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Job Transitioning Experiences of Blue-Collar Employees After Federal Downsizing

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Eduardo Hurtado, Jr.

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Job Transitioning Experiences of Blue-Collar Employees After Federal Downsizing

by

Eduardo Hurtado, Jr.

MS, University of Oklahoma, 2011

BS, University of Phoenix, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Organizational Psychology

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Downsizing, realignment, and closure of military bases have forced many low-skilled, blue-collar federal employees into involuntary job loss and job transition. The impact of involuntary job loss on blue-collar workers has been linked to stress and other adverse psychological effects. There is gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological study was to examine lived experiences of job loss and job transition for federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. Schlossberg's transition theory provided a conceptual framework for the study. Ten ex-federal blue-collar employees were recruited through purposeful sampling and interviewed using a semistructured interview strategy. The modified Moustakas and Stevick-Coliazzi-Keen method of analysis was used to analyze the data and report emergent themes. The following 7 themes emerged from the data: transition was associated with negative feelings, employer was unprepared for transition process, support provided by employer, emotional support from family and significant others, engaged in other activities, accepted the transition process, and drew motivation from family. The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing important information that human resource managers, industrial/organizational psychologists, and government agencies can use to advocate for the need for developing programs that support civilian job transition services to individuals who are affected by federal downsizing.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mother, Margarita, who always believed in me and encouraged to never change the way I am when it came to reaching my dreams. Dad, I love you dearly. I also would like to dedicate this to my children, Maria, Paul, and Robin who were patient with me through this difficult journey. Sorry that I could not be there at all times when you needed me. Susi, without your support and understanding, I would have not found the strength to complete my doctoral degree. Thank you for being my angels on earth. I love you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The civilian workforce is a vital component of the operations of the Department of Defense (U.S. DoD, 2015). Since the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, over 30,000 defense civilian employees have been deployed in support of U.S. military operations (Mayes, 2012). The initiation of the DoD Base Realignment and Closure Commission (DoD BRAC) led to downsizing in the military force, which also affected job positions held by civilian defense employees (Nataraj, Hanser, Camm, & Yeats, 2014). Sources indicate that the U.S. federal government will continue to downsize and restructure its workforce, and the downsizing will lead to an increased number of defense employees who face involuntary job transitions (Shanker, Thom, & Cooper, 2014). The problem addressed in this study was the impact of involuntary job loss on blue-collar federal employees, as previous research had linked involuntary job loss to stress and other adverse psychological effects (Classen & Dunn, 2012; Karren, 2012).

For this study, I used a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore the chosen problem, which was the job transition experiences of federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases and how the employees coped with the stress associated with the transition. The findings from this study may have practical significance for human resource managers as well as for industrial-organizational (I/O) psychologists supporting today's federal blue-collar workers who have experienced downsizing and job transition issues. The next sections in this chapter present the background of the issue, problem statement, purpose of the study, nature of the study, and research questions. The theoretical framework for the study,

definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitation, limitations, and significance of the study are also covered. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

Background

According to Nataraj et al. (2014), information from past base closures revealed that reductions in military forces affect job positions held by civilian defense employees. Since President Reagan's administration, the DoD has closed over 100 domestic and international bases in support of budget and legislative requirements (GAO, 2013). Changes implemented in 1988, 1991, 1993, and 1995 resulted in 387 base closures and realignments (Cowan, 2012). In 2004-2005, the Bush Administration initiated the Global Defense Posture Realignment process and started to withdraw 70,000 military employees from 300 overseas sites back to the United States, saving a substantial amount of money (Weyand, 2012). Weyand (2012) opined that further base closures were inevitable, predicting that those closures would affect military communities and federal employees. The DoD is the largest employer in the nation, with a defense workforce composed of approximately 742,000 civilians who are located at more than 5,000 sites worldwide (U.S. DoD, 2015). White-collar workers account for 81% of the DoD civilian workforce, of which 72% work in administration. Blue-collar workers comprise the remaining 19% of the civilian workforce in the DoD (Eaglen, 2013).

Problem Statement

Downsizing has had detrimental effects on employees working for agencies of the federal government (Lavigna, 2014). The effects of downsizing include poor organizational commitment (Hur & Perry, 2014) and decreased employee motivation and performance (Warren & Chen, 2012). Researchers have found that downsizing is linked

to involuntary job loss, which is a problem that has been linked to a number of adverse effects on employees' psychological well-being (Classen & Dunn, 2012; Karren, 2012). Past studies have linked involuntary job loss to low self-esteem (Gowan, 2012), anxiety (Duke, Bergmann, Cunradi, & Ames, 2013; Papa & Maitoza, 2013), emotional exhaustion, cynicism, depression (Burke, Ng, & Wolpin, 2016), and suicide (Classen & Dunn, 2012). Young (2012) also noted that individuals who experience involuntary job loss may experience negative long-term effects on their psychological well-being that may continue after reemployment.

Downsizing, realignment, and closure of military bases have forced many low-skilled, blue-collar federal employees into involuntary job loss and job transition (Nataraj et al., 2014; U.S. DoD, 2015). The re-employment prospects for those blue-collar employees are low due to the employees' low levels of education (Baumann, Lipps, Oesch, & Vandenplas, 2015) and the labor surplus in the United States (Hall & Krueger, 2012; Oesch & Baumann, 2014). Blue-collar workers in the United States who lose their jobs experience long periods of unemployment (Brand, 2015), compete against undocumented workers for unskilled work (Roark & Graham, 2011), and have a high likelihood of psychological distress (Karren, 2012).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological research was to examine lived experiences of job transition for federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. Bratton (2013) argued that much of the outdated literature on federal civilian downsizing is no longer useful in offering new direction to this field of research. Therefore, additional research is needed to determine participants' experiences

with job transition. Information gathered from such studies could possibly be used to determine what resources may be needed to effectively assist individuals coping with the aftermath of federal downsizing.

Nature of the Study

This study used a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) to explore lived experiences of job transition among federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. Qualitative research methods enable in-depth investigation of phenomena (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Qualitative studies facilitate investigators' exploration of problems by enabling extensive examination of beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of participants on particular processes or phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). The key feature of the qualitative mode of inquiry is that it permits integration of individual philosophies and opinions (Van Baren, 2013). According to Smith (2011), the focus of IPA in research is the detailed, lived experiences of participants and how they make sense of specific experiences. Researchers using the IPA method of inquiry also seek to understand participants' social and personal worlds via use of hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The IPA research method is appropriate for exploring blue-collar employees' experiences with job transition following federal downsizing. The sample size for this study was 10 participants. IPA necessitates in-depth analysis of personal accounts, which requires sample sizes to be restricted to a small number of participants (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015). Because IPA requires individual case analysis, which results in a time-consuming transcript development process, the typical sample size for these studies is 10 participants (Callary et al., 2015; Smith & Osborn, 2007). In this study, I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants

from the targeted population of interest. Researchers initiating IPA studies use purposeful

sampling to identify a defined group for questions that are most significant to the study

(Smith & Osborn, 2007). The primary data collection method that I used was

semistructured interviewing guided by open-ended questions. Researchers need to follow

detailed guidelines in designing and conducting interviews efficiently (Creswell, Hanson,

Plano, & Morales, 2007). Therefore, an interview protocol was created in order to guide

the interviews. Using an interview guide ensured consistency in the wording of the

questions for each participant. The data were analyzed and coded using Moustakas's

(1994) method.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one overarching research questions and three

subquestions. Several interview questions were used to collect data related to the

subquestions. The questions that were used to guide this study were the following:

Research Question

How were federal civilian employees affected by federal downsizing?

Subquestions

1. What are the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees as they relate

    to job transition due to base downsizing?

2. What support systems did blue-collar employees use during the job transition

    in gaining re-employment?

3. What strategies did federal blue-collar employees in transition use to manage

    the stress associated with their job transition process?

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. A *transition* was described by Schlossberg (1981) as "an event or non-event [that] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). I used four factors of job transition theory, which are referred to as the 4 Ss, to explain how a life transition, namely job loss and transition, affects an individual. The 4 Ss are (a) situation of transition, (b) support of environmental characteristics, (c) self as stable personal characteristics, and (d) strategies that individuals use to cope during transitions (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). The interactions or presumed relationships between the four factors represent the transition process that can lead to positive or negative outcomes for individuals (Schlossberg, 1981). According the Schlossberg's definition of transition, it can be an anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent. Transitions can play an integral role in adult development and can have a lasting impact on individuals' cognitive and psychosocial functioning. All adults experience transitional changes, which typically result in developing a new perception of self and a new network of relationships (Schlossberg, 1981). The principles of transition theory in this study provided a context for explaining how federal downsizing affected outcomes for federal blue-collar employees.

Definition of Terms

Anticipated transitions: Job moves that occur in a predictable fashion (Schlossberg, 1981).

Blue-collar workers: Employees who fill job roles commonly categorized as manual labor (Sum et al, 2010).

Coping: The manner in which individuals think or act to manage and/or minimize stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991).

Coping assets: A surplus of resources that support stress management and responses to job transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Coping liabilities: A shortfall in resources that support stress management and responses to job transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Coping resources: Social (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, coworkers) and psychological (e.g., self-esteem, self-denigration, and mastery) support for the management of stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Job transition: A voluntary or involuntary move from one job role to another (Johnson & Corcoran, 2003).

Involuntary transitions: Occur when workers are laid off, are forced into retirement, or reenter the labor force because of policy changes or changes in personal circumstances and work environments (Fouad & Bynner, 2008).

Nonevent transition: Move from a job role due to an anticipated life event that never came to fruition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Outplacement programs: Employment career guidance and job-placement services for terminated employees (Butterfield & Borgen, 2005).

Support systems: Assistance from close family relationships, a network of friends (e.g., coworkers or acquaintances), and institutional support (e.g., formal programs, rituals, and ceremonies; Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980).

Transition: According to Schlossberg (1981), an "event or non-event resulting in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requiring a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5).

Voluntary transition: A job change with sufficient time to consider multiple options and opportunities to physically and psychologically prepare for the move (Fouad & Bynner, 2008, p. 247).

Well-being: The sense of happiness, quality of life, and overall life satisfaction (Allin, 2007).

Unanticipated transition: An unexpected and unscheduled job move (Schlossberg, 1981).

Assumptions

The study of phenomenology relies on descriptions of experiences from participants who have lived experiences with a phenomenon of interest (Davidsen, 2013). Therefore, this research was predicated upon a number of assumptions. The first assumption of this research relied on participants' subjective meaning of a lived experience (Creswell, 2013). Because people are influenced by prejudices, their openness to the world is biased and they can never, even through reflection, entirely keep critical distance and be objective. It was assumed that the participants' personal prejudices, values, and biases would always be present in the study, as people cannot distance themselves to be completely objective; however, the responses of the participants were regarded as their honest perceptions of events (Creswell et al., 2007; Davidsen, 2013). It was also assumed that the participants would willingly share their past experiences with job transition. The interview process depends on participants' honesty regarding their

lived experiences. The goal of the research was to elicit the views of the participants as they related to the situational circumstances under study (Creswell et al., 2007). A major assumption of this study was that the individuals interviewed would accurately identify themselves as having experience with the major phenomenon of interest, which was job transition as a federal blue-collar employee following downsizing of military bases. The following assumptions were taken into consideration as I conducted the interviews and analyzed the data. I assumed that participants answered all interview questions in a truthful and honest manner. Participant honesty in answering the questions was vital to the validity of this study. In order to meet this assumption, I briefed all participants on the details of how the interview would be conducted. I informed the participants of their anonymity and that their participation in the study was voluntary. I further assumed that as the researcher, I would understand the participants' responses to the interview questions. Based on these assumptions, I assumed that I was able to interpret the participants' responses when I recorded and analyzed their responses. I also assumed that if responses were poorly translated, the dependability and credibility of the obtained results could be affected. Thus, transcribing results verbatim with accuracy and thought was necessary to gain a complete understanding of the participants' real-life experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

Ellis and Levy (2009) explained that the scope of a study involves the topic that is researched and the information that is collected and subsequently analyzed. In addition, the delimitations of a study refer to choices that are made and are therefore under the control of the researcher. In this study, I examined the lived experiences of blue-collar federal employees who experienced job transition following military base downsizing.

White-collar federal employees and contractors employed by federal and state

government agencies that support military installations were excluded from participating

in this study. Employees hired as non appropriated funds employees were also excluded

due to nonfederal status (i.e., because such workers were not compensated through

Congress). Blue-collar employees from domestic and overseas positions who had not

experienced federal downsizing and job-to-job transitions were also not recruited for

participation in the study.

Limitations

Limitations of a study refers to things that are beyond the control of the principal

investigator, and those limitations should be stated by the researcher (Brutus, Aguinis, &

Wassmer, 2013). In phenomenological research, the aim is to gain in-depth understanding

of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences by eliciting a narrative from them

(Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). A common limitation of semistructured interviews is that

the questions asked or the way in which the researcher asks the questions may interfere

with the participants' stories (Chan et al., 2013). For this reason, I limited myself in the

number of questions I asked and by not interrupting the flow of speech when a participant

related experiences or feelings. Another limitation of this study was that participants

might have limitations in recalling their job transition experiences following downsizing.

Some participants might have experienced selective memory or not remembered accurate

details of their post-job-loss experience, which could have affected the credibility of

findings from the study (Sacred Heart Library, n.d.). To mitigate recall deficits during the

interviews, I first put participants at ease by talking about everyday events. If the

participant's memory seemed particularly poor, I made it possible to make another

appointment because a cyclical approach can facilitate memory and recall (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, this study used a very specific population from a targeted (military base closing) setting. Generalizability of the findings from the study is therefore limited.

Validity includes trustworthiness of the interpretation of data and obtaining valuable data from participants (Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015). To ensure validity, member checking was used so that participants could verify the correctness of transcriptions. I used bracketing or epoché to limit the possibility that interpretations were biased toward my presuppositions. Phenomenological studies do not use large groups of participants as they focus on in-depth and rich data; this impacts transferability of findings to other situations or groups of people (Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015).

Moustakas (1994) suggested that a researcher should establish rapport with the coresearcher before starting an interview. This creates an atmosphere of trust that is furthered by efforts to protect the participant's confidentiality. In addition, the use of multiple participants and triangulation with the analysis of past research literature were used to mitigate issues of bias and verify the data with more sources (Creswell, 2013). The various limitations noted in this section were reduced significantly by using the strategy outlined.

Significance

In this qualitative IPA study, I investigated the job transition experiences of federal blue-collar employees following the downsizing of military bases and how the employees coped with the transition experience. Existing studies had not provided insight into how job transitions affect federal blue-collar employees. The findings from this study may have practical significance for human resource managers as well as for I/O

psychologists supporting today's federal blue-collar workers who have experienced downsizing and job transition issues. Further, organizations could use this information for social change by advocating the need for developing programs that provide supportive services to individuals who are affected by federal downsizing. The personnel section of DoD could benefit from the results and possibly change its management of the BRAC situation. In addition, organizations could sponsor employee outplacement programs to smooth the job-transitioning process during military downsizing and related base closures.

Summary

This study examined the job transition experiences of federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. The initiation of DoD military base closure to increase DoD efficiency and subsequent downsizing processes have led to reductions in military forces, which have also affected job positions held by civilian defense employees (Nataraj et al., 2014). The threat of downsizing has had a detrimental effect on employee job satisfaction and trust in the agencies of the federal government, which could present a long-term issue for these institutions; this study has the potential to mitigate these effects (Lavigna, 2014). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO; 2012a) and Nataraj et al. (2014), reductions in defense spending have primarily impacted lower skilled workers. With the downsizing, realignment, and closure of military bases (Nataraj et al., 2014), many low-skilled civilian employees are forced into involuntary job transition (Nataraj et al., 2014; U.S. DoD, 2015). Blue-collar workers have higher risk for job loss, experience longer periods of unemployment (Brand, 2015),

compete against undocumented workers (Roark & Graham, 2011), and have a greater likelihood of psychological distress (Karren, 2012).

The study employed a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological approach in exploring the research topic. The purpose of using a phenomenological approach was to capture the lived experiences of study subjects who had been affected by DoD downsizing. The participants were men and women between 18 and 65 years of age who were ex-federal blue-collar defense employees who had firsthand experience of involuntary job transition through DoD downsizing. Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted to gather data, which were analyzed to gain new knowledge surrounding environmental characteristics related to the phenomenon of interest, personal characteristics of those progressing through job transition, and the strategies enabling individuals with such transition.

In the following chapter, existing literature related to the theoretical framework implemented in this study is reviewed, along with studies that present historical data regarding the influence of unemployment on the well-being of past defense blue-collar workers. Chapter 2 includes a more detailed discussion of the literature reviewed for this study; specific attention is given to the theoretical framework on which the study was grounded.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Past research has indicated that involuntary job loss is a problem because it is a traumatic event that can negatively impact every part of a worker's life, including economic standing, mental health, physical health, and long-term prosperity (Brand, 2015; Gowan, 2014; Vickers & Parris, 2007; Young, 2012). Due to the restructuring of DoD, civilian employees have been subjected to involuntary job transitions (Farrell, et al., 2012). The Pentagon has not asked for a new round of BRAC in the 2019 budget even though DoD estimates savings of $2 billion should another round be implemented (Maucione, 2018). Lower levels of education and the large labor surplus make reemployment prospects poor for displaced blue-collar workers (Baumann et al., 2015; Hall & Krueger, 2012; Landsbergis, Grzywacz, & LaMontagne, 2014; Oesch & Baumann, 2014). Consequently, blue-collar workers experience longer periods of unemployment (Brand, 2015). Limited data exist on the involuntary job-transition experiences of federal blue-collar workers (Young, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the job transition experiences of federal blue-collar employees (e.g. mechanics, service technicians, maintenance operators) following downsizing of military bases.

