certain duration of time. The act also included a 1-year extension of the Montgomery GI Bill for unemployed veterans toward either education or training programs provided by community colleges or technical schools. Finally, the act also extended vocational rehabilitation privileges for 1 year to disabled veterans (DPCC, 2011).

**DOD Skillbridge Program**

Also known as the Job Training, Employment Skills Training, Apprenticeships, and Internships (JTEST-AI) program, the DOD Skillsbridge program was established in 2014 with the aim of offering service members and newly transitioning service members the opportunity for civilian job training. The program focuses on offering skills acquisition and job placement through apprenticeship and internships for service members 180 days from ETSing. The program works in collaboration with industry partners to ensure a smooth transition into the workforce after acquiring the necessary skill sets (DOD, 2014).

**Forever GI Bill**

In 2017, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act was signed eliminating time restriction on GI Bill benefits to veterans and increased assistance to service members. The act also removed higher education restrictions allowing veterans to use their GI Bill at postsecondary vocational institutions otherwise restricted under the standard GI Bill terms. Further, a monthly housing stipend was incorporated into the bill, a pilot program was established in which veterans could enroll in technology based
educational programs, and outreach programs were established to inform veterans of
institutions enforcing priority enrollment of veterans (VA, 2018a).

Various Stakeholder Support

In addition to the government-funded interventions mentioned above, many
stakeholders within the community have attempted to ease the military-to-civilian
transition by offering resources to newly separated service veterans (see Appendix A).
Transitional assistance comes in the form of mentoring programs, advocacy groups, tools,
training and on demand centers of knowledge. Each organization offers a unique website
that connect newly separated service members, centers of excellence or transitional
counseling resources. Specialized assistance may be sought by the veteran and usually
comes at no cost. Many of the resources provided to veterans from the organizations
listed in Appendix A link veterans with top employers in different fields. For example,
the MBA Veterans Network connect first- and second-year MBA student veterans with
top employers through career conferences.

Transitioning Challenges

Although the unemployment rate of Gulf War Era II veterans has significantly
decreased since 2011 (see Figure 4), BLS reported an elevated unemployment rate (5.7%)
for veterans who reported serving in Iraq and Afghanistan (BLS, 2019b). Annual
surveying of veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan reveals that transitional
challenges still exist. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA, 2017)
surveyed over 4,300 veterans, of which 79% of those unemployed reported being without
work for over 27 weeks. Further, of those veterans employed, 37% reported feeling that
their current occupation was below their skill set (IAVA, 2017). Further, a report
published by Zoli, Maury, and Fay (2015) on the surveying of over 8,500 veterans and service members revealed that several key transitional issues include maneuvering VA programs, services, and benefits (60%); establishing employment (55%); adjusting to civilian culture (41%); handling financial challenges (40%); and translation of military skills to civilian life (39%). The literature revealed several key challenges that veterans face when transitioning to the civilian sector, including employment issues such as employer discrimination, stigma, and lack of transitional support; education challenges that mirror those found in employment; military-to-civilian culture clash and loss of identity and purpose; mental and physical health and social connectedness and awareness; and access of VA benefits as issues in transition and reintegration into the civilian sector (Keeling et al., 2018; Van Slyke & Armstrong, 2019).

Employment

Even with the extensive programs and services offered to newly transitioning service members, employment still ranks very highly among those surveyed as a major transitional challenge (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Dirani, 2017; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Keeling et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2015). The literature review revealed that employment challenges were primarily associated with employers’ misconceptions and stigmas regarding veterans skill sets and mental health (Davis & Minnis, 2017; Keeling et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2015) as well as retention challenges (Harrod, Miller, Henry, & Zivin, 2017).

One of Keeling et al.’s (2018) findings was that participants reported significant organizational and societal barriers in the form of perceived employer discrimination and stigma, a lack of transitional support, negative support service experiences, the feeling of starting over because they had to obtain entry level jobs, and military skills that were either mismatched or did not transfer to the civilian sector (Keeling et al., 2018). These challenges have also been documented in the work of Bergman and Herd (2017), Davis and Minnis (2017), and Harrod et al. (2017). The concept that veterans face a wide variety of challenges that limit their reentry into civilian employment is also seen in the work of Kintzle et al. (2015). In his study, researchers conducted semistructured interviews with pre-9/11 ($n = 16$) and post-9/11 ($N = 17$) veterans regarding employment challenges. Participants reported difficulty translating military skill sets to the civilian sector and the fact that employers hesitated to hire veterans as a result of their perceptions about veteran’s mental health issues (Keeling et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2015).
One researcher explored the process of transferring military skill sets into the civilian sector by conducting in-depth interviews with members of a veterans service center within the United States (Dirani, 2017). Participants ($N = 10$) were purposefully selected and had to be veterans who successfully transitioned into the civilian workforce for over 1 year. Research findings suggest that veterans who can successfully transition into the civilian workforce were able to transfer their military skill set through individual transfer factors such as ability (personal capacity) and through organizational support. Specifically, veterans had to unlearn certain erroneous military routines and skill sets and learn new ones in their place. Organizational support in the form of supervisory and peer support were found to be essential for this transition to occur. Based on the research findings, organizational support should include an engagement program in which veterans are strategically placed on projects or within teams for a short duration of time before being placed within the general workforce. Participants noted a perceptual change of how they viewed themselves as “in command,” “a hero,” or “leader” to being just an everyday citizen. Therefore, the research findings suggest that organizational supports should engage new veteran hires into these team environments to facilitate the necessary cognitive change essential for transition into the civilian workforce (Dirani, 2017).

Another major transitional challenge for veterans is job retention. Service-connected disability of Gulf War Era II veterans was at 41% as compared to 25% of all other veteran populations (BLS, 2019a). A research study conducted on veterans’ experiences in maintaining employment suggested that disabled veterans experience higher turnover rates than nondisabled veterans (Harrod et al., 2017). Participants ($N = 10$) with employment and mental health issues were recruited from a VA primary care
clinic and took part in semistructured interviews. The research findings revealed three key themes as they pertain to this sample population. First, mental health symptoms manifested themselves while the veteran was in the workplace. This was predominantly seen with veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Second, many of the participants felt that their current civilian position was a demotion from their career in the military. Third, participants reported being unable to relate to coworkers, preventing them from forming work relationships. These research findings suggest that veterans with physical or mental health disabilities could be inherently disadvantaged in obtaining work-related opportunities or promotions as a result of their inability to establish work relationships (Harrod et al., 2017). It is important to note that veterans who do successfully transition and are retained in the civilian workforce often choose professions in which military experience applies (Schulker, 2017). A quantitative research study analyzing the field and income of successfully transitioned service members suggested that vocational programs for newly separated veterans should focus on occupations and industries with military–civilian overlap (Schulker, 2017). Research findings from this study revealed that “protective service occupations and the public administration industry emerge as having greater than 3 times the likelihood of employing veterans” (Schulker, 2017, p. 701). Conversely, for those service members whose military occupational specialty (MOS) are within infantry or in some other field not readily translated into the civilian sector, apprenticeship programs are essential (Hanson & Lerman, 2016).

**Education**

Major challenges reported in the literature regarding newly separated service members’ transition into academics partially mirrored employment challenges.
Specifically, translation of military skills into academic credit, as well as acclimation to the new culture, is a particular challenge (Bergman & Herd, 2017; Naphan-Kingery & Elliott, 2015; Voelpel, Escallier, Fullerton, & Rodriguez, 2018). A systemic review of the literature conducted by Bergman and Herd (2017) suggested the importance of offering newly separated service members college credit for skills learned in the military. High-risk service members such as those with mental or physical health challenges, those experiencing an abrupt separation from the military, and gender and ethnic minorities could especially benefit from academic programs offering college credit for already acquired skill sets because these groups suffer the highest unemployment rates (Goldberg, Cooper, Milleville, Barry, & Schein, 2015; Greer, 2017). Military skills assessment for college credit could significantly influence service members’ employability and ultimately ease the military-to-civilian transition.

Other challenges veterans face within the academic realm stem from clashes between military and academic culture, which is exacerbated by their nontraditional student status (Dobson, Joyner, Latham, Leake, & Stoffel, 2019; Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Tkacik, & Dahlberg, 2018) and financial strain (Dyar, 2016). A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to assess faculty and staff’s implicit cultural values and expectations of prior service members as they relate to what the researcher termed as “a hidden curriculum against student veterans’ smooth transition into higher education” (Lim et al., 2018, p. 291). Faculty (n = 9) and student veterans (n = 20) were recruited for the study from a public university located on the southeast side of the United States and asked to participate in semistructured individual and group interviews. The two major findings from this study were that faculty/staff and veteran students held
different views on the definition of self-sufficiency and on concepts of leadership and accountability derived from the core beliefs and values established by their cultures. Consequently, incongruences in the definitions between these two groups result in conflicting understandings and behaviors that ultimately impeded student veterans’ academic transition. Namely, faculty/staff expect student veterans to be self-sufficient in a way that requires little to no supervision and expect them to be proactive and assertive when needing help. Unfortunately, this perception is counter to the socialized norms found in military culture in which the service member is expected to “accomplish tasks despite any obstacles and to follow directions without questioning authority or asking for help” (Lim et al., 2018, p. 302). Further, faculty/staff expect student veterans to possess leadership skills that facilitate their gathering of struggling students to direct and motivate them. To the contrary, student veterans expect to share leadership with self-directed teammates. As a result, student veterans perceive their faulty/staff’s behavior as unsupportive, scattered, and ambiguous. They also perceive faculty’s push toward leadership as a major point of contention because the student veteran is in a state of distress and is expected to handle what he or she perceives to be irresponsible teammates (Lim et al., 2018). Research findings from this study illustrate the significant effect military culture has on newly transitioned veterans’ perceptions of the civilian sector and the underlying importance of understanding the conceptual differences.

**Military-to-Civilian Culture Clash and Loss of Identity and Purpose**

A significant transitional issue reported within the literature is that of culture clash. Newly separated service members have a strong military identity as a the result of years of socialization resulting, in warring identities between service members military
and civilian self (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). This military identity that created a supportive social framework within the military has been found to significantly hinder a service member’s ability to assimilate into civilian communities and the workforce (Cox, 2019; Keeling et al., 2018; Rose, Herd, & Palacio, 2017). As a result of military separation, many veterans report feeling a loss of identity and, ultimately, purpose (Stern, 2017). Prior research findings regarding identity loss provide further support for the significance of this transitional challenge. Extensive research exists to support the importance of an individual’s identity and impact on their professional success. Argyris and Schön (1974) produced research that describe how an individual’s self-view and the difference in their public representation of self ultimately drive interpersonal relationships and affect organizational enculturation. Argyris and Schön’s concepts of theory-in-use and Espoused theory research has been replicated multiple times and has proven that that the disconnect between self and public view contributes to both intended and unintended consequence. The concept of theory-in-use and espoused theory is especially import for the transitioning military member, as their identity flexes within a drastically changing cultural construct. A research study conducted by Albertson (2019) on a cohort of veterans with substance abuse and disciplinary issues sought to explore the relationship between separation and sense of belonging and citizenship. Contrary to the comradery experienced in the military and socialization formulating a military identity, participants (N = 35) reported feelings of bereavement and a sense of loss upon transitioning out of the military (Albertson, 2019). In contrast, the second part of a mixed-methods case study conducted by Hawkins, McGuire, Linder, and Britt (2015) aimed to explore the contextual influences of reintegration in a sample of disabled veterans (N = 9).
criteria for participants consisted of veterans deployed during the Global War on Terrorism who self-reported one or more physical or psychological disabilities. Contrary to prior research findings of military identity hindering transition into the civilian community and workforce, researchers found social support structures with other service members essential to reintegration into civilian communities. Hawkins et al. posited that the relationship between military identity in disabled veterans is directly connected to self-esteem, which is buffered by establishing relationships with former military service members. Major research findings from this study suggested that social support and personal factors such as self-efficacy are directly linked to veterans’ ability to successfully reintegrate into civilian communities (Hawkins et al., 2015). Taken together, these studies suggest that successful integration of prior service members into the civilian culture requires an intermediary step between military and civilian environments that facilitates a slow and gradual dissociation from a military identity into a civilian one.

**Mental and Physical Health and Social Connectedness**

Physical and mental health needs of veterans pose a significant challenge for service members’ transition into the civilian workforce and community (Henderson & Burns, 2015; IAVA, 2017; Olenick, Flowers, & Diaz, 2015; Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2015). The literature review revealed a heavy concentration in the prevalence of mental health disabilities within the veteran population such as PTSD, depression, anxiety (Elnitsky et al., 2017; Harrod et al., 2017; Kintzle, Barr, Corletto, & Castro, 2018), and related maladjusted coping mechanisms such as an increase in substance abuse and suicides (Olenick et al., 2015). Loss of identity and sense of purpose often results in a
lack of social connectedness, which is suggested to significantly trigger mental health symptomology (Kintzle et al., 2018). The prevalence of combat related PTSD among service members and veterans is suggested to be anywhere from 13.5% (Dursa, Reinhard, Barth, & Schneiderman, 2014) to as high as 34% (Xue et al., 2015). A total of 500,000 service members have been diagnosed with PTSD since 2002. Unfortunately, PTSD is difficult to diagnose since symptomology may not appear until a significant time has passed since the initial trauma thereby suggesting that the actual number of service members and veterans with PTSD is actually higher (M. Thompson, 2015). Originally termed “soldiers’ heart” in the American Civil war (Pollard et al., 2016), PTSD has had several different names over the years to include “shell shock” during WWI, “battle fatigue” during WWII, and it was termed “operational exhaustion” during the Korean war (Hinton & Good, 2016). Finally, after the Vietnam war, the term “operational exhaustion” was changed to PTSD (M. Thompson, 2015).

In addition to a high prevalence of PTSD within the veteran population, there are also risk factors that increase a veteran’s susceptibility to developing PTSD (see Table 2). A meta-analysis of risk factors associated with developing combat-related PTSD in service members and veterans was conducted. Researcher findings suggest several “significant predictors of PTSD among military personnel and veterans” (Xue et al., 2015, p. 1). The research study described three categories of risk factors found before the trauma (pretrauma), during the trauma (peritrauma) and after the trauma (posttrauma) had occurred. Demographic factors such as race/ethnicity and gender are considered pretraumatic factors to the development of PTSD. Specifically, service members or
### Table 2

*Risk Factors for Combat-Related PTSD in Service Members and Veterans*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Odds ratio (95% CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretraumatic factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female gender</td>
<td>1.63 (1.32-2.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White race</td>
<td>1.18 (1.06-1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower education level</td>
<td>1.33 (1.14-1.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower rank (nonofficer)</td>
<td>2.18 (1.84-2.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army as branch of service</td>
<td>2.30 (1.76-3.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat specialization</td>
<td>1.69 (1.39-2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of deployments (≥2)</td>
<td>1.24 (1.10-1.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer length of deployments</td>
<td>1.28 (1.13-1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverse life events</td>
<td>1.99 (1.55-2.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior trauma</td>
<td>1.13 (1.01-1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological problem(s)</td>
<td>1.49 (1.22-1.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peritrauma factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat exposure</td>
<td>2.10 (1.73-2.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharged a weapon</td>
<td>4.32 (2.60-7.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw someone wounded/killed</td>
<td>3.12 (2.40-4.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe trauma</td>
<td>2.91 (1.85-4.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment-related stressor</td>
<td>2.69 (1.46-4.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttrauma factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdeployment support (yes)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.18-0.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Veterans of racial minority status and women are suggested to have a higher risk factor of developing PTSD as opposed to their Caucasian male counterparts (Xue et al., 2015).

Other pretrauma risk factors associated with the development of PTSD include minimal education, a prevalence of prior adverse life events and traumas, serving in the Army as opposed to other branches, enlisted ranking (nonofficer status), prior mental health issues, combat specialization, and length of deployment. Research findings suggested that factors of the trauma period (peritrauma) also played a role in the likelihood that a service member or veteran would develop PTSD. The research findings suggested that
peritrauma factors include the type of combat exposure experienced, whether the soldier discharged his or her weapon, witnessing the death or maiming of other individuals, and experiencing other severe traumas and stressors related to deployment. Finally, the research study described only one posttrauma risk factor that significantly increases the chances of a service member developing PTSD, and that is a lack of a strong postdeployment support system (Xue et al., 2015).

