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Entrepreneurship Strategies for Reintegrating African American Male U.S. Military Veterans After Military Service

Schavass L. Hamilton
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Schavass L. Hamilton

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Entrepreneurship Strategies for Reintegrating African American Male U.S. Military
Veterans After Military Service

by

Schavass L. Hamilton

MBA, Western Governors University, 2020

BS, Everglades University, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

African American male U.S. military veterans struggle with transitioning from military to civilian life; however, engaging in entrepreneurship can ease this integration. Grounded in the Schlossberg 4-S model, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the experiences of four veterans and one active-duty member in their transition from military to entrepreneurial practices. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis was used to identify eight themes: (a) challenges encountered in entrepreneurship, (b) minimal external financial assistance used, (c) multiple paths to entrepreneurial education, (d) strategies for entrepreneurial success, (e) adapting to COVID-19 challenges, (f) diverse marketing practices used, (g) entrepreneurial tools and strategies among African American male U.S. military veterans, and (h) setbacks in entrepreneurship. A key recommendation is for military veteran entrepreneurs to explore alternative growth strategies. The implications for positive social change include the potential for African American male U.S. military veterans to use entrepreneurship to integrate successfully after military service. Findings may be used to inform policymakers, educators, and support organizations to enhance support structures for African American male U.S. military veterans, facilitating their successful transition to civilian entrepreneurship.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to any veteran battling post-traumatic stress disorder. The road may seem tough at times, but you're not alone.

Acknowledgments

I must thank God for having me reach this milestone in life. Also, thank you to my chair, Dr. Irene Williams, and instructor, Dr. Brenda Hudson. Your guidance and encouragement pushed me to reach a life goal. I am ever grateful!

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Section 1: Foundation of the Project.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose	2
Research Question	3
Assumptions and Limitations	3
Assumptions.....	3
Limitations	4
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	4
Literature Searching Strategy	6
Entrepreneurship as an Important Option	6
Military Service as Equipping Veterans	11
Navigating Identity Change from Military to Civilian	17
Lack of Research.....	19
Steps for Success.....	20
Agriculture as an African American Male Veteran Coping Mechanism.....	23
Conceptual Framework.....	27
Transition	28
Section 2: Research Project Methodology	31
Project Ethics	31
Nature of the Project.....	33

Population, Sampling, and Participants	34
Eligibility Criteria for Study Participants	34
Strategies for Gaining Access to Participants	35
Strategies for Establishing a Working Relationship With Participants	35
Data Collection Activities	36
Interview Questions	37
Data Organization and Analysis Techniques	38
Reliability and Validity	39
Credibility	39
Dependability	40
Transferability	40
Confirmability	40
Data Saturation	41
Transition and Summary	41
Section 3: Findings and Conclusions	43
Presentation of the Findings	43
Theme 1: Challenges Encountered in Entrepreneurship	44
Theme 2: Avenues for Financial Assistance	46
Theme 3: Paths to Entrepreneurial Education	48
Theme 4: Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success	50
Theme 5: Adapting to COVID-19 Challenges	51
Theme 6: Diverse Marketing Approaches	53

Theme 7: Entrepreneurial Tools and Strategies Among African American Male U.S. Military Veterans.....	54
Theme 8: Setbacks in Entrepreneurship	58
Transformative Power of Entrepreneurship on Military Transition	59
Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice	62
Implications for Social Change.....	66
Recommendations for Further Research.....	67
Conclusion	68
References.....	70
Appendix: Draft Interview Protocol	87

List of Tables

Table 1. Challenges Encountered in Entrepreneurship.....	46
Table 2. Avenues for Financial Assistance.....	48
Table 3. Paths to Entrepreneurial Education.....	49
Table 4. Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success	51
Table 5. Adapting to COVID-19 Challenges.....	53
Table 6. Diverse Marketing Approaches	54
Table 7. Entrepreneurial Tools and Strategies Among African American Male U.S. Military Veterans	57
Table 8. Setbacks in Entrepreneurship.....	59

Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

African American male U.S. military veteran entrepreneurship is an underexplored topic in U.S. male military veteran entrepreneurship/self-employment. According to Lyonette et al. (2018), there are several benefits associated with self-employment by military veterans, including the attainment of their own financial goals and their contribution to their country's economy through the creation of employment opportunities and the generation of revenue. Military culture and training instill dedication and discipline (Chernushenko & Passmore, 2018). Although the private and corporate sectors have benefitted from this, it is time for veteran entrepreneurship to increase. African American male U.S. military veterans serve their country in many ways while in the U.S. military. When faced with the challenge of what the next possibility is upon separating from U.S. military service, African American male U.S. military veterans face many opportunities. Most veterans are equipped with skills that take time to adapt to civilian life (Cooper et al., 2018). Countries such as Israel focus their veterans on self-employment opportunities that coincide with their military duty (Mires et al., 2020). The United States could consider doing the same. U.S. military veterans have served their country, and their country should serve them.

Research exploration is paramount. Considering the minimal research on U.S. military veteran self-employment (Crecente et al., 2020; De Klerk et al., 2022), the present study may encourage additional research. Along with the need for more research, few avenues point veterans to opportunities for self-education and funding (Wolfe, 2018).

De Klerk et al. (2022) posited that for some U.S. military veterans, self-employment is not an obvious choice during their transition to civilian life. Educating can provide the basis for helping U.S. military veterans identify their potential and motivation.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The business problem was that some African American male U.S. military veterans face barriers hindering their successful transition to self-employment or business ownership, impeding their economic reintegration into civilian life. In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study, the goal was to explore the successful strategies African American male U.S. military veterans employ in building and sustaining viable businesses beyond 5 years to identify strategies for fostering sustained success in self-employment. I adopted a qualitative pragmatic inquiry design.

The sample population group for this study comprised five African American male U.S. military veterans who had successfully transitioned to self-employment and sustained viable businesses beyond 5 years. The sampling method involved purposeful sampling, and the sample size depended on data saturation. Participant eligibility criteria included African American male U.S. military veterans who transitioned to self-employment and sustained a viable business for over 5 years. Access to participants was facilitated through U.S. military veteran networks and social media. The targeted geographic locations were Florida and Texas, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of African American male U.S. military veterans in different contexts.

Data sources included in-depth interviews, archival library records, and relevant scholarly documents. All identified data sources aligned with institutional review board

approval. Participants were selected based on their status as African American male U.S. military veterans who had successfully transitioned to self-employment and sustained viable businesses for over 5 years, aligning with the study's business problem and purpose. The study's conceptual framework was anchored in Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory. I aimed to add to the literature on African American male U.S. military veteran entrepreneurship, providing valuable data for academic discourse and practical applications, thereby fostering positive societal change.

Research Question

The foundational research question for this study was the following: What successful strategies have African American male U.S. military veteran entrepreneurs used to build and sustain businesses beyond 5 years?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Certain assumptions formed the foundation of this research. Assumptions are believed to be true but cannot be empirically verified. Nakamura and Ando (2022) noted that assumptions cannot get declared as true negations. The current study included the assumption that the self-reported experiences shared by the participants were accurate and reflective of their entrepreneurial journey. Additionally, I assumed that the participants would provide truthful and comprehensive responses in the interviews, offering insights into their strategies for entrepreneurial success. These assumptions were inherent in self-reported data and the design of the study.

Limitations

This research, while providing valuable insights into entrepreneurship strategies for the reintegration of African American male U.S. military veterans, had certain limitations. The reliance on self-reported interview data restricted me from making definitive conclusions that could be universally applied to all veterans who served in the military. The participants were restricted to African American male U.S. military veterans engaged in self-employment, thereby constraining the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups within the veteran population or those pursuing different paths after -military service (see Jackson & Brown, 2020). Furthermore, the study was conducted with a small sample size, limiting its generalizability to a broader population.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature surrounding U.S. military veterans' self-employment, franchising opportunities, and agricultural engagement as a coping mechanism represents, insights, and emerging trends that provided the foundation for the current study. This section offers a brief yet critical analysis and synthesis of diverse scholarly sources, encompassing peer-reviewed journals, reports, seminal books, and relevant publications. The aim was to illustrate the depth and breadth of the related research, providing a compelling rationale for the current study's focus and objectives.

The literature on U.S. military veterans' self-employment is a multifaceted exploration into the world of entrepreneurship for those who have served in the U.S. military. Only five branches of the military were included. The sixth branch, the U.S.

Space Force, was still in its infancy and had not been included in any other such research. This review addresses various aspects, including franchising opportunities, coping mechanisms through agricultural engagement, and the broader transition from military to civilian life. Scholarly works provided a rich array of findings, offering insights into the entrepreneurial traits of military veterans, barriers they face, coping strategies they adopt, and the potential positive societal impacts of their ventures.

Cumberland et al. (2020) underscored the similarities in skills and attributes between military veterans and franchisees, illuminating the potential alignment of military training with entrepreneurial endeavors. Conversely, De Klerk et al. (2022) revealed the challenges veterans encounter during their transition to self-employment, emphasizing the need for tailored support mechanisms. Furthermore, the exploration of agricultural engagement as a coping mechanism for African American male U.S. military veterans, as highlighted by P. Winston et al. (2018) and Acevedo and Brown (2019), provided a compelling dimension of the research.

The literature review is organized into thematic sections, each dedicated to an aspect of veterans' self-employment. The sections encompass franchising opportunities, coping mechanisms through agriculture, entrepreneurial education, support systems, and comparative analyses. This structure ensured a comprehensive exploration of the topic, presenting a coherent narrative that allows for a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Literature Searching Strategy

The literature was systematically explored through academic databases, including but not limited to PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest, and journals related to entrepreneurship, veterans' affairs, and agricultural engagement. The search strategy involved using a combination of keywords such as "veterans," "self-employment," "franchising," "agriculture," "entrepreneurship," and related terms. Boolean operators were used to refine searches, and a meticulous screening process ensured the inclusion of peer-reviewed, recent, and high-quality scholarly sources. To maintain high scholarship quality, I ensured that approximately 85% of the referenced sources in this literature review were peer-reviewed articles from reputable academic journals. This rigorous selection criteria ensured that the information presented was backed by scholarly rigor and had undergone a thorough peer-evaluation process. In line with the recommended scholarly standards, approximately 85% of the referenced sources in this literature review were published within the 5 years preceding the completion of this study. This criterion ensured that the review incorporated the most recent research and current developments in the field, enhancing the timeliness and relevance of the study.

