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## Overseas Military Transition and Post-Military Job Retention

Chea Hale-Hernandez  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Chea Hale-Hernandez

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2026

Abstract

Overseas Military Transition and Post-Military Job Retention

by

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MS, Southeast Missouri State University, 2004

BS, Southeast Missouri State University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial Organizational Psychology

Walden University

February 2026

## Abstract

Adjustment from military life to the corporate or civilian world can be challenging for some individuals who have served in the armed forces. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of U.S. military veterans transitioning from overseas service to civilian employment and to identify the factors contributing to long-term job retention. The military transition theory and turnover contagion theory grounded this study. The participants consisted of 20 male veterans representing the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Army National Guard in Dayton, Ohio. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and public documents. Two themes emerged from the interpretative phenomenological analysis: (a) transition experiences and (b) job retention factors. Subthemes included military skills transfer, adjustment to civilian culture, mental health and emotional impact, support systems and resources, and expectations and career fit. Additional subthemes were work ethic and discipline, job satisfaction and work conditions, support systems for retention, tenacity and motivation, and organizational understanding. Findings indicated that veterans' transitions are multidimensional, shaped by the interaction of personal resilience, institutional resources, and social support. Veterans who secured purpose-driven roles and experienced organizational inclusion demonstrated higher retention and well-being. The implications for positive social change include the potential for employers, policymakers, and service organization leaders to develop holistic transition programs that integrate mental health, mentorship, and career alignment to assist veterans in sustainable employment practices.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—my children, Amber, Alondra, and Adirael; my grandchildren Isabella and Kayle, and my great-grandson Nolan —whose love and encouragement have been my constant source of strength. To my parents, who taught me resilience and perseverance, and to my brother, Robert, for always believing in me.

To Gilbert, thank you for pushing me to the end and reminding me of what I am capable of.

A special acknowledgment goes to my favorite niece, Savannah, and my favorite nephew, Harken, who bring joy and laughter to every part of my life.

This journey is as much yours as it is mine.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

U.S. military service represents a distinctive career field that imposes demands on those who choose to serve. Estimates from the U.S. Department of Labor show that approximately 70% of service members will transition from military to civilian careers after completing their required years of service, with an unemployment rate of 4.4% among veterans (Minnis, 2020). For veterans, this transition entails securing employment in the civilian sector and maintaining a job. Several organizations are dedicated to assisting veterans, with some specifically focused on aiding them in job placement (Flack & Kite, 2021).

Transition challenges for new hires have become increasingly crucial to understand and address due to over 250,000 service members annually transitioning from military to civilian life (Keeling et al., 2020). Military service provides personnel with a strong support system, but lacking a similar network after leaving can greatly impact their ability to adjust to civilian life (Dexter, 2020). Lack of support or appreciation for their service and sacrifices can influence a veteran's perspective on their contribution to the country. Military service is structured and disciplined, often presenting a stark contrast to civilian employment routines (MacLeish, 2020). To identify potential challenges service members may face during their initial post-service employment, this study focuses on social adjustments, emotional, and psychological challenges. Additionally, the current research explores the complexities of transitioning into civilian employment and suggests possible ways to provide assistance and support for veterans navigating these challenges.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive account of the qualitative research on veterans transitioning to civilian roles. Chapter 1 starts with the background of the study that outlines areas of problem encountered due to gaps in prior research. The theoretical framework that guides the study will also be explored. A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen to explore employment retention experiences of veterans transitioning to a civilian position in the United States after an overseas assignment. Possible biases in the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with a transition to Chapter 2.

### **Background of the Problem**

Transitioning from a life in the military to the civilian job market is a significant challenge for many veterans. Several veterans transition smoothly into their initial roles in the civilian workforce; however, a significant portion encounter challenges when it comes to sustaining employment (Alonso et al., 2021). Adjustment from military life to the corporate or civilian world can be particularly difficult for some individuals who have served in the armed forces. Despite possessing valuable skills and experiences gained during their service, these veterans may face obstacles in adapting to new work environments and expectations (Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). According to Perkins et al. (2020), 42% cannot keep a full-time job. Disparity between those who seamlessly integrate into civilian jobs and those who find it challenging highlights the diverse experiences and hurdles that veterans encounter as they navigate post-military life.