For those soldiers who are diagnosed with PTSD, treatment options include psychotherapy and medications. Specifically, nonpharmacological treatments include talk therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure therapy, and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). Exposure therapy is a behavioral technique used in the treatment of anxiety disorders. In this method of treatment, the veteran would be exposed to the source of anxiety in order to address his or her emotional reactions in a safe environment. EMDR is a psychotherapeutic method first described by Fancine Shapiro in the 1990s. Using this form of therapy, the veteran would be asked to recall distressing images and then participate in bilateral sensory input, like moving his or her eyes back and forth or tapping both of his or her feet. Pharmaceutical intervention or medications include antidepressants, antianxiety medications, and second-line medications such as Prazosin (Reisman, 2016). Antidepressants in the form of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) are the primary medication prescribed if talk-therapy alone has not been enough. Other medications used to treat PTSD are considered off-label or second-line therapies and only sertraline and paroxetine (SSRI’s) are FDA-approved drugs specifically approved to treat PTSD (Reisman, 2016). Although there are
several options for the treatment of PTSD, the effectiveness of treatment is subjective and varies by person.

A quantitative research study conducted by Tsai and colleagues (2016) examined growth from PTSD over time. Specifically, researchers surveyed 1,838 U.S. veterans and identified five different categories of posttraumatic growth (PTG). The categories consisted of a “Consistently Low group (33.6%), Moderately Declining (19.4%), Increasing PTG (16.8%), Dramatically Declining (15.7%)” (Tsai et al., 2016, p. 9). Researchers concluded that growth from PTSD is persistent over time for those veterans (59.4%) who reported at least moderate growth from PTSD. Research findings further suggest that veterans’ symptomology of PTSD can be attenuated with social connectedness, a feeling of purpose in life, altruism, religiosity, and certain psychological factors (Tsai et al., 2016). Interpretation of these research findings suggests a positive mediating role between veterans’ feelings of social connectedness and levels of mental health severity.

**Awareness and Access of VA Benefits**

Although significant provisions have been made to accommodate service members in their transition to the civilian sector, awareness and access are still significant transitional challenges (Zoli et al., 2015). A quantitative research study conducted by Zoli and colleagues (2015) revealed that 60% of respondents ($N = 8,500$) reported issues with accessing and navigating VA services and benefits. With a high prevalence of service-connected mental and physical health disabilities and elevated suicide rates, awareness and access to mental health services is essential for newly separated service members to successfully transition into gainful employment and the civilian community.
A 2018 report published by the VA described steps taken to ensure access to these at-risk veteran populations. Specifically, the Joint Action Plan for EO 13822 described efforts taken to ensure awareness and access to mental health services (VA, 2018b).

**Veterans as Executives**

As described by the literature, several transitional challenges are suggested to affect a service member’s ability to successfully transition into the civilian workforce (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Dirani, 2017; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Keeling et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2015). Although the transitional challenges of newly separated service members are great, the majority successfully transition into the civilian workforce (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015) to include a small subset of senior military leaders who enter the executive suite (Ford, 2017). Prior research suggests that military training offers veterans leadership skills conducive to C-suite positions. However, there are fewer ex-military CEOs holding positions in Standard and Poor (S&P) 500 organizations than 4 decades ago.

**Leadership**

A mixed-methods research study conducted in 2005 by Korn/Ferry International explored the relationship between ex-military CEOs’ experience in the military and their executive performance. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Economist Intelligence Unit and consisted of a two-part study in which a quantitative analysis of S&P 500 companies led by CEOs with a military background was conducted followed by in-depth interviews with four ex-military CEOs (Korn/Ferry International, 2006). Research findings suggested that six leadership traits were acquired by participants as a result of their military service. The six traits included
the ability to stay calm under pressure, a highly developed sense of ethics, the
ability to define goals and motivate others to follow, good communication skills,
organizational skills such as planning and effective use of resources, and the
ability to work as a team. (Korn/Ferry International, 2006, p. 1)

A research study using secondary data sources was conducted by Benmelech and
Frydman (2015) aimed to explore the relationship between ex-military CEOs’ military
experience on corporate outcomes, managerial decisions, and financial policies. In line
with the research findings reported in Korn/Ferry International’s (2006) study,
Benmelech and Frydman (2015) discovered that firms run by ex-military CEOs
performed better than other firms not run by ex-military CEOs during industry downturns
and were less likely to be involved in fraudulent activities. These research findings
suggest that ex-military CEOs do perform better under stressful conditions and may have
a highly developed ethical sense (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015). Further support for the
study conducted by Korn/Ferry International (2006) was provided by a research study
conducted on military cadets ($N = 594$) at West Point on their attitudes in comparison to
undergraduate Generation X students ($N = 372$) at Syracuse University (Franke, 2001).
Research findings suggest that West Point cadets had a significantly higher ethical
component (honesty is best policy and moral action) as compared to their peers (Franke,
2001). Korn/Ferry International (2006) describes an individual’s ability to define goals,
execute a plan, effectively utilize resources, motivate others to follow and maintain
effective communication as the integral components of being a leader in the U.S.
military. However, it is assumed that even the most competent leaders require some
crafting. Although peer-reviewed literature on the topic of CEOs and mentoring is
almost nonexistent, the researcher hypothesized that some type of mentorship must take place well before a leader enters the executive suite.

**Mentoring**

Originally proposed in Homer’s *Odyssey*, mentor was portrayed as a teacher and guide to Odysseus’ son Telemachus (Jakubik, Eliades, & Weese, 2016). However, the character mentor portrayed in Homer’s *Odyssey* did not embody the characteristics associated with what is thought of today as a mentor, instead Francois Fenelon’s 1699 novel *Les Adventures de Telemaque* described a mentor as a father figure or a guiding instructor better in-line with the views of the definition of mentor today (Smith, 2018). Mentorship is described in the literature as the relationship between two individuals in which one holds more knowledge and is the mentor while the other is the mentee or protégé (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018). It is suggested to be an intense relationship of one-on-one development (Rosser, 2005). Traditional definitions of mentoring, as posited by Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978), highlighted how different a mentoring relationship is as compared to that of work colleagues or other workplace relationships. Namely, that traditional mentoring relationships incorporate dimensions such as how emotionally intense the relationship can be, the power of the mentor in the relationship, and the amount of intense focus and assistance the mentor provides the mentee (Turban & Lee, 2007).

The role of mentoring in adult development was originally explored in Levinson et al. (1978) scholarly research in human development and further developed by Roche (1978) and Kram (1983, 1985). Levinson et al. (1978) examined the role and importance of mentoring during an adult’s development, while Roche (1979) examined the
importance and prevalence of mentoring of executives within companies (Levinson et al., 1978). Roche’s (1979) research findings suggested that a high prevalence (two thirds) of the sample population (\( N = 4,004 \)) had been mentored during their career. Further, those who had been mentored experienced higher salaries at a younger age, were better educated, had a higher prevalence of following a career plan, and in turn, were more likely to mentor others.

Mentorship has long been a pillar of military leadership development. In 2003 the United States Navy’s Chief Naval Officer (CNO) emphasized the role of mentorship when he suggested that mentoring should be a preeminent focus of the U.S. Navy. CNO Admiral Vern Clark directed Navy leadership to help “create a mentoring culture” and “assign a mentor for every service member by March 2003.” (Clark, 2003 pg.26). A review of the literature revealed many references that support Adm. Clark’s perspectives. Huwe further supported Adm. Clarks view in her study by identifying that the Navy's most successful officers had been mentored (Huwe. J 1999.) within each branch of the United States Armed Forces. With such an emphasis on mentorship and the success that it engenders within the military and the existence of similar references within the civilian community it is ironic that a literary gap exists in the comparison of military to corporate mentorship practices. Void of direct comparison significant literary references exist that describe the criticality of mentorship in the civilian workplace.

The research findings suggested that executives who were mentored were happier with the progress of their careers and experienced greater pleasure doing their jobs (Roche, 1979). Originally implemented in the workplace in the late 1970s and early
1980s, the practice of mentoring flourished in the 1990s and became a common practice within the corporate world (Jakubik et al., 2016).

A qualitative research study conducted by Rosser (2005) aimed to explore the informal mentoring experiences of organizational CEOs ($N = 15$). Inclusion criteria for the study required participants to be the “chief decision-making officers,” willing to partake in an hour-long face-to-face interview, “willing to share their experiences,” and the company they headed had to have a minimum of 500 employees (Rosser, 2005, p. 529).

Each participant in this research study described informal mentoring relationships that formed as a matter of happenstance. The length of the mentor–mentee relationships ranged from a few months to over 30 years for this sample population. Participants noted that the mentoring process started long before they entered the C-suite, and all participants credited this relationship to their success and current standing as a CEO. It is important to note that 11 of the 15 CEOs interviewed for this study came from low SES backgrounds. These participants perceived that their mentoring allowed them to break the barriers associated with their low SES. One participant noted a negative mentor–mentee experience but used that experience as a model of how not to mentor. Ultimately, this research study suggested the importance of the mentor–mentee relationship in cultivating executive leadership and is an example of how to cultivate executive leaders.

Another quantitative study conducted in the field of Information Technology (IT) examined the relationship between mentoring and job success and employability (Bozionelos et al., 2016). In Bozionelos et al.’s (2016) research study participant pairs ($N = 207$), consisting of a subordinate and a line-manager, were asked to complete various
surveys based on their position, which consisted of five different instruments. The five instruments were the mentoring receipt scale, a subjective career success scale, an employability and job performance scale, and an objective career success scale. The research findings suggested that mentoring was significantly linked to job and career success as well as employability (Bozionelos et al., 2016).

Prior research findings suggest the importance of mentorship in cultivating executive leaders. Positive career outcomes associated with mentorship include increasing the likelihood of job and career success, and significantly influencing employability (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Roche, 1979; Rosser, 2005). Further, the research findings suggest that those who are mentored tend to be happier with their career progression, are more likely to follow a career plan, and are more likely to mentor others (Roche, 1979). Hence, mentoring is an excellent tool to groom newly separated service members into successful executive leaders.

**Veteran Recruitment**

The recruitment of military officers into the corporate world occurred as a result of the Vietnam War. Namely, the draft had forced corporate recruiters to take stalk of junior military officers (JMO) for corporate positions because there were minimal people to recruit from college campuses (Cameron, Alvarez, & Junker, 2012). Initially recruiters were hesitant because of the advanced age of newly separated service members, but they quickly realized prior service veteran’s CEO potential. In the 1980s and 1990s, the interest in recruiting JMOs into corporate positions continued to grow following the Gulf War (Cameron et al., 2012). Then, in March of 2010, an issue of *Fortune* magazine highlighted the recruitment of military officers into leadership positions by publishing a
picture of a JMO on the cover page with the title, “Meet the New Face of Business Leadership” (O’Keefe, 2015, p. 1). The article described how large corporations such as Walmart and Pepsi were seeking out JMOs to fill leadership roles within their organizations with room for advancement (O’Keefe, 2015).

Although a majority (59%) of CEOs in the 1980s served in the military, as of 2015, ex-military CEOs only accounted for 6.2% of the total CEO population (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015). As a result of shortages in middle and upper management, several companies have taken the initiative to seek out both newly separated enlisted and officer service members to join their ranks. Companies such as Deloitte (2019), USAA (“Assistance Programs,” 2019), Walmart, General Electric (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015), and Alliance (“Working Everyday,” 2019) have recruitment programs specifically targeted toward veterans.

In addition to individual companies taking a proactive step toward recruiting, developing, and retaining veterans, the I Vow to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 established lucrative provisions in the form of tax credits for employers to hire veterans and service-connected disabled veterans (DPCC, 2011). Regardless of the current incentivization for hiring veterans, many companies acknowledge the skills and attributes that noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and senior military leaders possess and often recruit senior military leaders into executive positions prior to ETS (Ford, 2017). However, the decline in ex-military CEOs over the last 4 decades begs the question as to why more service members are not being recruited into executive-level positions.
Summary

In conclusion, newly separated service members face a plethora of transitional challenges. The literature review revealed several studies that identified employment and education, military-to-civilian culture clash and loss of identity and purpose, mental and physical health and social connectedness, and awareness and access of VA benefits as issues in transition and reintegration into the civilian sector (Keeling et al., 2018; Van Slyke & Armstrong, 2019). As a result of the enactment of several provisions by the U.S. government, unemployment rates have significantly decreased since 2011 (BLS, 2012b, 2018). However, the prevalence of veterans in executive positions is low (6.2%) as compared to their prevalence in executive positions (59%) in the 1980s (Benmelech & Frydman, 2015). Newly separated junior and midlevel military leaders have leadership competency and a unique set of skills and attributes conducive to C-suite positions warranting their recruitment into these positions. However, fewer veterans are acquiring these positions. To maximize the benefits of recruiting this segment of top talent, the interplay of mentorship and self-awareness of the transitioning leader must be further understood. Therefore, understanding the transitional and mentoring experiences of veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions is warranted.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III contains the methodology utilized for this phenomenological study designed to investigate the transitional and mentee experiences of veterans who obtain senior leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies. Patton (2015) described the qualitative design as an appropriate methodology to “describe and explore” while “examining multiple perspectives” (p. 324). The primary objective of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these individuals while identifying variables and trends that can provide information to enable greater corporate leadership success among the target population. Focused interviews were conducted utilizing Schlossberg’s (1981) transition model as the primary lens to explore the transitional experience with a strategic sampling of the veteran leadership population (Anderson et al., 2012). This chapter contains the research study’s purpose statement, research questions, research design, population sample, instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the transitional and mentoring experiences as described by veterans who achieve civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Research Question

What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?
Research Design

The qualitative phenomenological research design was chosen for its alignment with the stated research objectives and appropriateness. Patton (2015) described phenomenology as having its disciplinary roots in philosophy and being best situated to address the core questions such as what the structure is, meaning and essence of lived experience of phenomenon for the person or group of people. . . . No two individuals experience the texture of life in the same manner, as such an examination of multiple perspectives and lived experiences may identify common trends, interactions or behaviors. Equipped with this greater awareness, follow on research may be conducted to establish causation and further effect positive change. (Patton, 2015, p. 98)

This study employed the qualitative phenomenological inquiry toward a veteran’s transitional experience and the effects of mentorship in his or her achievement of success. As myriad independent and dependent variables are at play throughout the transition process, it is virtually impossible to isolate the golden element that drives a veteran’s success. As such, this study adheres to the postpositivist deterministic philosophy. Creswell and Patton suggested that those who adopt a positivist view seek to observe and measure in describing phenomena while the postpositivist researcher recognizes that many factors are at play, and it may not be possible to directly correlate causes and effect within the focused area of study. Postpositivist philosophy maintains that by executing discrete and intentional actions, a researcher may maintain alignment with the scientific method of thinking and avoid bias in the investigative result. In keeping with a postpositivist qualitative method of study, this effort utilized inductive analysis and
interviews. The successful culmination of research will adhere to the phenomenological objective of describing experiences rather than explanation or analysis (Moustakas, 1990).

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described population as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). By definition, population describes a collective group with similar characteristics to which a researcher would like to generalize the results of the study (Roberts, 2010). The population of this study was quite small, much in part to the exclusivity of its membership and access to its membership. The 10 U.S. Code § 526 limits the total number of U.S. General Officers concurrently serving to 653. The exclusive nature of the population required the researcher to further expand the population to include senior company grade officers. Additional common characteristics further defined the population of this study, including a minimum of 10 years of military service within the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corp, Navy, Army, or Coast Guard. In order to support the research aims of the study, the population must have experienced a period of transition, which required an active civilian job search, transition, and at least two promotions within the civilian workforce structure prior to achieving their terminal executive employment position, and have interacted with a person the interviewee identified as a mentor.

**Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame associated with this study was quite small. The U.S. military produces fewer than 600 of these individuals per year (Walker, 2013). The individuals
identified are in high demand and often possess limited availability because of the rigors of their executive station. A minimum time in service, postmilitary executive success, and interaction with a mentor were criteria utilized to define the sample frame. The initial sample frame identified a total population of approximately 5,000 members (BLS, 2019b). The final sample of eight research candidates was determined by applying the best practice guidance offered by Patton (2014) and candidate availability. Purposeful, chain, and snowball sampling were used to isolate the final sample set. Patton (2015) described the benefits of purposeful sampling and the approach’s ability to aid the researcher in developing in-depth information about the target population. Snowball and chain sampling proved quite useful because initial searches failed to yield an adequate number of interview candidates. Patton (2002) described both snowball and chain sampling as two of the most appropriate purposive sampling methods when the researcher begins with few information-rich interviewees. The researcher began with access to several candidates who met the prescribed criteria and relied upon references and introductions from the initial interview subjects to arrive at the total sample population. Given the exclusivity of the subjects and limited schedule and geographic availability, the sample of eight former military leaders was appropriate and indicative of the larger population. It is unlikely that a larger population would have yielded alternative findings or impacted bias in a positive or negative manner.

**Sample**

In order to achieve the goals and objectives of the study and in alignment with Creswell’s (2013) guidance, individuals from the sampling frame were selected to represent the generalized population. The sample for this study was developed with
consideration to the small size of the population and guidance provided by Patton (2014) and Creswell (2013) recommended extreme variations in sample size for phenomenological research with sample sizes ranging from one to over 300 participants, but he suggested that a sample set of 10 representative individuals is often ideal as long as response saturation is achieved. Further consideration in small group sample selection was offered by Marshall (1996) who suggested that the minimal sample must answer the study’s research questions and provide for generalizing to the survey population. Although not readily generalizable to a large population, studies with smaller sample sizes provide valuable information in their own right on the chosen topic (Myers, 2017). A sample of eight research candidates was determined to achieve the goals of the research, yield meaningful themes, and arrive at a point of data saturation.

Instrumentation

The researcher served as the primary investigative instrument in this study. Because the researcher possessed experiences in both the military and civilian leadership environments, he brought familiarity with terms of art and the social norms of both communities. When determining the optimum instrumentation for this study, the researcher reflected upon the unique and complex nature of the transitional experience and posttransition leadership adaptation. It was the complexity of the organizational and personal condition that contributed to the decision to utilize focused interviews and a carefully crafted survey to further explore this lived experience. The complexities of human linguistics and experiential storytelling was described by Patton (2002), in his work which identified strategies in qualitative research and the benefits of using the researcher as the primary research instrument.
The researcher chose to utilize the semistructured interview format to gather data. The semistructured format was selected because it is known to elicit detail and depth from the respondent without constricting the response to the point that stifles elaboration (Leech, 2002). Interview questions focused on the perceptions of the lived experiences of military leaders as they transitioned from military leadership positions and sought equivalent leadership positions within civilian organizations.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the importance of leaving enough flexibility in the line of questioning to allow the respondent to elaborate on his or her experiences. In contrast, the researcher could have elected to utilize an informal conversational approach; however, because of the exclusivity of the sample set and concerns for response validation, the researcher chose to utilize the semistructured approach. Interviews were conducted at the respondent’s place of business, and interviews did not exceed 1 hour in length. The questions were designed to elicit unbiased responses in alignment with the purpose statement and research question of this study. While identical questions were posed in sequential order, the questions were open ended and asked in a conversational manner to maximize the detail and breadth of data. The interview protocol (Appendix B) was designed with best practices in mind and based upon the respondents’ transitional and mentee experience and aligned to Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) transition theory. Kimberlin and Winterstein’s (2008) guidance was considered in the formulation of interview protocols, and they stated that “there is no statistical test to determine whether a measure adequately covers a content area or adequately represents a construct; content validity usually depends on the judgment of experts in the field” (p. 2279). Correspondingly for this study, three experts in the field
of phenomenological research methods reviewed the interview questions (the experts utilized possessed doctoral degrees and experiences in the use of the phenomenological research methodology). Interview questions and protocols are found in Appendix B.

**Field Test**

Jacob and Furgurson (2012) described field-testing as an essential step in the preinterview process and an essential step to the validity of a research project. A field test was conducted prior to the candidate interviews in order to ensure interview content validity. The field test utilized the full protocol designed for the sample set as well as a postinterview questionnaire. In order to achieve the highest level of quality, the researcher included a subject matter expert, impartial researcher, and a committee of research experts in the field-test team. The field-test team provided pretest guidance and postinterview feedback and evaluation of the researcher’s questioning techniques. Upon completion of the field test, the researcher completed the Brandman University’s Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) process.

In 2002, Patton established that the meaningfulness, insights gleaned, and validity of qualitative inquiry have more of a correlation with the information richness of the selected cases and the analytical capabilities of the researcher as opposed to the sample size itself. Patten (2012) explained that in order to determine the content validity of a measure, the researcher must make judgments on the appropriateness of its contents. Considering “there is no statistical test to determine whether a measure adequately covers a content area or adequately represents a construct, content validity usually depends on the judgment of experts in the field” (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 2279). For this study, experts with experience in the phenomenological research methodology,
familiarity with the research questions, and specific experience in managing effective unbiased interviews reviewed the interview questions (Appendix B). More specifically, the experts were two individuals who had earned a doctorate. These experts helped to attest to the validity of the measure by determining the cohesion and relevance between the interview questions and the research question. In addition, they screened the questions to ensure that they were written in a manner that elicited common and shared meanings among participants in accordance with Patten’s (2012) recommendation. Following the piloting of the questions to the experts, the researcher revised the instrument based on the expert feedback. Upon completion of field test, the researcher completed the BUIRB process.

**Validity and Reliability**

While qualitative research is a useful approach to use in developing an understanding of a lived experience of social condition, it does pose several limitations. Validity defines the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the collected data and consists of construct validity and both internal and external validity (Noble & Smith, 2015; Yin, 2014). Reliability is defined by the consistency of the analytical procedures and must account for personal bias and methodological biases that may have influenced the conclusions (Noble & Smith, 2015). This study utilized the researcher’s unbiased interpretation of standardized interview responses within the subject’s natural setting. Although careful action has been taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, it is impossible to completely isolate extraneous variables and shadows of subjectivity when utilizing a human instrument. As such, validity and reliability were established through several primary methods. In order to ensure that the data collected remained pure
and the discoveries were as pure to form as possible, the researcher adopted several of the 10 validity enhancing strategies suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010).

**Internal Validity**

Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) considered that “there is no statistical test to determine whether a measure adequately covers a content area or adequately represents a construct; content validity usually depends on the judgment of experts in the field” (p. 2279). The primary methods utilized to ensure that the research remained valid included a field test and expert review of the interview protocols. The study’s interview questions were screened by two doctoral degree experts with specific knowledge associated with this study’s research objectives. In accordance with Patten’s (2012) advisement, the interview questions were reviewed to ensure that they were written in a manner that prompted consistent and commonly interpreted responses. Additionally, the interviewer’s cadence, questioning technique, and use of probes was evaluated for appropriateness. Following the piloting of the questions and the interview protocol, the experts conducted a debrief, and the researcher revised the instrument and protocols accordingly.

**Criterion Validity**

A field test was conducted by the researcher to confirm the validity and consistency of the interview protocol. Criterion-related validity “determines whether the scores from an instrument are a good predictor of some outcome they are expected to predict” (Creswell, 2013, p. 165). The researcher partnered with Brandman University’s Associate Dean of the School of Education and Qualitative Research Chair to select qualified leaders to participate in the research study.
Content Validity

Creswell (2003) stated, “Researchers evaluate content validity by examining the plan used in constructing the instrument and they examine the information about the objectives and level of difficulty of the questions” (p. 164). The researcher developed interview questions that would elicit descriptive responses in alignment with the phenomenon and experiences in question. As the life experiences are unique to each subject, the researcher employed the content validity approach to maximize standardization in response format and minimization of interviewer bias. Content validity refers to a researcher’s dependence upon instrument construction to ensure that the elements of the construct are measuring the research questions adequately (Patton, 2015).

Reliability

Patton (2002) and other prominent qualitative researchers suggested that triangulation may assist in establishing confidence by offering the examination and validation testing of multiple sources of data. Patton further elaborated on the value of triangulation in assisting the researcher in establishing data consistency. Another method utilized to ensure reliability was the use of a coactive coding partner. In 2003, Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken suggested that a study conducted without the use of coactive coding in which the researcher solely conducted primary analysis could be considered faulty. Language as strong as this contributes to the overall criticality of conducting independent coding analysis on a subset of data. Given the subjective nature of qualitative analysis, intercoder analysis provides a leading indicator of the validity of the study because a high degree of disagreement may indicate a faulty study criterion or
coding schema. In this study, the coactive coding method required the secondary coder to code 10% of the data with 80% coding alignment determined to be the minimum threshold to support data validity.

Utilizing multiple coders does not guarantee validity mathematically in the same way covariance analysis does in a quantitative study, but it is considered an elemental best practice in a qualitative study. Although there is no statistical absolute in qualitative data gathering and analysis, the approaches described previously as well as the use of consentual mechanical recording of the interview and participant review ensured that this study conformed with practices in data collection and data synthesis.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) referred to the personal in-depth, unstructured interview as the mainstay of the phenomenologist. Given the personal and experiential nature of this multiple-case phenomenological study, the researcher acted as a guide, assisting the interviewee as he or she recalled specific experiences associated with the topic of investigation. Given that the open-ended nature of the phenomenological interview structure can be of concern, the researcher chose to use semistructured questions in an attempt to allow the interviewees to reflect and expand on experiences but adhere to a consistent flow of questioning. Carefully prepared questions were designed to explore Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory and interactions with mentors during the transition from military to civilian leadership roles.

Data Types

Face-to-face interviews, observations, and examination of artifacts were used as the primary means of data collection. Given the extremely personalized nature of the
phenomenon, it was deemed necessary to utilize all three approaches to develop a full understanding of each research candidate’s personal journey from military service to senior civilian leadership. Each of the chosen data collection methods offered unique glimpses into the experience of the individual candidate. The evaluation of all three data types contributed to a broader and more personalized understanding of the lived experience.

**Interviews.** Multiple face-to-face interviews were conducted at the interviewee’s place of business or via telephonic means. Each interview adhered to a consistent set of semistructured interview questions and lasted 1 to 2 hours in duration. The interviewer utilized probes and pauses to elicit depth in the response but at no time led the direction of the response. Immediately following each interview, the researcher obtained signed validation of the interview’s validity from the interviewee. Digital recording and transcription of each interview was utilized, specifically the transcription software Rev was used. All documents, field notes, and subsequent data associated with the interviews were stored in a secure manner.

**Observations.** Patton (2002) suggested that observation and direct participation serve as the best research methods to gain an understanding of “the full complexity” of a situation (p. 23). Observations provide a method of confirming the data obtained via interview questions and also offer a view into the cultural practices of the organization. Observations included staff meetings, public presentations, and stakeholder and board meeting interactions.

**Artifacts.** Just as an archeologist studies the implements used by lost civilizations, the phenomenologist uses artifacts to learn about and “describe people’s
experience, knowledge, actions, and values” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 361).
Artifacts included organizational documents, personal items provided by the research candidates, and publicly available items created or closely associated with the population and sample set at a time relevant to their lived experience.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher received BUIRB approval and completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification for the protection of human research participants prior to commencing interviews. Prior to initiating an interview, each research subject was provided a copy of the interview protocol, research participant’s Bill of Rights, and informed consent. The interview began once the informed consent was gathered and an overview of the research was provided by the researcher. One hour was planned for each interview, but additional time was allocated because of the open-ended nature of the questions and subject matter. Each interview session opened with a brief introductory dialog as the researcher shared a common background of military and civilian leadership experience in an attempt to develop rapport and common vernacular. Each research candidate was afforded flexibility in his or her response style, some choosing to offer descriptive examples and artifacts in support of his or her experiential description. The research candidates’ search for and presentation of additional information contributed to additional time in session beyond the planned 1-hour timeframe.

Audio was recorded with a digital audio recorder and Rev transcription application, which was obtained from the Apple application store. The researcher also took notes throughout the interview process. Interviewer notes primarily focused on visual observations and anomalies associated with candidate emotion or body language.
The use of digital audio recording served multiple purposes aside from observation. Digital recording enabled automated transcription, supported the coactive coding process, and contributed to greater validity and reliability.

Following automated transcription, the researcher verified the accuracy of the audio-to-text translation of the recordings. After each interview was transcribed, the transcription was provided to the participant to verify accuracy.

Observations and artifacts contributed to providing a deeper understanding to the postmilitary service phenomenon and also served the ancillary service as boosting data validity. Prior to the interview, the research candidate was contacted and asked to provide any documents that would contribute to a greater grasp of the organizational context.

**Data Analysis**

Following the collection of data via focused interview, the data were coded with the assistance of NVivo. NVivo is a qualitative research software used to aid the researcher in the analysis of interview transcriptions and the identifications of themes and their frequency. An inductive data analysis process was used to organize data into categories and determine patterns and relationships among these categories (Creswell, 2013). Initial themes were identified and then reviewed for consistency. During analysis, data were organized, assigned categories, and coded. Naming conventions and the final assignment of names are found in Chapter IV. A series of best practices were utilized throughout the coding process. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested considering the following guidelines for qualitative data analysis and coding:
1. The research question and foreshadowed problems or subquestions;
2. The research instrument, in this case, the standardized open-ended interview questions;
3. Themes, concepts, and categories used by other researchers;
4. Prior knowledge of the researcher or personal experience;
5. The data in and of itself. (p. 369)

**Data Coding Process**

Coding enables the researcher to organize, analyze, and determine key elements of discovery in an unstructured manner (Creswell, 2013). The data collected through coding also enables the researcher to identify themes, ideas, and patterns that present themselves during the data collection process (Creswell, 2013). Use of intercoder reliability contributes greatly to data validity as well as assists to avoid the introduction of bias. According to Patton (2014), “Interrater reliability is valued, even expected, as a means of establishing credibility of findings” (p. 665). Compton, Love, and Sell (2012) stated that “reliability in coding means that the biases inherent in the observers/researchers are substantially less than the ‘true variation’ of the behavior being coded” (p. 350). The researcher and coding partner independently coded data from the interviews, observations, and artifacts using the codes gathered from literature review and scans of the material.

**Limitations**

Phenomenological qualitative inquiry offers several associated benefits. Although many studies have been conducted with the intent of understanding the military-to-academic and military-to-civilian employment transitional experience, a
significant literature gap exists, and little is known about the effect of mentorship transition of former military leaders. Phenomenology’s descriptive and exploratory nature is well suited to assist in exploring this research gap. In order for the methodology to function within the natural setting and to utilize the researcher as an inquiry instrument. The researcher focuses on participants’ explanation of the process in persuasive and expressive language (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). According to Leavy (2014), qualitative research as a situated activity places the researcher in the world, and it encloses material practices and a set of interpretative feedback to make the interview subject’s world visible. Such practices include interviews, notes, recording, and conversations. Qualitative research takes an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world. Thus, the researcher attempts to make sense of phenomena and give meaning to individual experiences. The aim of this study was to analyze the data collected from veterans’ lived experiences as they navigate their career to the C-suite levels. In such a context, the limitations associated with this research included the sample size of 10 veteran CEOs. The smaller sample size was attributed to the difficulty in access and time to reach CEOs with a military background. The second limitation was potential researcher bias along with lack of control over the perceptions, attitude, and experience of participants (Maxwell, 2013).

There could be numbers of external factors such as political and economic environment that can influence the study, which is beyond the scope of this study. Assumptions for this study included that participants have served in the military within the last 10 years and that participants have experienced the process of military transition
into the corporate world with a mentee. A third assumption was that data interpretation accurately depicted participation perceptions.

One of the vulnerabilities of a qualitative study is the potential for bias. Patton (2002) suggested that when the researcher is the primary research instrument, he or she introduces personal bias and perceptions into the data collection and analysis. The researcher conducted the face-to-face interviews, collected artifacts, and conducted observations. As such, the potential for bias existed, and effective countermeasures were always top of mind. As a former military member who has successfully transitioned to and served in multiple senior civilian, senior leadership positions, the researcher was careful to suspend personal judgment and not introduce subjectivity in the formulation of interview questions, coding approaches, thematic observations, and so forth. Countermeasures used to combat bias throughout this study included the use of mechanical recording devices to prevent memory lapse, the use of an independent coding partner, and the use of independent review of structured interview questions.