Entrepreneurship, as an Important Option

Entrepreneurship has many different definitions and meanings. Understanding the meaning of entrepreneurship was important to the current study because it laid the foundation for using the term as a viable means of life for veterans after military service. Diandra and Azmy (2020) stated that entrepreneurship could be viewed as a process of organization, the building of mindset and skills, discipline, or the generation of

opportunities. Prince et al. (2021) expanded this definition to include pursuing opportunities, profit -seeking, and business uncertainty or creation. Both definitions allude to the idea that entrepreneurship is to be actively pursued.

Entrepreneurship also has different origins of meaning. Davison (2021) compared many definitions of entrepreneurship and stated that it was derived from the French word *entrepede*, which translates to the act of undertaking. In this context, the individual assumes the action and responsibility of business-like pursuits. Lidow (2022) took an approach of browsing history to find examples of entrepreneurial behavior and supported Davison's (2021) assertions, noting the emergence of entrepreneurship in 1755 by Cantillon. However, Lidow also found that entrepreneurial acts dated as far back as 8,000 years. Under either of these concepts, both authors agreed that no central understanding of entrepreneurship existed.

Aside from understanding the definitions of entrepreneurship, analyzing the traits of entrepreneurs may also prove beneficial. Tsai (2021) completed a qualitative study to analyze whether openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism yield positive experiences in entrepreneurial pursuit. Tsai concluded that neuroticism was the only negative trait. Kusumawijaya and Astuti (2021) expanded this research to include the propensity to take a risk and the need for achievement as additional traits. The researchers agreed that certain personality traits are beneficial to entrepreneurship.

Although certain traits benefit entrepreneurs, it is not clear how citizens can identify which works best. Gregory et al. (2021) proposed that education should focus on

teaching and discussing, the traits because action-based teaching will increase understanding. Entrepreneurial education can also provide the necessary competencies to foster future entrepreneurs (Ardie et al., 2020). However, the question of whether traits can be taught arises. This may be better answered in a psychology course. Also, Ardie et al. (2020) mentioned identifying traits that work best and not acquiring traits.

Another thought on the idea of entrepreneurship is that it can be taught. Goodman (2022), noted that entrepreneurs must first unlearn what previous business courses teach. This notion came from the idea that education on entrepreneurship focuses more on teaching business models than entrepreneurial skills. Bhatia and Levina (2020) stated that entrepreneurs often resort to a process of effectuation by using prior experience and gained networks to make choices. This process is void of using formal educational analysis taught by business schools.

As with other endeavors, entrepreneurship comes with stress concerns. Vendrig et al. (2021) researched the risks of overwhelming psychological stress for entrepreneurs, and found that concern exists for elevated psychological stress. Vendrig et al. also developed a scale to help mitigate such risks. Gligorovski and Odzaklieska (2021) supported this by noting that entrepreneurs have some of the most stressful jobs. Nevertheless, each person can manage stress by creating an environment focusing on stress as energy. By considering stress as energy, entrepreneurs can find ways to use stress as motivation and not an unhealthy barrier to success.

Social entrepreneurship is an upcoming faction of entrepreneurship, but it needs defining. Although much of the research focused on entrepreneurship benefiting

businesses and individuals, social entrepreneurship addresses how society may benefit from the practice. One theory on social entrepreneurship is that it has drawn direction from political philosophy and focused on political impact (Ranville & Barros, 2022). Under this thought, scholars defined philosophical lenses to explore and define social entrepreneurship (Ranville & Barros, 2022). Wu et al. (2020) further defined social entrepreneurship as benefiting the public.

Entrepreneurship has many documented benefits to people with disabilities, including creative flexibility and other advantages of self-employment (Agoratus, 2022). Axelrad and Tur-Sinai (2019) noted that self-employment/entrepreneurship offers a means for extending employment and coping for those approaching forced/mandatory retirement. Another benefit of self-employment/entrepreneurship is the possibility of supporting gainful economic growth as ventures add jobs for previously unemployed or vulnerable citizens (Axelrad & Tur-Sinai, 2019). The flexibility of entrepreneurship/self-employment may allow citizens with disabilities to contribute to their household and local economy when other forms of employment have not succeeded.

There are many reasons for individuals with disabilities to engage in entrepreneurial actions. Ostrow et al. (2021) noted that autonomy, flexibility, and increased work–life balance were benefits of entrepreneurship for persons with disabilities. After many negative experiences, business owners with psychiatric disabilities acquired a means to reevaluate and gain success through self-employment and entrepreneurship (Ostrow et al., 2021). Wiklund et al. (2018) found that business owners with mental disorders reported high satisfaction because they were able to craft and adapt

their endeavors around their symptoms and diagnoses. These results could bode well for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder because this diagnosis requires flexibility in employment.

When traditional employment ventures are not successful for citizens with mental disabilities, entrepreneurship provides new opportunities. Ostrow et al. (2019) concluded that business owners with psychiatric disabilities found their way back to work and purpose with entrepreneurial endeavors. Ashley and Graf, (2018), and Csillag et al. (2019) also reported that individuals with mental disabilities who opt for entrepreneurship have higher financial sufficiency and training levels than those who seek other employment means.

The transition from paid employment to entrepreneurial ventures remains a concern for any interested party. Koch et al. (2021) found that persistent and specialized efforts yield better job satisfaction and financial return than traditional paid employment or combining paid employment and self-employment/entrepreneurship. Litsardopoulos et al. (2021) also noted positive effects on social standing for those who change from paid employment to self-employment/entrepreneurship. Both studies focused on cases in which individuals voluntarily pursued self-employment/entrepreneurship ventures.

Although different types of entrepreneurship exist, the term *self-employment* has not been clearly defined in the literature. Dvoultey (2018) and Szaban and Skrzek-Lubasinska (2018) found that this is due to previous research stating the differences between the two. However, Szaban and Skrzek-Lubasinska stated that it is time to merge the terms self-employment and entrepreneurship. Dvoultey also identified positive

correlations between self-employment practices and entrepreneurship. These researchers supported future research efforts to explain the similarities of these concepts to combine the terms.

A final approach to understanding the importance of entrepreneurship is to focus on its impact on communities. Due to scattered research in this area, Bacq et al. (2022) suggested focusing on the significance of communities to business. McQuaid and Etheve (2022), stated that healthy businesses need healthy communities. However, businesses also have a role in building the community. Misra and Pinheiro (2021) suggested that businesses should model the interactions of universities when planning community involvement.

Military Service as Equipping Veterans

Although the premise exists that military service instills desired leadership skills for self-employment and franchising in veterans, studies indicated factors that challenge this premise. Links between military education, service, and veteran entrepreneurship are unexplored (Crecente et al., 2020). Although the United States does not require military service, similar veteran employment levels were observed in countries in which military service is mandatory (Crecente et al., 2020). For example, South Korea, Israel, and Brazil have mandatory military service. Research suggested that mandatory military service better prepares veterans for entrepreneurship, it is unclear whether these countries' training is a contributing factor (Crecente et al., 2021). Baktir and Sillah (2021) found that only 8% of the U.S. population identifies as veterans.

Risk tolerance is one of the sought-after traits of veterans. As with other life-changing events, risks are inherent in entering the business world and transitioning from military service. The ability to navigate and assess risk is not an inborn trait (Brachert et al., 2020). Social environments are how risk-taking skills are developed and shaped. Social backgrounds or cultures also instill values and interactions (Shulz, 2020). Post-military culture may create ways to better influence and prepare veterans for entrepreneurship. Supporting this thought, Bartee and Dooley (2019) cited military service as one of the most accessible means for members to gain skills and employment experience. However, although military service may equip members with experience, this experience may not always aid in after-service employment or entrepreneurial pursuits.

Military culture and training may allow members to hone skills such as leadership (Haspel, 2019). Although the private and corporate sectors have benefitted from this, it is time for veteran entrepreneurship to increase. Veterans serve their country in many ways while in the military. Leadership and other learned skills are not easily applied outside the military. Koch-Bayram and Wernicke, (2018) noted positive outcomes in prior military executives as higher ethical traits are displayed.

Another challenge comes with educating veterans on entrepreneurship. Like many civilians, some veterans shy away from self-employment opportunities due to a lack of knowledge in preparation for entrepreneurship. Glaveski (2019) mentioned collecting and connecting data when considering entering self-employment. In the context of the current study, collecting the data requires individuals to reflect on and evaluate their experiences to gain perspective on where to focus their entrepreneurial efforts. Military members

develop many excellent and desirable skills from their military service (Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). The problem is that they may need help identifying areas where these skills can aid their self-employment efforts. Education can provide the basis for helping veterans identify their potential and motivation.

The U.S. military has a long record of preparing its service people for the rigors of civilian life, equipping them with the skills needed to make positive contributions in their fields. This finding extends to providing opportunities for those wishing to become entrepreneurs. Veteran-owned businesses continue to increase, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2019) offers resources designed to help veterans start their businesses. Many veterans have realized that their experience in the military can provide them with skills and personal qualities that benefit entrepreneurship. Military service has been known to equip veterans with various competencies, including leadership, discipline, problem-solving abilities, risk-taking capacity, and adaptability (Chernushenko & Passmore, 2018). These core values for self-discipline can be transferred to the entrepreneurial environment.

US military service fosters an entrepreneurial spirit through training emphasizing self-reliance, discipline, and problem-solving-all essential qualities for successful entrepreneurs (Lyonette et al., 2018). Furthermore, experiences related to leadership, management, organizational change, and financial planning all shape veterans' specific skill sets essential to a business's successful day-to-day operations (Rousseau & ten Have, 2022). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, (2019) adopted training

supplemented by veteran resources with assistance regarding financing strategies, tax incentives, and access to VA benefits for startups.

Leadership is perhaps one of the most important traits acquired through military service. To complete missions successfully, a leader must possess certain characteristics such as trustworthiness and decision-making (Fryer & Freundlich, 2019). Furthermore, leaders must remain calm during high-pressure situations while presenting an air of assurance and confidence (Goleman, 2021). With this idea in mind, it becomes evident that the skills required to lead a platoon are akin to those needed to manage a business effectively.

Problem-solving is an essential responsibility for entrepreneurs. These skills involve breaking down complex issues into smaller components while weighing risks and benefits (Conn & McLean, 2019). However, problem-solving must also include foresight. Soldiers have learned to work through challenging situations without hindsight or prior knowledge (Zoss & Stewart, 2018). Entrepreneurs must be able to anticipate potential obstacles and develop strategies accordingly. In the field, service members must be prepared for unexpected circumstances and adjust quickly (Garcia Zea et al., 2023; Soeters, 2018). Similarly, according to Blank and Dorf (2020), entrepreneurs must remain agile to pivot when needed while remaining flexible in the face of adversity.