This review provides a summary of the literature related to involuntary job transition and the stress that results from such events. The search strategy section details the literature search methods used to find the research treated in subsequent sections. The theoretical foundation section contains a discussion of the theoretical framework of the study, which was Schlossberg's (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation to

transition. The literature review section contains descriptions of the ways in which factors influencing and affecting levels of stress for displaced workers have been investigated in recent studies. This chapter includes an analysis of the relevance and weaknesses of the studies reviewed and a discussion of their applicability to the present study. Finally, the summary and conclusions section synthesizes these findings into an overview of the state of research in this area and points out the research gap that the present study addressed.

Literature Search Strategy

The search strategy for this literature review involved iterative searches that were conducted within Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost), ProjectMuse, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and Science Direct databases to retrieve articles related to the study. Key terms used in the database searches included *blue-collar worker(s)*, *displaced (industrial) workers*, *civilian/military support forces*, *downsizing (workforce reduction/ reduction in force)*, *coping (assets, liabilities, resources)*, *coping and stress*, *(chronic) unemployment*, *job (work) transition*, *(voluntary) involuntary transition*, *outplacement programs*, *psychological capital*, *social support. stressors*, *lived experience*, *organizational psychology*, and *psychological phenomenology*.

The keywords and combinations of keywords listed above were entered into each of the listed databases and search engines within each of the following disciplines: organizational psychology, phenomenological psychology, counseling, government affairs/accountability, sociology, organizational studies, organizational behavior, vocational development, economics, public health, and nursing. The reference pages for relevant articles were searched for additional relevant sources, which were then located

by searching in the aforementioned databases and search engines. Eighty-eight percent of the source materials used in this review were published in the last 5 years.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory for analyzing human adaptation to transitions served as the primary theoretical framework for this study. The theory originated in the early 1980s in the work of Schlossberg and colleagues, who proposed it as a conceptual framework for understanding the varying degrees of success experienced by former NASA employees in adapting to job loss (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, & Leibowitz, 1980). Schlossberg and other researchers postulated that transitions occur throughout the lifespan of human beings (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). These researchers further asserted that any theory used to study transition in human lives must include a simultaneous analysis of individual characteristics and external occurrences. In the theory they developed, Schlossberg et al. (1980) noted the following three composite factors that influence adaptation to transition: the characteristics of the specific transition, the characteristics of the pre and post transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. These factors were described as interacting to produce an outcome of the transition, which was either adaptation or failure to adapt. Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) further found that the relative salience of the contributing factors depended on the transition under consideration and the population being studied.

According to Schlossberg (1981), the key concepts of transition theory are *transition* and *adaptation*. A *transition* occurs when an event (or nonevent) forces a person's assumptions about him- or herself, and the world, to change. The transition

results in corresponding changes to the individual's behavior and/or relationships.

Transitions include life events such as graduation, marriage, childbirth, bereavement, loss

of career aspirations, or the nonoccurrence of expected events (e.g., a promotion)

(Schlossberg, 1981). Within a given transition, Schlossberg (1981) identified three

stages: crisis (a severely upsetting situation requiring high levels of individual resources),

the transition state (period marked by relational and personal changes), and end of

transition (marked by stable, new life organization and identity).

Schlossberg (1981) described *adaptation* as the process by which an individual

moves from being completely preoccupied with a transition to making the transition an

integrated part of his or her life. Strategies for promoting adaptation include gathering

adequate information, maintaining adequate internal conditions, and keeping some degree

of autonomy (Schlossberg, 1981). The difficulty or ease of the adaptation depends on

whether and how much the person's perceived and/or actual resources exceed or fall

short of the resources required to make a successful transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) first investigated the associations between job

loss, shock, depression, and lowered self-esteem among former employees of NASA's

discontinued Goddard Space Flight Center. Fifty-three participants completed mail

questionnaires, and in-depth interviews were conducted with eight of them, at the time

the layoffs were announced and 3 months later. The researchers introduced a model that

outlined three composite factors that contributed to a worker's success or failure in

adapting to job loss. Those factors were (a) the characteristics of the transition itself (e.g.,

whether it was voluntary or involuntary, expected or unexpected, disadvantageously

timed or not, welcome or not); (b) the characteristics of the worker's environmental

supports (e.g., the supportiveness of family and friends, the availability of reemployment, and the efficacy of institutional supports); and (c) characteristics of the worker undergoing the transition (e.g., psychosocial competence, attitude, resilience, and available coping mechanisms).

Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) used the abovementioned three factors (situation, support, and self) that play a role in adapting to change when studying a group of Goddard Space Flight Center employees who experienced involuntary job transition. The outcomes of this two-stage qualitative study indicated that the amount of organizational support in transitioning to another job and living arrangements buffered stress and emotional reactions to the transition. In the Goddard Space Flight Center-study, the organization played a strong positive role by assisting the employees in finding new jobs, which made the transition less stressful for the employees. Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) found that the transition model provided useful guidelines to draft semistructured questions and facilitate the interviews. Following results of other researchers, Schlossberg (1981) concluded that the influences of the transition factors have dissimilar salience and depend on the circumstances of the participants in the research. This realization led to the postulation of the 4-S transition model, which includes the s-variables: situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 1984). According to Anderson et al. (2012),

- *Situation* represents everything that happened during the transition period. If the transition took place during a period of multiple stressors, the transition is harder to manage.

- *Self* describes the person experiencing the transition. Individual differences in personality makeup and pertaining to life issues account for different transition experiences and outcomes.

- *Support* denotes the assistance available during the transition—family, friends, and most importantly the organization when involuntary job transition is involved.

- *Strategy* applies to the coping strategies applied by the person. There are individual differences in navigating transitions.

Goodman and Anderson (2012) further analyzed situational characteristics that influence the transition experience of individuals. These eight characteristics are set out in Figure 1. The degrees to which these situational elements function in the individual's life will codetermine the degree to which the individual experiences the transition. For instance, a blue-collar civilian who undergoes involuntary transition due to closure of a military site while also facing a divorce (or similar stressful situation) is more likely to experience the transition situation as more intense and upsetting.

Trigger: How did the transition come about?	Previous transition experience: Are there similar experiences that the individual can learn from?	Concurrent stress: What other stressful situation/s co-occur with the transition?
Timing: How is the change influenced by the individual's personal and social situation?	Duration: Is the transition temporary/permenent and does the interim period last long/short?	Situational assessment: How serious does the individual consider the transition to be?
Control: What degree of control does the individual have over the transtion?	Role change: Does the transition necessitate role change?	

Figure 1. Elements involved in situation. Adapted from "Applying Schlossberg's 4-S Transition Model to Retirement," by J. Goodman & M. L. Anderson, 2012, *Career Planning and Adult Development*, *28*(2), p. 60. by Copyright Holder.

As Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) observed, "Adults in transition are often confused and in need of assistance" (p. 37). When individuals fail to make a complete transition, they may display stress, difficulty in making decisions, negativity, and/or irritability (Anderson et al., 2012). When an individual's coping mechanisms are not sufficient for a particular transition, a deficit is incurred (Schlossberg, 1981). In the context of this study, a deficit situation would involve decreased well-being and increased stress as a result of involuntary job transition.

The majority of studies published since 2016 using Schlossberg's transition theory pertain to educational shifts, such as the work conducted by Montgomery (2017) on how best to support Chinese undergraduate students in their international educational transitions. Montgomery studied first-year Chinese students in the United States and

identified three transition influences, namely academic, individual/social, and linguistic. These factors were linked with transition characteristics from Schlossberg's model: student preparation prior to entering a United States university (situational control), amount and type of support provided by the university, and individual coping strategies to facilitate moving through the period of transition. Montgomery recommended that universities implement compulsory orientation programs with ongoing workshops to support Chinese students transitioning to U.S. universities. Improved residential facilities and experiences of daily residential life were also recommended to assist students transitioning to the United States (Montgomery, 2017).

Main et al. (2016) investigated the pathways used by military veteran students in engineering education, using the qualitative, semistructured interview methodology and theoretical framework. In total, the internet search for studies based on transition generated about 1,000 results, more than half of which used Schlossberg's transition theory to discuss educational transitions or transitions for military members. In a handful of other studies, researchers looked into other transition situations. For instance, Duggleby et al. (2017) researched transitions for end-of-life caregivers losing persons with cancer. Duggleby et al. conducted a review of studies on family members involved in end-of-life transitions. The researchers identified 72 relevant studies with qualitative designs. These studies essentially mirrored the primary data collection style used by Main et al. (2016), namely using semistructured questions to elicit rich and in-depth narrative from participants.

Review of the Literature

Involuntary job displacement is often a traumatic event that can drastically upset the self-concept and other stable characteristics of the workers affected. Such transition may complicate workers' ability to regain healthy equilibrium by creating a stressful situation that contributes to an almost exclusively negative lived experience. This section of the chapter presents literature that establishes the definition and current status of blue-collar workers, the effects of downsizing on individuals including federal workers, military base realignment and closure (BRAC), and the effects of job transition on individuals.

Blue-Collar Workers and Transition

The category of blue-collar workers includes construction workers, manufacturing and other production workers, laborers, material movers, maintenance and repair workers, and transportation operatives, among others (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2010). Typically, blue-collar occupations are characterized by manual labor and offer limited opportunities for advancement (Oesch & Baumann, 2014). Blue-collar workers tend to have comparatively low levels of education, which negatively affect their reemployment prospects when they undergo job transitions (Sum et al., 2010). Additionally, large labor surpluses exist in most blue-collar occupations in the United States, which further limit reemployment opportunities for displaced workers (Hall & Krueger, 2012; Oesch & Baumann, 2014). The aforementioned factors of low levels of education and oversupply of blue-collar workers result in longer intervals of unemployment for displaced blue-collar workers (Brand, 2015). Protracted periods of

involuntary workforce inactivity may be more harmful to blue-collar workers than to their white-collar counterparts (Karren, 2012).

Reallocation of jobs. Brand (2015) pointed to policy that requires prompt reallocation of jobs to those who experienced involuntary job losses. Brand suggested that reallocation to jobs of a more permanent nature might alleviate the extreme stress and negative experiences surrounding involuntary job loss. Schlossberg (1981) discussed the positive influence of support systems on transition—family, friends, and colleagues who support the person undergoing involuntary transition have a significant positive influence. Moreover, the amount and type of support received from supervisors or the organization assist the individual in moving through the transition. Types of support include reallocation to other similar jobs, reeducation to improve marketability as a worker, and assistance in moving to another geographic area where similar work is available. In modern society with its availability of social media, individuals have the added option to use these support networks during transition (Vaccaro, Adams, Kisler, & Newman, 2015). Vaccaro et al. (2015) studied first-year students' transition to university and found that social networking provided the needed support to mitigate stressful transitions.

Factors complicating transition for blue-collar workers. Several factors may complicate transitions for blue-collar workers. For instance, findings from a study by Adda, Dustmann, Meghir, and Robin (2013) indicated that blue-collar workers might experience easier transitions between jobs because they do not invest much time or effort in training. In contrast, findings from another study revealed that blue-collar workers were particularly vulnerable to the earnings losses associated with job transitions,

especially when those transitions involved role change (occupation or industry; Lagoa & Suleman, 2016). Moreover, male blue-collar workers facing transitions, who may perceive the technical proficiency, self-reliance, and physical strength associated with manual labor as obligatory expressions of masculine competence, may be vulnerable to self-doubt and a sense that they have failed to fulfill their gender role (Duke et al., 2013). Additionally, workers with industry-specific skills may be particularly vulnerable to prolonged periods of unemployment associated with the unavailability of appropriate jobs within reach of a feasible commute (Andersson, Haltiwanger, Kutzbach, Pollakowski, & Weinberg, 2014).

Overview on Downsizing

The downsizing or displacement of employees has increased considerably since the beginning of the recession in 2008 (Beehr, 2014; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2010). Downsizing refers to the reduction of an organization's labor force due either to the organization's desire to remove ineffective workers from the payroll or due to necessary decreases in operating costs (Karren & Sherman, 2012). Due to the ongoing federal budgetary crisis, many federal employees have been, and will continue to be, subject to downsizing (Farrell et al., 2012). Shortly after President Trump came into office the budget guidelines for 2018 were released. Fulfilling his pledge to increase spending on homeland defense, President Trump announced a reduction of forces in foreign countries and civilian agencies while redistributing the savings to homeland security (Carberry, Masmanian, & Rockwell, 2017). In a bid to protect the civilian labor force in the Department of Defense, the Armed Service Committee voted in favor of a move to retain sufficient civilians on the DoD payroll which would in turn protect active

servicemen from being overworked due to a lack of civil service staff (Katz, 2017). The

civilian post freezing at DoD has been lifted by President Trump, but posts will be filled

at a slow pace, stated Katz.

Much of the downsizing that has affected blue-collar federal employees has been

due to military base realignment and closure (BRAC), which Congress authorized the

DoD to undertake as a means of complying with budget reductions (Cowan, 2005). As of

2014, the DoD has used this authority to close more than 100 domestic and overseas

bases, a process which yielded $22 billion in savings (GAO, 2014). The impact of these

base closures on the DoD civilian workforce has been considerable (Nataraj et al., 2014).

For example, during one 4-year-round of base realignment and closure, 15,000 jobs were

eliminated for blue-collar naval-shipyard employees alone (Bartlett & Nielsen, 2005).

The Heritage Foundation report warned about the depletion of the DoD forces and

capacity (Spoehr, & Zissimos, 2017). The authors pointed out that the DoD has been

downsizing for the past 15 years, bringing it to an all-time low. To fulfil its duties the

DoD must have sufficient trained armed forces and equipment that is both up-to-date and

well maintained. Spoehr and Zissimos warned that budgetary cuts, BRAC and staff

reductions are a threat to the effective functioning of the DoD, the authors suggested that

all DoD sections should work closely with the Trump government to rectify the current

situation.

Effects of Job Transition on the Individual

It is the involuntary nature of job loss or transition, rather than departure from the

work force that appears to affect an individuals' well-being (Young, 2012). Young (2012)

identified involuntary job loss as a "trigger event" that precipitated large changes in the

worker's levels of stress. This researcher drew on two waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a large, representative national survey of U.S. households, using data from 6,310 respondents; the researcher took data from the years 2001 and 2003. Young treated measures of well-being as the outcome variable. The results indicated that not all job transitions negatively impacted well-being; workers who voluntarily left the workforce described positive lived experiences, and no significant decline in well-being or increase in levels of stress.

This section discusses the literature pertaining to the effects of job transition on employees, as these are the inherent areas that the study aims to improve upon both in terms of understanding, and the lived experience. The effects of involuntary job transition could lead to negative outcomes that affect a person's physical and mental health (Brand, 2015). Other researchers indicated that the individuals can experience personal growth in the aftermath of involuntary job transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Adverse outcomes of involuntary job loss. The stress associated with job loss can extend beyond the worker to the worker's familial networks (Luhmann et al., 2014; Mendolia, 2012). Luhmann et al. analyzed longitudinal data from 2,973 couples to investigate the effects of unemployment on life satisfaction over many years. The results indicated that when one spouse became unemployed while the other remained employed, both spouses reported diminished life satisfaction, although the effect was greater in the unemployed partner. In another study Mendolia (2012) used data from 14 waves of the British Household Panel Survey, a nationally representative survey of roughly 5,500 households. The purpose of the investigation was to analyze the effect of the husband's job displacement on the mental health of both husband and wife. The results indicated

that, when a husband lost his job through no fault of his own, both partners in the

marriage suffered from decreased mental health.

Brand (2015) argued that involuntary job loss was an event that could negatively

affect every aspect of a worker's life. Involuntary job loss was found to be associated

with subsequent unemployment, long-term loss in earnings, lower job quality (when

reemployment was found). Furthermore, a decline is found in the worker's psychological

and physical well-being, including increased disease reporting, increased hospitalization,

and increased cardiovascular disease. Socially the individual tends to withdraw, there are

increased risks of family tension and disruption, and lower levels of attainment among

the children of displaced workers. Brand also found that, while reemployment often

mitigated the effects of job loss, it did not cure them altogether. The researcher further

noted that the negative effects of job loss are more far-reaching than previously thought

as it affects the worker, the immediate family and friends, and ultimately the community

as a whole. Displaced workers and their families disproportionately bore the costs of the

involuntary job transitions.

Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, and Jolley (2013) conducted a qualitative study to

investigate the effects of job loss on workers' mental health using semi-structured

interviews. Results from the interviews revealed that the workers' mental health was

negatively affected as themes from the interviews revealed the workers experienced

stress, feelings of not being in control, reduced self-esteem, shame, financial worries, and

feelings of grief. Participants further reported engaging in negative behaviors such as

lashing out, two participants reportedly contemplated suicide, while most participants felt

powerless and disillusioned. Some participants were able to adopt optimistic outlooks and

implement positive lifestyle changes, suggesting that mental well-being and a predisposition to positive or negative adaptation behaviors may have an influence over well-being Anaf et al., 2013).