The core issue is the adaptation from the organized and regulated military premises to the flexibility of the civilian life sphere (MacLeish, 2020). Data collected

from several studies regarding this issue evidence that veterans face adaptation challenges when transitioning from military life to civilian life (Park et al., 2021; Perkins et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). Though the general level of satisfaction with the job of many veterans is very high, in some cases the veterans face negative treatment from their supervisors (Mohr et al., 2021). Veterans end up not fitting in the corporate environment with most of them facing challenges balancing between work and family life, which results in poor professional efficiency (Shepherd et al., 2021). Other reasons for leaving their civilian jobs include a lack of opportunities for career advancement and professional growth (Shepherd et al., 2021). Some veterans also mentioned that too many changes within their new job (e.g., new supervisor, new ways to complete job duties) created discomfort, leading to their decision to leave (Shepherd et al., 2021).

Research outcomes can offer insights into the common obstacles that veterans encounter as they move from military service to civilian employment. Becoming a relevant issue to determine since each year, there are a large number of retiring military members transitioning to civilian life (Park et al., 2021). According to Dexter (2020), enhancing the extent to which veterans retain their civilian employment augments the productivity and performance of the organization. Supporting veterans during their transition to civilian life is beneficial for both the veterans and the employers. Veteran support develops into mutualism through which both parties draw support for the growth and sustenance of their business or organizations.

When the need arises to integrate veterans into the civilian workplace, the development and implementation of strong tactics and support systems are essential

(Armstrong, 2023). Such strategies help veterans transition easily into the civilian work environment (Armstrong, 2023). It is crucial to recognize and address the unique hurdles they face during this critical phase of transition. This study is directed toward addressing the gap in the literature by investigating and analyzing the military veteran transition. The study therefore focused on the experiences of these military personnel for an enhanced understanding of this intricate process that eventually leads to the creation of particular strategies and assistance programs that are required to meet the needs of the transitioning veterans. Understanding this stage of transition may lead to better and more effective support mechanisms initiated for veterans going through this major change in their professional lives.

### **Problem Statement**

This qualitative phenomenological study addressed the employment retention challenges that male veterans face during the first 2 years at their first non-military job, but with a particular focus on those who have transitioned from an overseas deployment during their time in the military. The need for research into veteran employment experiences and understanding is crucial because these veterans face challenges during the transition process (Alonso et al., 2021). Although there is literature available that captures the veteran journey for employment, there is a great need to expand and counter past findings (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). Conducting this study fills this identified gap within the existing literature and provides a more current and relevant perspective in relation to how veterans are doing in their civilian transition roles post-overseas deployments. This problem statement is within the discipline domain and professional

scope; this problem statement harmonizes with the academic program, which highlights the importance and application of examining this issue of research in the area under consideration.

The current research adds a unique and relevant approach to the current literature on veterans' transition and job retention. Previous research has considered the broad difficulties that veterans endure during the transition period of civilian careers (Alonso et al., 2021), but this study specifically targets the issues which confront veterans who had been involved in overseas military deployments. Past research has not addressed whether deployments may influence the subsequent transition and job retention of this population (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). Overseas military often have their unique challenges that also contribute to the transition from military to civilian employment. This study focuses more on the experiences of veterans who served overseas to gather information that would lead to better and more specific support measures. Second, the use of a qualitative phenomenological research design helps to explain the perceptions and experiences of these veterans in a deeper way. This rich contextual data aims to complement largely the findings of previous research (Alonso et al., 2021; Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). The study's emphasis on veterans with overseas service backgrounds and the decision to use qualitative research methods make it distinct from other works and could contribute to better understanding of this major transition process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of U.S. military veterans transitioning from overseas service to civilian

employment and to identify the factors contributing to long-term job retention. This study describes transition barriers and identify those factors that contribute to effective veteran retention in their initial 2 years of employment following their overseas assignment. This study followed a qualitative phenomenological research paradigm to understand the employment lived experiences of veterans who completed their overseas assignments. Through a qualitative research methodology, this research helped uncover the perspectives of veterans as they guide themselves through the transition of environments and culture, from military to civilian work settings (see Johnson et al., 2020).

This study explored sustained employment among veterans for the first 2 years within their first civilian position of employment. By focusing on experiences, barriers, and factors that influence employment retention, this study contributes insights into requirements and considerations new to veterans transitioning to civilian employment positions from their overseas assignments. The research builds on current knowledge by filling the gaps in the literature to uncover ways to increase the possibility of veterans successfully retaining their post within the civilian job market (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). Ultimately, this study can inform employers, institutions, and policymakers of the unique experiences and barriers that the transitioning veterans from overseas duties have faced and provide suggestions on making the work environment supportive for veterans to be successfully retained in their civilian roles. The present study addresses some of the specific identified challenges with a view to making a contribution toward improved overall well-being and adjustment of veterans into life at the workplace.