Military members often learn risk assessment during service, which can benefit entrepreneurship (Börjesson, 2020). One can evaluate their options by understanding and accepting the consequences of various risks. Additionally, veterans may have a better grasp of potential economic challenges due to their experience with budgeting

(Wertheimer & Rauh, 2018). These analytical skills are beneficial when making business decisions as well.

Considering the skills and abilities military service provides, it is clear why veterans make great entrepreneurs. Military veterans have demonstrated an ability to rise above and overcome challenging situations, displaying a strength of character that is invaluable in business, also possessing important problem-solving skills, risk assessment acumen, and a unique adaptability that can serve them well when starting their businesses (Börjesson, 2020; Yates & Paustian-Underdahl, 2018). Furthermore, the tenacity and dedication developed through military service helps veteran entrepreneurs persist in adversity (Blank & Dorf, 2020). As such, Wertheimer and Rauh (2018) and Zhang and Guo (2022) also found military service as an excellent avenue for arming veterans with the skills they need to become successful entrepreneurs.

The transition from military service to entrepreneurship can be difficult, however. Veterans struggle with a lack of resources and access to capital (Cooper et al., 2018). Additionally, veteran entrepreneurs' support systems often need bolstering to provide them with meaningful assistance (Yates & Paustian-Underdahl, 2018). However, by recognizing and addressing these issues, governments can better equip veterans for successful entrepreneurship endeavors. The skills acquired during military service can play a significant role in equipping veterans for the entrepreneurial arena. Training and leadership experiences obtained through military service can help veterans build self-confidence, develop assertiveness, and hone decision-making abilities (Becker et al., 2023). Furthermore, these individuals have been exposed to high stress levels, which can

often benefit entrepreneurship by enabling them to handle challenging situations effectively (Wertheimer & Rauh, 2018). In addition to developing psychological capabilities, Liggins et al. (2018) stated military service provides veterans with technical and management skills such as budgeting, problem-solving solving, or organizational design that further equip them for an entrepreneurial career.

The development of self-efficacy is an important factor in the decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has positively influenced a veteran's intention to launch a business (Cater III & Young, 2020). This finding suggests that military service can foster self-efficacy by providing veterans with real-world experiences and exposure to difficult tasks, which can build their confidence and turn them into successful entrepreneurs.

The U.S. military has a long record of preparing its servicemen and women for the rigors of civilian life, equipping them with the skills needed to make positive contributions in their fields. This extends to providing opportunities for those wishing to become entrepreneurs. Veteran-owned businesses are on the rise, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers specific resources designed to help veterans successfully start their businesses (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019). Many veterans have realized that their experience in the military can provide them with skills and personal qualities that benefit entrepreneurship. Military service has been known to equip veterans with various competencies, including leadership, discipline, problem-solving abilities, risk-taking capacity, and adaptability (Chernushenko & Passmore,

2018). These core values for self-discipline can be transferred into the entrepreneurial environment.

Navigating Identity Change from Military to Civilian

Identity adaptation is an increased concern of veterans after military duty. Many veterans experience increased stress, suicidal ideations or attempts, immeasurable anxiety fluctuations, and severe degradation of mental health as they navigate the end of their military service and begin post-service life. Authors such as Drake and Wallach (2020) cite employment as a promoter of mental health. Joseph et al. (2020) stated vast differences between military and civilian cultures, which may increase identity dissonance. To help address problems stemming from identity dissonance, human resources (HR) departments should develop efforts to reduce transitional barriers for veterans (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020) and increase attention in hiring veterans by civilian firms (Dexter, 2020). While major efforts are underway to revamp HR departments to aid military members in transitioning to civilian life, they are not equipped to deal with the many issues veterans face in adapting or changing their identities (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020). HR efforts seem not equipped to deal with this.

Transitioning from military to civilian life is complex, but various ways exist to ease veterans' transition. In transitioning from military service, veterans must undergo an internal process of changing their identity from that of military duty to a civilian lifestyle. Using the Warrior Identity Scale, Flack and Kite (2021) surveyed 358 Australian veterans with military service ranging from 2011 to 2019. As a result of this quantitative study, the post-service well-being of veterans benefited from the continued nurturing of military

identity and positive social networks. Future research recommendations were that of conducting studies of both clinical and non-clinical members.

One universal gap in the literature they presented is a lack of understanding of the elements of military transition. Additionally, organizations need inclusion in creating an environment of belonging for veterans. Though not always voluntary in all countries, military service requires adaptation for members to enter, remain in, and exit. Becker et al. (2022) explored veterans' experiences of transitioning as they focus on realizing, relinquishing, and reconceptualizing as phases of entering civilian life. In summary, Becker et al. (2022) surmised that veterans represent a source of underutilized human capital and recommended that more veterans be surveyed to understand this demographic better. Even while researching this topic, most recovered articles emerged from outside the United States. This lack of articles from the United States further represents a need for more understanding and research concerning the veteran-to-civilian transition and identity.

The differences between military and civilian cultures require assistance to promote successful reintegration. Many veterans attempt self-coping and self-reintegration measures (Palmisano et al., 2022). This is likely due to as many as 84% of post-9/11 veterans feeling that military culture is not understood by the civilian populace, including family (Mobbs & Bonnano, 2018). Joseph et al. (2022) documented many veterans returning to their pre-military culture to ease transitional stress. Bond et al. (2022) numbered over 20,000 public and private firms that offered services for veterans; however, these services were passive at best.

Though the transition of identity from military to civilian life is complex, service members also face increased risks of suicide. Sokol et al. (2021) identified the first year of the transition from military to civilian life and the “deadly gap” due to the increased statistics of veteran suicide. Additionally, suicide has been reported as a leading cause of death for U.S. veterans (Nichter et al., 2021). A possible reason for such high statistics could be the lack of medical assistance within the first year of separation from military service (Sokol et al., 2021). The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2022) even stated that 50% of returning veterans receive needed treatment.

Other concerns with the employment of veterans in the civilian workplace exist. An example is Mael et al. (2022), who stated that employers raised concerns about veterans displaying tendencies of rigidity, misguided overwork, dismissive attitudes, being too decisive, using harsh language, and lacking patience. All such tendencies may prove disruptive while in the military and far more inconvenient in the civilian workplace. Although military experience may influence post-military identity (Turner & Moran, 2023), one can only wonder how it affects veterans adapting to the workplace and civilian life.

Lack of Research

As stated above, more research was needed while searching for self-employment information after retirement. Bryant (2020) and Cumberland et al. (2020) highlight this deficit and specifically report that limited research on veteran self-employment has been conducted. Additionally, they point out the need for a future study focusing on revitalizing human resource initiatives that promote self-employment opportunities.

However, other researchers such as Coile et al. (2021) and De Klerk et al. (2022) document some benefits of veteran self-employment.

While many of the issues noted are based upon my own beliefs and experiences, existing studies such as De Klerk et al. (2022) have added their fact-based research as validity and direction. De Klerk et al. utilized a semi-structured interview in a qualitative study to explore the transition of military veterans to self-employment. The study had 20 veteran respondents as well as members of support organizations (De Klerk et al., 2022). The study of De Klerk et al. reported some barriers to successfully transitioning to self-employment and recommended that further research on tailored transition is needed for veterans interested in entrepreneurship.

Steps for Success

The first step to meeting the goal of promoting African American male U.S. military veterans' business opportunities is to become educated in this arena. Though authors such as Sulistyowati et al. (2022) wrote that entrepreneurial education has no direct impact on the interest in entrepreneurship, they also state that it can shape the character, skills, competence, and confidence of aspiring individuals. Thus, engaging in entrepreneurial education may yield positive results in preparing for this venture. Farber et al. (2021) documented the expansion of entrepreneurial education into over 345 learning goals, with 400,000 students enrolling in different programs. Farber et al. also proclaimed that entrepreneurship education motivates students to learn by experience. Last, Fernández de Caleyá et al. (2023) recorded the benefits of entrepreneurship

education as allowing members to further personal growth and social development that may expand the cultural, social, and commercial activities for future companies.

Another avenue to ensure success in entrepreneurship is seeking support. One such support mentioned by Balcazar et al. (2023) is social or informal support, which can be viewed by family, friends, and other trusted adults. Balcazar et al. also mentioned formal support networks such as teachers, counselors, and assistants, who must be professionally trained before any positive contribution is rendered. These support systems prove valuable in business planning and personal life as well. However, the key to developing a support system is choosing the correct caliber of the network of individuals. When establishing a business, there is more to strategizing than making a profit. Planning an exit strategy is just as crucial as planning to make a profit. The structure of a business sets the tone for the duration of the business. Planning the exit strategy must take place as part of the beginning business structure (Kerley, 2019). An exit or end strategy is a foundation for everyday life and should be the same for business (Blank & Dorf, 2020). Exiting a business appropriately is the difference between making and keeping any profits.

Another tactic for startup planning is reviewing business models from the same sector. The initial thoughts of a business startup can leave entrepreneurs in a whirlwind of plans and possible directions. Ghezzi (2020) recommends exploring other business models to (a) understand entrepreneurial opportunities, (b) come to a consensus concerning the possible success of their startup, (c) sift through gathered research and information, (d) construct customer value tools; (e) prioritizing gathered information to

develop direction; and (f) processing all information and experiences. These actions will also benefit the search for startup capital.

With so many ideas on the definition of entrepreneurship, one may wonder what entrepreneurship is not. For example, freelancing is an emerging field of self-employment. However, Huđek et al. (2020) concluded that freelancing is not yet considered a form of entrepreneurship, though there is not much data to suggest otherwise. Huđek et al. continued that freelancers are considered promoters of entrepreneurship. However, they are often referred to as entrepreneurs, solopreneurs, digital micro-entrepreneurs, hybrids of employees and entrepreneurs, enablers, or potential entrepreneurs. If entrepreneurship is considered the generation or pursuit of opportunities (Diandra & Azmy, 2020; Prince et al., 2021), then the inclusion of freelancing should prove inherent. The inconclusiveness of this is yet another sign that further research is necessary.

An emerging sector of entrepreneurship is the solopreneur. Kluver (2019) defines the solopreneur as a business owner who runs alone or solo, hence the name. PR Newswire (2023) cited that most solopreneurs are female, weighing 54.4%, and males at 45.6%. The modern shift to online business and a higher percentage of female solopreneurs opens a new sexpreneur sector (Vickers & Brooks-Gordon, 2023). Sexpreneurs use online forums and attract clientele for payment. However, I will not explore this sector for broader research in the project.