Prolonged periods of unemployment are often the result of involuntary job losses. Similar to the Anaf et al. study (2013), Pelzer, Schaffrath, and Vernaleken (2013) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of job loss on unemployed workers' mental health. Participants in this study were 30 adult men, 15 of whom were employed and 15 of whom were unemployed. Participants were tested using quantitative measures for cognitive performance, depressive symptoms, personality factors, and social and communicative competencies. The results indicated that unemployed subjects showed more depressive symptoms than employed subjects. The matched-pairing system and screening methods allowed the researchers to determine that the increased levels depression experienced by unemployed participants were not due to age, education level, cognitive ability, preexisting illness, personality factors, psychological or drug problems.

Papa and Maitoza (2013) investigated the association between job loss and prolonged grief symptoms using survey-based methods for data collection. The researchers noted that previous studies of prolonged grief had been focused primarily on grief associated with the loss of a significant other. Participants were 73 adults recruited via Craigslist who completed an online survey. Apart from demographic and job-related questions, the participants were also asked to complete different psychological measurements. These included the Prolonged Grief-13 scale, Depression and Anxiety Scales (DASS-21), Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, and a combination of the General Just World Scale and the Unjust World Scale (Papa & Maitoza, 2013, p. 158). The results

indicated that the prolonged grief symptoms were linked to the participants' experience of job loss. Results also revealed that prolonged grief had symptoms separate from anxiety and depression, suggesting low adaptation processes within the participants, as divulged through the survey data collection and analysis.

Job loss can threaten the victim's sense of self, particularly as it is manifested in the worker's sense of self-continuity (Sadeh & Karniol, 2012). Sadeh and Karniol defined self-continuity as the ability to see one's self as extending continuously into both the past and the future. Participants in this quantitative study were 211 Israeli men and women, both employed and unemployed, who answered biographical questions and completed the Coping Strategies Questionnaire and the Possible Selves Questionnaire online. The results indicated that displaced workers had a lower sense of self-continuity than workers who had not suffered job loss. The reduced self-continuity was also found to be significant because the sense of self-continuity was identified as being an adaptive coping mechanism by the authors. Under the principles of transition theory, a sense of self-continuity could be construed as an adaptive coping mechanism that facilitates adaptation after job loss and displacement. The researchers suggested that interventions serving unemployed persons should be designed to enhance self-continuity.

Personal growth. Other research has revealed that a displaced worker may experience personal growth in the aftermath of involuntary job transition, if they successfully adapt to the transition (Kira & Klehe, 2016; Waters & Strauss, 2016). Kira and Klehe conducted a literature review to examine the ways in which job loss threatened workers over the age of 40s + identity and self-concept, the ways in which the workers coped with these threats, and whether the coping strategies led to psychological growth.

In protecting their self-definition, the workers developed different goals that they could fulfill by remaining in paid employment or changing jobs. Through their struggling with the job loss, participants developed different self-meanings and emerged as stronger and independent persons. This was identified through previously published literature, suggesting that this is an ongoing issue that has yet to be mitigated.

In a separate qualitative study Waters and Strauss (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 unemployed adults to explore posttraumatic growth in the aftermath of job loss. Posttraumatic growth was described as the subsequent positive changes experienced by those individuals who undergo a major life crisis or traumatic event (Waters & Strauss, 2016). The coping strategies that lead to positive transition outcomes included participants' realization of their own strength together with self-determination. Participants developed a stronger sense of self and some indicated that they increasingly focused on their ability to control their situation and choose those things that lead to their happiness. Moving beyond initial feelings of shame participants spent more time interacting with friends and other unemployed people which gave them a renewed appreciation of interpersonal interaction and life in general. Participants also became open to alternate career paths, leading to them becoming employed. It should be noted, however, that this discussion of growth was predicated on the finding that involuntary unemployment had traumatized the participants. In addition, it did not assess those individuals who had not reported positive live experience during involuntary employment.

Factors affecting adaptation to job transition. According to principles of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory there are three factors that mediate how a person

adapts to transition. Those factors were environmental, individual, and transition which were later renamed and expanded into the 4-S theory of transition, namely situation, self, support, and strategies. This chapter discusses literature pertaining to environment (situation) and individual (self) factors only, as these are most pertinent to the subject matter. However, discussions of transition have, and will continue to be included in the chapter as a whole.

Effects of situation on transition. Reemployment can partially mitigate the negative effects of job loss, even when the new position is not ideal (Gowan, 2012), whereas prolonged unemployment can be harmful to psychological well-being and lead to stress, even to the point of increasing suicide risk (Classen & Dunn, 2012). The availability of reemployment may therefore be an important environmental factor affecting a worker's lived experience of job transition. Andersson, Haltiwanger, Kutzbach, Pollakowski, and Weinberg (2014) investigated how environmental factors such as the availability of jobs within reach of a feasible commute impacted displaced workers.

Krolikowski (2014) argued, that the earnings losses experienced by displaced workers were remarkably strong and persistent. This was largely because these workers frequently experienced job mismatch upon becoming reemployed, and because their minimal tenure in their new positions made them particularly vulnerable to additional displacements. This is known as the last-in, first-out method for downsizing in blue-collar work environments and has been found to negatively influence the continued lived-experience of workers (Krolikowski, 2014).

Effects of support on transition. The availability of support, as explicitly noted by Schlossberg (1981) when describing the composite factors affecting worker stress during an involuntary job transition, included social support, such as supportive networks of family and friends and outplacement services provided by former employers. Wanberg (2012) found that intervention-based programs were effective in helping displaced workers find reemployment, which eased the negative impact of the job transition. This study is an example of the individual transition factors, and how environment (i.e. being involved in intervention programs with other individuals experience involuntary job transitions) is a positive means of affecting negative lived experiences.

Blustein, Kozan, and Connors-Kellgren (2013) conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences of underemployed and unemployed adults and the type of support the employees used to help them cope with job loss. The 13 participants were all receiving career exploration and job search services. The researchers used narrative inquiry as the data collection for the study. The researchers found that participants with access to financial resources and effective instrumental and relational support handled the difficulties associated with unemployment well. On the other hand, participants who were confronted with financial difficulties, health issues, and/or a lack of relational and instrumental support often manifested symptoms of despair and frustration.

Johansson (2014) investigated the experiences of individuals participating in an outplacement program. The study included 10 adult participants who had accepted one company's offer of outplacement services, and data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the availability of outplacement

services contributed to positive lived experience of employability, and decreased stress during transitions. Workers who used the outplacement program also indicated that they wanted counseling services, assistance with crafting resumes, and other practical assistance in securing new employment.

Supportive networks of family and friends are also factors that affect worker adaptation during and after job displacement (Gush, Scott, & Laurie, 2015). Gush et al. explored the impact social capital and social networks on job seekers during of job transition. Participants were drawn from a sample of 17 households in the United Kingdom. Data were gathered from 30 qualitative interviews. Findings indicated that family, friends, and wider social networks were mainstays in helping job-seekers back into work, but each in different ways and for different reasons. Family financial support allowed job-seekers time to find a new job which led to a more positive experience of the transition. Family ties helped with job searching in a tailored way because of the privileged knowledge close relations had about the job-seeker. Wider social contacts presented opportunities the job-seeker might not have otherwise heard about. Overall, the findings suggested that the job-seeker's social support mattered to 21st century job-seekers in three ways: through what they could impart, through what they knew about the job-seeker, and through what the job-seeker knew about them. The support from family and friends served to mitigate the stress usually experience during a major transition such as job loss.

Reemployment. The negative effects of stress caused by job loss can be persistent, but can be alleviated by reemployment (Gowan, 2012). Gowan surveyed a sample of unemployed workers at the time of job loss (T1) and again 6 years later (T2) to

investigate the persistence of the negative effects of displacement. Data were collected

from 73 participants and analyzed with paired sample t-tests and hierarchical multiple

regression. The results indicated lower stress and higher self-esteem among respondents

at T1 than at T2. The researcher noted that respondents who had found reemployment

that involved role change, their reported satisfaction levels were comparable to the

participants who found the kind of work they had sought. The researcher took the latter

finding as evidence that even a bad job was better for a worker's well-being than

unemployment.

Effects of individual worker characteristics (self) on transition. Schlossberg

found that all the demographic characteristics of an individual could impact on transition.

Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn, (2010) conducted a study to determine how

personal demographic factors affect transition. The authors concluded that one's outlook

on life is affected by factors such as age, gender, culture, values, and life stage. Evans et

al. grouped psychological reserves under coping strategies and commitment, values and

ethics under spirituality. A person's inner strength to cope with the adverse circumstances

during transition is determined by one's demographic and personal qualities as well as

the psychological resources (Schlossberg, 2011). The DoD made provision for veterans

to pursue other careers through study grants. A study that focused on the transition of

veterans from the battlefield to university, using Schlossberg's 4-S transition theory was

conducted by Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, and Harris (2011). Two elements of self that are

involved in such a transition are demographics and psychological reserves (Ryan et al,

2011). The demographic factors of interest included factors such as being a first-

generation student and the fact that the veteran is a nontraditional student while

psychological reserves included the veteran's level of motivation, study and academic

abilities. Veteran students who utilized academic support services to structure their

studies and study methods moved through the transition and achieved better. Ryan et al.

suggested that advisory services should assist veteran students to acquire a stronger sense

of control and hope pertaining to the transition. Furthermore, assistance in developing a

strong sense of self-efficacy (academic skills and ability) and development of coping

skills as a nontraditional student were found to empower veteran students and mitigated

the transition.

   Concluding discussion of factors affecting adaptation to job transition. A study

methodology that utilized different data collection methodology is that of Griep, Baillien,

Ysebaert, and De Witte (2015). The authors undertook a qualitative, phenomenological

study to gain a better understanding of the experience of unemployment and the coping

strategies used to negotiate the associated stressors, from the perspective of the

unemployed. Four participants used photovoice methodology to gather data. The

photovoice method involved loaning each participant a camera and giving them

rudimentary training in photography so that they could document from their own

perspectives the phenomena of interest. In addition, participants provided recorded

reflections on the photographs and were interviewed regarding the content they presented

through these media, to document the meanings, the participants associated with the

images. Four themes emerged from the data: unstable financial situation, loss of time

structure, negative stereotypes, and education and retraining. Coping strategies identified

by the researchers included social support, creating structure in time, education and

retraining, outdoor activities, and hope.

Summary and Conclusions

A considerable body of research has indicated that elements from Schlossberg's (1981) transition-adaptation mediator-categories affected the well-being of displaced workers via increased stress. These mediator-categories were *transition characteristics*, *environmental supports*, and *worker characteristics* (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981). Displaced workers' experienced significant levels of stress which were influenced by the job-loss transition and by the subsequent period of unemployment. The outcomes of prolonged stress included depression, a disrupted sense of self, social isolation, family disruptions and an increased risk of suicide (Anaf et al., 2013; Brand, 2015; Sadeh & Karniol, 2012; Pelzer et al., 2013). Other researchers indicated, however, that despite these negative effects, job loss could become an occasion for personal growth, if the worker was able to incorporate the change into a stable new identity (Brand, 2015; Papa & Maitoza, 2013). Environmental supports that assisted displaced workers included networks of family and friends, outplacement services, job-search interventions, and the availability of reemployment. The stress of displaced workers was also influenced by a range of individual characteristics such as age, socio-economic situation, and gender. Workers with constructive coping mechanisms such as the ability to set new attainable goals, ask for help, and find joy in interpersonal interaction ad life, were found to navigate the job-displacement transition with less damage to their well-being. Such displaced workers therefore considered the transition as lesser stressor events, than workers who did not possess those qualities (Papa & Maitoza, 2013; Waters & Strauss, 2016; Young, 2012).

Of the studies discussed in this review some were quantitative, (e. g. Pelzer et al., 2013; Sadek & Karinol, 2012) relying exclusively on surveys as data-gathering instruments. Qualitative methods have contributed considerably to the current, previous qualitative studies of workers in transition and allowed researchers to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the workers' lived experiences than surveys could have captured (e.g. Anaf et al., 2013; Duggleby et al., 2017; Main et al., 2016; Waters & Strauss, 2016). It will be noted that, of the quantitative studies discussed above, only a handful investigated the effects of elements from more than one of Schlossberg's categories on worker stress. The relationships among the categories were therefore not within the scope of those investigations; predictions that they will vary with their contexts (environmental, individual, etc.) and with the interactions between those contexts were not explored. Given the sensitivity of these mediators to circumstances, the results of studies of other populations cannot be extended with complete confidence to blue-collar federal employees, a population that has not yet been a subject of specific study. Chapter 3 will include a more detailed discussion of the method to be used in this study, with specific attention to the method's expected utility.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study examined the job transition experiences of federal blue-collar defense employees following downsizing and the influence of this transition on their sense of well-being leading to experiences of stress. In the first section, I provide a description of the problem, explain my role as the researcher, and discuss ethical considerations. The second part of the chapter centers on the research design—population, sample size, and participant recruitment. Finally, the methodology, instrumentation, site description, and data analysis process follow.

Research Design and Rationale

The study employed a qualitative interpretive, phenomenological research design. To achieve the goals of the study, the following research question and subquestions were posed. The overall question that guided this study was the following: What are the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees as they relate to job transition due to downsizing?

> *Subquestion 1*. What support systems did blue-collar employees have available
>
>> and use during job transition?
>
> *Subquestion 2*. What strategies did federal blue-collar employees in transition use
>
>> to manage the stress associated with their job transition process?

The present study employed a qualitative IPA approach to address the research question. Qualitative research methods enable in-depth exploration of a phenomenon under investigation (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Researchers use qualitative procedures when searching for information about a specific phenomenon or problem, or to empower

people by allowing them to share life stories on a personal level (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, a detailed investigation of the study problem is conducted by enabling extensive exploration of the beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of study participants (Creswell, 2013). The key feature of the qualitative mode of inquiry is that it permits integration of individual philosophies and opinions (Van Baren, 2013). Ponterotto (2005) described qualitative research methods as a class of empirical procedures that facilitate the interpretation of individual experiences within a specific context. As the qualitative mode of inquiry enables assimilation of contextualized lived experiences of participants, it constitutes a holistic approach (Tracy, 2013).

In the context of the present study, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate because it would facilitate an in-depth understanding of the job-transition-process experiences of downsized federal blue-collar defense employees. It would also enable me as the researcher to document the perceptions of the downsized federal blue-collar defense employees in exploring the research question. Furthermore, a qualitative mode of inquiry allows for investigation of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, by employing the qualitative method of inquiry, I was able to assimilate the experiences and perceptions of ex-federal blue-collar defense employees who had first-hand knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

A quantitative research design was deemed inappropriate for this study because the objective of this study was not to conduct experiments or use statistics and numbers to analyze data (Polit & Beck, 2010). Qualitative research focuses on the identification of why, how, and what is happening (Yin, 2009); therefore, a qualitative method was chosen for this study. Transitioning from a civilian post in DoD to a position as a regular civilian

employee is a very personal experience that would be difficult to express in quantitative terms. The specific experiences and perceptions of civilian blue-collar persons employed by DoD and facing involuntary transition are personal lived experiences that can only be explored through qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were therefore not suitable for this study. Because the focus of this study was the lived experiences of civilian blue-collar workers employed by the DoD who faced involuntary transition, a phenomenological design was chosen in which individual interviews were conducted for data collection.

In this qualitative study, I used the IPA as the research methodology. In everyday language, qualitative outcomes are commonly presented and incorporated in participants' own words to describe life experiences, psychological events, or phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005). In IPA, the aim is to create an understanding of coresearchers' experiences and perceptions, or personal realities, by exploring personal lived experiences and what meanings participants derive from them (Callary et al., 2015). This is achieved through the vigorous and unbiased study of how things really are to gain a fundamental understanding of the participants' experience (Dowling, 2007). Callary et al. (2015) noted that a phenomenological study requires in-depth analysis of participants' personal accounts of the phenomenon under study and thus requires a small number of participants.

Researchers conducting phenomenological studies should reflect on themes that constitute the nature of lived experiences and transcribe those experiences into an interpretive structural description of the participant (Van Manen, 2014). These

descriptions are then combined with other participants' descriptions to describe the essence as a universal way of lived experiences.

In the light of the above discussion, the IPA was the choice for this research methodology. According to Van Manen (2014), the focus of IPA in research is detailed examination of personal lived experiences involving how participants make sense of specific experiences and the meaning of those experiences. As described in Callary et al. (2015), IPA has the following key characteristics:

1. It is idiographic, because the researcher conducts a rich, detailed analysis of one case before moving onto the next one.

2. The open-ended nature of the research questions is designed to elicit deep and rich narrative to allow unexpected themes to emerge.

3. Data analysis interacts between induction and deduction, with more emphasis on the inductive method.

4. The results are discussed using present literature, forming an interrogative element.

5. The approach is influenced by the researcher's biographical background and knowledge of extant literature, which allows for interpretation of data through the researcher's own lens during the development of themes.