Summary

Little is known about the transitional experiences of veterans who ultimately achieve senior leadership positions at Fortune 500 companies, but what is known indicates that social adaptation and mentorship is essential (Keeling et al., 2018). This qualitative, phenomenological study focused on developing an understanding of the transitional experiences of this unique population and the experiences that enabled success of the sample set. The results of this study will provide valuable information that could positively affect hundreds of thousands of U.S. veterans and potentially save taxpayers and U.S. corporations millions of dollars.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This study explored the transitional and mentorship experiences of former military leaders who achieve senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) transition theory and Kintzle and Castro’s (2018) military transition theory (MTT) offered frameworks that were utilized during the transitional exploration. Schlossberg’s theory suggests that individuals’ transitional journey is affected by situation, self, social support, and adaptive strategies while Kintzle and Castro’s MTT view transition by phase. Both elements of the conceptual framework complement each other and offer additional depth of study when used together.

This chapter includes a review of the purpose statement, research statement, research question, design, population, and sample. Demographic data are also included. The primary focus of this chapter includes the analysis of post interview data and a summary of findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the transitional and mentoring experiences of veterans who achieve civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question:
What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?
Methodology

A multiple-case study methodology was employed after carefully weighing the potentially relevant methods and design types together with peer researchers and faculty advisors. The multiple-case study methodology was deemed as the most appropriate research design based on the type of data and study purpose. Semistructured interview questions were developed to explore the transition experience from active-duty service to entry into a chosen civilian career through the frameworks of Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) 4S transition model and Kintzle and Castro’s (2018) MTT.

Population

A population is an entire group or collection from which a sample is drawn in order to explore a phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also suggested that a population can be derived from findings attained from a study of a smaller element of a larger group. As such the evaluation of transitional experiences of a sample of the larger population of military leaders can offer valuable insight into the population’s transitional journey.

The population of this study consisted of veterans who achieved the rank of Senior NCO or higher and who served a minimum of 8 years in full-time military service within the U.S. Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marine Corps. The Department of Veterans Affairs and Bureau of Labor and Statistics estimates the 2019 population of this group at 1.1 million veterans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b).

Sample

A sample is a subset of the population that the researcher is interested in studying (Patten, 2012). In order to achieve the goals and objectives of the study and in alignment
with Creswell’s (2013) guidance, individuals from the sampling frame were selected to represent the generalized population and satisfy the unique needs of the study. The final sample of eight research candidates was determined by applying the best practice guidance offered by Patton (2015) and candidate availability. Purposeful, chain, and convenience sampling were used to identify candidates for the sample. Patton described the benefits of purposeful sampling and the approach’s ability to aid the researcher in developing in-depth information about the target population. Snowball and chain sampling proved quite useful because initial searches failed to yield an adequate number of interview candidates. A sample of eight research candidates was determined to achieve the goals of the research and yield meaningful themes.

**Sample Criteria**

Participants had to meet specified inclusion criteria that were consistent with today’s best practices in research and congruent with the population’s delimitations. All members of the sample were veterans who had achieved the rank of Senior NCO or higher and who had served a minimum of 8 years in full-time military service within the U.S. Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marine Corps. Additionally, each individual had achieved a senior executive position within a Fortune 500 Company.

**Sample Demographics**

The study’s sample set of eight senior civilian leaders were honorably discharged from the military. Each participant experienced a unique premilitary discharge transition program and was eligible for Post-Vietnam Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits. The variance in predischarge transition program and GI Bill eligibility can be attributed to the year in which the candidate separated from military service and program
availability at that time. All participants were screened prior to confirming selection to ensure that they met the criteria of the sample population for this study. Table 3 identifies the conforming attributes of all participants.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Criteria</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The veteran served in a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces for a minimum of 8 years</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The veteran attained a terminal rank of E-7</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The veteran successfully attained a C Level position at a Fortune 500 company.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants of this study ranged in age from 34 to 64 years (age \( M = 57 \)). The participants were all male with one of African American descent, and all others were Caucasian. Participants included service members from the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force service branches. Figure 5 summarizes the research study participants’ service and civilian length of service.

Each participant was assigned a number to preserve his or her confidentiality.

Demographic data were collected to aid in this study’s analysis and in future research. Personal demographic data included branch of service, length of military service, terminal rank, highest achieved educational degree, age, gender, ethnicity, and time between military separation and assumption of their civilian executive role.

Demographic data were gathered during the course of each interview by verbal solicitation and were not validated by independent means. Tables 4 and 5 highlight the candidates’ demographic data and highest educational degree attained.
Figure 5. Interview participants’ military service and civilian employment data.

Table 4

Interview Candidate Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vet 1</th>
<th>Vet 2</th>
<th>Vet 3</th>
<th>Vet 4</th>
<th>Vet 5</th>
<th>Vet 6</th>
<th>Vet 7</th>
<th>Vet 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service branch</td>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>USN</td>
<td>USN</td>
<td>USMC</td>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>USN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Highest Level of Education attained for Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Highest degree obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Artifact Collection and Identification

The collection of artifacts occurred prior to and following each interview. The researcher solicited artifacts from each candidate as well as collected them independently via public means when a particular artifact was alluded to by a candidate. After a thorough review of the transcripts and notes, a note was made of any additional artifacts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proved essential to developing a deep understanding of the veteran leader’s transitional experience and ultimate executive success. Postinterview data analysis revealed similarities in the interview candidates lived experience and the concepts espoused by the conceptual framework. This phenomenon proved helpful in answering the central research question. The central research question asked, “What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?” While the Schlossberg transition model and military transition model’s factors of situation, self, social support, and strategies provided a framework of exploration, they alone did not assist the researcher in exploring the research question regarding mentorship. In an attempt to fill this gap, the researcher created a multipart semistructured interview protocol to solicit information on the effect of mentorship and lived experiences throughout the various phases of employment. The interview was presented in four sections. Each section focused on a specific phase of the military-to-civilian-leadership transition, mentorship, and the lived experience in alignment with the central research question and was calibrated to register a response that could be evaluated against Schlosberg’s transition model. Interview questions, subquestions, and optional probes targeted the central
research question and asked the research candidate to recount life experiences from their time in a military leadership position, their transition to the civilian workforce and subsequent successes within Fortune 500 companies. Mentorship was explored in both the primary and subquestion. All questions and probes were developed in collaboration with peer researchers and faculty advisors. The question protocol was ultimately reviewed and approved by an independent quality reviewer prior to use. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

As previously discussed, the study’s conceptual framework relied on Schlossberg et al.’s transition model 4-S, and Kintzle and Castro’s MTT. The concept of mentorship was also central to the researcher’s conceptual framework and basis of investigation. Each research question was posed and evaluated relative to the conceptual framework and mentorship. Figures 6 and 7 offer a visual summary of the conceptual frameworks.

**Presentation of Data and Data Analysis**

The findings in Chapter IV are based on interview data obtained from each participant in response to the previously described semistructured interview questions, and the evaluation of artifacts central to the investigation of the central research question. The data collection process began November 2019 and concluded in January 2020. Data consisted of the responses of eight veterans residing in Minnesota, Virginia, Texas, and Florida who transitioned from military service to civilian careers within the previous 18 years and the evaluation of a collection of documents retrieved from two primary worldwide web sources available to all veterans. In order to present a uniform and bias-free analysis, the researcher conducted data analysis in accordance with the accepted best practices associated with qualitative phenomenological research.

**Schlossberg’s Framework Aligned to the Study’s Resulting Topics and Themes**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative data analysis as “an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories” (p. 367). Inductive data analysis assists a researcher in reducing a large volume of data into discernable codes and themes. Following the development of codes and themes, the researcher may then develop narrative and visual descriptions of the analyzed results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviewer notes and the verbal questions and responses of each interview were transcribed immediately following each session to aid in maintaining contextual accuracy. Transcription was
accomplished by digital means with the assistance of the REV and Zoom software solutions. Following transcription, the consolidated transcription files were uploaded to the NVivo software program to facilitate the identification of key word frequency, assignment of codes, and the development of topics and themes. In keeping with McMillan and Schumacher’s recommendations, the following process was utilized in the identification of key word frequency and context of usage, generation of codes, and identification of themes. In addition to the described procedures, the following best practices were applied:

1. Get a sense of the whole
2. Compare codes for duplication

3. Test initial coding schema


Qualitative data were collected and analyzed with the assistance of the NVivo analytics software solution to determine relevance to the central research question. The process utilized in this study is displayed in Figure 8 and began with the transcription of each interview.

![Inductive qualitative content analysis process](image)

*Figure 8. Inductive analysis.*

Initial analysis of all interview transcripts was conducted to identify the words with the highest frequency. Once the word count was complete, an analysis of the 40 most frequent words was conducted to further establish their context of use, relevance to the central research question, and to isolate the words that presented themselves independent of their use within the preceding question (i.e., words that appeared in the question preceding the response and interviewer commentary were omitted from analysis). Figure 9 highlights the prevalence of these results.

Once codes were applied, they were grouped into topics and the process of recursive analysis was performed. Throughout the recursive analysis process, the
researcher applied his experience with the subject matter to test each topic and subordinate themes for validity with both supporting and contradicting evidence. Once topics and themes were assigned, each interview was scanned for pattern emergence.

Figure 9. Key word frequency word cloud.

The analysis of the qualitative interviews identified six major topics comprised of multiple themes. The themes and topics provided a total frequency count of 505 from all sources. Topics consisting of education and training, leadership, preparation for future success, transitional challenges, mentorship, and core values emerged. Table 6 identifies the breakdown of the frequency count amongst the topics.
### Table 6

**Themes per Topic Frequency by Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>All interviews</th>
<th>All artifacts</th>
<th>All sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge &amp; skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development as a leader</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating valued skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding value to the team</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing authenticity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee differentiation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylistic leadership changes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently proving oneself</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic thinker</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military work ethic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication of teamwork</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing people first</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhering to personal integrity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate stewardship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accountability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of personal identity</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment &amp; fit</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility within the organization</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized adaptation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming stereotypes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ambiguity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to accept risk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Mentorship encounter</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor as a guide</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as a key integrator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying personal opportunities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming the mentor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcribed interviews and artifacts.

It is important to note that research evidence identified alignment between the six primary topics and Schlossberg’s transition theory and the MTT. Additionally each research subject identified instances where mentorship was a key component of their
transitional and executive success. This alignment informed the researcher’s approach to data analysis and subsequent presentation of data. Moreover, the high degree of similarity of each candidate’s response added to the study’s validity in terms of response saturation and consistency of lived experience. Figure 10 identifies the distribution of each major topic by frequency and percentage derived from all sources.

![Distribution of Topics](image)

*Figure 10. Distribution of topics.*

In addition to the in-depth interviews, the researcher collected and/or reviewed a number of artifacts. The artifacts included transitional documents available to all veterans and a publicly available source. The two primary sources of artifacts produced multiple pages of information, which were coded with the same coding schema as the interviews. The analysis of artifacts resulted in the emergence of data supporting two of the six major topics. Education and training yielded 59 frequencies, constituting 45.04% of the 131 total frequencies obtained from artifacts. Prepared for success made up the
balance of the evaluated artifacts at a frequency of 72 and 54.96%. Figure 11 identifies the source and frequency of each topic derived from all artifacts.

Figure 11. Distribution of topics derived from artifacts.

Analysis revealed that while topics and themes emerged with a high degree of frequency, the context of use and implication of each topic and theme varied during each phase of the interview candidate’s work life. For this reason, the research determined that the presentation of data would prove most useful to answering the central research question when presented in context with the conceptual framework. The following concept illustrates this point.

A candidate stated that in one phase of his life, core values contributed to his success and were developed as a result of his social interactions and the expectations of the military culture; however, in a subsequent phase of life, the same core values were detriments to his success. The lived experiences of the interview candidates varied
greatly in terms of military and subsequent civilian vocation, year of transition, and geographic location. When these data were presented in isolation and discussed solely within the context of a particular life phase, they offered limited value to the life experience in its entirety and did not fully answer the central research question. When the same data were evaluated within the context of the conceptual framework, a deeper analysis with greater relevance to the central research question was presented.

The major topics of education, leadership, preparation for future success, transitional challenges, mentorship and core values are all closely linked to the theoretical framework, they have been shown to exist and are primary contributors to the success of a transitioning military member. The connectional framework’s primary transitional factors included situation, self, social support, and strategies. The review of the literature revealed that this is the first time that these factors were explored within the context of executive success and examined within the context of mentorship. As previously described, the interview instrument was strategically developed to investigate each of Schlossberg’s (1981) four major tenants as well as explore mentorship experiences. Table 7 illustrates the alignment of the Schlossberg framework to the study’s resulting topics and themes.

The following analysis was conducted to serve three primary goals. The first goal focused on answering the central research question, the second goal explored the emergence of major topics and themes, and the third goal evaluated the interview question’s alignment to the theoretical framework.
Table 7

Schlossberg Framework Aligned to Study’s Resulting Topics and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic/theme</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education &amp; training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge and skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development as a leader</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valued skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adding value</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stylistic changes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proving oneself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic thinker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People first</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity loss</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource management</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with ambiguity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willingness to accept risk</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial encounter</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor as a guide</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Becoming the mentor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Section 1: Military Experiences

While serving in the U.S. military and prior to transitioning into the civilian workforce, veterans experienced mentorship, developed skills, and emerged as leaders.
The first section of the interview explored the pretransitional military experience and mentorship experiences of veterans who ultimately achieved C-level positions at Fortune 500 Companies. While there were six major topics identified during this study, only three appeared within the evidence of the first interview section. The predominant topics of education and training, preparation for success, and mentorship emerged with frequencies of 16, 27, and 19 respectively. During this section of the interview, veterans described their lived experience during military service and pretransitional period. The themes of value, skill, and leadership development emerged along with evidence of beneficial mentorship relationships. Table 8 highlights the frequencies of each topic that emerged in the evidence during Section 1 of the interview and the percentage of the total responses derived from all interviews for that topic.

Of the three topics that appeared in the evidence, multiple themes emerged. These themes are described in more detail in the sections following Table 8, as previously discussed the implications of the themes vary by life phase.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics/themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Frequency/total</th>
<th>Percentage/total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 of 30</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge and skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development as a leader</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 of 51</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 of 64</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 of 76</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27 of 64</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing team focus</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing personal identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19 of 62</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial mentorship encounter</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source, transcribed interviews.*
**Education and training.** For the topic of education and training in Section 1, two themes emerged: acquiring knowledge and skills and development as a leader.

**Acquiring knowledge and skills.** A major part of the veteran’s core knowledge and technical skill is developed while in the military; additionally military leaders prepare for the civilian transition during this period. Interview candidates were asked, “How did the training and experiences you received while serving on active duty prepare you for success within the military setting?”

The theme of military learning and development emerged in eight of the interviewed veterans. The high response frequency and consistent response rate across interview subjects supports the notion that former veterans experienced a culture of support that contributed to their success as military leaders. As previously cited, military members participate in an intensive course of training designed to support their success as a military leader. In many cases, in order to attain the rank of frontline leader within the U.S. Armed Forces, individuals must complete rigorous technical training, serve a minimum time within their grade, and achieve a minimum score on promotional assessments. Once the minimum qualifications have been met, the emerging leader attends structured courses designed to impart the skills, knowledge, and behavioral attributes expected of a military leader. Leadership courses take the form of in-residence academies, continued on-the-job training, and supervisory performance evaluations.

**Development as a leader.** This section identified the military as the environment in which interview participants emerged as a leader for the first time in their career. This theme was represented in eight veteran interviews.
**Preparation for success.** For the topic of preparation for success in Section 1, establishing team focus and developing personal identity emerged as themes.

**Establishing team focus.** Eight veterans cited the military as the primary source catalyst for their future success as Fortune 500 leaders. The concepts of team success and selflessness were established as primary core values and tenants of their leadership style.

**Developing personal identity.** All eight veterans identified traits, such as strong ethical and moral character, selflessness, and grit as core leadership attributes that ultimately led to their success as a Fortune 500 leader. Section 1 of the interview identified development of personal traits that contributed both to challenges and success throughout the veteran’s postmilitary career.