Agriculture as an African American Male Veteran Coping Mechanism

African American male U.S. military veterans can benefit from using agriculture as a coping tool after transitioning from military to civilian life. Gardening activities, such as gardening, farming, and animal husbandry, can help reduce anxiety and depression related to readjusting to life following deployment (Acevedo & Brown, 2019). Additionally, agricultural programs may help African American male U.S. military veterans build social capital by providing support networks with other farmers with similar experiences (Winston et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Zhang and Jordan (2019), when urban vacant lots are used to grow food or raise livestock, it helps increase access to healthy foods that may otherwise be limited due to economic status and creates an opportunity for positive economic outcomes through market sales or donations of excess food.

Overall, agricultural programs can allow African American male U.S. military veterans to acquire new skills while connecting them to resources that may not have been available otherwise (Smith et al., 2020). Such activities can also provide an effective coping mechanism to manage symptoms of mental health issues related to transitioning from military service. Thus, acknowledging the potential benefits of incorporating agriculture into post-military care plans for African American male U.S. military veterans is essential in creating successful reintegration and rehabilitation programs.

Additional studies indicated that African American male U.S. military veterans increasingly use agricultural activities to cope with life after service (Kyle, 2018). This finding is especially true in rural and low-income areas, where veterans face limited job

prospects and resources. Agriculture allows these men to practice meaningful work and encourages social interaction through the development of community gardens, farms, and other projects. Studies from authors such as Smith et al. (2020) found that veterans reported feeling calmer, more self-reliant, and physically healthier. Not only did this type of work serve as an effective form of therapy for participants in the study, but it also gave them a sense of purpose. Through their agricultural endeavors, veterans were able to help the communities in which they lived by providing fresh produce and other resources.

In addition to the therapeutic benefits of agricultural work, African American male U.S. military veterans are also provided with economic stability. By owning or managing farms and community gardens, many of these men have found an alternative source of income- rewarding and sustainable. Furthermore, when veterans build meaningful relationships within their local agriculture groups, they are more likely to receive job opportunities outside this sector (Acevedo & Brown, 2019). By engaging in farming activities, African American male U.S. military veterans are better equipped to cope with life after military service. These activities give them a sense of purpose and belonging while offering numerous physical and mental health benefits. Moreover, agriculture also allows veterans to contribute positively to their local communities and gain economic stability.

Positive outcomes from engaging in agriculture are evident as presented in studies such as Acevedo and Brown (2019), Winston et al. (2018), and Zhang and Jordan (2019). According to these sources, promoting agriculture as a tool for mental health promotion among African American male U.S. military veteran's post-military service provides a

means of coping with the social, psychological, emotional, economic, or physical changes that can occur after military service (Acevedo & Brown, 2019; Winston et al., 2018; Zhang & Jordan, 2019). These studies emphasize the importance of providing resources and support for veterans who engage in agriculture-related activities such as farmer training programs (Kyle, 2018), job placement services (Wood, 2018), and mental health counseling (Acevedo & Brown, 2019) to increase their success in transitioning to civilian life. Through the cultivation of agricultural production and experiences with nature, Winston et al. (2018) found that African American male U.S. military veteran farmers can regain a sense of purpose, which has often been diminished due to service-related trauma or stressors.

Furthermore, Besterman-Dahan et al. (2018) discuss how access to land is often a major obstacle for African American veterans considering transitioning to a life of farming. Besterman-Dahan et al. explained that access to land is correlated with the success rate of beginning farmers, and large disparities exist between minority, veteran, and non-veteran farmers in terms of access to land (Besterman-Dahan et al., 2018). In addition, Wilson et al. (2018) suggested that programs providing disadvantaged veteran farmers with technical assistance and small grants can be beneficial in helping them acquire land for agricultural production.

Additionally, Winston et al. (2018) discussed how African American veterans have experienced positive effects from participation in agriculture-related activities, such as stress reduction, improved self-esteem, enhanced resiliency skills, increased sense of personal worth and purpose due to caring relationships of mentors and peers.

Furthermore, Kyle (2018) discussed how those who are successful in transitioning to farming have the potential for economic success and can even become models of leadership in their communities.

Calo (2018) stated that access to land is a major obstacle for smallholder farmers, including veterans transitioning into farming after military service. They identified various barriers, such as the high cost of land acquisition and lack of available acreage, which can make it difficult for veterans to get started with their farming operations. Carlisle et al. (2019) also found that most new and beginning farmers in the United States face financial challenges during their first years of farming. These challenges can be extremely difficult for veterans with limited financial resources due to their lack of income post-service.

Winston et al. (2018) examined the difficulties African American veterans face when attempting to reintegrate into civilian life related to finding employment and receiving support from U.S. government programs or services. Reintegration into society can be especially challenging for veterans who choose agriculture to cope with life after military service since this career path may not provide them with the same level of financial security they are accustomed to while serving in the military. Durham (2020) focused on how African American veteran farmers use gardening as an empowerment tool to cope with their transition back into civilian life. Durham found that veterans can benefit from agricultural activities, as they provide an opportunity to create a sense of purpose and discipline, which many veterans had while serving in the military.

Veterans face various obstacles when attempting to reintegrate into civilian life through farming. These include limited access to land, financial constraints, and a lack of support systems for transitioning back into society. However, these challenges must be addressed due to their potential impact on veterans' mental health and stability who choose agriculture to cope with post-service life. While there is still much more research needed on this topic, current studies have begun to shed light on how African American male veteran farmers use agriculture for successful reintegration into civilian life after military service. Durham (2020) argued that African American male veteran farmers might have a greater sense of purpose and well-being when engaging in agricultural activities due to their familiarity with structure, discipline, and routine, which are also prevalent in military life. Furthermore, Durham found that veterans can gain a sense of ownership over their careers while farming due to the ability to be creative and tailor their projects to their needs. African American male veterans using agriculture to cope with life after military service may find empowerment and stability through reintegration into civilian life.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Schlossberg's (2008) Transition Theory. Bartee and Dooley (2019) stated the importance of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, suggesting that any event or non-event that requires change is a transition. Other studies (Chacon, 2023; Threatt, 2023) had the Schlossberg 4-S model to address four core areas: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies about military veterans and their transition to civilian life. Each assessed area regarded the equipping of members to transition from

service member to civilian successfully. As veterans transition from military to civilian life, each member must navigate this crucial time. Of the 4-S model, Schlossberg (2008) wrote each element to be (a) situation - the situation at the time of the event, (b) support - people and assets that encourage or cope with the event, (c) self - whom the individual perceives themselves to be, and (d) strategies - ways of coping. Schlossberg's Transition Theory is appropriate for this study in facilitating the understanding and interpreting of each participant's experience.

Additionally, in qualitative studies, the researcher will come to know each case personally. By studying multiple cases, the researcher can understand and articulate the phenomenon of the overlying program or occurrence. Last, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is applicable as veterans can better understand how they can use entrepreneurship and self-employment to enter civilian life.

Transition

In this section, the goal was to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by African American male U.S. military veterans in their transition from military to civilian life, with a specific focus on entrepreneurship. Also investigated were historical analyses, mental health stigmas, media misrepresentations, leadership styles, and discriminatory perceptions. The overarching goal was to establish a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles encountered by this demographic, setting the stage for subsequent sections.

The section concentrated on potential solutions and avenues for overcoming the identified challenges. Emphasis included the importance of utilizing available resources, such as support organizations and mentorship networks, to facilitate a smoother transition

into civilian life. Additionally, exploration included the significance of understanding one's rights, accessing educational benefits, and addressing career development barriers. By providing tangible strategies, the goal of this section was to empower African American male U.S. military veterans to navigate post-military challenges successfully.

In Section 1, discussion included challenges faced by African American male U.S. military veterans, emphasizing the enduring impact of negative stereotypes, racial discrimination, and societal misrepresentation in the military. The transition from military to civilian life adds to these challenges, creating hurdles that affect mental health and coping skills. The entrepreneurial endeavors of African American male U.S. military veterans emerge as a critical yet underexplored aspect, demanding an understanding of the unique challenges they encounter.

In the literature review, the goal was to explore existing research on veteran entrepreneurship, self-employment, and the challenges African American veterans face in their post-military pursuits. The literature addressed the complexities of entrepreneurship and discussed successful strategies veterans employ in various contexts. The goal of the exploration was to draw from perspectives, providing a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the dynamics of African American male U.S. military veteran entrepreneurship. As for the research of this literature review, the goal was to synthesize existing knowledge, identify gaps, and pave the way for a deeper exploration of successful strategies that have empowered African American male U.S. military veterans in their entrepreneurial pursuits. This synthesis served as a bridge, connecting the

foundational understanding established in Section 1 with the empirical aim to uncover in the subsequent sections of this research.

Section 2: Research Project Methodology

Section 2 of this research project includes the chosen methodology, focusing on ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, and the approach employed. With a commitment to transparency and ethical conduct guided by the Belmont Report, I detail my facilitative role in the data collection process. The method involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews to extract rich narratives regarding entrepreneurial success.

The nature of the project justified the pragmatic qualitative approach and Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory as the conceptual framework. Purposive sampling was conducted intentionally, with a sample size of five participants, to achieve data saturation. The methodology for data collection was in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face and virtual interviews, and included member checking to enhance credibility. The section concludes with a discussion of reliability and validity, underlining the importance of member checking, an audit trail, and detailed descriptions to establish the study's trustworthiness.

Project Ethics

I acted as a qualitative researcher, collecting and interpreting data for this study (see Johnson et al., 2020; Pietilä et al., 2020). To gain a thorough understanding of the experiences and perspectives of African American male U.S. military veterans involved in entrepreneurship, I conducted interviews, observations, and content analysis. The study's objectives aligned with the qualitative approach, which enabled a thorough understanding of the experiences of the participants (see Johnson et al., 2020; Pietilä et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021). There was particular interest in exploring African

American male U.S. military veterans' difficulties in the entrepreneurial environment. I, who am also a veteran, am passionate about helping the veteran community and think that entrepreneurship can empower individuals and communities. Before the study, the participants and I were strangers. I respected the importance of objectivity and dedication to accurately portraying the participants' experiences.