A peculiar characteristic of interpretivism is critical interaction between the researcher and the objective of investigation (Ponterotto, 2005). Smith and Osborn (2007) argued that IPA researchers should acknowledge that direct access to a participant's personal and social worlds can be limited by (a) the conceptions of the researcher, (b) the willingness of participants, and (c) the ability to express what participants think and feel.

Based on the complexity of the population being studied, IPA was an effective approach to the exploration of transitioning blue-collar defense employees following federal downsizing.

Other qualitative methods were also considered for the present study but ultimately rejected in favor of IPA. Ethnography was deemed inappropriate, as such a method would have required long periods of time in the "field" (Yin, 2009). Due to resource and time constraints, this method could not be selected. Grounded theory was also considered inappropriate to achieve the objectives of the study. Grounded theory is defined as "the discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). The aim of the present study was to examine the lived experience of involuntary job transition among downsized federal blue-collar defense employees. Therefore, grounded theory was not appropriate. Case study research design was also rejected for the present study. Unlike phenomenology, case studies do not focus much on capturing the lived experiences of study participants, which was necessary to achieve the objectives of the present study.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was responsible for all of the processes involved in this study, which implies that the potential impact of my understanding of the research was critical to the validity of the study. My role encompassed not only studying the relevant literature, but also recruiting and screening potential participants as well as conducting interviews and analyzing data. In qualitative research, the researcher is not an objective observer, as data collection involves participating in interviews. In a sense, the researcher forms part of the instrumentation in asking open-ended questions and possibly following

up with additional questions if the participants' responses are not clear. During

interviews, researchers also observe participants' reactions and body language, which are

recorded in field notes for later use during data analysis and interpretation. These

activities during the collection and analysis of data put me in the position of an observer-

participant (Van Manaen, 2014).

Acknowledgment of Researcher Bias

I personally observed U.S. military base closures in Germany between 2002 and

2016. Many of these bases closed during my time as an active duty soldier and federal

civilian worker. I observed how federal blue-collar employees struggled with their

transition of becoming unemployed. After conversing with federal blue-collar employees

and their families, I felt that I needed to advocate for the development of programs to

provide supportive services to individuals affected by federal downsizing. Therefore, in

avoiding the introduction of bias in the study, I used the bracketing process. Through

bracketing, researchers become aware of and put aside their own presuppositions to

capture participants' authentic experiences of the study phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014).

In so doing, the true essence of the phenomenon becomes observable without the

interference of the researcher's perceptions. I also used journaling to gain awareness of

my thoughts and feelings during the research process, and I discussed these with my

dissertation chair to assist with the processing thereof when needed.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target group of this study included ex-federal blue-collar workers who

suffered involuntary transition following a decision to close down a military facility due

to BRAC. The population involved in this research therefore encompassed former federal blue-collar workers who experienced military force reductions and displacement transitions during BRAC transitions. Possible participants were identified to have been serving in Germany. People tend to forget the depth of their feelings and experiences when a long period has elapsed since an initial involuntary transition; therefore, I determined that participants should have experienced their transition within a reasonable timeframe of no more than 3-9 years before the time of the study. On the other hand, when in the midst of the transition, an individual's feelings may be in turmoil, and recollecting the experience could be very traumatic. For this reason, care was taken not to include persons who might be too emotionally involved by recruiting people at least 6 months after they underwent an involuntary transition. For the purposes of this study, age, gender, and ethnic group were not relevant, although participants needed to be American citizens who were in federal service. Adults who were of retirement age during the BRAC transition were not included in the research. Persons of retirement age were excluded because it was possible that they were already in the process of preparing themselves to move away from the military facility due to upcoming retirement. Due to limited funding, translation services were not provided, and proficiency in English was established during the initial telephone conversation. To ensure that all participants underwent the same experience within the same timeframe, purposeful sampling was used (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Purposeful sampling was an appropriate technique for recruiting participants for this research, as the focus was on recruiting participants who shared lived experiences of the study phenomenon in line with the research questions. In purposeful sampling, the

researcher has control over participants who are included in the research, as criteria for

the inclusion of participants are set. Homogenous sampling is used to gather a sample

consisting of people who have similar traits by implementing inclusion criteria to select

participants (Silverman, 2011). To facilitate the identification of possible participants, I

used the social-media platform Facebook to post an electronic invitation to participate.

Facebook has managers for various interest groups; I contacted the manager for the

interest group for U.S. military bases that have been closed with a request to place a flyer

on that interest-group page. When interested parties saw the recruitment flyer on the

Facebook page—either on the side panel or on a banner across the page—they could

click on my email address in order to send me a message expressing their interest in

participating. Both institutions were asked to run the recruitment flyer for a period of one

calendar month. The invitation to participate included the criteria to determine eligibility,

an invitation to possible participants to email me, and my contact details (Appendix A).

After individuals contacted me, I contacted them by telephone to ensure eligibility and

get all contact details. Potential participants also received an informed consent form,

which was either posted or emailed to them. In addition, interested parties had the

opportunity to suggest possible dates and times for interviews. After receiving interested

parties' replies, I set up the interview schedules, which were communicated with the

participants. Prior to the interviews, participants were given an opportunity to sign the

informed consent form in person after I explained the form to them; after obtaining their

signature, I started the interview.

Criteria for selection. Participants in the study were required to meet the

following criteria: (a) ex-federal blue-collar defense worker; (b) adult between 21 and 65

years of age; and (c) experience with job transitions due to downsizing (i.e., workforce reduction) occurring between 6 months and 9 years ago (Appendix B). Supporting an individual experiencing transition due to job loss involves eliminating inherent obstacles, whether an employee is just beginning a transition or progressing through or completing a transitory process. In this study, I excluded from participation white-collar federal employees and contractors employed by federal and state government agencies to support military installations for the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, National Guard, Coast Guard, and Reserve Components. Employees hired as non-appropriate funds were also excluded due to nonfederal status, as such workers are not compensated through the U.S. Congress but by the installations moral and welfare activities that support the Armed Forces. Blue-collar employees from domestic and overseas positions who have not experienced federal downsizing and job-to-job transitions were not recruited for participation in this study.

Number of participants. A qualitative researcher conducting studies with individuals who have experienced a common phenomenon should interview between 10 to 12 individuals, although there is not a uniformly accepted sample size (Elo et al., 2014). Smith and Osborn (2007) suggested that IPA studies should use three to five participants to allow enough time to complete a thorough examination of relationships and variances for the creation of in-depth engagement with participants. However, to avoid problems with achieving data saturation, the sample size should not be too small; likewise, to avoid complicating analysis, it should not be too large (Burmeister, 2012). As mentioned, the recommended sample size for a qualitative study varies between five and 25, and for IPA between three and five; therefore, a sample size of 10 to 12

participants was planned to achieve saturation of data and thematic saturation (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Saturation. According to Elo et al. (2014), when a researcher no longer finds new emerging themes that shed new light on the issue under investigation, the identified themes and clusters become "saturated." In this study, I expected to reach the saturation threshold by interviewing 10 to 12 participants.

Instrumentation. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was compiled using the 4-S transition model of Schlossberg to guide the formulation and selection of questions. Mainly the questions focused on the four Ss—namely, situation, self, support, and strategy. In order to elicit deep and rich narrative, I kept the questions to a minimum and did not interrupt the participants' flow of thought during the interviews. The interview guide ensured that all participants got the same opportunities to talk about the different aspects of their experiences. In ensuring that all relevant aspects were covered and that the questions were uniformly understood, the interview guide was submitted to expert faculty at Walden University.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In this study, I sought approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before I started recruiting participants. Recruitment of participants was done via electronic media, namely Facebook postings through which I targeted military groups to reach ex-federal employees who had been affected by downsizing.

I personally contacted all interested parties who contacted me to establish eligibility and get all relevant contact details for distribution of the informed consent and short demographics forms—either via their personal email addresses or by post.

Interested parties were asked to indicate continued interest in participating after reading

the consent form by emailing me or sending a short message to my cell phone. I followed

up on persons who did not indicate continued interest in participating after the initial 10

days allocated for studying the informed consent and providing feedback. Participants

were identified using pseudonyms only. I did not maintain a list of pseudonyms linked

with the real names of the participants. The first 10 persons who indicated that they

would participate in the research were included in the interview section; however, I

maintained contact details of other interested parties who could be contacted in case

individuals withdrew from the research or if saturation was not achieved.

Data collection. Interviews enable a researcher to gather detailed information on

the research problem as reflected through the perceptions and views of study participants

(Baškarada, 2014). Interested parties had the opportunity to suggest possible dates and

times for interviews. After receiving interested parties' replies, I then coordinated an

interview schedule and venue(s), which were communicated to the participants. The

interviews were arranged at a public library near the participants' residence or workplace

and via teleconference. I booked a private meeting room at the library and set up the

audio equipment prior to the interviews, which lasted about 60-90 minutes. Prior to the

interview, participants had an opportunity to sign the informed consent in person; after I

explained the form to them, the interview commenced. If I could not be feasible to

conduct face-to-face interviews, I also suggested recorded Skype or telephone interviews.

Participants were interviewed once and were asked to do member checking of the

transcriptions via email.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research was to gather data regarding the lived experiences of former federal blue-collar employees who faced involuntary transition as a result of BRAC transitions. The initial phases of research was to determine the existence of a problem and reviewing available literature on the topic of interest. The following steps are participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and generation of the report generation (Merriam, 2009). Following the data collection, I transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews where after the entire dataset was coded and arranged in themes (Yin, 2014).

Narrative data analysis includes examining, ordering, and tabulating the evidence to address the objectives of a study (Yin, 2014). For this study, the case is defined as former federal blue-collar employees who faced involuntary transition due to BRAC transitions, mainly in Germany after the cold war. Each of the transcripts were coded as a whole, and not on a per-question basis, to create categories and group pertinent data by topic (Yin, 2014). Examination of data were followed by the modified Moustakas (1994) Stevick-Coliazzi-Keen method of analysis and of phenomenological data. After obtaining a full description of the phenomenon by interviewing the participants and transcribing the audio recordings, the following steps were followed for each participant:

- Reflect on statement to determine the importance thereof for describing the phenomenon
- Write down all relevant statements
- List all the statements that are not repetitive and not overlapping, these constitute the invariant horizons or units of meaning

- Cluster the relating invariant meanings in units and arrange in themes

- Synthesize the meaning units and themes to form the description of textures of the phenomenon and support it with verbatim quotes from the original data

- Deliberate on the textual description and use imaginative variation to develop the description of the structures of the phenomenon

- Create a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience

- Create a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience and support with verbatim quotations from the original data by using all the individual textual-structural descriptions' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-122)

Finally, member checking of each co-researcher's textural-structural description were done by the corresponding individual. The use of NVivo 11.0 software aided this process (Gibbs, 2015). NVivo is normally used in qualitative studies for the storage of large quantities data to assist researchers in performing a systematical analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). By using pattern matching, I matched the patterns found during data analysis with the expected patterns derived from the theoretical study (Yin, 2014). The results of the IPA were compared with the findings of the literature review pertaining to factors that are particularly stressful during involuntary transition with specific reference to the situation and the blue-collar worker's personal characteristics (self). Through this comparison I was able to determine theoretical, practical and future implications which were explored in the last chapter.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness of qualitative studies include establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and authenticity (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). In order to avoid observer effects, I (a) established trust with participants, (b) took contentious field notes (c) maintained a free play audio recording, (d) transcribed interviews verbatim, (e) described my relationship and role with participants, (f) and clarified with participants on the methods and procedures that were used for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My personal beliefs and biases were addressed through bracketing and extensive journal writing in which I documented my personal beliefs and types of biases that could compromise and affect my research as recommended for IPA research (Callari , Rathwell & Young, 2015). In qualitative research the notion of trustworthiness is essential to improve the quality of the research, therefore in this IPA triangulation was used in verifying confidence in the results (Cope, 2014). In addition, member checking was utilized on (a) transcriptions of the interview data to ensure accuracy and (b) the results of the analysis were sent to participants to be reviewed (Yin, 2014).

Establishing Credibility

By using triangulation, the validity of the study was increased (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010). Triangulation enhanced the credibility of the data which was collected by means of the interview guide in the semi-structured interviews, because valid research instruments are vital in collecting reliable data (Polit & Beck, 2010). The triangulation technique uses checking whether each significant finding is confirmed in a minimum of three instances to ensure that central meanings are not disregarded (Polit &

Beck, 2010). In this research only individuals who have experienced the same

phenomena were selected as participants, the study can therefore be deemed as credible

(Cope, 2014). To ensure that participants are at ease, I first spend some time to build

rapport. Rapport is necessary to obtain rich and deep descriptions from the participants.

In further assuring credibility, I maintained a field diary with field notes made during the

interviews and reflections during the research process. I also added notes on observations

made, thoughts and feelings which formed part of bracketing to reduce biases (Cope,

2014). In addition, I used member checking so that participants could control for

accuracy of the transcriptions. I further maintained credibility by following the data

collection process that was approved by Walden IRB and by adopting a professional

manner during the interviews.

Establishing Transferability

Transferability is linked to concept of external validity in quantitative research

(Munhall, 2012). "Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative

research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents – it is the interpretive

equivalent of generalizability" (Anney, 2014, p. 277). To establish transferability the

reader is supplied with detailed information on the study context to enable other

researchers to do related investigations with other populations. To further enhance

transferability, I maintained the original thick and rich replies of the participants and

provided an in-depth description of the methodology to enable other researchers who

want to use it may be able to do so (Munhall, 2012). Furthermore, purposive sampling

were used which is a sampling method where knowledgeable participants are identified

according to criteria for inclusion based on the purpose of the study questions (Anney,

2014). By selecting inclusion criteria for participants, the researcher can recruit a more homogenous sample that could yield more in-depth data than sampling methods such as probability sampling (Anney, 2014).

Establishing Dependability

Dependability indicates the constancy of the findings across a longer time period (Anney, 2014). Managing the complex data obtained from interviews can be challenging for construct validity. Yin (2014) suggested that this challenge could be overcome by (i) using various data sources (ii) develop a verification chain during data collection, and (iii) asking participants to review the results of the data analysis. In addition, the following four techniques can be used to secure internal validity during the data analysis process—pattern matching, explanation building, addressing competing explanations, and by employing logic models (Yin, 2014). Dependability was further enhanced by ensuring that the documentation is as detailed as possible to provide clarity and accurate presentation of all information. Future researchers were therefore able to repeat the research and determine the appropriateness of the present research processes (Cope, 2014).

Establishing Confirmability

Confirmability refers to level to which the findings could be corroborated by other researchers (Anney, 2014). Confirmability was established by member checking of transcriptions by the participants. The question in confirmability is not whether findings were found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected (Anney, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I maintained a journal throughout the research. Reflexive journaling involves writing reflections of data and preliminary interpretations together

with data collection planning (Anney, 2014). Maintaining a reflexive journal where everything that occurred in the field is written together with personal reflection and sudden insights, I kept a track of the impact of my personal history, views and interests on the research process (Anney, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

Upon receiving notifications of interest from potential participants reacting on the Facebook postings, I contacted them and collect their names, telephone numbers and postal or email addresses. I also called all interested parties via my personal telephone to conduct a short eligibility screening and thank them for their interest to participate when eligible, the individual was invited to participate in the research and a demographic survey together with the informed consent form (Appendix D) was posted or emailed to them. Included in the informed consent form was a description of the purpose of the study, the data collection process and the role of the participants. The informed consent ensures that all participants understand the conditions during collection of data, including the fact that interviews were audio taped. Participants were requested to read the informed consent and indicate their continued interest to participate in the research by emailing or cell phone text messaging the words "I consent" within ten days of receiving the informed consent document. I send out a reminder to interested parties ten days after sending the informed consent to all interested parties who have not yet replied. I called participants to arrange interview dates, times and establish which public library would be convenient to conduct the interviews. Should it not be possible to meet face-to-face, a recorded telephone call or Skype meeting was conducted. Informed consent forms were

signed after I explained the form to participants prior to conducting the interviews. A copy of the informed consent was given to the participants for their records.

Included in the informed consent is the participants' right to withdraw from the study by notifying the researcher of to skip a question should they wish to without any consequences to them. Participants were also identified by using a pseudonym and the audio recording were marked by using the chose pseudonym to keep participant information confidential. Participants were also be informed that partaking in the interview would not pose any more risks than those encountered in normal daily living.

Strict confidentiality was maintained during all processes of data collection and analysis throughout the study. To this end, all documents containing data that was collected—hard copies and electronic data—were secured by password protection and paper data was sealed in envelopes and stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office which is locked when not in use. The assurance of confidentiality may facilitate open and honest responses by participants during the interviews (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, participants were requested not to use any names of places, people or organizations that could be used to identify the participant. The paper and electronic data of the study will be maintained for 7 years from the date this study was approved. Data destruction will occur after the mandatory period has lapsed by permanently deleting electronic data and shredding all paper data. Audio recordings were deleted after transcriptions were member checked due to limited space on the electronic recording device and the possibility of identification of participants' voices. Should a participant withdraw from the study, the relevant data would be destroyed, in a similar manner as described above, upon receiving notification of the withdrawal. The report of the study only contains information that was

purged from any identifiable information of respondents and only aggregate of verbatim responses was used.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the research design and methodology for the proposed study: qualitative IPA that is grounded as the study of choice. I chose this method because a complex and detailed understanding of job transition and the subsequent influence on their experiences of stress that, in turn, impacts quality of life, happiness, and life satisfaction. Study participants were selected based on certain criteria such as ex-federal blue-collar defense employee, between the ages of 21 to 65 years and have experienced involuntary job transition due to downsizing. A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit participants via social media channels (e.g., Facebook) with special emphasis on closed military installation member groups in the United States and Germany. The key instrument of data collection used in the study was audio recorded semi-structured interviews. The collected data of semi-structured interviews were open- and close-ended questions, and the collected data was validated through prerequisite in all participating members. Data was be analyzed using the NVivo software following the IPA steps of coding, categorizing, and determining of themes.