**Mentorship.** For the topic of mentorship in Section 1, initial mentorship encounter emerged as a theme.

**Initial mentorship encounter.** Four of the eight of the interviewed veterans recalled mentorship experiences during their military service. In each case the veteran’s mentorship recollection was that of support and an experience that shaped his or her sense of self, behavior, and subsequent career trajectory. Of those veterans who described mentorship experiences, each recalled an experience that was closely linked with the major themes of education and values and subthemes of cultural alignment, grit, and servant leadership. Veterans 1, 2, 6, and 8 recounted and described their mentorship experiences as follows:

For me it was a particular individual that was my wing commander and we got along great. He thought highly of me and when he moved up from wing commander to 10th air force commander, he recruited me to come to work for
him on the staff. And so, I did the staff job for 5 years, eventually becoming the vice commander of the numbered air force. (Veteran 1)

I had a captain on my first ship, so my first tour of duty, who said, “Wow, I know you’re a nuclear engineer but what you really need to do is learn how to go be a warrior and fight. And those are done on different types of ships. And so, as soon as you get qualified on this ship, I want you to transition off of an aircraft carrier and move to a destroyer and really learn how to be a surface warfare officer, not a nuclear engineer.” (Veteran 2)

A specific colonel put everything into me. He let me go any place and do anything I wanted to do. I mean, I was flying all around the world doing Special Operations engineering, innovating and trying things I would have never tried otherwise. He supported the warfighter, which was very, very valuable to me. He did everything for his people and from an operational perspective, it wasn’t for him to get promoted. (Veteran 6)

My first military commander in the Navy, the top enlisted guy there is called the command Master Chief. He called all the new people in for a briefing once a month. This was their first command and it was basically an indoctrination to how he does business there. He just laid out the groundwork, and the framework for success within the Navy. The Master Chief shared all of the programs that they had available the continuing education and the tuition assistance and encouraged everybody to take advantage of that, regardless of their tenure in the military or their rank. . . . The number one takeaway I remember was that he said find yourself a mentor, find somebody who you want to be like and study them
and do what they do. Find somebody successful and copy everything that they do.
That’s what I set out to do. (Veteran 8)

**Conceptual analysis for Section 1.** Schlossberg’s transition theory categorizes the transitional experience in four core areas: self, situation, strategies, and social support. Of the sample set, 100% responded in the affirmative regarding intramilitary success as attributed to the training and experiential programs. Veteran 1 described the opportunity, training, and support received during his time as a military leader.

The military tends to think that everybody that comes in has the potential to be a leader. So, they train you and start grooming you from the get-go. They assume that you know, and you’ve had the education, the background, and the training to be a leader. And we’re going to not wait for you to just bubble up and see who makes it out of the pack. From that point, military leadership training builds everyone from that common foundation. The training, experiences, and expectations drive everyone to a common level of performance.

Veteran 1’s perspective effectively summarized the experiences of all of the interviewed subjects. While each candidate agreed that military leadership training and experiences effectively prepared him for success during his time in the military, each candidate offered a different perspective on what he would have done differently with the benefit of hindsight. The second question posed in Section 1, “Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your former self prior to separation from the military?” was designed to elicit self-reflection and a response that required the veteran to evaluate the totality of his career and identify the foundational elements crucial to his current success derived from military service. The interview subjects’ responses touched on various
elements of the 4S model. Veteran 2 stated, “I probably should have had a little bit more work life balance. I think I could have been just as successful, but I missed out on other things that probably fell on the family side that I sacrificed for my professional development.” Veteran 2’s response indicates that the intensive military training and commitment to professionalism both defined the candidate’s sense of self, created a situation that ultimately drove transition and impacted his social support network, and detracted from building strong support systems. Not one veteran attributed his corporate success to his family as a social support system. Both Schlossberg (1981) and Kintzle and Castro (2018) suggested that without strong social support structures, individuals struggle through transition.

**Interview Section 2: Transition to the Civilian Workforce**

The second interview section explored the military to civilian transition. Discussion during this section of the interview focused on the veterans’ experiences associated with all four tenants of the conceptual framework and civilian mentorship experiences. Themes emerged in all six topics. Education and training, leadership, values, transitional challenges, preparation for success, and mentorship offered frequencies of 9, 5, 19, 42, 13, and 24 respectively. Table 9 highlights the frequency of themes that emerged in each topic.

**Education and training.** For the topic of education and training in Section 2, one theme emerged: demonstrating valued skills.

**Demonstrating valued skills.** The notion that veterans develop marketable skills while serving in the military is a concept that presented itself time and again during the literature review as well as in the interviews of all eight interview candidates. All eight
### Table 9

**Themes per Topic Within Interview Section 2 (Military to Civilian Transition)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics/themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Frequency/total</th>
<th>Percentage/total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 of 30</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating valued skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 of 51</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing authenticity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 of 64</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military work ethic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication of teamwork</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42 of 76</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of personal identity</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational alignment &amp; fit</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility within the organization</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13 of 64</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24 of 62</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor as a guide</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: transcribed interviews.*

Interview candidates attributed their initial recruitment into civilian organizations to the skills that they developed while serving on active duty. While technical skills assisted the interviewed veterans in obtaining initial civilian employment, that did not equip those interviewed for success within the context of leadership and corporate advancement.

Veteran 8 described his experience within the first civilian company he worked as boring and unfulfilling. He stated,

> They hired me in a logistics position. I could do the job blindfolded, and I was working circles around everyone else. The problem was, it got boring very quickly. I missed the challenge and opportunity to grow, but what I really missed was being in charge and solving problems. (Veteran 8)

Veteran 8’s sentiment was not unique as other interviewed veterans articulated the notion that technical skills got them in the door but in no way assisted them in moving
into leadership positions. Conversely once the veterans learned to navigate the civilian culture, their skills as a leader allowed them to quickly advance. Veteran 1 described military leadership as a valued skill within the civilian organization:

Working on the civilian side, there were a lot of 30 or 40 somethings that just had no idea how to manage and lead people. Once I figured out how to show them that I could lead, the whole game changed. I think this was probably a key area in the development of my leadership style and bringing out who I was going to be.

Leadership. For the topic of leadership in Section 2, one theme emerged: expressing authenticity.

Expressing authenticity. Three veterans described situations where their values and approach to followership diverged from the civilian norm. Authenticity emerged as a theme that emerged in the veteran’s postmilitary working style. Several veterans described how they approached work and relationships in their early civilian days and the resulting problems. Veteran 4 described his authentic approach to work and how it caused him to run afoul of his teammates. Veteran 1 stated,

Hardest thing for me, going from military to civilian, and I don’t know if it’s unique to me, probably not, was it’s a totally different workforce. Totally different workforce. There was not much patronage, for lack of a better term, sucking up, in the military because most people were smart enough to spot it and it just didn’t work. In the civilian world, my lack of brown nosing was seen as a lack of interest in leadership jobs. What’s the old term about boss time, or face time, or whatever?
Values. For the topic of values in Section 2, two themes emerged: military work ethic and implication of teamwork.

Military work ethic. Five of the seven veterans interviewed cited work ethic and practices that differed from those of their civilian colleagues. The veterans interviewed described challenges adapting to the civilian working environment and situations that created tension in the workplace. Veteran 3 described how his core value of working until the job was done as off-putting to his colleagues. Veteran 3 described his colleagues’ behavior:

They never show up for meetings on time and they just punch out at five o’clock and all that good stuff. . . . When I worked late, I was ridiculed for sucking up. . . .

I really had a hard time with this.

The remaining veterans who indicated experience with transitional challenges attributed their challenges to differences in their cultural or value orientation.

Implication of teamwork. Three of the eight veterans interviewed recalled the concept of teamwork as a point of conflict when initially entering the civilian workforce. Veteran 6 described his perception that he took teamwork for granted when first entering the civilian workforce. In Veteran 6’s military experience, every member of the organizational team selflessly worked toward the same goal, whereas in the civilian world teamwork meant “acting as if everyone was working together, while stabbing each other in the back.” Not only was this a source of internal conflict for Veteran 6, it also helped him realize that he would never succeed within this particular organization’s culture. It is discussed in Interview Section 3 how this common experience helped shape the ultimate success of several of those interviewed.
**Transitional challenges.** For the topic of values in Section 2, three themes emerged: loss of personal identity, organizational alignment and fit, and visibility within the organization.

*Loss of personal identity.* According to Mobbs and Bonanno (2018), a significant number of veterans struggle following separation from the military due to challenges associated with loss of self-identify and struggle to adapt to new cultural norms. The following questions focused on the veteran’s transitional experience during this life phase:

For Interview Question 1, “What was the most challenging aspect of your military to corporate transition?” keyword and coding analysis validated the notion that many veterans experience transitional challenges. Seven veterans described experiences that caused the individuals to question their self-identity. After years of military indoctrination and successful performance as a military leader, the interview candidates described feeling inadequate and unable to perform successfully in lower level leadership capacities. Veteran 1 attributed the lack of success and self-identity to a misalignment of personal and corporate values. Veteran 1 stated, “I was constantly frustrated with my boss; he would tell me to do something and then expect me to understand that I shouldn’t delegate the task and then hold my employees accountable to the assignment.” When Veteran 1 was asked why his boss would do this, he responded, “My boss was more concerned about the perception of work than the work itself.”

*Organizational alignment and fit.* Organizational alignment was a concept that was introduced in all eight interviews. Seven of the eight interview candidates described their first civilian working experience as unsuccessful. While the specific examples
differed, lack of organizational alignment emerged as a consistent theme. While this lack of alignment contributed to initial challenges, the experience of organizational misalignment spurred each veteran to seek employment within an organization that possessed a culture that was more in line with his personal values and work style.

**Visibility within the organization.** Three of the eight veteran’s described organizational visibility as first providing challenge and later success. Several of the veterans described the military culture as a results-driven meritocracy and civilian culture as perception driven. Veteran 2 shared his thoughts on organizational visibility: “Yeah, just being there, in the civilian organization where I want to be seen by my boss just doesn’t work in the military. In the military results are all that matter, that and staying out of trouble, keeping your nose clean.”

The MTT traces the trajectory of transition from the pre-transition-approach phase through transition and ends with posttransition assessment. Of the MTT conceptional framework, 33% originates in cultural and value-driven personal characteristics.

**Mentorship.** For the topic of mentorship in Section 2, one theme emerged: the mentor as guide.

*The mentor as a guide.* The interview candidates unanimously attributed their ability to successfully navigate the civilian workplace culture during their military to civilian transition to a mentor. The notion that a mentor enabled these individuals to succeed was especially prevalent during their initial civilian transition but is referenced in the remaining two sections. Each interview candidate described his initial experience with a civilian mentor in detail and emphasized the relationship’s criticality. Each veteran emphasized that without his civilian mentor he would not have achieved success.
as a senior leader in a Fortune 500 company. It is important to note that each veteran described this relationship with the mentor as a lasting relationship that spanned many years, and in most of the examples provided, decades. The following question was utilized to gain a greater understanding of the civilian mentorship experience: “How has mentorship affected the transition from your terminal military role to your current position?”

Conceptual analysis for Section 2. Schlossberg’s transition theory and the MTT identify the period of transition as a particularly challenging phase of life. The transitional phase is especially difficult for the former military leader. During this time, individuals experience a sense of identity loss, community, and, ultimately, purpose (Stern, 2017). As the literature review indicated, this loss and struggle through transition interferes with many veterans’ civilian employment journey. Those interviewed experienced similar transition-related challenges; however, the data indicate that the involvement of a civilian mentor not only enabled successful transition but ultimately success beyond that of their civilian peers.

Interview Section 3: Corporate Assimilation

The third section of the interview explored the integration and enculturation of the post transitional veterans as they integrated into the civilian workforce and ultimately achieved the role of a senior leader within a Fortune 500 company. All major themes emerged within this section with the topics of education and training, leadership, values, transitional challenges, preparation for success, and mentorship offering frequencies of 5, 19, 34, 23, 8, and 16 respectively. Table 10 highlights the frequencies of each topic and
theme that emerged during Section 3 of the interview as well as the percentage of the total responses derived from all interviews.

Table 10

*Themes per Topic Within Interview Section 3 (Corporate Assimilation)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/theme</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Frequency/total</th>
<th>Percentage/total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 of 30</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding value to the team</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to take on new challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 of 51</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee differentiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylistic leadership changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34 of 64</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing people first</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhering to personal integrity</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23 of 76</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized adaptation</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing political awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 of 64</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm under pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 of 62</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as a key integrator</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying personal opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Source, transcribed interviews

The literature review identified that many previous studies terminated their research at a point at which a veteran obtains successful civilian employment. This section sought to aid the researcher in understanding this phase of a veteran’s postmilitary career. Section 3 assists the researcher in understanding the process by which former military leaders integrate within civilian organizations and their experiences as they rose above their civilian peers to obtain senior leadership positions. The following three questions guided this section’s discussion:
1. Please describe your experiences as a former military leader as you assumed your first postservice position.

2. Please describe any experiences with a mentor that impacted your success in this phase of your life.

3. What were the greatest challenges you faced in adapting to the cultural and organizational differences of civilian leadership? The following topic themes emerged within the evidence.

**Education and training.** For the topic of education and training in Section 3, two themes emerged: adding value to the team and motivation to take on new challenges.

**Adding value to the team.** Two of the eight interview candidates identified technical and leadership skills gained while on active duty as beneficial to organizational integration. Both veterans described these skills and abilities as helping them gain credibility within their new organizations. Veteran 8 described the value of his technical knowledge: “Whenever there was a high viz problem or issue that other people gave up on, the leadership would come to me.”

**Motivation to take on new challenges.** The willingness to volunteer for challenging assignments and taking initiative was described by Veteran 1 as a beneficial trait. Veteran 1 described himself as a self-starter, or someone who required very little managerial direction. He described how his motivation assisted him in developing a reputation of a valued employee and also allow boosted his self-esteem. Veteran 1 said, “I was always looking for something to do. Staying busy helped me focus and pass the time. It also made me feel good about myself in the new job at the same time.”
Leadership. For the topic of leadership in Section 3, two themes emerged: employee differentiation and stylistic leadership changes.

Employee differentiation. While all interviewed veterans described feelings of organizational misalignment, not all described their differences from their civilian colleagues as being negative. Veteran 7 described differentiation as positive:

The boss at the first place I worked after getting out had a pretty negative view of the team. After working for him for about a month, he started to complain to me about the others and treat me differently. While I can’t say this guy was a mentor, he ultimately left, and I was named as his replacement. A lot of the guys were pissed because they had been there years longer than me.

Stylistic leadership changes. The military leadership culture is often referred to as top down or directive in nature whereas most civilian organizations are more collaborative and inclusive in their leadership styles (Korn/Ferry International, 2006). In order to succeed as a senior leader, a veteran must first succeed as a first-level leader. Veteran 3 described his struggle to lead civilian subordinates: “I really had a tough time at first, no one took their job seriously and most of the guys acted as if we owed them a paycheck.” Veteran 3 went on to describe how his initial inability to adapt as a leader almost cost him his job: “I ended up in HR a lot that first year as a manager. I expected HR to support me and ended up having to justify my actions 90% of the time.”

Values. For the topic of values in Section 3, two themes emerged: placing people first and adhering to personal integrity.

Placing people first. The ability to place the needs of one’s employees ahead of his or her own was a recurrent theme amongst the veterans interviewed. Five of the eight
the veterans interviewed described placing people first as the hallmark of their leadership style and an attribute that set them apart from their peer managers. Veteran 4 described his servant leadership style best:

When you’re in the military, the first thing they teach you at the Academy is to take care of your guys. That really gets ingrained in you. When I first became a manager, I kind of took that for granted and just kept leading like I always had. Over time I realized that there was a huge difference between leadership and management and in most organizations the managers outnumber the leaders.

Veteran 4 went on to describe his servant leadership style as a trait that not only differentiated him from other managers but was an attribute that helped him receive visibility and subsequent promotions. Veteran 4 described this later in his interview when he stated,

Years later one of the guys that I had managed earlier in my career sent me an email to say thank you. He had made vice president and said he couldn’t have done it if it wasn’t for me. I didn’t do anything special for this guy, but apparently whatever I had done had helped and was different from all of his other bosses.

Adhering to personal integrity. Integrity is a value that many veterans take for granted. Three of the eight veterans interviewed described integrity as a value that enabled their success as senior leader. In fact, Korn Ferry International (2006) identified a highly evolved sense of ethics as one of six critical leadership traits for CEOs. Veteran 5 jokingly remarked, “Service before self, integrity first, excellence in all we do is the Air
Force mission statement, I can’t tell you how many guys either left the company or failed to promote do to basic lack of integrity.”