Throughout the research process, I upheld moral principles. Confidentiality was upheld, participant rights and well-being were protected, and participation was voluntary and informed, -as required by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects (Koh & Villacis, 2019; Park et al., 2022; White, 2020). I adhered to the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons outlined in the Belmont Report. The goal of the current study was to maintain reflexivity and be aware of my perspectives and possible biases to reduce bias (see Buetow, 2019; Jamieson et al., 2023). I practiced regular self-reflection to identify and reduce the impact of personal beliefs or preconceived notions on the interpretation of data. Peer-debriefing and member-checking activities helped ensure the data's credibility and provided a checks-and-balance system to reduce bias (see Fathi et al., 2023; Jungheim, & Vega López 2022; van Loon, 2019). Participants were offered the chance to review the findings and discuss them with me. Interviews are valuable for qualitative studies because they offer detailed information and insights into participants' perspectives and experiences (Jain, 2021). The current study provided a thorough understanding of the difficulties and solutions associated with veteran entrepreneurship; the interview protocol was designed to encourage participants to express their ideas honestly. The protocol guided the interviews, ensuring consistency

while allowing flexibility to examine emerging themes. Data collected from interviews will be encrypted and digitally stored for 5 years to protect confidentiality.

Nature of the Project

Part of the significance of researching is developing a conclusion. However, how the researcher gets to the conclusion may vary. Standard research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (qualitative and quantitative). These methods govern how each researcher analyzes the different sources required to build and support the framework of the research project. Quantitative research comprises numerical and standardized data, which allows the researcher to conduct statistical analyses to test a hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2016). However, quantitative methods are less effective in exploring experiences, emotions, or observations because they require numerical data. Qualitative research includes words and images collected from non-standard data that allows for a conceptualized analysis (Saunders et al., 2016) using a conceptual framework. Saunders et al. (2016) noted that the mixed-methods approach includes qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

A qualitative approach was used for the current study. This study was best suited for qualitative research because of the need for in-depth exploration and understanding of African American male U.S. military veterans' experiences, perspectives, and challenges in entrepreneurship and self-employment. The use of a qualitative design was justified by the research question and the goal of learning about the experiences and challenges African American male U.S. military veterans as they transition into entrepreneurship. Qualitative methodology enables a detailed exploration of the complexities involved

(Tenny et al., 2022), giving participants a voice and allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences. This method provided the necessary flexibility for capturing this specific demographic's multifaceted and diverse narratives. Data saturation is critical in qualitative research to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic and to confirm that additional data collection is unlikely to yield significantly new insights (Saunders et al., 2016). I used a purposive sampling strategy to achieve data saturation, selecting participants based on predetermined criteria related to their entrepreneurial experiences. The iterative data collection and analysis process was continued until no new themes or insights emerged, indicating data saturation.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

Data were collected from interviews with five African American male U.S. military veterans who were entrepreneurs with businesses that remained viable for more than 5 years. The participants ranged from 35 to 80 years old and lived in Florida and Texas. Each veteran was purposefully selected and interviewed via a semi-structured interview process. The interview consisted of nine questions designed to elicit the experiences of the interviewee regarding the start-up and successful operation of their entrepreneurial and self-employment endeavors. Data collection also included organizational documents and other scholarly literature for relevant information.

Eligibility Criteria for Study Participants

The eligibility criteria for participants in this study were closely aligned with the research question: What strategies have African American male U.S. military veteran

entrepreneurs used to build and sustain businesses beyond 5 years? To answer this question, I established the following eligibility criteria:

1. Participants must be African American male U.S. military veterans.
2. Participants must have experience as entrepreneurs who have successfully managed and sustained a business for a minimum of 5 years.
3. Participants should be willing to share their experiences and insights regarding their entrepreneurial journey.
4. There are no restrictions regarding the type or industry the business participants manage.

Strategies for Gaining Access to Participants

Access to participants was obtained through a multi-faceted approach:

1. I leveraged professional networks, veterans' associations, and entrepreneurship-related organizations to connect with potential participants.
2. Participants who met the eligibility criteria were asked to refer other potential participants, expanding the pool of qualified individuals.
3. I used online platforms and social media channels to reach out to potential participants and engage with them.
4. I sought referrals from personal contacts and individuals within their professional network who may be aware of suitable participants.

Strategies for Establishing a Working Relationship With Participants

To build a constructive working relationship with participants, I implemented the following strategies:

1. -Participants were provided with clear information about the research purpose, objectives, and informed consent procedures before the interviews.
2. An informed consent form was used to ensure the participants understood their rights and the research process.
3. I created a comfortable and non-judgmental environment during interviews, encouraging open and honest communication.
4. Regular follow-up and communication was maintained with participants throughout the study to address any concerns or questions they may have.

The eligibility criteria and access strategies were aligned with the business problem and research question, ensuring that participants would provide valuable insights into the experiences of African American U.S. military male veteran entrepreneurs (see Alam, 2021). These strategies helped me foster a positive and productive working relationship with participants throughout the research process.

Data Collection Activities

The data for this study were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants, either face-to-face at mutually agreed -upon locations or virtually through video conferencing, accommodating participant preferences. Semi-structured interviews offered flexibility to explore the participants' experiences and strategies concerning entrepreneurial success (see Mashuri et al., 2022). Several advantages and disadvantages exist in employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the data collection technique. On the positive side, this method allows for an in-depth exploration of complex experiences, yielding rich and detailed narratives. Moreover, this

method offers the researcher adaptability to tailor the interview according to participants' responses (Mashuri et al., 2022). However, as stated by Kakilla, (2021), it is essential to acknowledge the potential downsides, such as the considerable time and resources needed for conducting and transcribing interviews and the susceptibility to response bias.

Member checking was employed to ensure the credibility and validity of the data interpretation. Participants were allowed to review the interview summaries, to validate the reliability of the findings. Feedback from this process was invaluable in making necessary adjustments to the interview protocol, ensuring its effectiveness and appropriateness before the full-scale data collection process was completed. This iterative approach to refining the research methodology contributed to the robustness and rigor of the study.

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were focused on eliciting each interviewee's best practices and experiences:

1. What tools were needed to start your own business?
2. What are the avenues of financial assistance you used to start your business?
3. What methods did you use to educate yourself for entrepreneurship?
4. What are the strategies that helped you to succeed?
5. What were the methods that you used to sustain during COVID-19?
6. What marketing practices did you use?
7. What are the areas that you failed most in, and how did you recover?

8. How did starting your business help with your transition from military service?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

In this qualitative pragmatic study, robust systems for data organization and understanding of emerging themes were implemented. Research logs were maintained to provide a detailed account of each research activity, including interviews or observations, contextual information, and initial interpretations. Reflective journals captured my evolving and methodological decisions throughout the study. Additionally, a comprehensive cataloging and labeling system was employed to categorize data based on themes, concepts, or participant information, facilitating efficient retrieval and analysis during the research process.

Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), aligned with the research design for the current study. Thematic analysis offers a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis is well suited for exploring complex experiences and perspectives, making it an appropriate choice for comprehending the multifaceted aspects of entrepreneurial success among the current participants. The data analysis process followed a logical and sequential path. After transcription, coding was conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. The coding process involved systematically categorizing and organizing data to identify patterns and themes. Mind mapping aided in visualizing connections between themes, and Excel was used to organize and summarize the data.

This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough and systematic analysis of the collected data.

Key themes were identified through the thematic analysis process. These themes were then interpreted in the context of existing literature, including any new studies published since the proposal was written to enrich the analysis. The conceptual framework guided this correlation, ensuring alignment between the identified themes, literature, and theoretical underpinning. This iterative process contributed to a nuanced understanding of the research findings in the context of existing knowledge and the study's conceptual framework. Any data collected from interviews will undergo encryption and digital storage for 5 years to protect confidentiality.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, ensuring the trustworthiness of the study is of utmost importance. Rose and Johnson (2020) noted that reliability is the soundness of research, while validity is the fidelity or accuracy of research. Reliability and validity refer to the trustworthiness of research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Trustworthiness involves establishing the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research, which are analogous to the traditional concepts of validity and reliability in quantitative research.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study findings are believable and trustworthy. To enhance credibility, member checking was used. This process involves sharing the preliminary findings and interpretations with the participants to seek their

input, corrections, or validation (Davis & Lachlan, 2017). Their feedback helped ensure that the data analysis accurately represents their experiences and perspectives.

Additionally, using rich descriptions and detailed quotations in the research report further contributed to the study's credibility.

Dependability

Dependability is important to the stability and consistency of findings over time (Coleman, 2021). To establish dependability, an audit trail was maintained, documenting the research process from data collection to analysis. This record provided transparency and allowed for the replication of the study by future researchers, increasing the study's dependability.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research corresponds to the generalizability of findings to other contexts or settings. It often refers to the degree in which findings can transfer to other contexts or settings (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Although qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalization, we provided thorough descriptions of the research context, participants, and data collection procedures. This information may enable readers to assess the applicability of our findings to similar contexts or populations, thus enhancing transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the equivalent of objectivity in quantitative research. It relates to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participants and the data rather than the researcher's bias (Hays & McKibben 2021). To ensure confirmability, we maintained

reflexivity throughout the study, acknowledging our preconceptions and actively working to minimize their impact on the research. ,readers can verify evidence by linking data to sources (Alzono & Teng, 2023). Incorporating these strategies and following qualitative research best practices, we aim to establish the trustworthiness of this study, ensuring that the findings accurately represent the experiences and perspectives of the African American male U.S. military veterans in entrepreneurship.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is critical in qualitative research to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic and to confirm that additional data collection is unlikely to yield significantly new insights (Saunders et al., 2016). The study used a purposive sampling strategy to achieve data saturation, selecting participants based on predetermined criteria related to their entrepreneurial experiences. The iterative data collection and analysis process will be continued until no new themes or insights emerge, indicating data saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included an outline of the research project methodology, focusing on ethical considerations, the researcher's role, and the chosen qualitative pragmatic approach. The researcher positions themselves as a facilitator in the data collection process, using semi-structured interviews. Ethical practices are underscored, including informed consent, confidentiality measures, and transparency. The nature of the project is discussed, justifying the qualitative approach, and adopting Schlossberg's (2008) Transition Theory as the conceptual framework. The study population, sampling, and

participants target African American male U.S. military veterans in entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling is chosen, with a minimum sample size of 5, to achieve data saturation. Data collection involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews; member checking is employed for data credibility. Data organization and analysis techniques, thematic analysis, and strategies to ensure reliability and validity was done with NVivo. Established qualitative pragmatic research methodologies support the chosen methodological approach, and the importance of member checking in enhancing data credibility is emphasized.

Section 3: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What strategies have African American male U.S. military veteran entrepreneurs used to build and sustain businesses beyond 5 years? To answer this question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five African American male U.S. military veterans to gain insights into their transition from military to entrepreneurial practices. Of the five individuals engaged in various business activities, four were veterans and one was an active military member. I used the Schlossberg (2008) 4-S model, to facilitate the understanding of each participant's experience.