Information about participant demographics and the results of this study are discussed chapter 4. Chapter 5 will provide an overall interpretation of the qualitative data and data analysis. It will detail the accounts gathered from the study participants and provide an analysis of the same.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Restructuring of the DoD has led to involuntary job transitions for some civilian employees (Farrell, et al., 2012). Involuntary job transitions may have an impact on an individuals' economic standing, mental health, physical health, and long-term prosperity (Brand, 2015; Gowan, 2014; Vickers & Parris, 2007; Young, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological research was to examine lived experiences of job transition for federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. Results for the following research questions were answered in this chapter:

Research Question

What were the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees who experienced job transitioning due to military base downsizing?

Subquestions

1. What support systems did blue-collar employees use during the job transition in gaining re-employment?

2. What strategies did federal blue-collar employees in transition use to cope during the job transition process?

This chapter is organized into eight sections. Following this introduction, the second section contains a description of the setting of the study. The third section contains demographic information for the 10 participants who were interviewed for the study. The fourth section contains a description of the data collection method. The fifth section contains the data analysis procedures. The sixth section details evidence of trustworthiness, followed by the seventh section, which contains the results of the study.

The results are presented in themes developed from data analysis. The final section contains a summary of the chapter.

Setting

The focus of the study was BRAC transitions involving military force reductions and displacement transitions. The setting of the study contained a majority of federal workers serving in Germany, as the BRAC transitions were addressed after the post-Cold War era. The military base populations consisted of active duty personnel, blue-collar civil service workers, and their families. This study was focused on ex-federal blue-collar employees.

Demographics

The participants of the study were 10 ex-federal blue-collar workers who experienced involuntary job transitions following a military base realignment and closure (BRAC), which resulted in closure of the military bases where the participants had been employed. The population was generally serving in Germany following the post-Cold War era. The majority of the participants were serving in Germany at the time of the base closures. Nine participants were male, and one participant was female. Table 1 shows an overview of the participants' employment locations during the BRAC transitions. The data were collected according to the procedures outlined in Chapter 3.

Table 1

Employment Locations of the Participants

Participant	Location	Position	Gender
1	Germany	Mail clerk	Male
2	Germany	Motor vehicle operator	Male
3	Germany	Mail clerk	Male
4	Germany	Motor vehicle operator	Male
5	Germany	Facility maintenance	Male
6	United States	Transportation	Female
7	United States	Mail clerk	Male
8	Germany	Transportation	Male
9	Germany	Transportation	Male
10	Italy	Transportation	Male

Data Collection

The data collection method for this study consisted of semistructured interviews. I collected data from 10 volunteers who had experienced involuntary transition following downsizing of military bases in Germany, Italy, and the United States. All interviews were conducted at times convenient for the participants. I individually interviewed eight participants via telephone in Germany and Italy. The other two face-to-face participants were interviewed in a local city library. The calls made to Europe were all made on Saturday and Sunday evening between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. Central European Time and around 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Pacific Time. There were no deviations from the specified plan of data collection procedures outlined in Chapter 3. The procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection were handled in accordance with the outline in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures were conducted in accordance with guidelines

established by the modified Stevick-Coliazzi-Keen method of analysis of

phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The aim of data analysis was to extract

themes from the data regarding the lived experiences of former federal blue-collar

employees who faced involuntary job transitions as a result of BRAC military base

closures. The analysis was aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11.

Immediately after the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings word by word

using Microsoft Word. I e-mailed the transcripts to the corresponding participants to

verify the accuracy of the transcription and to review their responses. The participants

were allowed to revise or change their responses as they saw fit. The participants then

returned the reviewed transcripts via e-mail. After receiving the reviewed transcripts from

the participants, I imported the text files to NVivo 11. To begin data analysis, I read and

reread the transcripts to become familiar with the data. During the multiple readings, I

identified statements in the data that appeared relevant to answering the research

questions. Instead of writing down the relevant statements, I used NVivo 11 to highlight

the statements and assign them into nodes. The outcomes of the data analysis procedures

resulted in the development of seven major themes: (a) transition was associated with

negative feelings, (b) employer was unprepared for transition process, (c) support

provided by employer, (d) emotional support from family and significant others, (e)

engaged in other activities, (f) accepted the transition process, and (g) drew motivation

from family. The themes and the descriptions are presented in the results section. After

clustering all of the nodes into themes, I synthesized and reviewed the themes. Verbatim

quotes from the original data were used to include thick text descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of job transitions. I used the themes to develop textural descriptions. Textural descriptions involved imaginative variation to develop a structure of the participants' experiences, thus leading up to the creation of structural descriptions. Imaginative variation involved my interpretation of the data as I searched for meaning among the themes by using the participants' varying points of reference (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation involved understanding what the participants experienced, and how the participants experienced it. The textual and structural descriptions were then integrated to develop a broader explanation of the essence of the participants' experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Methods to increase the trustworthiness of this study were used. Increasing trustworthiness of the study involved establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). Credibility refers to the accuracy of study findings (Merriam, 2009). Credibility was increased through selecting participants with experiences of BRAC transition. Participants with relevant lived experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied contributed to the accuracy of the findings; hence, the credibility of the study was also increased. During the interviews, I attempted to collect rich data to increase the credibility of the study. I built rapport with the participants to make them more comfortable in speaking during the interviews. During the interviews, I wrote field notes to help minimize bias when analyzing the data. The data were immediately transcribed and analyzed after data collection. I sent the

transcripts and interpretations to the participants via e-mail for member checking. The participants reviewed the accuracy of the transcripts and the interpretations.

Transferability refers to the extent that one can apply the study findings in other contexts (Merriam, 2009). Transferability was increased through proper documentation of the procedures involved in the study. Proper documentation provides readers with detailed descriptions of the context in which a study was conducted.

Dependability refers to the consistency of the study findings when replicated (Merriam, 2009). Dependability was increased through the data analysis procedures involving pattern matching, explanation building, addressing competing explanations, employing logic models, and proper documentation.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are based on the participants' narratives rather than the researcher's personal biases (Merriam, 2009). Confirmability was increased through member checking and review of the findings in contrast with the raw data. Through member checking, the participants were able to validate that the transcripts and the interpretations were representative of their lived experiences. After the participants' validation, I reread the raw interview data and highlighted excerpts from the text that were representative of the themes. Lastly, I practiced reflexivity by keeping notes during the data collection and data analysis procedures. The notes contained self-inquiries and memos to distinguish personal biases.

Results

This section contains the results of the study. The results were used to answer the research question: How were federal civilian employees affected by federal downsizing? The results were also used to answer the following subquestions:

1. What were the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees as they relate to job transition due to base downsizing?

2. What support systems did blue-collar employees use during the job transition in gaining re-employment?

3. What strategies did federal blue-collar employees in transition use to manage the stress associated with their job transition process?

Seven themes emerged to answer the research questions. The themes were: (a) transition was associated with negative feelings, (b) employer was unprepared for transition process, (c) support provided by employer, (d) emotional support from family and significant others, (e) engaged in other activities, (f) accepted the transition process, and (g) drew motivation from family. The themes and the number of references for each theme are presented in Table 2. Descriptions of the themes as well as excerpts from the data to support the themes are presented in the subsections below.

Table 2

Overview of the Themes

Major theme	Emergent themes	Number of references
1. Negative feelings	• Stress and anxiety 　o Job availability 　o Impact of downsizing to their families • Worry over financial status • Uncertainty about the future • Emotional stress due to transition • Stress adapting to family reaction	38
2. Employer was unprepared for transition		22
3. Support provided by employer		21
4. Emotional support from family and significant others		9
5. Engaged in other activities		16
6. Accepted the transition process		7
7. Drew motivation from family		4

Research Subquestion 1: What Were the Lived Experiences of Federal Blue-Collar Employees as They Relate to Job Transition due to Base Downsizing?

The first research subquestion focused on the lived experiences of the participants as federal blue-collar employees who went through job transitions. Responses collected from Interview Questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 were used to address this research question. Question 2 involved the participants' initial thoughts upon learning about the downsizing, and Question 3 involved the participants' perceptions of how the transitions affected them. Both questions elicited responses relating negative emotions with the experience.

Specifically, the participants generally experienced stress, anxiety, worry, uncertainty, and distress. The negative feelings were related to job availability, impact of downsizing on their family, their financial status, the future, and the experience of unexpectedly losing their job. The impact of downsizing on family was also supported by responses from the interview questions 4 and 5. Hence, Theme 1, negative feelings, emerged from the analysis.

Theme 2, the perception that the employer was unprepared to transition, emerged from the interview questions 10 and 12. Question 10 elicited responses referring to the DoD's lack of preparedness to handle the employees' job transitions. Question 12 also elicited responses stating that the DoD's preparation to transition workers would have helped the participants have a better job transition experience.

Theme 1. Negative feelings initially associated with the transition. The participants described experiencing negative emotions during the first week upon learning about the transition. Overall, upon learning about the transition, the participants experienced feelings of stress, anxiety, worry, and uncertainty. The feelings were generally associated with concerns about the availability of a new job, financial worries, and supporting their families. The subsections below contain the subthemes that describe the participants' initial feelings upon learning about the transition.

Stress and anxiety over job availability. The majority of the participants reflected that they experienced stress and anxiety, with job availability being cited as the biggest stressor. Participant 7 articulated feeling "elevated anxiety, depression, and frustration." The participant explained,

Oh, elevated anxiety, depression, frustration, trying to find a job that was as

fulfilling, not only financially, but gave me the sense of accomplishment and a

sense of purpose, compounded with a sense of working with a team to build a

common goal. It was just hard to find that sort of camaraderie as I was searching

after the initial downsizing.

Participant 10 initially felt that the transition was a "very, very stressful time." The participant recalled feeling "well, shocked. I couldn't believe it. A very, very stressful time and, uh, what else can I say? Not good." Participant 10 explained that the source of stress was "finding employment." The participant stated,

Well, I had to figure out what to do in regards to finding employment, so, hoping

that the HR had something for us, either transferring to other bases or you know,

having me go back to the United States and continue to work as a federal worker

there.

Stress and anxiety over the impact of downsizing on their families. Some participants also worried over how the job transitions affected their families. Whether the participants supported their parents or their spouses and children, they felt negatively about their families making sacrifices during the downsizing. Participant 7, who financially supported his parents, said, "They had to take a bit of a cut. That was my real obligation. So, that felt things, but other than that, no. That's as far as it extended." Participant 9, who supported his children, felt badly about the children and believed that workers with families of their own were the ones "really set up to fail" due to the children having to adjust. Participant 9 reiterated,

But, the ones with family, the people with children, those were the ones that were

really set up to fail, because for them, the transition was very difficult knowing

that the kids are in school, and to pull them out of school, and to move them back

to the United States, or the parts of Europe was going to be very, very

challenging, and a lot of these people could not speak the language, especially in

Europe.

Worries over financial status. Participant 7 also claimed experiencing worries

over finances and ended up accepting a job in a different field. Similarly, Participant 2

claimed to have worked in a bowling alley after being downsized from the military base

to "make ends meet." Both participants mentioned accepting different jobs in order to be

able to keep up with their expenses. Half of the participants also expressed worries over

finances. Participant 1, who was then supporting his significant other when the transition

occurred expressed uncertainty and worries about paying bills. The participant believed

that he was the breadwinner and found difficulties in making "ends meet financially."

Participant 1 noted,

A lot of uncertainty, you know. We had bills we had to pay, obviously. Rent that

needs to be paid; things of that nature and I was kind of, I was the bread-winner

for the [family]... well we were just boyfriend and girlfriend at the time, but, still.

If I was out of a job we wouldn't be able to make ends meet financially.

For Participant 4 who had a wife, two children, and pets to support, worried about

making money were also expressed. Participant 4 highlighted:

I mean, we didn't know how we were going to be able to live. So one of you didn't

... had to start looking for work as well. And ... and, you know, she wanted to

work but she would have to make more money to ... to help all four of us. So I

have two daughters, me and my wife and dogs.

Uncertainty about the future. The participants also generally expressed

experiencing uncertainty about the future. Some participants claimed to be uncertain

about where they were going to live and what they were going to do. Participant 3, who

also had a wife and children to support, mentioned worries about the future despite his

wife having a job. Participant 3 stated, "[Future employment] was just a waiting game

and we were unsure." Similarly, Participant 1 was also unsure of how to proceed during

the job transition. Participant 1 mentioned that experience and years in service in the

DoD did not guarantee one's future in military bases. Participant 1 claimed:

A lot of open-ended, I guess open-ended questions that weren't really solid,

definite "yes". The people that were working at the post office would be picked

up for positions that are available elsewhere throughout Germany. So, we weren't

being told that it was pretty much, the base is closing down and we might be out

of a job. And, um, and so with me for example I was a five-point veteran because

I'd gone to Iraq and Afghanistan so that put me a little further up in the selection

process but, that was no guarantee either so.

Emotional distress over unexpected transition. Participants 2, 4, and 9

emphasized the feeling of emotional distress over the unexpectedness of the job

transition. Participant 2 knew that he was employed in a temporary position, but he

thought that he had a few years to work towards a securing a permanent position. The

participant was distressed that "the army didn't follow their own regulations," and he was

not able to secure a permanent position. Participants 4 and 9 had permanent positions, but both were distressed over the surprise of losing their jobs. Participant 4 narrated:

> Well, it was kind of difficult to grasp the idea of that we were going to basically lose our jobs, especially after getting comfortable and feeling that we do have, how can I say ... we were ... we didn't expect this to happen.... So, I was depressed. I was shocked to ... to hear that we were basically going to lose our jobs not in 5 years but like now. So it was too ... too quick.

Participant 9 was initially shocked upon hearing about the downsizing. The participant learned of the downsizing from the news rather than directly from the DoD. Due to the unexpected news, the participant expressed "emotional distress." Participant 9 mentioned:

> Well, I was pretty shocked to hear the news on TV, uh, and then hear it a day later at work. But, there was no information coming to prepare us, or others of this type of decision that definitely has an impact on our day-to-day life, not just from working, but we have families. We have people, we're taking care of ourselves, and now we are in limbo. We don't know what's going to happen. So, I was going through a lot of emotional distress.

Theme 2. Employer was unprepared for transition. Participants perceived that their employers/superiors were not prepared for the transition. While the majority of the participants believed that the DoD did its best to provide compensation and financial support for the transition, as well as aid them in searching for another job, the participants also generally believed that the support was insufficient. Participant 2 expressed, "I wasn't angry about the closure, I was angry for the lack of help." Participant 2 felt angry

that the workers were not offered any support. Similarly, Participant 7 experienced difficulties from being downsized as a blue-collar worker. As a non-military worker, the participant did not receive a severance package or a retirement package. Furthermore, the DoD did not offer much support in finding another job for the downsized non-military workers. Participant 7 stated, "It [support] was really just minimal at best."

The DoD hosted job fairs during the transition, however, job options were limited, and job opportunities were sparse. Participant 10 narrated that human resource personnel came to the base during the transition and attempted to help the workers secure another job. However, for some skilled workers, no jobs matched their skills. Participant 10 also claimed that some workers did not want to leave the area of the closed down base, as they had already built their lives around the area. The DoD did their best to accommodate the workers. Participant 10 shared, "So the, the Department of Defense did do, did try their best. They showed us web links where we can look for work, and we were on, put on prior- priority placement." However, Participant 10 also stated:

> They were going to have the Human Resources come in and start briefing us on what was happening, so we were getting information from the leadership, but a lot of the information that they were giving to us didn't seem right, didn't seem correct.

Basically, the majority of the participants perceived that the experience of transition would have been easier if the DoD prepared the workers better. Participant 1 believed that the superiors were not able to communicate with the workers well enough. Participant 1 shared:

I think our chain of command didn't do too good of a job of explaining what the
outcomes were going to be, but I think that's also due to the fact that senior
leadership wasn't communicating. There wasn't really a good top-down
communication going on.

Composite Textural Description of Results for Subquestion 1

Results from the data revealed that federal blue-collar employees' experience of
downsizing and transition involved experiencing negative feelings upon learning about
the transition, and the employer's lack of preparedness to accommodate the transitioning
employees. Upon learning that the base was to be affected by BRAC, the majority of the
participants expressed feeling stressed, anxious, worried, and fearful. The negative
feelings were associated with job availability, financial matters, their families, and the
future in general. During the initial experience of transition, the majority of the
participants believed that the DOD was not able to prepare for the transition. The
participants cited experiences of lacking options and opportunities for a new job, lack of
counseling and emotional support, and lack of resources for the transition

Research Subquestion 2: What Support Systems Did Blue-Collar Employees Use
During the Job Transition in Gaining Re-Employment?