## **Research Questions**

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to capture and examine veterans' experience transitioning to a civilian employment position from an overseas assignment. The following research questions will guide the study:

- RQ 1: What positive and negative experiences do veterans have transitioning into their new jobs?
- RQ 2: What are the contributing factors for job retention?

## **Theoretical Foundation**

This study is anchored in two important theories: the military to civilian transition (MCT) theory and the turnover contagion theory. The MCT forms a comprehensive paradigm through which the process of transitioning from military life to civilian can be unveiled (Bergman et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2017). Central to this theory is a focus that seeks to unfold the psychological, social, and vocational aspects relating to the experience of this transitional journey (Karre et al., 2024). Through the theoretical lens of MCT, researchers try to contribute insights about the innumerable challenges and influencing variables that inform successful adaptation and integration into civilian life (Karre et al., 2024), an area that addresses RQ 2.

The promising factor for the advancement of veterans within their transition process is observed as directly related to their satisfaction and job performance within a civilian environment (Tremblay, 2021). This also underscores a key task of MCT theory in revealing the positive and negative employment encounters veterans experience when seeking their way to new civilian roles. According to Tremblay (2021), a context-based

analysis affecting the job retention capabilities of veterans established important findings that further contribute to the understanding of how the veterans are faring during the transition process which may help answer research question one.

The other theory used in this research is the turnover contagion theory, which describes the social mechanisms within organizations and how employee turnover has a snowball effect on the turnover rate in the organization (Hom et al., 2012; Porter & Rigby, 2021). According to Porter and Rigby (2021), this theory dictates that people in a workplace are highly affected by the turnover proclivity and events of their coworkers. In this study, the turnover contagion theory helped understand the factors that influence job retention, especially among veterans. Turnover contagion theory is applicable in this context since it provides some vital understanding with regard to factors that impact veterans' job retention which helps in addressing RQ 2. According to Oh and Chhinzer (2021), this theory also helped understand how the behaviors of the veterans at their jobs influence their decision processes in regard to either continuing with their existing positions or not.

The use of these two theories in the process of this research augments current knowledge on the comprehensive retention of veterans within an employment position and their transition to civilian opportunities subsequent to overseas deployments. These two theories helped in exploring both the positive and negative phenomena experienced during the transition, addressing RQ 1, and factors involved in job retention, addressing RQ 2. This study was founded on MCT theory and turnover contagion theory to understand the complexity of the veteran's job retention experience variables and

mechanisms at play. Chapter 2 of this research provides a better understanding of the theories.

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed in this research. The qualitative methodology specifically was chosen in pursuit of obtaining an in-depth understanding of male veterans' employment retention journeys upon transitioning into civilian jobs after serving their overseas assignments (Johnson et al., 2020). The phenomenological research design was chosen since it considers both investigation and understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of the male veterans (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). According to Tomaszewski et al. (2020), the concept of lived experiences is to ensure that information regarding the problems and retention-related elements could be extracted. The main focus of this study was to establish how male veterans retained their jobs within the first 2 years of initial employment in the civilian workplace after returning from deployment overseas. The primary focus of the research is mainly due to seeking information that can be key in transitioning from military to civilian life, where the veterans are likely to face unique challenges and also make key decisions about retaining their jobs.

Purposive sampling was employed in this research to enable the exact selection criteria of particular participants with attributes and experiences that resonate with the central research questions for this study (Campbell et al., 2020). A deliberate selection of persons with prior exposure to overseas deployment was done to explore in detail barriers unique to employment retention by this section of male veterans. In this study, a sample

of 10 participants was planned. A sample size of 10 is suitable for a qualitative phenomenological study as it is appropriate for reaching data saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mason, 2010). Data saturation in qualitative research refers to a point in data collection where no new information arises from any extra participant (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data collection was done by interviewing veterans who are members of a Veteran Administration facility located in Dayton, Ohio. The participants were recruited by posting the invitation on the social media platform under the management of the Veteran Administration. After the recruitment, online interviews were used for data collection, with the purpose of getting a clear explanation of the first-hand experiences, views, and challenges met by the respondents. According to Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021), online interviews were used as they are convenient and flexible in that the respondents are able to participate in the study from wherever they may be (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Semistructured interviews as the primary sources of data were triangulated with secondary data from the Veteran Association facility in Dayton Ohio focusing on the reports present in the facility which have information on the experiences of veterans transitioning to a civilian position after an overseas assignment.