After conducting the interviews, and transcribing, organizing, and verifying the data, I used NVivo 14 to assign coding, identify themes and subthemes, and categorize the material used in the study. From the thematic analysis, distinct themes and subthemes emerged, which included challenges faced by African American male U.S. military veterans on transitioning to entrepreneurship practices, sources of finances for starting entrepreneurship, education on entrepreneurship activities, tools and skills needed to start a business, strategies that helped African American male U.S. military veterans to succeed, marketing practices used by veterans, and the power of military skills in business. This information was used to present a meaningful answer to the research question in this study.

Each participating veteran was assigned a pseudonym (Interviewee 1–5) to protect their identity and ensure data saturation. The interviewees were from Texas and Florida.

The represented industries were agriculture, lawn care, sports referee, livestock, real estate, and consulting. Some interviewees operated multiple businesses, in different industries, and others had one entrepreneurial focus. ,

Theme 1: Challenges Encountered in Entrepreneurship

When asked about the challenges of starting a business, Interviewee 3 pointed out the inherent difficulty, stating, “that is a challenging question. Oh, so in a very abstract manner. You don’t know what you don’t know.” Interviewee 3’s response reflected the ambiguity and uncertainty entrepreneurs face. Interviewee 5 highlighted the ongoing challenge of maintaining accountability for success while being cautious about business expansion. Interviewee 5 mentioned, “I guess I probably should have expanded, took on some more employees, did a whole lot more work. But I chose not. I think because of my age, I should not go that direction.” Interviewee 3 also shared his perspective on missed opportunities and the challenges of recognizing them at the right time. Interviewee 3 admitted, “there were a multitude of opportunities that I missed out upon. There are probably a plethora of opportunities that I am unaware of; I still miss them because I did not recognize them as opportunities at the time.” Interviewee 1 reflected on the challenges of losing customers and the need for a comprehensive understanding of client expectations. Interviewee 1 noted that failure in this aspect could result from not delivering services in a preferred manner, stating, “sometimes you lose customers if you don’t do something the right way or they get a little finicky about how you do things.” This revealed that one area of failure lies in customer relationship management and the potential loss of clientele due to service dissatisfaction.

Interviewee 2 identified a specific area where he faced challenges early in his entrepreneurial journey. Interviewee 2 acknowledged the struggle of not charging friends and family appropriately, leading to burnout and resource depletion:

“The biggest worry was me not charging friends and family first. And I could get by basically saying, hey, if I just give you the resources or if you want me to do the work for you, then we’re not going to charge you.”

This highlighted the potential failure in setting clear boundaries and pricing strategies, especially when dealing with personal connections faced by the veteran.

One significant challenge highlighted by Interviewee 5 was the impact of external factors on business operations. Interviewee 5 mentioned the need to adapt due to quarantine measures affecting livestock. Interviewee 5 stated, “yeah, Quarantine. Oh, we had to get rid of the hog because of disease. So I know. Got back into raising hogs anymore.” Moreover, Interviewee 5 addressed the issue of advertising and business promotion. Interviewee 5 emphasized the organic growth of his business, attributing it to word of mouth and client satisfaction. Interviewee 5 noted, “I never had to advertise. That actually I felt if I ever tried, I couldn’t even keep up with the beat.” Although advertising might seem positive, it also introduced the challenge of potential limitations in reaching a broader market or exploring alternative growth strategies. Subthemes of Theme 1 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Challenges Encountered in Entrepreneurship*

Subtheme	Reference	Number of interviewees	Coverage percentage
Inherent difficulty	5	2	2.45%
Uncertainty	5	2	5.4%
Caution in expansion	7	1	5.2%
Missed opportunities	8	1	2.7%
Losing customers	6	1	0.27%
Understanding client expectations	6	3	5.7%
Charging friends and family	9	3	5.3%
Setting boundaries	9	3	2.3%
Impact on operations	5	3	1.7%
Adaptation to changes	5	4	1.3%
Reliance on organic growth	4	2	4.7%
Limitations and challenges	4	3	5.6%

Theme 2: Avenues for Financial Assistance

Interviewee 5 presented a self-reliant approach to entrepreneurship, noting the use of personal funds without seeking external finance. Interviewee 5 asserted, “no, I didn’t seek finance. Everything just came out of my pocket. I was at the time able to purchase what I needed, and I didn’t need no finances, just okay.” In contrast, Interviewee 1 introduced another financial strategy, emphasizing resourcefulness and leveraging financial instruments. Interviewee 1 articulated,

“that I was in pretty good shape, ma’am, where I took some money off my phone.

One case, you know, and just borrowed against that. So it wasn’t anything I had to pay taxes on. So it was kind of easy to get started that way.”

Interviewee 1 not only utilized personal funds but also strategically borrowed against assets as an avenue of funding to start and maintain his business. Interviewee 1

introduced the concept of combining personal and government assistance in his entrepreneurial journey. Interviewee 1 mentioned, “my personal money is what I used to start everything. However, you know, I started using I tried to use government assistance in a USDA form.”

Interviewee 3 reflected on missed opportunities for financial assistance, highlighting the crucial role of knowledge and awareness in navigating available support. Interviewee 3 shared,

“there were no forms of financial assistance that I used for a business entity creation, although if I was more knowledgeable and aware of them upon starting, then there would have been some that I would have been able to leverage and utilize with acquired real estate.”

Interviewee 1’s perspective showed that veterans may require financial help, but lack of knowledge on where to get it can be a challenge, leading to skewed sources of funds.

Interviewee 1’s journey suggested that a lack of awareness can lead to missed opportunities for African American male U.S. military veterans. Interviewee 1’s missing help was confirmed by Interviewee 2, who addressed the challenges active-duty members face in accessing financial aid for entrepreneurial ventures. Interviewee 2 stated, “I did not use any. And I guess this was even until down the road. But, you know, as an active-duty member, it’s not much assistance. Right. You would have to go out.” Interviewee 2 revealed the unique hurdles African American male U.S. military veterans confront, indicating limited avenues for financial assistance. Subthemes for Theme 2 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Avenues for Financial Assistance*

Subtheme	Reference	Number of interviewees	Percentage coverage
Self-reliant approach	6	3	3.4%
Resourcefulness and leveraging financial instruments	8	2	2.7%
Combining personal and government assistance	7	2	3.8%
Missed opportunities due to lack of knowledge	5	1	1.7%
Challenges for active-duty members	4	1	1.4%

Theme 3: Paths to Entrepreneurial Education

Interviewee 5, drawing from his community and familial roots, stated, “well, the community that I was raised in to help educate me because I would see my uncles and all.” Interviewee 4, in contrast, amalgamated various sources for his entrepreneurial education. Interviewee 4 shared,

“I didn’t know. Reading stuff. Reading. And there are some courses that I promised to take, but I didn’t take those college courses or business courses. But I mostly spoke with other people in business. And getting a guinea getting advice before you really get deep in it, talking to them, seeing how they run things and what is the best way to do it. So, it’s good to have mentorship. I think that was the biggest.”

Interviewee 2 took a modern route, relying on social media for education and direct interaction. Interviewee 2 stated,

“I listen to social media—just direct contact with individuals on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Now, it’s just me sitting behind the computer or directly just talking to the individual. I normally make those points since I don’t have any advertising or marketing. There’s just needs. Behind the computer screen, we turn out to be individuals.”

Interviewee 2 emphasized using LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram as sources of knowledge, which was a contemporary perspective, using digital platforms for networking and staying informed. Interviewee 4 combined self-directed learning and mentorship. Interviewee 4 acknowledged reading and engaging with experienced entrepreneurs, demonstrating the value of personal and interpersonal learning to veterans transforming to entrepreneurial activities. Subthemes for Theme 3 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Paths to Entrepreneurial Education

Subtheme	Reference	Number of interviewees	Coverage percentage
Community and familial roots	5	2	5.1%
Amalgamation of various sources	7	2	4.7%
Social media and direct interaction	6	1	2.4%
Intertwining self-directed learning and mentorship	7	4	2.8%

Theme 4: Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success

Interviewee 3 brought attention to the necessity of resiliency and understanding impact versus intent. Interviewee 3 shared, “you absolutely have a thick skin and understand that it’s not about you. And it just seems very direct, very blunt, very abrupt, but really at the end of the day. That’s a crucial understanding.” Interviewee 5, reflected on his entrepreneurial journey, emphasizing the significance of strategic expansion. Interviewee 5 advocated for a prudent approach to expansion, tailored to individual circumstances, underlining the importance of aligning growth strategies with business goals:

“I feel that I really don’t want to expand anymore, but I would recommend that for the younger guys.”

Interviewee 5 noted that a foundational understanding of business operations is necessary and urged aspiring entrepreneurs to take a business class: “I would recommend to take a business class. Because that’s one of the most important parts of your business. Know how to manage your business.”

Interviewee 5 also suggested that understanding financial practices is important for business success:

“because even in my bed, I see I’m not really doing it correctly, even though I know I should be doing, you know, because I did have a little finance background. We had a finance class and planning operations. And we had to keep in mind, you know, the long-range plan and the short-range and keep all that in mind. The financing part of that understanding that really can help any business. “

This highlights the significance of financial acumen in navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship.

Interviewee 2 advocated for a unique approach to marketing through social media:

“So our business motto is ‘Turning passion to profits.’ At the center, we all have had things that we thoroughly enjoy. We just don’t know how to monetize it.”

Interviewee 2 also emphasized turning passion into profits, which is a transformative potential of aligning business practices with the personal interests of veterans. Subthemes for Theme 4 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success

Subtheme	Reference	Number of interviewees	Coverage
Resiliency and understanding impact versus intent	5	1	1.7%
Strategic expansion	6	1	0.67%
Business education and financial acumen	7	1	0.12%

Theme 5: Adapting to COVID-19 Challenges

The interviewees approached the challenges posed by COVID-19 using diverse strategies based on the nature of their businesses and circumstances. Most interviewees were unaffected by COVID-19; however, Interviewee 1 was affected. Interviewees 4 and 5 focused on minimizing personal interactions. Interviewee 5 mentioned,

I didn't really do anything during Covid-19 unless there was an emergency thing because I did whatever it took to not be around people. If I had to do any work, it had to be where I wouldn't be around anyone.

Interviewee 4, whose work is primarily outdoors, continued operations with minimal disruptions: "Most of my stuff is outside. So I was able to do things outside without any issues."