The results presented in this section were the themes that emerged for the second
sub-question. The interview questions that helped answer the second research sub-
question were questions 7, 8, 9, and 11. Interview question 7 guided the participants to
recall the assistance received from the DoD during job transition. The responses
generated theme 3, *supported by employer*. Interview question 8 asked about the financial
assistance provided by DoD, which also contributed to theme 3. Responses for interview

questions 9 and 11 generated theme 4, *emotional support from family and significant others.*

The participants generally described the support they received from their employers involving some form of support such as counselling, job fairs, or financial support. Some descriptions mentioned little to no support received from the employers. The participants also described support received from family and significant others.

Theme 3. Support provided by employer. The majority of the participants believed that the DoD officials did try their best to support the workers who were downsized. Several participants perceived that the DoD contributed to their support system during the transition, although support from the DoD was also perceived to be a bare minimum. The participants indicated that with as many as 300 workers in a single area being affected by the downsizing and the DoD attempted to help all of the workers either get a new job or receive compensation for their job losses. Participant 2 believed that the DoD prioritizes transferring downsized workers to fill open positions at other bases. Participant 3 also believed that the DoD was transferring downsized workers and was one of the workers reassigned to another base to fill an open position. However, Participant 3 claimed that he and his colleagues who were reassigned to another base, however they endured longer commute to get to work. The advantage, however, was that he immediately had another job and he got to work with people and a system that he was familiar with.

Some participants believed that while the DoD did their best to provide support for downsized workers. Specifically, human resources personnel and counselors were made available. However, the support was claimed to be insufficient due to the lack of

support staff. The personnel providing support were also being downsized. Participant 4 shared:

> Well, because I was mentioning that. They ... they were giving us support like my links to USAJobs.gov. But they really couldn't help out because they were also moving out. And a lot of the supervisors and leaders were the first ones out. So there ... there were really minimal manning back that had minimal experience to be able to help us. And I really felt like they had just left us down. Some people were getting transferred to other bases where they were going to remain open. But ... but from my job description, it was just too impossible.

Participants 1, 8, and 9 also encountered insufficient support due to the lack of supporting staff. Participants 1 and 8 claimed that the DoD provided counseling services for downsized workers, however, the counselors were also being downsized. Participant 9 stated:

> They're closing the base down, and they're also getting rid of the HR, everyone on base is going to be leaving. So, it's not like they were sending people from other parts of the United States to come here and they'd assist us with this with the whole downsizing perspective.

Participant 8, however, claimed that the workers were given access to Army emergency relief including taking out loans and seeking placement counseling. Participant 7 also stated that the DoD provided programs to support the workers, however, the participant narrated:

> They said there were programs in place, I guess unemployment type things for a few months immediately following separation. As I referenced before, there were

job fairs that were available, and as always, human resources do provide

emotional support if needed, but that was really the extent of it.

Theme 4: Emotional support from family and significant others. In addition to

the support received from the DoD, the majority of the participants reported that they

experienced emotional support from their families and significant others. The participants

generally experienced the emotional support from their loved ones to be a major

contributor to their support system. The participants' loved ones motivated them to have

a positive outlook and get back on their feet.

Generally, the participants believed that their loved ones remained positive and

supporting despite the transition. Their loved ones offered moral support contributed to

the strength of the support system. Participant 5 indicated that his wife helped him get

back on his feet by helping him accept the situation. His wife encouraged him to have a

positive outlook in being hired in another job. The participant's wife did not mind

moving to a different area for the participant's job. Similarly, Participant 10 stated:

Well, my wife is very positive, and I tend to be positive, so that helped us out a

lot. To be positive and not to get too involved with this emotional transition

where, you know, it comes into stress and depression.

Participant 1 was not yet married but he was in a relationship when he

experienced the transition. His significant other and now current wife encouraged him to

go back to school and get a degree in order to secure a better job in the future. The

participant narrated:

And that's part of the reason why I ended going back to school because you know

I didn't want to be in a position again where there's going to be that type of

uncertainty and so after we transitioned to [location] she told me, she was like,

we've got this money that you've made you know that you earned through your

service in the military. You should go back to school and finish out your degree.

And that's what I did. So, it worked out in the end. I've just finished out my

second master's degree. I'm now GS12 working in [location] as a logistics

management specialist. So that transition, it kind of set things in perspective for

me. Not to count on a blue collar job like that because there's no guarantee.

There's no guarantee for the work I'm doing now either but I think my, I increased

my odds of seeking employment in case something like that should happen again.

Participant 4 was also encouraged by his wife to accept the situation and move on.

Participant 4 claimed to have been motivated by his wife's story of how his father-in-law

also experienced transition and became successful. Participant 4 was able to accept the

changes in his life and was able to secure a new job. Participant 6 was offered emotional

support by her mother. Her mother also offered a safety net of moving with her if the

participant could not find another job. Participant 6 said, "You know the family is going

to stick by you and help you in all the ways that we can." Participant 7 who supported his

parents mentioned:

As they, themselves, were a bit shocked and saddened by the incident, they were

there to help provide emotional support for me, but that was the extent of it and

they were doing the best they could do just given the situation.

Composite Textural Description for Subquestion 2

Results from the data revealed that federal blue-collar employees had support

systems during job transition. The support system included their employers and their

families and significant others. The majority of the participants believed that the DoD

attempted their best to provide necessary support for job transition. However, some

participants perceived that the DoD support was bare minimum. The DoD offered to

relocate some workers, while inviting other workers to job fairs. The DoD also provided

counselling to the extent of their capabilities. The issue with counselling, however, was

that counselors in the DoD were also experiencing base closure. Therefore, the number of

counselors was perceived to be insufficient as compared to the number of employees

hoping to avail the services. The majority of participants also turned to their families and

significant others during job transition. The majority of the participants experienced

being emotionally supported by their loved ones during the transition.

Research Subquestion 3: What Strategies Did Federal Blue-Collar Employees in

Transition Use to Manage the Stress Associated with Their Job Transition Process?

The results in this section consisted of the themes that emerged for the third sub-

question. The themes answering the strategies federal blue-collar employees used to

manage the stress associated with their job transition process were engaging in other

activities, adapting to the transition process, and drawing motivation from family. The

themes emerged from the participants' statements describing how they diverted their

thoughts from the transition.

Theme 5: Engaged in other activities. In order to cope, the majority of the

participants focused their attention away from the loss of their jobs. Some participants

focused on finding a new job. Participant 2 shared, "I wouldn't have a job after the date it

was closed, but I was already looking on the Germany economy for other jobs. And also,

find other military posts." Participant 9 similarly applied for any job opening, and that

focusing on looking for another job kept him from dwelling on the loss of his job.

Participant 9 articulated:

> I really believe that if you keep yourself engaged by applying everywhere, fixing
>
> up your resume, tailoring up, working with unemployment, in that city, to find out
>
> what type of jobs they have, especially for veterans, it's very, very helpful.

Participants 1 and 6 both engaged themselves in talking to people to remove their

attention from the loss of their jobs. However, Participant 1 talked to people to relieve his

stress, while Participant 6 talked to people to build up network and help find a new job.

Participant 1 stated, "I talked to a lot of people, just to get those things off of my chest."

Participant 6 claimed:

> To make it easier, just so happen the position that I was in, it was like, how do I
>
> say it, I was like out in the open where I was meeting a lot of people, I was
>
> networking….And so I did run into a lot of different people like military people,
>
> Marines, Air Force, Army, whatever so this one Chief Master Sergeant offered
>
> me a position when we were talking. I told him that I wouldn't have my job
>
> anymore, so he offered me a position.

In addition to talking to people, Participant 6 also prayed and went to church, and

claimed that, "Just really let my faith take over and yeah, that's how I eliminated the

stress." Generally, the participants turned to various activities to help them keep busy.

Participant 7 confessed to feeling "a little depressed," and staying at home most of the

time, however, the participant also got busy working out. Participant 7 perceived working

out as "kind of finding myself time. It wasn't really, a very positive uplifting kind of

motivational moment." Participant 10 admitted to turning to alcohol, but he was able to

cope with the transition through keeping busy fixing his resume. Participant 10 also kept busy playing sports. Participant 9 kept busy with multiple activities such as walking his dogs and helping his children with homework. Participant 8 focused on making plans while also taking up scuba diving. Participant 8 shared:

This gave me a whole perspective, being on land and getting the opportunity to travel in, on the sea. And be able to have seen marine life and knowing that it's, it's a different world. It's a time for me to relax. It's a time for me to go out with friends or just newly individuals that I just met on that, on that boat ride, and going into, into the ocean and seeing life. At it's from a different perspective.

Theme 6: Accepted the transition process. The participants generally believed that accepting the transition process helped them cope with the job transitions. Some participants adapted a go-with-the-flow mindset to be able to move on from the experience of job transition. Participant 3 reiterated:

Well, there wasn't, I guess there wasn't much of a reaction. Just, the situation we were in, I basically had to go with the flow. I had to accept the job, make the best of it. That was it in a nutshell because the situation I was in, I was a local hire, with the military. I didn't have return rights to the U.S. or anything like that. If I would have resigned I would have just been on my own. So basically, it was take the job or, start looking somewhere which would have been difficult. I didn't speak the local language at the time.

Participant 5 emphasized adapting a go-with-the-flow mindset. Participant 5 was able to remain positive in thinking that another job existed for him somewhere. The

participant also shared that he was "used to" job transitions being part of employment with the DOD. Similarly, Participant 9 claimed:

So, you cannot think that there's no help out there. There's plenty of help out there, you just have to be brave and look for it. Don't get lost in this transition of losing jobs. As you can see, there's always going to be work. There's no catastrophe of downsizing. It's just something that really, really impacts our emotional stability at times, and I can see depending on how people cope, there's people that can't cope, and there's people that can cope.

Participant 1 was able to accept the transition through taking small steps. Participant 1 shared:

At the time, I wasn't really thinking about managing my stress, I was thinking about where my future was going to end up. You know what I mean? So, I was more of a, kind of take it day by day type of activity to manage stress. Some days were like, okay I got it; it is what it is.

Theme 7: Drew motivation from family. With emotional support from family being one of the contributors to the participants' support system, some participants believed that motivation from family helped them cope. Participant 6 was initially "upset" over the job transition, but was able to cope due to motivation from her mother. The participant shared:

Well again like I said, in the beginning I was upset but then I realized, after my mom spoke to me and she was, assured me that I wouldn't just be out in the street with my daughter. So, after she reassured me that and then after speaking to that Chief Master Sergeant, everything was fine. I was fine.

Participants 4 and 9 shared that they had fallen into bad habits, but motivation from their families helped them cope. Participant 4 was smoking cigarettes and was having sleeping problems, but his family supported him, and he was able to get back on his feet. Participant 9 turned to liquor, but his wife encouraged him and boosted his confidence in securing another job. Participant 9 claimed:

My wife had issues at times saying that I was drinking too much, and it's probably because of the loss of job, and instead of drinking, I should be looking for work. So, she pushed me, quite a bit. So, I coped with, with knowing that I had a good resume, knowing that I was going to get a job, and staying positive, and that's all the ways I coped. So, I kept doing stuff that I did at the house. Fortunately, we were doing a lot of packing, because we knew we had to leave. So, I kept myself busy.

Composite Textural Description for Subquestion 3

Results from the data revealed that federal blue-collar workers maintained their sense of well-being during the job transition process through engaging in other activities, adapting to the transition process, and drawing motivation from their families. Generally, the participants aimed to divert their attention from the loss of the jobs. The majority of the participants focused on finding a new job. In the process of searching for a new job, some participants engaged in hobbies, or in spending more time with their children. Some participants engaged in vices such as smoking and drinking; however, the participants were able to cope through focusing on the positive. The majority of the participants also adapted a go-with-the-flow mindset and accepted the situation of losing their jobs. As such, the participants were able to adapt, and secure a new job. Lastly, the majority of the

participants used their families as motivation to cope. The support received from their families helped motivate the participants. In addition, thinking of their families' current and future needs helped motivate the participants.

Textural-Structural Descriptions

A textural-structural description was generated for each participant and were presented in the sub-sections below. The textural-structural descriptions aim to provide the essence of the experience of job transitions. The essence of the experience is described through synthesizing what the participants experienced, and how the participants experienced them.

Participant 1. Participant 1 served as a mail clerk. Upon hearing about the transition, the participant claimed to have felt negative feelings, specifically, uncertainty. Participant 1 experienced uncertainty over the future in general, involving getting a job in a similar field, and moving to a new place for a new job.

The participant also felt uncertain about the possible "outcome" of the job transition. The participant was also uncertain about supporting his significant other during the transition. In addition, Participant 1's initial response to the transition included the perception that the DoD was unprepared and lacked communication, and that a confusion about the chain of command existed. According to the participant, the DoD generally provided counseling services for employees affected by downsizing; however, during his experience, the counseling personnel were also being affected by the downsizing. Thus, the participant claimed that the DoD was not able to provide emotional support. Nonetheless, the participant was emotionally supported by his significant other during the transition. His girlfriend encouraged him to go back to his

studies, rationalizing that earning a degree may prevent similar experiences of downsizing in the future.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a postal worker who also took on the role of a supervisor and the postal operations supervisor when the downsizing occurred. The participant had a wage grade blue-collar position for about seven years before the BRAC. During that time, Participant 2 claimed to be aware that the position was temporary. However, Participant 2 shared that his family was "doing good" despite his temporary position, citing that they rented a house with "a good size for five people," owned a car, and spent money on trips during the weekends. Nonetheless, prior to the transition, the participant's wife passed away, and about a year later, he was in another relationship.

Upon learning about the transition, the participant experienced negative emotions due to the unexpectedness of the change. The participant claimed to have been aware that military bases were closing; however, the participant did not expect to be affected so soon, claiming that his place of employment "was not supposed to close" until a certain amount of time. As the transition was unexpected, Participant 2 also believed that initially, the DoD was unprepared. The remaining work was interrupted due to "supply problems," shortage of staff, and heavier workload for remaining staff, as several bases were closing. The remaining workers were sent from one base to another to "help them close." Participant 2 claimed to be unsure of what was going on during the transition; however, the participant focused on engaging in looking for another job.

Participant 3. Participant 3 worked at a military post office. Initially, Participant 3 experienced emotional distress upon learning about the transition. The participant felt "locked in" his job due to the need to support his children. Participant 3 claimed that the

DoD provided adequate assistance to the employees affected by the downsizing; however, the transition experience was not easy. While adapting to the longer commute was a challenge, Participant 3 perceived that working with colleagues he was familiar with helped ease the transition process. Eventually, Participant 3 was able to adapt to the situation after the initial feelings of distress. Participant 3 claimed to accept the situation as it was, "and make the best of it." That was it in a nutshell because the situation I was in a local hire position, with the military.

  Participant 4. Participant 4 was stationed in Germany during the BRAC transitions, and initially reacted negatively with the idea of losing his job. The participant did not expect to be affected by the downsizing. Participant 4 was supporting his wife and school-aged children during the transition. The participant claimed to be in a "state of limbo" and "had no plan" to deal with the transition. Participant 4 was confident that the DoD was going to provide assistance in terms of providing a new job; however, the participant was worried that the nature of his job did not allow an easy transition.

  Participant 4 hoped that the DoD provided at least a year of notice to prepare the employees cope with the downsizing. In addition, the participant perceived that placement programs specifically for blue-collar workers would have made the transition easier. Participant 4 claimed that the DoD did provide some support for the employees affected by the downsizing; however, the support was inadequate, as the supporting offices were also being shut down.

  Participant 4 claimed to have received emotional support from his family. While his children were too young to understand the situation, they remained positive, which

helped the participant cope. The participant's wife experienced the effects of downsizing from her father being downsized, and also remained positive during the transition.

Participant 4 mentioned that the transition was not smooth, and that he smoked cigarettes at some point during the transition. However, the participant was able to engage in working on his college degree and building his resume to cope with the transition process.

Participant 5. Participant 5 was stationed in Europe during the BRAC transition as a facility manager. The participant was feeling uncertain about the effects of moving upon learning about the transition. The participant felt "insecure" about relocating. Participant 5 claimed to have the support of his wife, although the participant also claimed that his wife had always been supportive of him. In addition, Participant 5 claimed that the DoD, specifically the human resources department, did not lack in providing support for looking for a new job. Due to the support of the DoD, the participant was able to adapt to the transition process and felt confident in doing so.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was stationed in a military base in the United States during the BRAC transition as transportation worker. Upon learning about the downsizing, the participant's initial response was worry over supporting her child. The participant was a single parent. Furthermore, the participant was worried about her finances. In addition, the participant was worried over finding a job, as the human resource team could not find anything for her.

At that time the participant experienced negative thoughts. Her mother was supportive throughout the transition process, which helped her cope. During the

transition, the participant also went to church and engaged in widening her network in the hopes of opening opportunities for a new job.

Participant 7. Participant 7 was also stationed in a military based in the United States during the BRAC transition. The participant initially felt anxious about future employment upon learning about the transition. The participant experienced anxiety for securing another employment. Participant 7 was also worried about his parents, as he was financially supporting them." The participant experienced stress and anxiety over job availability, as he believed the job market was "flooded" with applicants. Participant 7 ended up taking a job in a different field to "make ends meet." The participant summarized the feelings associated with the transition as "depressing."