**Transitional challenges.** For the topic of transitional challenges in Section 3, three themes emerged: individualized adaptation, overcoming stereotypes, and developing political awareness.

**Individualized adaptation.** Three veterans indicated that cultural adaptation proved challenging and a barrier to corporate assimilation. Differences in working styles, organizational norms and values, and interpersonal behaviors were identified as the root cause of many workplace assimilation issues. Veteran 1 described the differences in organizational norms by describing a typical workplace interaction:

In the military, we’re used to sitting down across the table from each other and going, “You screwed up.”, and you’re not going to be offended by that. You’re going to go, “Yep, I screwed up. Tell me how I can get better.” You do that in the civilian world, and they’ll start crying on you. And so, you’ve got to transition the mindset from being a military leader to a civilian leader. It’s more critical that you, because they’re not homogenic like DOD where you can sit down with anybody that was in uniform and pretty much have the same discussions. The civilian workforce, you can’t. You have to understand the differences in the people that are working for you and manage your leadership style accordingly. It’s more flexible, more situational leadership than it is in the military.

This response highlights the stark differences in how military and civilian managers offer feedback to their employees.
Overcoming stereotypes. The literature review identified stereotypes as a common barrier for a veteran successful civilian transition. Two of the eight veterans interviewed cited stereotypes as challenges that initially prevented their success. Veteran 1 explained that this challenge did not disappear with time in the organization. Veteran 1 described how stereotypical mindsets persisted throughout his civilian leadership career: “I learned to be careful about sharing my opinions. When I was a vice president working in Washington DC, I realized that if you shared your personal values, you’re bound to alienate someone.” Veteran 1 provided additional detail on the danger in sharing personal values in the civilian workplace:

Yeah, I’m pro second amendment. That’s another part of the DOD. And in reality, in DOD, you never said anything bad about the president. You just didn’t. You took an oath of office to support and defend and follow the orders of the president. So, in the civilian world though, you could be a deep state actor and would have a lot of friends. So, big difference in that. Realize your environment that you’re going into.

Developing political awareness. A thorough understanding of the organization’s political environment is essential for a leader at any level. Two of the eight veterans interviewed identified political awareness as an important element of organizational integration. Veteran 2 described how his career rapidly changed once he understood the organization’s politics:

Once I figured out the game, things really changed. I had demonstrated that I was the go-to guy, was a known commodity but didn’t always have what I needed to
be successful. Once I figured out how to get what I needed, I ran circles around everyone else.

Veteran 2 also described bias that he encountered in his time as a civilian leader: “You’re going to run into people that are anti-military. And I did, I thought everybody supported the flag. No. It turns out they didn’t.”

**Preparation for success.** For the topic of preparation for success in Section 3, one theme emerged: calm under pressure.

**Calm under pressure.** Civilian leadership positions can be stressful. Long hours and competing priorities are just two challenges that all leaders face in the average week. It’s hard enough to lead when things are going right let alone in crisis situations. One veteran described his ability to remain calm under pressure and how it translated into success:

One of the things that stands out in my memory is from the time when I first started working on Wall Street. The hours were insane in the competition within the firm was intense. Not everyone can handle an environment like that, but to me it was just like being back on the ship.

**Mentorship.** For the topic of mentorship in Section 3, two themes emerged: mentor as a key integrator and developing personal opportunities.

**Mentor as a key integrator.** All eight veterans identified a civilian mentor who assisted them within their civilian organization. Three of the eight veterans identified their civilian mentor as someone who helped them integrate within the organization. Veteran 2 described his civilian mentor as “lending him” credibility and authority: “Because he had taken me under his wing, the other guys respected and listened to me.”
**Developing personal opportunities.** Two of the interview subjects described how challenging it was initially to develop an opportunity to lead within their new organizations. In all cases they attributed their initial opportunities to a civilian mentor. Veteran 7 provided an example that was common among all eight interview subjects:

He knew that I was a former chief and that’s all that mattered. I was on my first cross-country business trip with Mike, when he introduced me all of the regional vice presidents. When I returned, I started to receive emails from the majority of them. Do you know how long it would have taken me to reach out and build a relationship with those dozen or so people?

**Conceptual framework for Section 3.** Both the MTT and the 4S model identify social support networks as essential elements of a successful transition. Such was the case for this sample set of Fortune 500 leaders. Of the interviewed veterans, 26% cited civilian mentors as a catalyst for their successful civilian enculturation. Veteran 3 informed the researcher that mentoring is commonly used in the civilian workforce to grow the competence and skills of emerging leaders. Mentors are often formally or informally assigned to those deemed worthy of investment. Mentors draw on their experience to help mentees develop career plans, acquire necessary skills, and network to follow through (Decaro, 2017). Decaro’s (2017) description reads as if mentoring was specifically designed to check all 4S boxes. An additional dimension of mentorship that two veterans described was networking. Networking is the practice of exposing oneself to senior or influential individuals in an organized or informal setting. Proficient networking is credited as a strategy that offers the practitioner contextually relevant resources including accelerated social capital, perceived influence, and access to senior
leaders or decision makers (Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, 2018). Veteran 2 directly linked mentorship and networking as the most important element during his transition:

I remember a former chief who was president of a local professional networking group. We were at the big dinner thing, he brought me up on stage thanked me for my partnership, and then he goes, “Oh by the way Veteran 2 is retiring in the next 90 days.” I had probably 50 guys show up and offer me a job before I even separated from the military.

The ability to identify another influential veteran within a new organization was described as a key strategy to succeed and obtain influence. Veteran 1 described this approach by saying,

I do that still today. I’ll hear about someone I meet, and they go, “Well, they’re also a colonel in the reserves,” or something, that’s instant credibility to me because it means, number one, they volunteer. They don’t have to do it, they’ve achieved a certain rank, but they do it anyway.”

Veteran 2 said,

I’ve got a buddy of mine that I spend time with here. I got to know this person smoking down at the cigar shop that I go to. He’s a retired Chief and he’s a GS 14 now, basically working at Air Force Personnel Command, but he’s a retired chief and that was when I met him, that’s instant credibility, right?

Veteran 2’s response highlights the value of networking in obtaining a position following military service but does not solve the problems associated with cultural assimilation.
Interview Section 4: Corporate Executive Success

The final section of the interview focused on the experiences of former military leaders while leading Fortune 500 companies. The questions posed during this section were designed to elicit responses that were a result of the interview candidates’ reflection on their career to date and the success that they achieved. All major topics emerged within this section with the exception of education and training. The major topics of leadership, values, transitional challenges, preparation for success, and mentorship offered frequencies of 19, 11, 11, 16, and 3 respectively. Table 11 highlights the frequencies of each topic that emerged during Section 3 of the interview and the percentage of the total responses for that theme derived from all interviews.

Table 11

Themes per Topic Within Interview Section 4 (Corporate Executive Success)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic theme</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Frequency/total</th>
<th>Percentage/total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0 of 30</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 of 51</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently proving oneself</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic thinker</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11 of 64</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate stewardship</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional challenges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11 of 76</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing in a flat organization</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for success</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 of 64</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource management</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to accept risk</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 of 62</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming the mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4 maintained the same contextualized approach to data analysis and was conducted in a similar manner as the previous three sections. Three questions guided this section and included the following:

1. What experiences, knowledge, or capabilities proved most critical to your successes to date?
2. How did your military and personal perceptions affect your career path to date?
3. What advice would you offer others seeking success as a senior leader in the civilian business community?

**Leadership.** For the topic of leadership in Section 4, two themes emerged: consistently proving oneself and strategic thinker.

**Consistently proving oneself.** Corporate and external peers/stakeholders. Former military leaders do not stop proving themselves once they have enculturated within the organization. Two of the eight veterans interviewed described that proving oneself is an ongoing process at all levels within the organization and to both internal and external stakeholders. In fact, both individuals interviewed suggested that proving oneself is critical to maintaining both personal and organizational respect. Veteran 1 stated, “You constantly have to prove that you’re better than the next guy, you’re always being evaluated whether it be by the organization as a whole, the executive board, or the competition.”

**Strategic thinker.** Senior executives are responsible for establishing a long-term plan or an organization. The overall success of the company depends on senior leadership’s ability to think strategically. One of the eight veterans interviewed attributed
his selection for the role of chief financial officer to his ability to think strategically, an attribute that he states was developed early on in his military leadership career. Veteran 3 stated, “The lessons I learned as a junior officer running the nuclear power plant on an aircraft carrier had a direct correlation to my ability to develop and execute a strategic plan for the company.”

**Values.** For the topic of values in Section 4, two themes emerged: corporate stewardship and personal accountability.

**Corporate stewardship.** As described in previous sections, many of the interviewed veterans thought and acted selflessly without consideration for personal impact and for the betterment of others. This core value translates to a similar behavior to the company as a whole while serving in a senior leadership position. One of the eight veterans interviewed highlighted the importance of corporate stewardship. Veteran 3 referenced a senior leader’s responsibility to the company, its shareholders, and employees: “One thing the board could always count on was that no matter how a decision turned out, I was always making it logically, ethically, and in the best interest of the company.”

**Personal accountability.** Personal accountability refers to a sense of ownership that a leader exhibits in the performance of their duties. One of the eight veterans interviewed stressed the importance of personal accountability:

As I mentioned earlier, I’ve encountered my share of people that didn’t demonstrate the high level of integrity that we all expect of our service members. I think that as I moved through different positions within the company, I was always recognized for the personal ownership I demonstrated.
Transitional challenges. For the topic of preparation for success in Section 4, three themes emerged: resource management, dealing with ambiguity, and willingness to accept risk.

Managing in a flat organization. It has been previously discussed that marked differences exist between military and civilian organizational structures. Military organizations tend to be hierarchical whereas civilian organizations tend to be less so. Two of the eight veterans interviewed provided examples of how the leader must adapt his or her leadership style in order to succeed in a civilian organization. Veteran 1 described the difference in leading a civilian organization as a senior executive:

I would say one of the main differences, and this will answer your question I think, is between military and civilian, in the military, the boss is the boss. The boss gives the order, everybody salutes and goes forward. In the civilian world, as a boss, you can be successful. The key word, I think, is influence. You want to lead the team where they make the decision, so you influence them, and you want collaboration and consensus. I think the influence piece is bigger in the civilian world and it helps you to be successful as you build a team.

Preparation for success. For the topic of preparation for success in Section 4, three themes emerged: resource management, dealing with ambiguity, and willingness to accept risk.

Resource management. Resource management is the process of preplanning, scheduling, and allocating resources to maximize efficiency. Benmelech and Frydman (2015) discovered that firms run by ex-military CEOs performed better than other firms not run by ex-military CEOs during industry downturns and were less likely to be
involved in fraudulent activities. One of the eight veterans interviewed highlighted the importance of the leader’s ability to manage resources: “It doesn’t matter what type of company you’re running these days, you always need to do more with less comma the trick is to identify opportunities for efficiency that don’t detract from the organization’s ability to execute its mission.” He went on to say, “It doesn’t matter what branch of service you’re in, most junior officers are trusted with the responsibilities of managing millions of dollars of equipment and safeguarding the lives of hundreds if not thousands of those who serve under their command.”

**Dealing with ambiguity.** Senior leaders are often forced to make a decision without all the facts. One of the veterans interviewed suggested that the ability to deal with ambiguity helps an individual succeed at a senior level. Veteran 3 stated,

One thing that set me apart from my civilian peers was the ability to make a decision when no one else would, you don’t always have the benefit of all the information. In the military they call it the fog of war.

**Willingness to accept risk.** Not all decisions work out positively. Two of the eight veterans described risk and the ability to accept risk as a part of their decision-making process. Veteran 1 discussed risk and risk aversion when he stated, “There’s a saying in the military that no plan, no matter how good survives first engagement. You have to be OK with making the call and living with the results.”

**Mentorship.** For the topic of mentorship in Section 4, one theme emerged: becoming the mentor.

**Becoming the mentor.** Senior executive leaders are at the top of the organizational pyramid. While serving in this top spot, different behaviors emerge. One
of the eight veterans interviewed described his role as a mentor and the differences between military and civilian mentorship. Conversely, one veteran described mentorship in the civilian working environment to be significantly different than the mentorship he received while serving the military. Veteran 1 described his experience:

When I got to the civilian organization, my boss’s idea of mentoring was sending me to Harvard for 2 weeks to the JFK School of Government, which I really enjoyed, or sending me to a media school, which I’d already been to, or sending me to some flavor of the month, touchy feely kind of thing. That was his idea of mentorship. There was no one-on-one personal mentorship. Maybe that was a personality thing with him, I don’t know, but I didn’t see it with a lot of people there. They just don’t have the hands-on mentorship. To them, they think, number one, they’re not concerned about people below them and growth.

**Conceptual framework for Section 4.** In contrast to previous studies that focused on the transition of non-leader veterans, not a single veteran cited access to support systems or the support of family as a key success enabler; however, one veteran referenced family relationships and familiarity with the business he gained through his father’s work experiences as a secondary attributing success factor. While familial social support systems (S3) did not emerge as a prominent success catalyst, ingrained personal values (S2) did consistently emerge as a key component of success for the veterans interviewed. Of the sample set, 100% identified values that were imparted and reinforced during their military service as primary elements of their success. The most prominent values, which emerged a total of 27 times, included factors that could be described as integrity, consideration of team over self, innovation, and servant leadership. Veteran 8
described the manifestation of ingrained military oriented values when he described his growth mindset:

You have to step out and do something difficult to reach those hard goals. It’s not going to come to you; high rank in the military doesn’t come to people who don’t take big challenges and that’s the same in the corporate world.

The final pillar of evolution within the 4S model includes strategies central to success (S4). The research candidates were asked if their successes could be replicated. Of those interviewed, 50% of the veterans responded in the affirmative that their career trajectory could in fact be replicated and 16% indicated that they have developed developmental programs to intentionally mentor individuals and organizations to the same level of success that they enjoyed. Veteran 3 offered the following comment on replication of his career trajectory:

Yeah, I think so. I think I’ve seen it at, you know, since we sold MTS over the last year, I’ve, I’ve started a new business and I’ve been after meeting with a lot of small companies. And some mid-market companies and some of those leaders of those organizations are mentoring type and I’ve walked into their organizations. You get a certain feeling, a vibration when you when you first walk in, as to what an organization is like and you know certainly that the success could be replicated. So yeah, I think it can be duplicated. I think it takes a special person who is willing to follow the recipe.

Veteran 3 identified a particularly interesting observation, which is outside the scope of this study but is worth highlighting. Veteran 3 suggested that female mentees often prove more willing to participate and succeed as a result of mentoring. Veteran 3 offered two
examples of female success stories and referred to six male individuals who failed to achieve success despite intentional mentorship. Veteran 3’s second example of female mentorship follows:

You know, there’s another one with a young lady that I mentored in Connecticut. Now she’s a rising star at the State Department. So, you know, the mentoring thing works. To make that happen, she exhibited the same traits and hunger to adapt and learn, which is not much different than I was back then.

**Artifacts**

The majority of artifacts aligned with Schlossberg’s factors of social support (S3) or strategies (S4). It is important to note that the concept of mentorship is absent in the majority of documents. Within the factor of social support was the military’s formal transition program, Veteran Career Transition Assistance Program Vet (CTAP) and Syracuse University’s Institute for Veteran and Military Families (IVMF) program. IVMF provides transitional assistance and training in the areas of entrepreneurship and educational and skill-based career curriculums. IVMF provides veterans a no fee pathway to obtaining highly sought-after professional certifications such as the Program Management Certification (PMP). The concept of mentorship is advanced by IVMF’s ARSENAL graduates’ program. The ARSENAL graduates’ program consists of peer-to-peer support, networking, and enablement network spanning the globe.

**Key Findings From Qualitative Interview Data**

The research question asked veteran leaders who have attained C Level positions in Fortune 500 companies to answer nine open-ended interview questions related to Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S model as well as Kintzle and Castro’s (2018) military transition
model. The nine interview questions were designed to collect data and solicit personal experiences that could contribute to the gap in available knowledge and provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of this unique population.

**Validation of Conceptual Framework**

Data obtained from the interviews and a thorough review of artifacts revealed a high degree of alignment between the S4/MTT models and the lived experiences of those interviewed. In keeping with the research objectives, the researcher analyzed all responses for references to mentorship as career enabler or detractor. Of the eight veterans interviewed, 87.5% identified civilian mentorship as a key enabler to their success and 100% identified military mentorship experiences as the primary catalyst to their military success and having contributed to their development of personal values and sense of self. Another key finding included the frequency and response saturation associated with sense of self and personal values.