While operating as a proprietor, Interviewee 3 highlighted his business model's flexibility. Interviewee 3 shared,

it really works more so to where there is definitely a relationship base in order to be able to sustain a company. But it is more or less involved with specific projects and specific endeavors. So that makes it more so like a contract type of relationship.

Interviewee 3's business model allowed him to navigate the pandemic with fewer constraints on managing personnel. Interviewee 2 claimed COVID-19 as a blessing as he took advantage of increased online presence during lockdowns: "For me, it was more profitable. More people were at home. More people were on social media. More people were getting money from the government stimulus checks." Recognizing the shift in consumer behavior, Interviewee 2 seized the opportunity to scale his business during a period when attention and resources were more accessible. In contrast, Interviewee 1 experienced no significant business changes due to COVID-19: "In terms of business, nothing. No special business strategies due to Covid." Subthemes for Theme 5 are presented in Table 5.

Table 5*Adapting to COVID-19 Challenges*

Subtheme	Reference	Number of interviewees	Coverage percentage
Minimizing personal interactions	8	2	1.66%
Flexibility in business model	7	1	2.1%
Taking advantage of increased online presence	6	1	3.7%
No significant business changes	5	1	2.4%

Theme 6: Diverse Marketing Approaches

African American male U.S. military veteran's entrepreneurs employ various marketing practices, due to their diversity in their business models and personal preferences. Interviewee 1, who intended to keep his business small and family-oriented, utilized flyers for advertising: "I just do flyers, you know, I'm kind of in a low scale... So it's very small, just basically just flyers." Interviewee 1 emphasized simplicity and local engagement for, his desire to maintain a manageable scale. On the other hand, Interviewee 2 leveraged the power of social media and direct interactions for marketing efforts, "just direct contact with individuals on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram... just talking to the individual." Interviewee 2's approach revolved around personal connections and online platforms, reflecting a modern and individualized strategy. In contrast, interviewee 4 relied on word of mouth and avoided extensive advertising:

“all about business marketing, all that stuff is more word of mouth. I won’t advertise... I don’t want to get too big... This is something to keep me busy, keep me engaged, and keep my sanity”.

Interviewee 5 appeared to adopt a more traditional approach.: “the work that you do. Because people talk.” Interviewee 5 focused on the quality of work as a marketing tool, suggesting that veterans use commitment to build a reputation through the services provided. Subthemes for theme 6 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Diverse Marketing Approaches

Marketing approach	Reference	Number of interviewees
Flyer for local engagement	6	1
Social media and direct interaction	8	1
Word of mouth, avoiding extensive advertising	7	3
Emphasizing quality of work as marketing	5	3

Theme 7: Entrepreneurial Tools and Strategies Among African American Male U.S.

Military Veterans

In exploring the entrepreneurial tools used by African American male U.S. military veterans, interviewee 5 narrated their journey starting with equipment acquisition during their employment at Florida Power—a loader. Interviewee 5 entry into entrepreneurship, triggered by downsizing, showcased the role of unforeseen events and adaptability in the entrepreneurial process,. Interviewee 5 stated,

“I bought the payloader really for the farm work. Then Florida Power downsized, and I got laid off. So, I went into land clearing since I had a payloader to clear land with. That’s what got me started.”

This experience of interviewee 5 underscored the entrepreneurial spirit’s resilience, demonstrating how setbacks in traditional employment can serve as catalysts for venturing into business ownership, especially for African American male U.S. military veterans.

Interviewee 1 emphasized their transition to self-employment, initially inspired by umpiring and later delving into the lawn care business. Interviewee 1 stated,

“I thought, Hey, I could go in and make money for myself doing, you know, being self-employed. And that came up with the umpire stuff. That was back in ‘95. And then later the lawn care business.”

Their entrepreneurial journey encapsulated the evolution of self-employment ideas, starting with sports-related ventures and expanding into lawn care. The narrative suggested that military experience cultivated a mindset conducive to identifying diverse entrepreneurial opportunities. The lawn care business is further explored, and he detailed the financial aspects of starting such a venture.

“one thing I had to buy was an enclosed trailer, which cost me about three grand. I got it to carry all my lawn equipment. The lawn shops will mostly finance all the other equipment interest-free for 4 or 5 years.”

Interviewee 1 underscored the accessibility of loans for necessary equipment, particularly the ease of obtaining interest-free loans for essential tools like mowers and trimmers, making entrepreneurship feasible even with limited resources.

Interviewee 4 presented a unique perspective on entrepreneurship related to animal husbandry. Their interest in understanding and caring for animals, particularly cows, reflects a combination of personal passion and financial considerations.

“That’s what I wanted to do, is come up with more understanding about the animals. Number one is what they eat and how to keep the nutrition flowing so they look good when taking them to the market.”

Interviewee 4’s experience highlighted the importance of aligning entrepreneurial ventures with individual interests and addressing practical challenges associated with high maintenance costs. Their entrepreneurial journey unveiled the intersection of personal passion and business.

Interviewee 3 provided a comprehensive overview of the process of acquiring real estate success. Interviewee 3 emphasized legal components, business processes, and state-specific knowledge of the complexity of entrepreneurship, especially in industries with specific regulatory frameworks. Interviewee 3 boldly stated,

“so it’s understanding that all is not created equal. In that regard, you have to be very familiar with the legal statutes that pertain to the activities and what you’re doing. That’s your area.”

This focus on legal statutes illuminates the nature of entrepreneurship, particularly in real estate for veterans. The mention of “not created equal” implied the need to understand

legal frameworks, emphasizing the importance of legal literacy in entrepreneurial pursuits.

Certifications emerged as crucial tools in entrepreneurship, as demonstrated by interviewee 2. They emphasized obtaining project management and Six Sigma certifications as tools to streamline processes. Interviewee 2 stated,

“I got my project management certification and my Six Sigma certification. My career field as a training manager had already equipped me with, you know, with tools of how to streamline and make processes easier.”

This experience showcased the value of skills enhancement and knowledge acquisition in navigating the challenges of entrepreneurship. Interviewee 2’s pursuit of certifications underscored the role of continuous learning and skill development in entrepreneurship.

Subthemes for theme 7 are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Entrepreneurial Tools and Strategies Among African American Male U.S. Military Veterans

Entrepreneurial tool and strategy	Reference	Coverage percentage
Equipment acquisition and adaptability	5	0.57%
Transition to self-employment and diverse opportunities	6	0.79%
Financial aspects of starting a lawn care venture	6	0.79%
Entrepreneurship in animal husbandry	7	2.91%

Theme 8: Setbacks in Entrepreneurship

When asked about recovery in business challenges, the interviewees provided candid reflections on their entrepreneurial journeys, overcoming obstacles, and charting a course toward success. Reflecting on their business's evolution, Interviewee 5 touched on the ongoing process of being accountable for success, "being accountable for the success of the company what I want to do with it...I probably should have expanded...because of my age, I decided not to go that direction." Despite facing challenges, interviewee 5 was reluctant to expand his business extensively, potentially due to factors such as age. Their experience unveiled the theme of strategic decision-making in business expansion. They also emphasized a unique aspect of their business growth: "the one thing that did help me...people always came to me...if I ever got tired, I couldn't even keep up with the beat."— the absence of conventional advertising. They attributed the expansion of their business to the satisfaction of clients who, in turn, became advocates.

Interviewee 5 further addressed the challenges of maintaining customers and emphasized understanding client expectations. They stressed the importance of consistent quality in customer service, regardless of the payment received. Interviewee 5 contributed to the theme of consistent customer service as a key business principle, "sometimes you lose customers...get a good understanding of what people want...treat every customer the same...apply the same quality." These insights underscored the theme that consistency in service and client interaction is paramount in sustaining a successful entrepreneurial venture.

Interviewee 3 reflected on missed opportunities and the importance of knowledge and preparation in navigating the entrepreneurial. They acknowledged the subjective nature of failure, attributing it to missed opportunities rather than a lack of ability, “a multitude of opportunities that I missed out upon...because I did not recognize them as opportunities at the time due to my lack of knowledge about that subject area.”

Interviewee 2 shared their experience of initially focusing on attracting friends and family to their entrepreneurial activities, leading to burnout. They introduced setting boundaries and value for services rendered,

“I tried to attract friends and family...spending so much time doing all the work and not necessarily charging them...burning myself out when I could have been working for external customers who would pay for my services.”

Subthemes for theme 8 are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Setbacks in Entrepreneurship

Setback in entrepreneurship	Reference	Source
Reluctance to expand business	7	3
Client satisfaction as a catalyst for growth	11	2
Challenges of maintaining customers	4	2

Transformative Power of Entrepreneurship on Military Transition

As veterans embarked on the entrepreneurial journey post-military service, certain recurrent themes resonated, uncovering the profound impact of this transition. Reflecting on their military service, interviewee 5 acknowledged the development of leadership

skills and the experience of leading men. They stated, “what my military service did for me was help me lead men. Which other men didn’t like it, but I had to accept it. The military also allowed me to go to college.” Their journey illustrated leadership as a cornerstone, a skill cultivated in the military that serves as a foundation for entrepreneurial success. This testimony underscored how military service not only hones leadership abilities but also cultivates the interpersonal skills necessary for navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship.

Interviewee 1 underscored the continuity of military professionalism into entrepreneurial ventures. The theme of professionalism became evident as they emphasize its role in a seamless transition. “the military has helped me tremendously for knowing how to be professional, you know, so professionalism travels to these. There were businesses, too, and so it was an easy transition.” Interviewee 1’s narrative showed the theme of professionalism and authenticity in business. Their experience emphasized that the principles of professionalism acquired in the military translated into entrepreneurial ventures, contributing to a smoother transition, and fostering authentic business practices.

Interviewee 3 articulated a theme centered on intrinsic purpose and passion. They stressed the significance of knowing one’s passion areas and having an intrinsic purpose, aligning business ventures with personal motivations.

“this is also going to be an abstract answer from the most beneficial component of having had started my business before I left the military. And it would still also apply to individuals who are in the military, as I knew where my passion areas

were and therefore had more of an intrinsic purpose for what it is that I wanted to do.”

This narrative contributed to the theme of intrinsic purpose and passion, highlighting that successful entrepreneurship for veterans is often rooted in personal motivations.

Interviewee 4 introduced the theme of recognizing and leveraging skills that may go unnoticed in discussing leadership skills gained from the military. They emphasized the difference great leadership makes, when transitioning to the civilian market.