Thematic analysis was employed in this research to analyze the data collected. The thematic analysis method is used to seek underlying patterns, major ideas, and recurring themes in the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The key insights and high-level themes that apply to the experiences of retention in employment were derived from this analysis process. NVivo software was used to organize and manage data, making it

easy to systematically analyze. According to Allsop et al. (2022), NVivo software helps have a proper and efficient review of collected data to help improve the effectiveness and accuracy of the analysis and review process.

### **Definitions**

For clarity within this study, the following terms are defined:

*Civilian world:* This refers to the non-military sphere that is highly unstructured as compared to the military surroundings, which are disciplined (Perkins et al., 2020).

*Military transition:* This refers to the process of veterans moving from military to civilian employment (Alonso et al., 2021).

*Military veteran:* This refers to an individual, who was engaged in employment in the armed forces. Such an individual would be part of military service, performing duty within the organized unit, carrying an obligation to live up to a certain code (Alonso et al., 2021).

*Retention:* In this study, it refers to the length of time a person stays employed in an organization, giving testament to their ability to sustain active and continual participation with the employer (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020).

*Veteran transition:* This term pertains to how Veterans shift from military duties to civilian employment. This phrase involves different aspects including; the timeline of getting new job opportunities, the duration served for the position they take in the civilian work environment, and their decision for further involvement in the civilian employment opportunity (Alonso et al., 2021).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions in this study enabled understanding of the experience of veterans during their first time on a civilian job providing a clear starting point for this research (Ward, 2020). I assumed that the participants would agree to take part in the study. A phenomenological study is based on the understanding of lived experiences where data is collected from people who have direct knowledge of the phenomenon being examined (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This assumption is crucial as the cooperation of veterans facilitated the collection of essential personal narratives that relate to research questions.

I also assumed that the participants would provide honest information regarding their experiences of the transition from military service to civilian jobs. This assumption is primary as phenomenological research tries to accomplish an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of life experience through honest and transparent testimonies shared by the participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The other assumption is that I would be granted permission to access secondary data from the Ohio Veteran Association facility. The secondary data collected supplemented the data collected from the interview sessions accomplishing data triangulation. This is an important consideration since supplementary secondary data enhanced the research results through a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study focused on the re-integration of returning and overseas-based military personnel and how they are able to sustain employment upon departing from the military assignment. This study was intended to represent the obstacles that veterans face within

civilian employment during the first 2 years following transition into civilian employment and identify the factors that aid in successful retention into non-military work. The study has a specific scope to ensure that it only focusses on the purpose and the objectives of the study.

This research is restricted to the demographic of military veterans who completed foreign service out of the country while on active duty. It involves participants who served in the military branches of the United States and who, upon returning from overseas, pursued careers in non-military sectors. Paying attention to foreign deployments will provide this study with the richness to explore the unique difficulties and experiences articulated by service members who have served from outside the nation's borders. However, this research did not explore experiences among veterans who lack any overseas deployment experience, and neither does it address those who have not even transitioned into civilian employment.

Since this study was conducted to understand the reintegration of military personnel returning from overseas deployments and sustaining employment subsequent to transitioning from the military, there are theoretical frameworks not considered in this research. The study limits its exploration of theoretical perspectives relating to psychological or social adjustment models. Moreover, the findings of the research can only be generalized to those veterans who have similar characteristics and belong to the same background as presented in this study. The particular context of deployment and its key co-determinants, such as overseas deployment in this case, may limit the extent to

which these findings pertain to veterans who might be deployed in dissimilar military cultures or who have not experienced an international assignment.

### **Limitations**

Basic qualitative research is known for its time-intensive nature, often demanding a substantial investment in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Johnson et al., 2020). Researchers face the challenge of managing their resources, including time. This can lead to decisions such as reducing sample sizes. Opting for these alternatives might give rise to certain reservations regarding the applicability of results since a reduced number of participants could restrict how broadly the research conclusions can be applied (Hays & McKibben, 2021). Yet a small sample size is adequate and is demonstrated to have statistical significance (Serdar et al., 2021).

One of the primary limitations of this study is the transferability of the findings of the study. This qualitative study examined a sample size of 20 veterans who have transitioned from overseas assignments. While the sample size is not extensive, it is sufficiently robust to provide valuable insights into the experiences of this specific group of Veterans (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mason, 2010). However, it limits the generalizability of the findings of the study since based on the sample size the results cannot be applied to other transitioning international military veterans. The careful selection of participants from this particular context will help mitigate concerns regarding transferability, as the findings will be directly applicable to veterans who have undergone similar overseas transitions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

The other anticipated limitation in this study is the potential for researcher bias. Researcher bias refers to individual inclinations that may affect the data analysis and interviewing process (Johnson et al., 2020). To mitigate this risk, peer review was applied in the data analysis and development of the research questions to ensure that I had no influence on the outcome of the study. The other limitation of this study is geographical limitation. This study focused on veterans from the Veterans Association located in Dayton, Ohio. This is a geographical limitation as the study will overlook experiences of veterans in other regions, which limits the generalizability of findings to other veterans in other regions. I mitigated this limitation by ensuring a diverse selection of veterans to try and capture the experiences of different veterans.