Participant 7 claimed that the support given by the DoD was "minimal." Following the news of the downsizing, the participant retreated into solitude. The participant also engaged in working out. Overall, Participant 7 believed that the experience of being downsized was not positive, and he had no desires to go through similar experiences in the future.

Participant 8. Participant 8 was stationed in Europe during the BRAC transition under transportation. Upon hearing the news of downsizing, the participant expressed immediate worry over his family. The participant was worried over finances, specifically paying the bills. Participant 8 was also worried about getting used to another line of work, as a blue-collar job did not guarantee landing a new job with the same skill set. Participant 8 believed that the DoD provided options of relocation for the employees affected by the downsizing. Nonetheless, Participant 8 believed that the moral support of

his father helped him cope with the experience of downsizing. Participant 8 claimed that he distracted himself from the situation and took up scuba diving.

Participant 9. Participant 9 was also stationed in Europe during the BRAC transition. The participant first heard the news of downsizing on the television. The following day at work, the downsizing and BRAC transitions were announced. The participant initially felt emotionally distressed, as the downsizing came unexpectedly.

The participant was initially worried about the future of his children, as they needed to be pulled out of school and move to a new location if the participant was to be relocated. After the announcement of the transition, the participant perceived that the superiors were unprepared to accommodate employees, as the workplace appeared to be in "chaos."

The participant's family was supportive at that time. Participant 9's wife searched for a job to help financially support their family. The participant's daughters remained positive throughout the transition process. Participant 9 engaged in finding another job, as well as spending time with his dog and his children.

Participant 10. Participant 10 was stationed also stationed in Europe during the BRAC transition. The participant's initial response to the transition was shock followed by feelings of stress over "finding employment." Participant 10 hoped for the DoD to provide assistance. However, the participant claimed that the DoD was unprepared in terms of communicating the transition process. The participant claimed that the effects of downsizing was experienced by over 300 people, and that several of his colleagues helped each other out. Nonetheless, the DoD was also doing their best to assist in reassigning the employees affected by the downsizing.

Participant 10 revealed that the transition process was not smooth, as he experienced turning to alcohol for comfort, and withdrawing from his family. The turning point for the participant was his desire to provide for his family, in which he became busy sending out his resume. The participant also tried doing sports. In case of future experiences of downsizing and transition, Participant 10 claimed to have a better handle on stress.

Composite-Structural Description

Generally, the ex-federal blue-collar workers' lived experiences regarding job transitions following downsizing of military bases involved negative feelings, challenges posed by the employer, support systems, and coping strategies. The negative feelings that emerged as sub-themes were stress, anxiety, worry, uncertainty, and distress. The negative feelings were associated with future employment and the future in general, financial status, family's sacrifice, and unexpected job loss. Depression was mentioned a few times in the interviews but did not emerge as a theme. Mention of depression was often incorporated with other feelings such as stress, anxiety, and shock. Although the mentioned negative emotions may be depressive symptoms, the excerpts supporting the findings mostly described the other negative emotions.

The participants also experienced the DoD's lack of preparedness to transition employees. The participants perceived the phenomenon as a challenge. The participants further stated that the DoD's preparedness would have helped with job transition process. Nonetheless, the participants perceived that the DoD attempted to provide assistance to the employees affected by military base downsizing. However, help from the DoD was

claimed to be inadequate. The participants narrated that the DoD was laying off support staff such as human resource personnel and counselors.

The participants were generally able to cope with the job transitions through emotional support from significant others, and through personal coping strategies. The participants' loved ones encouraged them to get through the job loss. Some participants coped through focusing on other activities, such as job hunting, spending time with family, and doing sports or hobbies.

Summary

This chapter contained the presentation of the results of the study, addressing the purpose to examine the lived experiences of job transition for federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. The research design was qualitative, interpretive phenomenological research, and involved semi-structured interviews with 10 ex-federal blue-collar workers who experienced BRAC transitions as the data collection method. The data analysis procedures generated themes based on the modified Moustakas (1994) Stevick-Coliazzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. The results of the study answered the following research questions: How were federal civilian employees affected by federal downsizing?

Subquestions:

1. What are the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees as they relate to job transition due to base downsizing?

2. What support systems did blue-collar employees use during the job transition in gaining re-employment?

3. What strategies did federal blue-collar employees in transition use to manage the stress associated with their job transition process?

Seven themes emerged from the data to answer the research questions. The themes were: (a) transition was associated with negative feelings, (b) employer was unprepared for transition process, (c) support provided by employer, (d) emotional support from family and significant others, (e) engaged in other activities, (f) accepted the transition process, and (g) drew motivation from family. Generally, participants felt negative emotions such as stress and anxiety during the first week of learning about the transition. The participants were generally worried about their future and the future of their families, job availability, and financial status. Some participants also expressed anxiety over the stability of their next jobs. In addition, the lived experiences of the participants included difficulties from employers. Some participants believed that the DoD was trying their best to support the downsized workers. Compensation for unemployment and other monetary support were appreciated by the participants in general; however, the participants also generally perceived that the DoD provided little support in terms of options and opportunities for job transitions. Some participants believed that the lack of options and opportunities led to difficulties such as enduring longer commute to work and starting over again in building credentials in the workplace. Furthermore, some participants also believed that the transition would have been easier if the workers were informed about the transition ahead of time. Some participants claimed to have first learned about the transition from the news. Some participants witnessed their superiors meeting with human resource personnel but had no clue as to what was happening. Communicating the situation to the workers was perceived to most likely

making the transition experience more bearable, as the workers may have had more time to adapt and look for another job.

Nonetheless, all the participants appeared to have coped with the job transitions and claimed to have received support from their families and significant others, and their employer. Families mainly provided emotional support, encouraging the participants to get back on their feet. Some participants were offered financial support by their parents. Employers provided job fairs, counseling, and compensation to support downsized workers.

Lastly, the participants shared that they coped during the job transition process by focusing on other activities, having a go with the flow mindset, and motivation from family. The majority of the participants kept busy during the transition, focusing on looking for another job, socializing, or engaging in social and recreational activities, such as attending church, working out, or scuba diving. Most of the participants also claimed to take things slowly, and went with the flow depending on job availability. Some participants did not mind being relocated for another job, and relied on the BRAC transition process. Some participants also shared that supporting their families motivated them to maintain their well-being.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological research was to examine the lived experiences of job transition for federal blue-collar employees following downsizing of military bases. Bratton (2013) argued that much of the outdated literature on federal civilian downsizing is no longer useful for offering new direction to this field of research. Information gathered from this study could possibly be used to determine what resources may be needed to effectively assist individuals coping with the aftermath of federal downsizing.

An involuntary job loss can be a stressful life event leading to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Burke, Ng, & Wolpin, 2016; Classen & Dunn, 2012; Duke et al., 2013). Blue-collar workers facing involuntary job loss and transition may be particularly vulnerable to wage loss and periods of prolonged unemployment (Lagoa & Suleman, 2016) due to minimal re-employment prospects (Baumann et al., 2015) and a general labor surplus (Hall & Krueger, 2012; Oesch & Baumann, 2014). The goal of this work was to describe the participants' experiences with involuntary job loss and transition. Scholssberg (1981) theorized that all of the factors affecting a worker's transition must be considered in tandem, as they interact to affect the success or failure of the worker as he or she moves through the transition. The lived experiences of these 10 federal blue-collar workers contain information that may be useful to organizations, human resource personnel, and I/O psychologists whose responsibility it is to provide support to federal blue-collar workers experiencing involuntary job transition due to downsizing. Further, little research exists describing how involuntary job loss specifically

affects blue-collar employees.Thus, this work was conducted to the research base by providing specific information on the job-transition experiences of the 10 participants in this study.

Key Findings

The overall research question involved how federal blue-collar employees experienced job transitioning due to military base downsizing. The lens used in this study was Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. To that end, three research questions were developed to explore each of the three factors that contributed to a worker's success or failure in adapting to a job loss: characteristics of the transition, characteristics of environmental support, and characteristics of the worker (Schlossberg, 1981). Seven themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes help to directly answer the three subquestions. In relation to the first subquestion regarding the lived experiences of federal blue-collar employees, participants expressed negative feelings associated with the transition and reported that they believed the DoD to be unprepared for the downsizings. The second subquestion pertained to specific supports used during transition. Participants discussed receiving support from two sources: their employer and their families. In relation to the third subquestion about strategies used to manage stress, participants reported engaging in other activities, developing a way to adapt to the transition, and drawing motivation from family. The remainder of this section addresses each individual research question and its subsequent themes.

Research Subquestion 1: Description of Lived Experiences as They Related to Job

Transition and Schlossberg's Theory

According to Schlossberg (1981), individuals move through three stages—crisis, transition, and end of transition—when faced with a life-altering event. In the case of these 10 federal blue-collar workers, that transition was involuntary. From this study, clear descriptions of participants' lived experiences emerged.

The first subquestion involved the workers' lived experiences in relation to involuntary job transition due to base downsizing. Schlossberg (1981) posited that the characteristics of an actual transition (i.e., voluntary or involuntary) affect a worker's success. The 10 workers in this study reported feelings of stress, anxiety, and worry across multiple areas of their lives, including job availability, family, finances, uncertainty, and the unexpectedness of the change. At the same time, they reported believing that the DoD was unprepared to help them through their respective transitions.

Feelings of Stress and Anxiety

Participants recalled experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety during the first week after learning of the transition. This finding is in keeping with Schlossberg's (1981) supposition that the first stage of transition involves interpreting the initial loss as some form of crisis. Individuals undergoing a period of change go through two stages: *transition* and *adaptation.* Within the transition period, Schlossberg (1981) identified three stages: crisis (a severely upsetting situation requiring high levels of individual resources), the transition state (period marked by relational and personal changes), and end of transition (marked by stable, new life, and identity). The participants' perception of the initial loss as being a crisis fits into Schlossberg's theory. The participants' initial

stress reaction to the sudden change was most often related to worries over job availability and the related categories of financial status and uncertainty. However, participants reported this anxiety in varied ways.

Participants also reported increased stress and anxiety because other family members could be negatively impacted by the transition. The participants did receive support they needed from their families due to the negative experience. The participants also had to rely on their own resources for a prolonged period; this resulted in increased levels of stress, thus confirming Schlossberg's theory. Additionally, some participants reported feeling stress and anxiety because the transition was, however, depression was mentioned a few times in the interviews but did not emerge as a theme.

Employer Unprepared for Transition

This theme was characterized by participants' negative feelings in relationship to the DoD. Although some supports were available for transitioning employees such as job fairs, websites, and a priority listing, participants generally believed that these supports were insufficient to meet their needs. Some received financial compensation, but others did not. Participants also reported believing that the DoD did not provide them with adequate information or could not help them with re-employment because there were no available jobs. In Schlossberg's (1981) theory, the 4-Ss include situation, support, strategies, and self. In terms of the situation the participants found themselves in, it was not foreseen, and they were not prepared for the sudden life-changing situation. In addition, the DoD did not appear prepared and did not provide the support that the participants expected to receive. This left the participants having to rely on their own

resources, which then led to a prolonged transition stage where high levels of stress and uncertainty were experienced.

Research Subquestion 2: Support Systems Utilized in Job Transition

The second research question explored the support systems that blue-collar employees used during the job transition in gaining re-employment. Two themes emerged from this question. This section addresses both the supports provided by the employer and the emotional supports that workers received from family, friends, and significant others. Schlossberg (1981) emphasized the importance of employer support in times of unsolicited workplace changes. The other source of support available to the participants was their family and friends (Schlossberg, 1981). Emotional support from family was one of the contributors to the participants' support system, and some participants believed that motivation from family helped them cope.

As Anderson et al. (2012) observed, "Adults in transition are often confused and in need of assistance" (p. 37). Receiving support is therefore essential to individuals in a transition situation.

Support Provided by Employer

While some participants listed DoD supports such as job fairs, websites, counseling, and financial support, others mentioned little or no support. As with the last research question, participants reported believing that the DoD attempted to assist them, but that the support offered was insufficient. Perceived reasons for this lack of sufficiency varied. Four participants believed that there was less support because the services provided by human resources were also being downsized. Thus, there were fewer personnel to provide needed services. Three participants believed that workers were

reassigned when possible, but that re-employment led to inconveniences or was not possible at all. According to Schlossberg, individuals do not always pass through transitions in the same fashion. The transition might be incomplete due to differing perceptions (e.g., DoD's level of support), experiences, and coping mechanisms. When a transition is incomplete, the individual (participant in this study) may experience a decrease of well-being and increase in stress as a result of the involuntary job transition. Schlossberg (1981) indicated that factors mitigating a transition must be considered in relation to one another. Unfortunately, some participants experienced a negative sense of well-being as the employer was found to be unprepared for downsizing and transition.

Lived Experience and Perceived Adequacy of DoD Support

For the workers in this study, it would appear as though a perceived lack of support on the part of the DoD added to the stress and anxiety they felt upon hearing of the job loss. Participants reported that part of their lived experience was feeling that their employer was unprepared to help them with the transition, did not provide adequate services or communication, and, in some cases, was unable to help them find new jobs. On the other hand, when asked about supports, most participants reported that the DoD did provide some supports, but that these were not adequate. Further examination of the textural-structural descriptions for each participant provides even more information.

Many participants revealed that their stress and anxiety were related to financial concerns. Some directly discussed needing to make ends meet while others talked of being responsible for children or parents. It may be that participants who had those worries alleviated in anyway (Schlossberg, 1981) had different recollections of their experience with DoD supports. Indeed, Gush et al. (2015) found that wider social

networks provided opportunities for job seekers. While the female participant was initially frightened of having no place to live, she was first reassured that she and her child could live with the mother and subsequently offered another form of employment, indicating the importance that support from family can have (Gush et al., 2015).

Emotional Support From Family and Significant Others

Participants reported that their significant others and families helped them in myriad ways throughout their transitions. Most reported that their spouse provided emotional support. Others were specific in describing how a wife or fiancée encouraged them to return to college or to have a positive outlook on the future. The third "S" in Schlossberg's theory is *support.* The level of support that the individual receives from the social environment, notably close family, is often regarded as the key to managing the insecurity and stress following a transition trigger. The support that participants received from their close family members was pivotal in maintaining and developing a positive outlook. Many of the participants reported how family support was crucial to their job loss transition. One participant mentioned how his wife gained employment to help with the household responsibilities, and another participant had an offer from his parents to stay at their home in case they returned to the United States.

Research Subquestion 3: Strategies Used to Manage Stress

The final research question asked what strategies federal blue-collar employees used to manage stress and maintain their sense of well-being to describe personal characteristics (Schlossberg, 1981) that might have had an influence on the workers' ability to transition. Three themes emerged in relation to this question. Participants reported engaging in other activities, adapting to the transition process, and drawing

motivation from family. In their study of NASA employees who underwent a similar job transition, Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) formulated a transition model that included three factors—situation, support, and self—that contributed to individuals' success or failure in adapting to job loss. One of these factors is the characteristics of the worker undergoing the transition (self; e.g., psychosocial competence, attitude, resilience, and available coping mechanisms). The personal characteristics of individuals undergoing transition are central to their reaction to the transition and can lead to either being successful or experiencing difficulties and failing to transition completely (Schlossberg, 1981). In the case of the latter, the individual is likely to experience a decreased sense of well-being.

Engaging in Other Activities

Many participants reported engaging in the activities that would lead to re-employment, such as filling out job applications, engaging in job searches, and improving resumes. Sometimes, this focus on re-employment involved talking to people to help find a new job or to build up a network. For example, in discovering through conversation that Participant 6 had lost her job, a Chief Master Sergeant offered her a new position. With this kind of support coming from inside the organization, an individual may experience a sense of relief and increased trust in the organization (Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, being offered another position in the organization reconfirms the individual's worth, thus confirming self-efficacy.

Other participants reported engaging in other activities either because they saw them as a diversion or because they viewed the time as an opportunity to focus their efforts in other areas. Most activities reported were positive in nature, such as attending

church, taking up scuba diving, or spending more time with children. Positive behaviors

served to engage individuals in more supportive situations with family, friends, and the

community (church). Schlossberg (1981) indicated that social support is important to

assist individuals undergoing transition. However, a few participants also reported

engaging in behaviors such as alcohol and smoking cigarettes. The factor of *self* in

Schlossberg's 4-S theory includes both positive and negative characteristics and behavior

of the individual. Increased alcohol use and smoking can be negative, as such behavior

does not invite other people and experiences into the individual's life.

Adapting to the Transition

Three participants discussed the attitudes they adopted that allowed them to

manage their stress. However, these responses varied. For example, Participant 3

discussed trying to "accept the job, make the best of it," while Participant 4 reported

believing that there was "help out there." On the other hand, Participant 6 indicated

managing her concerns for the future by "taking it day by day." Individuals' attitudes are

part of the personality characteristics of *self* as described by Schlossberg (1981). As

such, positive reactions displayed by Participants 3 and 4 may have enabled them to

make a full transition. On the other hand, the reaction of Participant 6 may have been

linked with persistent stress and difficulty in making the transition. Individuals'

perceptions of the transformation situation influence the manner in which they go through

the transition.