“Sometimes you don’t recognize that you got great leadership skills because you think it’s natural because you see so many leaders around you. But when you come on to the civilian market, you can definitely see the difference that great leadership makes a difference.”

The theme of the recognition of unseen leadership skills was evident in this narrative. Interviewee 4 emphasized veterans’ sometimes-overlooked skills in entrepreneurship, stressing their intrinsic value and the positive impact they can have on a business.

Interviewee 3 discussed the nature of entrepreneurship by introducing a theme related to balancing entrepreneurial personalities. They discussed the roles of the inventor, entrepreneur, and manager, stressing the importance of embodying all three. Interviewee 3 stated, “in order for you to be able to effectively run a business and to be an entrepreneur, you really need to be able to do all three of those and know which is appropriate and when.” As highlighted by interviewee 3, balancing entrepreneurial personalities offered practical guidance for veterans venturing into entrepreneurship. It

suggested that success often lies in mastering and balancing multiple roles within the business, ensuring comprehensive and effective management.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The research findings on African American male U.S. military veterans transitioning into entrepreneurship represent a significant stride towards enhancing professional business practices. The research contribution lies in tackling the distinctive challenges encountered by this demographic during their transition to entrepreneurial journey. These findings can serve as a compass for business leaders, inspiring them to proactively address the financial hurdles faced by African American male veterans embarking on entrepreneurial ventures. To this end, leaders, policy makers and entrepreneurs should consider the initiation of comprehensive financial literacy programs in organizations. Collaborating with financial institutions and subject matter experts, businesses can design and implement initiatives that equip veterans with the necessary financial knowledge and skills, fostering an environment conducive to their triumph in entrepreneurial pursuits.

Moreover, the research outcomes show the critical importance of educational support for veteran entrepreneurs. Business leaders, recognizing the educational gaps highlighted in the study, have an opportunity to contribute to the professional development of veterans. organizations can offer scholarships, online courses, or training programs that address the specific needs of veterans entering the entrepreneurial landscape which will establish strategic partnerships with educational institutions. This proactive approach shows a commitment to diversity and inclusion and cultivates a

skilled and knowledgeable veteran workforce, amplifying their potential for success in the business arena. In essence, the research findings suggest a blueprint for leaders to enact targeted interventions, fostering a business ecosystem that is supportive, inclusive, and conducive to the triumph of African American male U.S. military veterans as they transition into entrepreneurship.

Recognizing the importance of available financial assistance sources, business leaders play a role in supporting veterans' entrepreneurial aspirations. To foster awareness and accessibility, collaboration with veteran support organizations, financial institutions, and government agencies is essential. Business leaders can proactively engage in partnerships with these entities, utilizing their networks to disseminate information about various funding options. Implementing workshops or informational sessions within the workplace emerges as a powerful tool, ensuring that veterans are well-informed and equipped financially, thereby enhancing their ability to secure necessary support for entrepreneurial practices.

Furthermore, the research findings highlight an opportunity for business leaders to address the identified educational needs of veteran entrepreneurs. Establishing strategic partnerships with educational institutions positions leaders to make a meaningful impact by offering educational opportunities. Scholarships, online courses, or specialized training programs geared towards veterans' unique requirements can be instrumental in fostering their professional development during their services as militaries before transitioning. This proactive investment in educational initiatives aligns with corporate social responsibility and contributes to cultivating a workforce of veterans equipped with

the requisite knowledge and skills, ultimately enhancing their potential for success in entrepreneurship.

Veteran businesses, cognizant of the significance of innovation and adaptability in marketing, can foster a culture that encourages experimentation within their marketing teams. Businesses can explore unconventional strategies that align with the preferences and needs of their target audience. They should recognize the efficacy of word-of-mouth marketing, companies can implement initiatives aimed at enhancing client satisfaction, ultimately transforming satisfied clients into enthusiastic advocates. However, While the use of word of mouth and flyers has proven effective for some veterans in their marketing strategies, it is recommendable for veterans transitioning into entrepreneurship to complement these traditional strategies with modern marketing approaches. Business leaders can recommend incorporating digital marketing techniques such as social media advertising, online content creation, and search engine optimization (SEO). Encouraging veterans to establish a strong online presence can significantly broaden their reach and attract diverse clients. Also, business leaders or support should provide training or resources on digital marketing tools and platforms that can empower veterans to leverage the benefits of contemporary marketing strategies.

Strategic decision-making, particularly in business expansion, acts as an opportunity for business leaders to play a mentorship role. Establishing mentorship programs that connect experienced entrepreneurs with veteran counterparts can provide invaluable guidance. This mentorship enables veterans to make informed decisions about the growth trajectories of their ventures through inspiration or guidance shared by their

mentors and their wealthy experience. Additionally, recognizing the centrality of strategic decision-making, leaders can integrate training programs into existing professional development initiatives. This proactive step ensures that employees, especially those engaged in entrepreneurial activities, acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for making strategic decisions that contribute to the sustainable growth of their ventures.

This research emphasizes continuous learning and adaptation through missed opportunities which is imperative for businesses to cultivate a culture of resilience and ongoing learning. Considering this, leaders play a role in shaping an organizational environment where failure is perceived not as a setback but as a steppingstone for learning and innovation. Ensuring a supportive culture that encourages employees to share and learn from their experiences, leaders can contribute to the development of an adaptive, forward-thinking organizational ethos. This approach instills resilience and promotes a mindset where challenges are viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement. Leaders should actively nurture such a culture, empower their teams to navigate uncertainties, learn from failures, and continuously adapt to the evolving business landscape.

Business leaders also can recommend that veterans assess their growth potential and consider expanding their operations to reach a wider market. This expansion should be aligned with the specific goals and capacities of the veteran entrepreneurs. Leaders can advise on the importance of hiring additional personnel to support increased operations, contributing to business growth and to employment opportunities in the community. Business leaders should educate the veterans on the significance of thoughtful expansion,

ensuring that it aligns with the long-term vision of the veterans and enables sustainable success. Providing mentorship programs on business expansion and human resource management can further support veterans in making informed decisions as they scale their enterprises.

Implications for Social Change

Walden University (2023) defines social change as just another way of saying improving lives. People working to improve others' lives is the definition of social change. As a combat veteran, I find passion in creating opportunities for other veterans, especially disabled ones. Furthermore, as a combat veteran who has struggled with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, I have a soft spot for those veterans who have worked through similar issues.

One of the reasons for starting this doctoral journey was to find tools to begin businesses for hiring veterans and felons and create business opportunities for veterans. When other companies cannot hire some people, they still deserve a chance. A veteran-owned business will employ vets and felons by starting small in hometowns and give families health and retirement benefits. Aside from this, new non-profit organizations may also focus on providing scholarships and funding for people in need. These are but small indications of contribution to positive social change. As many veterans and felons may feel thrown away, veteran-owned businesses will give them a place of belonging. Also, implementing transformational leadership into business practice will show a positive example to others that all can overcome obstacles and return as beacons of hope.

On transformational leadership, Martinez and Leija (2023) wrote the priorities of the transformational leader to regard their followers before themselves. Transformational leaders cultivate their followers by getting involved. Also, implementing transformational leadership will show a positive example to others that all can overcome obstacles and return as beacons of hope. By equipping veterans with business ownership, communities become enhanced. If cities are improved, overall society and economies become positively impacted. This idea leads to the thought of promoting positive social change.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research could expand the demographic scope beyond African American male U.S. military veterans to include other racial and gender groups. This would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how various demographic factors influence entrepreneurial strategies post-military service.

Following veterans over an extended period would provide insights into the evolution of entrepreneurial strategies, capturing changes, adaptations, and long-term outcomes. This would contribute to better understanding of the dynamic processes involved. Incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches would enhance the research findings. Utilizing surveys with scaled responses and objective performance metrics would offer a more quantifiable evaluation of entrepreneurial success and challenges.

Future research should also delve into how variables such as age, educational background, or specific military experiences intersect with entrepreneurial strategies. Future research could include a more thorough examination of objective business

performance metrics. Incorporating financial records, growth indicators, and other quantitative measures that would offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the economic impact of entrepreneurship on veterans. Also, to enhance generalizability, future research could conduct comparative studies between veteran entrepreneurs and non-veteran entrepreneurs. This would help identify unique challenges and strengths specific to veterans, offering insights for both veteran support programs and the broader entrepreneurial community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this qualitative research project provide a comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurial experiences of African American male U.S. military veterans as they transition from military service to civilian life. The analysis of interviews revealed distinct themes and subthemes, highlighting the challenges faced, financial sources used, educational strategies employed, tools and skills acquired, marketing practices adopted, and the transformative power of military skills in entrepreneurship.

The finding is the self-reliance demonstrated by the veterans, particularly in terms of financing their entrepreneurial ventures. The predominant use of personal funds, particularly retirement pensions, show their resilience and commitment to entrepreneurship. Leveraging military skills, such as leadership, professionalism, and resiliency, emerged prominently, emphasizing the integration of these skills into their business pursuits.

The challenges encountered in entrepreneurship, such as difficulties in recognizing opportunities, client relationship management, and strategic decision-making in expansion of their business, shows the need for targeted support and education which could enhance the success of African American male U.S. military veterans in their entrepreneurial endeavors. These research emphasis on continuous learning, adaptability, and the recognition of missed opportunities for personal and professional development.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the need for tailored support mechanisms to address the challenges faced by this demographic during their transition to entrepreneurship. Policymakers, educators, and support organizations can use these insights to develop initiatives that foster a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for African American male U.S. military veterans. This research contributes perspectives to the ongoing discourse on veteran entrepreneurship and calls for targeted interventions to maximize the potential of this resilient and skilled group.

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Appendix: Draft Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
Actions from Interviewer	Draft Script
Introduction	<p>Hello. My name is Schavass Hamilton. I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University. Thank you for your time and helping me complete my studies.</p> <p>Before we begin, please provide your name, the name of your business(es), and the nature.</p>
<p>Conduct the interview with the enclosed questions. While doing so, I will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch body language and nonverbal cues. • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What tools were needed to start your own business? 2. What are the avenues of financial assistance you used to start your business? 3. What methods did you use to educate yourself for entrepreneurship? 4. What are the strategies that helped you to succeed? 5. What were the methods that you used to sustain during COVID-19? 6. What marketing practices did you use? 7. What are the areas that you failed most in, and how did you recover? 8. How did starting your business help with your transition from military service? 9. Is there anything else that you would like to share?
Interview Wrap-Up	<p>Thank you again for your time. There may be a few follow up questions compiling all data from this interview. All information will undergo encryption and digital storage for the protection of your identity and shared comments.</p>