**Military Values Drive Success When Organizational Alignment Exists**

The veterans interviewed attributed values that were developed during military service as both complicating their civilian transition and the most important element aside from mentorship in driving their executive success. Responses that identified integrity, selflessness, work ethic, and innovation ranked highest of themes within the major topics of success preparation with frequencies of 19, 16, 12, and 8. Although it was only identified during one interview, the concept of gender and success of a mentee offered a surprising consideration. Each interviewed leader offered a differing experience with regard to his or her rise to the top. In fact, 66% of those interviewed attributed access to a mentor, and strong alignment of personal and workplace values as primary contributors
to their success. The remaining 33% of those interviewed attributed their success to previous leadership experiences, and grit as their primary success enabler.

**Transitional Challenges Are Consistent and Predictable**

The transitional challenges described by previous studies and highlighted in Chapter II of this study (literature review) are consistent and predictable. Veterans experience factors such as loss of personal identity, sense of community, various biases against military service members, difficulty relating to civilian peers, misalignment with organizational and personal values, and challenges in adapting to civilian organizational structures. With awareness comes the ability to apply support strategies to boost the veterans’ chances of success.

**Not Every Organization Is Ripe for a Military Leader**

Military leaders possess unique skills and perspectives that often differ from those of the organization. In many cases the organization’s culture and priorities are at odds. The evidence suggests that despite the veteran leader’s best efforts, enculturation may prove elusive.

**Mentorship Is Critical During Transition and Beyond**

Mentorship emerged time and again in the evidence of the study as a critical success factor as former military leaders sought and obtained senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Mentorship emerged in each phase of the interview candidates’ careers. While the concept of mentorship consistently presented itself, the role it played in the mentee’s life varied by life phase. In the initial employment phase, the veterans interviewed attributed their acquisition of skill, knowledge, and development of core values to a mentor. Several veterans described how emulating their mentor
contributed to early successes. During the transition phase, the mentor served as a guide showing the military leader a new career trajectory and a new set of behaviors that resulted in successful integration in an organization with aligned values. In the final stages of the military leader’s career the roles of mentor and mentee shifted, with those interviewed describing their assumption of the role of mentor and their commitment to those following in their footsteps. Those who cited the mentor as the primary enabler to their success, described the mentor as the reason that they were able to maneuver the political gamut and receive visibility, recognition, and opportunities that propelled their careers.

The concept of gender and branch of service and ethnographic considerations is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the approach and data obtained from this multiple-case study qualitative phenomenological inquiry. This study was designed to aid in understanding the experiences of formal military leaders who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies using the factors of situation, self, social support, and strategies from Schlossberg’s transition model and the more recently adapted MTT. This chapter began with a review of the purpose statement and research questions, followed by a summary of the research design, population, sample, and veteran demographics. The study’s data focused on answering the specific central research question.

Once themes were identified, narratives were developed to further add descriptive detail to each research candidate’s response. Building upon the data obtained during the
interview phase of this study, Chapter V offers further analysis of the research findings and evaluation of the implications within the context of Chapter II’s review of literature. Additional implications, opportunities for further research, and suggested application of the findings are also offered within Chapter V. Chapter V concludes with the researcher’s personal remarks and poststudy reflection.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V begins with a review of the study’s purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. The remainder of the chapter describes the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions based on those findings, and implications for action based on the conclusions. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and final remarks.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the transitional and mentorship experiences of former military leaders who achieve senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Research Questions

One central research question guided this study: What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?

Research Methods

A multiple-case study methodology was employed after carefully weighing the potentially suitable methods and design types together with peer researchers and faculty advisors. The multiple-case study methodology was deemed as the most appropriate research design based on the kind of data and study purpose. Semistructured interview questions were developed to explore the transition experience from active-duty service to enter into a chosen civilian career through the frameworks of Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S transition model and Kintzle and Castro’s (2018) military transition theory (MTT). Schlossberg’s theory suggests that individuals’ transitional journey is affected by
situation, self, social support, and adaptive strategies while Kintzle and Castro’s MTT views transition by phase. Both elements of the conceptual framework complement each other and offer an additional depth of study when used together.

**Population**

The population was defined as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics,” and thus, “a population can be any size and come from any area” (Creswell, 2013 p. 644). The population of this study consisted of veterans who achieved the rank of Senior Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) or higher and who served a minimum of 8 years in full-time military service within the U.S. Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marine Corps. The Department of Veterans Affairs and Bureau of Labor and Statistics estimate the 2019 population of this group at 1.1 million veterans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b).

**Sample**

To further narrow the sample, to achieve the goals and objectives of the study and in alignment with Creswell’s (2013) guidance, individuals from the sampling frame were selected to represent the generalized population and satisfy the unique needs of the study. The final sample of eight research candidates was determined by applying the best practice guidance offered by Patton (2015) and candidate availability. Purposeful, chain, and convenience sampling were used to identify candidates for the sample. Patton described the benefits of purposeful sampling and the approach’s ability to aid the researcher in developing in-depth information about the target population. Snowball and chain sampling proved quite useful because initial searches failed to yield an adequate
number of interview candidates. A sample of eight research candidates was determined to achieve the goals of the research and produce meaningful themes.

**Major Findings**

Several major findings were discovered during this research study. The major findings represent a culmination of the knowledge and insights gained through extensive literature review, interviews, and the evaluation of artifacts. The data derived from qualitative investigation and recursive analysis provided insight that aided the researcher in developing conclusions, which in turn assisted in the creation of implications for action.

The following are the researcher’s assertions, supported by the investigation’s evidence. Individuals who have served in the U.S. military possess a vast array of educational, social, and economic benefits not available to their civilian counterparts. Regardless of the benefits available, many veterans fail to obtain meaningful private employment, let alone achieve senior executive positions in America’s top companies. The evidence contained within this study revealed consistent patterns of challenge during the military-to-civilian transition as well as information that sheds light on actions that may be taken to not only surmount these challenges but to thrive as a civilian leader.

**Major Finding 1: The Veteran Who Is Equipped With Knowledge of the Conceptional Frameworks Enjoy Positive Transitional Experiences**

Castro and Kintzle’s (2018) MTT and Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) 4S transition model are useful in tools in understanding the experiences of military leaders as they transition into the civilian workforce and ascend the corporate ladder. Both frameworks are supported by years of peer-reviewed research and validated by hundreds of
individuals’ life experiences. This study revealed that the conceptual framework’s relevance does not end following the veteran’s active transition but persists throughout the civilian career. The data supported consistency of experience and are described in both the literature review and throughout all phases of the candidates’ interviews. Data obtained from the interviews and a thorough review of artifacts revealed a high degree of alignment between the S4/MTT models and the lived experiences of those interviewed. In keeping with the research objectives, the researcher analyzed all responses for references to mentorship as career enabler or detractor. Of the eight veterans interviewed identified, 87.5% identified private mentorship as a critical enabler to their success, and 100% identified military mentorship experiences as the primary catalyst to their military success and having contributed to their development of personal values and sense of self. Another critical finding included the frequency and response saturation associated with self-knowledge and personal values.

**Major Finding 2: Military Values Drive Veteran and Organizational Success When Alignment Exists**

The study revealed that a consistent set of core values is ingrained in servicemembers during their time in the service and throughout the military leadership development process. Values included integrity, selflessness, work ethic, and innovation. The research indicated a vital link between core values and a veteran’s success as a senior civilian leader. The evidence highlighted a lack of the individual’s success when the veteran leader’s core values conflicted with the organization’s values. A review of available literature suggested that organizations that espouse these values enjoy success beyond that of their competitors. The results of this study indicated that in each example
the veteran recognized the lack of organizational alignment and chose to leave the organization. The veterans interviewed within this study ultimately achieved executive success when they found employment within an organization that was aligned with their core values. The major topic of values identified themes that suggested that military core values not only served to guide the military leader’s behavior and mindset but also shaped the individual’s sense of self and personal identity.

**Major Finding 3: Transitional Challenges Experienced by Veteran Leaders Are Consistent and Predictable**

The transitional challenges described by previous studies and highlighted in Chapter II of this study (literature review) are consistent and predictable. The research identified that throughout the transitional journey, veterans experienced factors such as loss of personal identity, loss of sense of community, biases against military service members, difficulty relating to civilian peers, misalignment between organizational and individual values, and challenges in adapting to private organizational structures. While these challenges are pervasive, they are also easily identifiable and mitigated. Countermeasures are discussed in the conclusions and implications for action sections of this chapter.

**Major Finding 4: Not Every Organization Is Ripe for a Veteran Leader**

Organizations often seek to hire military leaders for a variety of reasons. The research identified hiring justifications ranging from the pursuit of tax benefits to a desire to achieve gains in the areas of marketing and reputation regardless of the individual organization’s motivation. The research has identified that veteran leaders possess unique skills and perspectives that have been shown to benefit the organization’s success.
The evidence also indicated that in cases where the organization’s culture and priorities are at odds. And despite the veteran’s leader’s best efforts, enculturation may prove elusive. In these cases, both the veteran and the organization are better off to avoid engagement and ultimately damage to both parties.

**Major Finding 5: Mentorship Is Critical to a Veteran’s Assumption of a Senior Leadership Position Within Fortune 500 Company, During the Transition and Beyond**

Mentorship emerged time and again in the evidence of the study as a critical success factor as former military leaders sought and obtained senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. The evidence suggested that mentorship took many forms and provided a panacea of sorts successfully mitigating the common challenges military leaders faced throughout their transitional journey. Mentorship emerged in each phase of the interview candidates’ careers. It consistently served as a success multiplier, allowing the mentee to transcend challenges and accelerate beyond their peers in terms of organizational status. This finding is the most critical finding of the study.

**Unexpected Findings**

**Unexpected Finding 1. The Role of Gender in Mentorship Relationships**

The concept of gender and mentee success arose as an unexpected finding in this study’s interviews. Two of the interviewed veterans described female mentees as performing better during and postmentorship than the males they mentored. The interview candidates described the mentorship experiences of two separate female mentees; in both cases the mentees were described as participating in the mentee relationship for a longer period of time, accepting feedback better than male mentees and
ultimately surpassing male mentees in terms of career success. One of the interview candidates attributed the mentee’s success to her “not letting her ego get in the way” and exhibiting greater humility, respect, and an overall willingness to incorporate the mentor’s feedback. The concept of gender did not reveal itself during the review of literature or during the other candidate interviews.

**Unexpected Finding 2. Detrimental Mentorship Experiences, Negative Case**

**Example**

The beneficial effects of mentorship were represented throughout this study with one noteworthy exception. One interview candidate described a series of mentorship experiences that not only failed to align with the experiences of the other interview candidates but diverged entirely. Interview Candidate 1 described a series of negative mentorship experiences in which the mentor attempted to impart unethical and potentially destructive behaviors. A bad mentor in and of itself could be assumed to be an isolated occurrence. Alarmingly, this was not the case. The interview candidate described a series of mentors within the same organization that exhibited similar behavior and actively coached their subordinates to follow their example. The examples of negative mentorship discovered within this study are disturbing and represent the antithesis of mentoring’s intent.

**Conclusions**

This study examined the transitional and mentorship experiences of former military leaders who achieve senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Based on the significant and unexpected findings, this study produced four conclusions.
The conclusions that follow are supported by the findings of this study and body of literature available for this subject.

**Conclusion 1**

Based on the finding that transitional experiences define the success of veteran leaders, it can be concluded that veterans who are well equipped to transition from military leadership to civilian positions experience success and maintain a sense of self-identity, community, and remain an optimistic employment mindset. Conversely, those individuals who are not equipped for the transition often struggle with similar factors and do not ultimately achieve positions as Fortune 500 executives. Keeling et al.’s (2008) research supports this conclusion, finding that many of the challenges that veterans encounter during the transition are self-imposed and directly related to their mindset. Self-imposed barriers such as perceived employer discrimination and a devaluing of skills or feelings of hopelessness are avoidable.

**Conclusion 2**

This study found that the 4S and MTT frameworks were both accurate and predictable throughout the veteran’s transitional and executive development journey. While Schlossberg’s transition theory 4-S model (2003) was originally developed to explain a non-military member’s response to periods of acute change, the framework proved essential in describing the military leader’s transitional experience. The transitioning members awareness of these two frameworks is crucial. Both framework’s be utilized to assist military leaders with personal awareness and a host of strategies that will improve the transitional and subsequent civilian employment experience.
Conclusion 3

As evidenced by the study’s findings, both veterans and organizations struggle to achieve their full potential when they lack an alignment of values. Argyris’s theory-in-use and espoused theory (1974) were evidenced following a military leader’s military separation. Each of the interviewed Veteran’s described professional failure due to the disconnects associated with their internal values and the reality of civilian organizations. It can be concluded that every employment situation is not ideal for the transitioning military leader or the gaining organization. If the transitioning veteran maintains awareness of this fact and seeks employment with an aligning organization, he or she can avoid common personal challenges and will achieve greater success. Furthermore, with alignment, comes expedited enculturation, promotional advancement, reinforcement of core personal values, and a greater sense of community. Likewise, organizations that hire veteran leaders with aligned value orientation achieve greater success than their competitors and maintain enhanced employee morale.

Conclusion 4

Based on the finding that mentorship assists military leaders in mitigating a number of challenges throughout their lifelong employment journey and aids in the attainment of C-suite positions, it can be concluded that mentorship must be available and utilized in order for the former military leader to achieve a civilian leadership position within a Fortune 500 company. This conclusion is supported by unanimous responses from the study’s sample and evidenced by the review of the literature. Many of the studies reviewed throughout this research note that while current veteran educational and transitional programs are effective in aiding veterans in gaining entry-level employment,
Ford (2017) found that few obtain C-suite positions despite possessing skills conducive to the role.

**Implications for Action**

In light of the findings and conclusions derived during this qualitative multiple-case study’s findings regarding the mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies, the researcher was able to identify three conclusions. Those three conclusions clearly articulate an imminent need for action. The implications for action are necessary in order to immediately improve the transitional and subsequent employment experiences of former military leaders and the success of the Fortune 500 companies that hire them. This study’s implications for action apply to millions of America’s greatest heroes. The researcher believes that former military leaders are an essential element in driving continued economic success and prosperity within the United States.

**Implication for Action 1**

Based on the conclusion that veterans who are well equipped to transition from military leadership to civilian positions experience less personal and professional challenges, it is essential that veterans and organizations alike adopt programs to educate themselves about the predictive nature of transition-related challenges. Armed with the knowledge founded in the MTT and 4S framework, individuals may more easily recognize problems that are developing and employ mitigation strategies. The adoption of this recommendation will contribute to greater success and boost the number of former military leaders who achieve executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Equally important, organizations that can support the transitioning military leader are more apt to
realize the full measure of technical and leadership capabilities that these veterans possess. Opportunities exist to practically implement this recommendation within the US Military’s formal and mandatory transition program (GPS). Another easily accomplished opportunity exists within the onboarding programs maintained by individual corporations. The researcher suggests civilian organizations customize their onboarding process to add educational materials for their newly hired veterans.

**Implication for Action 2**

Based on the study’s findings, which highlight the criticality of individual and organizational core value alignment, the researcher implores organizations seeking to hire former military leaders to analyze their core values. This researcher identified that many organizations espouse values similar to those of the U.S. military; however, they fail to integrate these values into the day-to-day organizational culture successfully. The dysmorphia associated with this concept often contributes to unnecessary challenges for the individual and organization as a whole. Once organizations establish an understanding of the nature of their core values, they should look within their ranks and select emerging leaders for senior executive positions who both reinforce and amplify these values. It is anticipated that this practice would not only cement values that have been proven to contribute to increased organizational success but would also reduce the cost associated with employee turnover. Organizations may easily accomplish this recommendation by reviewing their recruiting and onboarding programs. An emphasis on core values and formal employee values assessment would expose disconnects in values early in the employment relationship.
**Implication for Action 3**

As evidenced by the finding that mentorship serves as a crucial element in the mitigation of a host of transition-related challenges, an immediate focus and investment in mentorship must occur in both military and civilian sectors. This study identified the benefits of mentorship during the interview candidate’s formative years as well as during the crucial transition period and then as a guiding and enabling force throughout the rise to senior leadership. The cost of developing formal mentorship programs within the civilian sector is negligible; however, these programs offer benefits that have been proven to deliver tremendous economic and competitive value. Similar approaches have proven successful in unrelated populations, including the medical field and Science and technology communities. The researcher urges business leaders to employ values-based mentorship programs and practices targeted explicitly at the development of executive succession plans. Examples of these succession and mentorship programs may be found by searching the internet or consulting the organization’s Human Resources department. Many of the resources required to satisfy this implication are publicly available and come at no cost.