Drawing Motivation From Family

The participants reported that their families motivated them in a variety of ways

toward actions such as including continuing to look for work and avoiding bad habits.

Others reported taking comfort in the reassurances that family members offered.

Schlossberg (1981) identified the social support of family and friends as being a key

element in the transition process. Schlossberg (1981) quoted Vaillant (1977), who

asserted that the quality of relationships that people establish and maintain empowers

them to manage a transition. Receiving positive support from those close to them that is

aimed at building and motivating them assists individuals in moving through transition

while experiencing less stress.

Summary of Key Findings

Participants' responses to the three research subquestions yielded seven emerging

themes. These included feelings of stress and anxiety, the perception that the employer

was unprepared to help them with the transition, supports provided from the employer

and from family members, engaging in other activities, drawing motivation from family,

and adapting to the transition. Schlossberg (1981) theorized that having support

structures available throughout the transition could mediate some of the negative effects

of transition. The personality characteristics of an individual (self) and the degree of

support that he or she receives from a significant other, family members, friends, and

organizations are of pivotal importance in moving through a transition (Schlossberg,

1981). The next section provides an interpretation of these results in relationship to the

existing literature.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings from this research confirm previous literature and add to the body of

work on transition. Past researchers have indicated that involuntary job loss and

subsequent transition can be a stressful and anxiety-ridden event, and that such events can

have negative effects on mental health and overall sense of well-being (i.e., Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, & Jolley, 2013; Brand, 2015; Luhmann, Weiss, Hosoya, & Eid, 2014). In particular, past studies have linked involuntary job loss to low self-esteem (Gowan, 2012), anxiety (Duke et al., 2013; Papa & Maitoza, 2013), emotional exhaustion, cynicism, depression (Burke, Ng, & Wolpin, 2016), and suicide (Classen & Dunn, 2012). Young (2012) noted that the negative impacts on an individual's sense of well-being may have a lasting influence on the person's life. All of the 10 blue-collar workers in this study indicated stress and anxiety related to their job loss. These descriptions align with previous findings that workers who are faced with involuntary job loss experience negative effects (i.e., Classen & Dunn, 2012).

Similarly, research also exists indicating that some of the detrimental effects of involuntary transition can be mitigated. Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) found that environmental supports by the employer could lead to more positive situations where employees adapt more easily. Some participants in this study reported relying on the supports provided by the DoD, such as re-employment services, counseling, and financial assistance. These reports align with past research which indicated that employer support factors such as re-employment programs and interventions could be useful in assisting workers through transition (i.e., Brand, 2015; Gowan, 2012).

In some cases, however, workers perceived the DoD officials' efforts to were minimal, and thus displayed negative feelings toward their employer's efforts. In addition, some workers reported having difficulty finding new jobs. This experience confirms the earlier work of Hall and Krueger (2012) and Oesch and Baumann (2014), which indicated that there was surplus of blue-collar labor. As a result, blue-collar

workers in the U.S. may experience long periods of unemployment (Brand, 2015);

increasing the likelihood of psychological distress (Karren, 2012). A few participants did

indicate receiving re-employment through the DoD. Although some participants

receiving new jobs reported dissatisfaction with elements of their new employment. This

finding is in contrast with that of Gowan (2012) who found that reemployment mitigated

the negative effects of job loss even when the new job is not a perfect match. The

dissatisfaction noted by participants may be due to the prolonged presence of the negative

impacts of job loss (Brand, 2015). Alternatively, as note earlier, blue-collar jobs are

limited (Brand, 2015; Hall & Krueger, 2012; Oesch & Baumann, 2014) and the blue-

collar employees at DoD have developed more Army-specific skills which makes finding

an alternative job that is a perfect fit truly difficult.

Participants in this study also indicated that they drew support from friends and

family. Participants' increased social interaction in response to the job loss situation,

echo the findings of previous researchers (i.e., Kira & Klehe, 2016; Waters & Strauss,

2016), who indicated that positive coping strategies (e.g. drawing support from family)

can lead to a positive transition, and ultimately to personal growth in the face of

adversity. Gush and colleagues (2015) reported that family, friends and social networks

are also critical factors in aiding workers through job transitions. In addition, participants

also reported engaging in other activities such as going to church and working out as a

way of dealing with the transition. Some participants indicated adopting an accepting

outlook on the situation which allowed them to move forward. Participants reported an

ability to accept the transition, maintain their motivation, and engage in other outside

activities which support prior research findings. Previous researchers found that personal

factors such as psychological reserves, inner strength, and motivation are critical in relation to how a person moves through transition (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Schlossberg, 2011).

Present results also extend what is known by painting a picture of the workers' anxieties. At the top of the list were worries about finances and finding a new job. Other factors, such as the effects on families and the need to relocate also surfaced. As Oesch and Baumann (2014) indicated, some of these workers were affected because they held blue-collar jobs. A few participants indicated increased anxieties because they knew how difficult it would be to find a new job utilizing their very specialized skill sets. Further, Duke et al. (2013) suggested that blue-collar men might be particularly vulnerable to involuntary job transitions because they may feel that they've failed to fulfill their gender roles. In the present study, nine of 10 participants were male. Of those, four directly indicated financial responsibilities and supports of children, significant others, and parents. In particular, participant 9 who was concerned for the welfare of his children felt that he was "set up to fail" by the DoD.

Family Supports and Coping Strategies

The themes of emotional support from family as well as motivation drawn from family and friends also surfaced across research questions. While Schlossberg (1981), and Gush et al. (2015) indicated that support from family can be a positive factor during transition, the relationship between the supports of family and friends and the individual characteristics of the worker are not described. In the present work, respondents indicated that their family members provided ongoing support. Participants reported drawing upon family in their immediate need as well as later, when family helped them to

create or maintain a positive outlook, bolstering their motivation. According to Ryan et al. (2011), motivation is considered to be part of one's psychological reserve.

According to Schlossberg (1981), each of these instances can be considered examples of how family support can mitigate stress and anxiety (Gush, et al., 2015). However, they also fit into other categories. Having a positive outlook and being able to go with the flow are personal qualities (i.e. Ryan et al., 2011) that can positively mitigate an involuntary transition. Beyond mitigating the negative effects of job transition, some participants were even indicated personal growth as an outcome of the experience. A particularly obvious example of the interweaving of Schlossberg's (1981) factors is the case of participant 4. He returned to school (an outside activity) at the encouragement of his wife (family support), and achieved a degree so that would not have to face the same blue-collar situation in the future (personal growth), but had also taken up smoking, which he believed to be directly related to the transition.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation of this work is also precisely the reason for which this study was conducted. The sample was limited to 10 blue-collar federal workers who suffered involuntary transition following a decision to close down the military facility due to BRAC. Each of those workers provided a picture of their personal experience. Because some experiences were similar, basic conclusions can be drawn. However, because the sample was small and because it was 90% male, it would be difficult to determine whether the same experiences would be transferable to all federal blue-collar workers, especially those who are female. It may be that many federal blue-collar workers have similar experiences. However, Bratton (2013) indicated that much of the

data on federal workers is outdated and no longer useful. Thus, more information is needed to determine whether the scenarios provided by these 10 workers were indicative of the experiences of all federal blue-collar workers affected by base downsizing.

The qualitative, phenomenological approach does not lend itself to be generalized for a larger population (Anney, 2014). Phenomenological principles are used to embrace, understand describe ambiguous patterns of meaning, such as the perceptions and experiences of involuntary job transition of former DoD blue-collar employees. Unlike quantitative research, the phenomenological approach does not use numerical data to substantiate results. As such, the transferability of the findings are limited based on the small sample size, scale of the research, geographical location, and type of service namely federal blue-collar workers.

Recommendations

While the descriptions provided in this study explain the experiences of federal blue-collar workers in involuntary transition. It would be interesting to understand whether re-employment opportunities had any effect on workers' perceptions of the DoD. Of the participants in this study, those who had the most negative impressions of the DoD's support services were those who were unable to find re-employment. Further, it would be interesting to understand whether this was directly due to receiving federal re-employment, or whether workers who found employment outside the federal system also had more positive impressions of the DoD's support services.

Participants all discussed the value of having family supports. While it was beyond the scope of these results, it might also be worthwhile to determine whether workers with stronger family supports, particularly in terms of concrete financial and

living arrangements, had an easier time coping with the transition, and thus, more positive retrospective reflections regarding their former employer. Most employees also indicated their initial stress was financial in nature. Research indicates that re-employment can have a mitigating effect (Schlossberg, 2011). It would be valuable to understand whether some of this stress can also be alleviated through other avenues such as emergency loans, temporary severance, or promise of family support in terms of housing and paying bills. Schlossberg (1981) indicates that factors affecting transition must be considered in tandem. In this work, participants' statements indicate this to be accurate. However, determining how the factors work together was beyond the scope of this study. It would be beneficial to better understand how family and employer supports might affect personal characteristics and coping strategies.

Finally, the 10 participants in this study were blue-collar employees. As such, each respondent provided a description of how they were affected by involuntary job loss and transition. On the other hand, nine of the 10 participants in this study were male. Participant 6 was the only female. In her report of how she coped with the transition, she reported that she prayed and went to church. None of the nine men included indications of faith. That is not to say they were not present. It would be interesting to determine whether gender differences exist in relationship to how job loss affects employees and/or if these differences exist in what participants feel is important to report.

Implications

This work adds to what is generally known about workers who are coping with involuntary job transitions. The experiences of the participants in this study align with Schlossberg's (1981) theories. All of the participants first displayed negative feelings of

anxiety and indicated multiple stressors (i.e., Young, 2012), but also indicated that both

employer and family supports (Gush, et al., 2015; Wanberg, 2012) were operating at

some level. Perhaps more significant is the contribution of these effects as they relate to

blue-collar employees, an area where the research is lacking. Further, in the face of

outdated information (Bratton, 2013) the findings provide more current information about

the experiences of federal blue-collar workers when faced with involuntary transition.

Downsizing can have detrimental effects on employees working for the federal

government (Lavigna, 2014), and because of the specific nature of blue-collar work

(Brand, 2015), descriptions of these 10 employees in this study help to explain how they

were specifically affected by involuntary job loss and transition due to base closures. It

can provide the DoD with operational suggestions for better assisting its blue-collar

workers. The lived experiences described can impact how counselors, human resource

managers, and I/O psychologists provide assistance to blue-collar workers facing job

loss. Further, from the evidence, suggestions for base operations in the face of

downsizing can be extrapolated and used to improve services and develop programs that

might better provide needed support services.

The goal of this work was to describe participant perceptions in order to better

provide services. Descriptions from these workers can be used to better address the needs

of blue-collar workers who experience job loss. The following is a list of specific points

for consideration as they relate to base closures:

1. Downsize human resources departments last. Participants felt there were not

    enough personnel left in leadership or human resources to adequately address

    their needs.

2. Provide adequate communication. Participants felt they were not receiving adequate communications about base closures and its effects and what they were receiving was not complete.

3. Devise a system for providing information to on-base leadership and human resources personnel so they can adequately communicate these changes to all workers. Participants did not feel they had adequate information.

4. Provide specific information about re-employment when it exists. If reemployment opportunities do not exist, provide adequate justifications.

5. Provide adequate notice. Participants felt they did not have enough time to engage in job-seeking activities.

6. For workers who cannot be re-employed, provide face to face re-employment assistance. Participants who were not re-employed had the most negative lasting impressions of the provided DoD services.

7. Clarify limitations of support services. While some participants were re-employed, others were not. Participants were unclear about how the DoD's priorities in helping employees find new jobs.

Conclusion

This qualitative IPA study sought to determine the lived experiences of 10 blue-collar federal employees in the face of involuntary job loss and subsequent transition. Because base closures are so prevalent and because there is little information regarding how blue-collar employees cope with involuntary job loss, the twofold goal of this research was to a) provide research information about how blue-collar workers are affected by base closures and b) provide human resource workers and I/O psychologists

with information that could help them support blue-collar workers who are subject to downsizing. The findings of this study are in line with the body of literature regarding the negative effects of involuntary transition on workers. Further, they provide new descriptions of how these 10 blue-collar workers used their available resources and what specific coping strategies they employed.

While it is clear that each employee in the midst of involuntary job transition will experience it differently, it is important to hear the voices of these 10 employees. Their experiences provide a composite picture that can inform DoD base-closure operations. By providing adequate and complete communications, adequate personnel, re-employment when possible, and temporary emergency aid, the DoD could help to provide a smoother, more positive transition for a population of its workers who are particularly vulnerable to job losses. Chapter 5 concludes this study.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

R e s e a r c h   p a r t i c i p a n t s   n e e d e d !

For a research study entitled:

Job Transitioning Experiences of Blue-Collar Employees After Federal Downsizing.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, feelings and perceptions of previous Federal blue-collar employees after involuntary job transitioning due to Federal downsizing.

You may participate if you:
(a) Are an ex-federal blue-collar defense worker;
(b) Are an adult between 21 and 65 years of age;
(c) Experienced job transitions due to downsizing (i.e., workforce reductions), between 6 to 96 months ago, and
(d) Are proficient in English.

Activities include:
Participating in a telephone conversation to determine eligibility to participate (about 15 minutes)
Reading and signing the informed consent form (about 20 minutes)
Partake in an audio recorded interview (about 60-90 minutes) at a public library near you

At a later stage check if the researcher captured the information correctly (member checking) lasting about 30-45 minutes.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and no compensation will be given to participants.

Interested? Any Questions?
Please email or phone the researcher at email eduardo.hurtado@waldenu.edu
Please use your private email address to protect your privacy.

I am looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Eduardo Hurtado Jr.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

I am a doctoral student from Walden University, and I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral degree requirements. My study is entitled, *Job Transitioning Experiences of Blue-Collar Employees After Federal Downsizing.* This is a letter of invitation to participate in this research study and is intended for adult (21-65 years) Federal blue-collar defense employees who experienced downsizing. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, feelings and perceptions of Federal blue-collar employees who experienced non-voluntary job transition following Federal downsizing.

By agreeing to participate in the study, you will be giving your consent for the researcher to include your responses in the data analysis. Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary, and you may choose not to participate without fear of penalty or any negative consequences. You will have the option to withdraw from the survey at any time and all survey responses will be deleted, including the informed consent form agreement. Further, there will be no individually identifiable information, remarks, comments nor other identification of you as an individual participant.

All results of the study will be presented as aggregate, summary data. If you wish, you may request a copy of the results of this research study by emailing the researcher at eduardo.hurtado@waldenu.edu The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Your participation will contribute to the current literature on the subject of the psychological impact of non-voluntary downsizing by Federal government. No compensation will be offered for your participation. If you would like to know more information about this study, please contact the researcher at: eduardo.hurtado@waldenu.edu

Please indicate your interest to participate by emailing the researcher after you read the Informed Consent form that was emailed to you together with this invitation.

I am looking forward to hearing from you!

Eduardo Hurtado Jr.

Appendix C: Inclusion Criteria

People who are eligible to participate:

(a) Are an ex-federal blue-collar defense worker;

(b) Are an adult between 21 and 65 years of age;

(c) Experienced job transitions due to downsizing (i.e., workforce reductions), between 6

to 96 months ago, and

(d) Are proficient in English.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. Where were you stationed in the United States when the downsizing occurred?

2. What were the first things that went through your mind when you heard about the downsizing?

3. How did the job transition affect you personally?

4. What strategies did you take to make the transition easier for your family?

5. Describe how the job transition affected your family life.

6. What strategies did you take to make the transition easier for your family?

7. What type of transition assistance did the DoD offer you during the job transition?

8. Describe how the DOD sponsored transition assistance helped you to make the transition.

9. What transition assistance did you use outside of the DOD?

     9a. What agency provided the assistance?

     9b. How did the assistance help you manage the transition?

10. Describe the challenges you faced in making the job transition.

11. Describe the factors that helped you to make the job transition.

12. What would have made the transition easier for you?

13. What recommendations do you have for others who may face job transition due to downsizing?

14. Is there anything that you would like to add to your interview responses?

Note:

The researchers will only ask the questions marked with (a), (b) when prompting is needed. Should a participant talk freely the researcher will not interrupt the flow of speech by asking questions.

Appendix E: Demographic Screening Questions (Telephone)

Good day, may I speak to _____.

Good day, I am Eduardo Hurtado. I this a convenient time to speak or should I call later?

Thank you for indicating your interest to participate in the research study about the *Job Transitioning Experiences of Blue-Collar Employees After Federal Downsizing.* You have read the flyer about the research, is there anything that you would like to ask about it?

To ensure that you are eligible to participate in the research, I would like to ask you some questions, if you don't mind.

(a) Are you an ex-federal blue-collar defense worker?

(a-i) What kind of work did you do?

(a-ii) Were you employed by DoD or and agency supporting military actions?

(b) Are you between 21 and 65 years of age? OR What is your birth year? (Between 1953 and 1997)

(c) When did you experienced job transitions due to downsizing (i.e., workforce reductions)? 2013 – 2017 (October)

(d) What kind of housing do you currently occupy? Alone standing house / apartment / living facility.

(d-i) If living facility—what is the name of the facility you live in? OR

(d-ii) If living facility—what kind of facility is that?

(e) Do you speak and understand English well? (We do not have translators).