**Implication for Action 4**

Based on the researcher’s findings related to the mentorship and its beneficial value throughout each employment phase, the researcher strongly recommends that the Department of Defense (DOD) partner with Fortune 500 companies to create mentorship programs that begin early during the military career and continue far into the civilian employment journey. By providing a continuum of consistent and aligned mentorship throughout the full span of a service member’s military and civilian career, veterans...
would experience enhanced self, social and professional support. This approach would allow the DOD to continue its practice of mission-oriented mentorship while offsetting the cost and derivative value of partnering private organizations. It was stated in Chapter I of this study that $189 billion was spent in 2019 to aid separating military members during their civilian transition. Much of this expenditure focuses on education but does little to satisfy the needs of veterans when it comes to social and organizational integration let alone offer any advocacy as an emerging civilian leader. Given the massive tax burden that $18 billion represents, it is clear to see that cradle-to-grave mentorship would easily offset the costs of implementation while both satisfying many of the challenges highlighted by this study while saving millions of tax dollars.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends further research in the following areas to expand the body of knowledge and understanding of the transitional experiences of former military leaders who achieve senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies.

1. Since this was the first study that investigated the transitional experiences of former military leaders who achieve senior executive positions within Fortune 500 companies, it is recommended that this study be replicated. Replication would allow for further investigation into the target population’s lived experience. Additional study would also identify other themes that may aid the community in the development of programs and success strategies.

2. It is recommended that subsequent quantitative research commence. It is the researcher’s hope that this study inspires an investigation on a broader scale. A
quantitative research approach would enable a researcher to present a hypothesis that identifies the causes and effects associated with former military veterans’ executive success. Likewise, quantitative research would identify additional dependent and independent variables that come into play. Armed with greater understanding and quantitative data, programs leaders may be swayed toward further action.

3. This study did not focus on the specific experiences of the population who possessed specific racial, sexual orientation, or gender attributes. While themes associated with these factors did not emerge within this research, one interview candidate suggested that female mentees were more successful throughout and following mentorship. America’s military leaders are the epitome of diversity, and it stands to reason that additional exploration would benefit all segments of the population and may uncover unexpected findings.

4. While this study represented a significant and critically important segment of the U.S. population, the represented population pales in comparison to those who have served within the U.S. military and separated without leadership experiences. The data contained within this study highlighted attributes such as core values, technical knowledge, and skills possessed by leaders and nonleaders alike. Additional research focusing on former military nonleaders may uncover factors that could successfully affect millions.

5. The scope of this study focused on leadership success. In contrast, military-acquired technical skills consistently emerged in parallel throughout this study’s research. Today’s civilian organizations are shifting their learning and development investments into the development of skills and capabilities instead of competencies. The
researcher suggests additional research focused on individuals who possess market-ready technical skills.

6. The Researcher strongly recommends Military and Civilian organizations alike develop an awareness of mentoring best practices that exist within each domain. Armed with this knowledge both organizations may develop training and support programs for mentors and mentees alike. A consistent culture of mentorship will greatly increase veteran success while reducing psychological stress.

7. This study focused on veterans who successfully achieved success within Fortune 500 companies. As evidenced during this study’s semi-structured interviews, challenge and failure is the norm rather than the exception. The researcher suggests subsequent research with a focus on understanding the lived experiences of Veterans who did not achieve success to develop an understanding the challenges and barriers that exist on the road to executive success.

**Final Thoughts**

Former military leaders have been shown to perform as well or better than their peers in senior executive positions. This is attributed to several traits. Traits including robust ethical alignment, the ability to define strategic goals, excellent communicating skills, effective use of resources, and the ability to stay calm under pressure all lend themselves to an organization’s success. Veteran leaders remain an underrepresented population among the executive ranks.

The data obtained during this study identify common and predictable barriers that, if mitigated, would provide immediate relief to the population. Mitigating factors include the creation of programs that aid transitioning military leaders in developing awareness to
common transitional challenges, including bias (actual and perceived) peer integration, and self-induced mindsets that limit career growth. The mitigating solutions identified within this study are readily available, easily attainable, and low in cost to the organization or veteran.

While mitigating solutions may assist in the short term, a truly universal solution requires much broader action. To solve this dilemma, an overall shift in the cultural mindset within Fortune 500 companies and their shareholders must occur. The comprehensive solution requires recognition and acceptance of real biases against veteran leaders, the identification of cultural and organizational differences, and the recognition of the value these individuals possess.

Aside from the previously stated reasons, additional factors are emerging that heighten the urgency of action. Recent research has identified the importance and impact that capabilities and skills are playing in a business’s ability to cope with the exponential rate of change and volatility associated with the rapid advance of technology. Companies are placing an ever-increasing premium on job-ready skills at all levels; this includes technical, process, and evolved approaches to leadership. Veterans readily demonstrate the ability to adapt and innovate and often possess in-demand skills not readily available from formal degree programs.

Educational institutions lag behind industries in the development of job-ready technical skills and curriculums focused on emerging process-related methodologies. Additionally, access to these programs is often limited to the segment of the population that can afford to attend. The U.S. military and civilian organizations alike must coordinate their approach to training, mentorship, leadership development, and transition
if the United States is to harness the underutilized resource the researcher refers to as the “Hero Leader.”
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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the transitional and mentoring experiences as described by veterans who achieve civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies.

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<td>Goldberg, M., Cooper, R., Milleville, M., Barry, A., &amp; Schein, M. L. (2015)</td>
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“My name is Anthony Gagliardo and I lead an enterprise learning organization at Xcel Energy. I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I’m conducting research to better understand the transitional experiences and the role of mentorship in former military leaders who achieved senior executive positions within Fortune 500 Companies. The elements of conversation used in this study are derived from intensive literary research in the areas of veteran service to civilian transition, and the effects of mentorship and community of practice. Interactions during the interview and subsequent conversations will be used to explore the individual experiences of the research candidate in attempt to divine trends and patterns of experience. This is study is designed to gather information that could inform the success of future veteran leaders in transition.

I am conducting approximately 8 interviews with leaders like you. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the experiences that contributed to your success as a civilian leader and will add to the body of research currently available.

Incidentally, even though it appears a bit awkward, I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating exemplary leaders will be conducted in a consistent manner.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.
Interview Questions with Additional Probes

Note: The interview is in 4 sections. Each section focuses on a specific phase of military to civilian leadership transition, mentorship and the lived experience.

Military Leadership.
1. How did the training and experiences you received while serving on active duty prepare you for success within the military setting?

Optional probe: Tell me about your fondest memory as a military leader.

2. Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your former self prior to separation from the military?

Optional probe: How would this advice have changed the path of your personal and professional life from the point of military separation?

Transition.
1. How has mentorship affected the transition from your terminal military role to your current position?

Optional probe: How did you obtain the mentorship or professional associations described?

1. What was the most challenging aspect of your military to corporate transition?

Optional probe: In hindsight was there anything you could have done to mitigate these challenges?

Corporate Assimilation.
1. Please describe your experiences as a former military leader as you assumed your first post service position.

2. Please describe any experiences with a mentor that impacted your success in this phase of your life.

Optional probe: How have these experiences shaped your personal perspectives and actions?

3. What were the greatest challenges you faced in adapting to the cultural and organizational differences of civilian leadership.

Optional probe: How did you navigate these challenges?

Corporate Success.
1. What experiences, knowledge or capabilities provided most critical to your successes to date?
2. How did your military and personal perceptions affect your career path to date?

3. What advice would you offer others seeking success as a senior leader in the civilian business community?

Optional probe: Do you believe your experience could be replicated?

Optional probe: How have others responded to that?

**Alignment of RQs to Interview Questions**

*Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions for Veteran Leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Corresponding interview questions</th>
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</table>
| RQ 1: What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within | 1. How did the training and experiences you received while serving on active duty prepare you for success within the military setting?
|                                                                                  | 2. Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your former self prior to separation from the military?
|                                                                                  | 3. How has mentorship affected the transition from your terminal military role to your current position?
|                                                                                  | 4. What was the most challenging aspect of your military to corporate transition?
|                                                                                  | 5. What experiences, knowledge or capabilities provided most critical to your successes to date?
|                                                                                  | 6. How did your military and personal perceptions affect your career path to date?
|                                                                                  | 7. What advice would you offer others seeking success as a senior leader in the civilian business community? |
Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions for Former Military Executives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Corresponding interview questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1: What are the transitional and mentoring experiences described by veterans who have achieved civilian executive leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies?</td>
<td>1. What strategies do you use to give focus and direction to the organizations’ communication activities?</td>
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</tbody>
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## APPENDIX C

Various Resources for Military to Civilian Transition and Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Programs</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP (American Corporate Partners) - <a href="http://www.acp-usa.org">http://www.acp-usa.org</a></td>
<td>Centurion Military Alliance - <a href="https://cmawarrior.org/">https://cmawarrior.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bunker Labs - <a href="https://bunkerlabs.org">https://bunkerlabs.org</a></td>
<td>CASY (Corporate America Supports You) - <a href="http://casy.msccn.org/">http://casy.msccn.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>MVPvets (Mentoring Veterans Program) - <a href="https://www.mvpvets.org">https://www.mvpvets.org</a></td>
<td>SHIFT Military Fellowship Program - <a href="https://guide.shift.org/">https://guide.shift.org/</a></td>
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<td>Organizations (Cont.)</td>
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<td>Return 2 Work - <a href="http://www.return2work.org/">http://www.return2work.org/</a></td>
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<td>Veterans Transition Support - <a href="https://www.veterantransitionsupport.org/">https://www.veterantransitionsupport.org/</a></td>
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<td>Corporate Gray - <a href="https://www.corporategray.com/">https://www.corporategray.com/</a></td>
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<td>The Mission Continues - <a href="https://www.missioncontinues.org/">https://www.missioncontinues.org/</a></td>
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<td>Breakline - <a href="https://breakline.org/">https://breakline.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) - <a href="https://iava.org/employment-programs/">https://iava.org/employment-programs/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>AMVets Career Centers - <a href="http://amvets.org/prepare-for-employment/">http://amvets.org/prepare-for-employment/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>American Legion Career Center - <a href="https://www.legion.org/careers">https://www.legion.org/careers</a></td>
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<td>Four Block - <a href="http://fourblock.org/">http://fourblock.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hire Our Troops - <a href="https://www.hireourtroops.org/">https://www.hireourtroops.org/</a></td>
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<td>Call of Duty Endowment - <a href="http://www.callofdutyendowment.org/">http://www.callofdutyendowment.org/</a></td>
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<td>Veterans Ascend - <a href="https://veteransascend.com/">https://veteransascend.com/</a></td>
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<td>Fast Port - <a href="https://fastport.com/">https://fastport.com/</a></td>
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<td>Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Employment Assistance - <a href="https://www.vfw.org/assistance/employment-assistance">https://www.vfw.org/assistance/employment-assistance</a></td>
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<td>Hope For The Warriors - <a href="https://www.hopeforthewarriors.org/">https://www.hopeforthewarriors.org/</a></td>
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<td>Hire Purpose - <a href="https://www.hirepurpose.com/">https://www.hirepurpose.com/</a></td>
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<td>Military Network - <a href="http://www.mil-net.us/program.html#sthash.fsyCxdUN.dpuf/">http://www.mil-net.us/program.html#sthash.fsyCxdUN.dpuf/</a></td>
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<td>Operation New Uniform - <a href="https://onuyets.org/">https://onuyets.org/</a></td>
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<td>National Veterans Foundation - <a href="https://nvf.org/">https://nvf.org/</a></td>
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<td>Veterans Care Foundation - <a href="https://veterantransitionresourcecenter.com/">https://veterantransitionresourcecenter.com/</a></td>
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<td>Hire Heroes - <a href="https://www.hireheroesusa.org/">https://www.hireheroesusa.org/</a></td>
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</table>
# Tools and Databases

- **The Transition Intelligence Dashboard** - [http://www.military-transition.org/dashboard.html](http://www.military-transition.org/dashboard.html)
- **Military Skills Translator** - [http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills_translator](http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills_translator)
- **The Resume Engine** - [https://www.resumeengine.org/](https://www.resumeengine.org/)
- **Glassdoor** - [https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm](https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm)
- **Transition Planner** - [http://www.7m4studios.com/](http://www.7m4studios.com/)
- **Database of Lessons Learned, Opinions and Comments** - [http://www.military-transition.org/comments.html](http://www.military-transition.org/comments.html)
- **Military to Civilian Occupation Translator** - [https://www.careerinfonet.org/moc/](https://www.careerinfonet.org/moc/)
- **My Next Move** - [https://www.mynextmove.org/](https://www.mynextmove.org/)
- **VICTOR Mobile APP** - [https://victorapp.io/](https://victorapp.io/)

# Training and Education

- **DoD Skills Bridge** - [https://dodskillbridge.com/](https://dodskillbridge.com/)
- **Vets2PM** - [http://www.vets2pm.com/](http://www.vets2pm.com/)
- **Workshops for Warriors** - [https://workshopsforwarriors.org/](https://workshopsforwarriors.org/)
- **Combat to Corporate** - [http://www.combattocorporate.com/](http://www.combattocorporate.com/)
- **Army Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL)** - [https://www.cool.army.mil/](https://www.cool.army.mil/)
- **Navy Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL)** - [https://www.cool.navy.mil/](https://www.cool.navy.mil/)
- **Marine Corps Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL)** - [https://www.cool.navy.mil/uscoc/](https://www.cool.navy.mil/uscoc/)
- **VetForce Training** - [https://veterans.force.com/](https://veterans.force.com/)
- **PM-ProLearn Training** - [https://www.pm-prolearn.com/](https://www.pm-prolearn.com/)
- **ETAC-USVeteranJobs.com** - [https://usveteranjobs.com/](https://usveteranjobs.com/)
- **Salute America’s Heroes** - [https://usveteranjobs.com/](https://usveteranjobs.com/)
### Training and Education (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Onward To Opportunity (O2O)</td>
<td><a href="https://iivmf.syracuse.edu/onward-to-opportunity/">https://iivmf.syracuse.edu/onward-to-opportunity/</a></td>
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<td>Amazon AWS</td>
<td><a href="https://aws.amazon.com/education/awseducate/veterans/">https://aws.amazon.com/education/awseducate/veterans/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>VetsInTech</td>
<td><a href="https://vetsintech.co/">https://vetsintech.co/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Splunk</td>
<td><a href="https://workplus.splunk.com/veterans">https://workplus.splunk.com/veterans</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>CBT Nuggets</td>
<td><a href="https://www.cbtnuggets.com/veterans-promo/">https://www.cbtnuggets.com/veterans-promo/</a></td>
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<td>NS2 Serves - SAP Training and Certification</td>
<td><a href="https://www.ns2serves.org/training-course/">https://www.ns2serves.org/training-course/</a></td>
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<td>SANS Vet Success Academy</td>
<td><a href="https://www.sans.org/cybertalent/cybersecurity-career/vetsuccess-academy">https://www.sans.org/cybertalent/cybersecurity-career/vetsuccess-academy</a></td>
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<td>Veterans on Wall Street</td>
<td><a href="http://veteransonwallstreet.com/">http://veteransonwallstreet.com/</a></td>
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<td>Veterans Who Code</td>
<td><a href="https://vetswhocode.io/">https://vetswhocode.io/</a></td>
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<td>Operation Code</td>
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<td>Coder Vets</td>
<td><a href="https://codervets.org/">https://codervets.org/</a></td>
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### Colleges/Universities/Scholarships

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<td>Posse Foundation – Veteran Scholarships</td>
<td><a href="https://www.possefoundation.org/recruiting-students/veteran-nominations/">https://www.possefoundation.org/recruiting-students/veteran-nominations/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Service to School</td>
<td><a href="https://service2school.org/">https://service2school.org/</a></td>
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### Advice

#### Networking

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