### **Significance**

This study on international military transition and post-service job retention is considered significant to industrial organization psychology. This study provides important perspectives regarding the challenges ex-servicemen experience in transitioning from military service to civilian work. The findings of this study fill in the gaps in the current literature by examining the military transition process as they return home, especially when their assignments abroad are successfully concluded.

In terms of policy and practice development, this study could yield useful findings for the development of effective strategies and mechanisms of support that will assist in the further integration of veterans into civilian work settings. Identifying the barriers around transition and success factors of veteran retention within the first 2 years of their employment, this study provides practical guidance for institutions policymakers and

employers. In this case, the findings of this study help explore the basics and considerations for setting up an inspiring work environment that increases the probability of veteran job retention. The findings of this study could facilitate the implementation of policies and practices particularly altered to accommodate the unique demands of transitioning veterans to promote efficiency, effectiveness, and workforce well-being.

This research also has the potential to effect positive social change within the context of the study. By elaborating on the difficulties that veterans go through during their transition, society can support and appreciate the contributions of the veterans better. The findings of this study can contribute toward the creation of an environment that is more supportive and affirming to veterans reducing any barriers that may influence their successful employment and integration into civilian life. The overall stimulating effects will facilitate a positive social change by promoting equal opportunities and improving veterans' welfare.

### **Summary and Transition**

Chapter 1 introduced the study of how male veterans experience the transition from a foreign military deployment to a civilian career in the United States. This chapter began with a background that outlines and details most of the experiences of veterans upon leaving their military careers and transitioning into civilian life and jobs. Thereafter, the chapter presented the problem statement pinpointing the retention barriers of veterans during the first 2 years of civilian employment after their overseas assignments. The chapter included the two research questions to understand experiences that are advantageous and disadvantageous for veterans as they make these transitions and some

of the factors that influence retaining employment. The chapter concluded by discussing the study's theoretical framework focusing on military transition theory and turnover contagion theory. A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework will be presented in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem for this study is based on the need to investigate veteran employment experiences and understanding is crucial because these veterans face challenges during the transition process. Although there is literature available that captures the veteran journey for employment, there is a need to expand and counter past findings (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). Conducting this study filled the identified gap within the existing literature and provides a more current and relevant perspective in relation to how veterans are doing in their civilian transition roles post-overseas deployments. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the employment retention experiences of veterans transitioning to a civilian position in the United States after an overseas assignment. This study describes transition barriers and identifies factors that contribute to effective veteran retention in their initial 2 years of employment following their overseas assignment. Amidst the workforce landscape characterized by fluctuations in size, the struggles of hiring and retaining employees is significant for organizations. Contributions from previous research have illuminated issues and unveiled a shift in job satisfaction paradigms and the transformation of the workforce (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). Furthermore, a reduction in the strength of military forces has imparted an unmistakable trajectory toward increased civilian sector employment for military veterans.

In Chapter 2, I will provide the literature review for the current study. The chapter will provide the criteria for searching literature for this study. The literature review will explore the challenges faced by military veterans as they move from military life to

civilian careers. I examine how organizations and support networks help veterans transition smoothly into the workforce. The review will synthesize existing literature on veterans' experiences during this transition, highlighting the complexities of adapting to civilian workplaces. The chapter will explore the struggles individuals face as they shift from military service to civilian employment, emphasizing the profound impact of this journey on their lives. This research provides valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders invested in supporting veterans' successful integration into civilian jobs. Lastly, the chapter will end with a summary and a transition to Chapter 3, which will provide the methodology for the study.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

An extensive search for relevant literature was conducted to uncover the key issues within this research domain, drawing upon the rich resources available at Walden University, various government research databases, and reputable libraries. These sources, owing to their expansive nature and the inclusion of numerous pertinent journals, offered a wealth of information. The focus was directed toward articles published in respected peer-reviewed journals, ensuring the quality and credibility of the sources. The investigation spanned from 2019 to 2024 allowing us to capture contemporary insights into the subject matter. However, a few seminal studies published before 2019 were included in the theoretical framework. Additionally, to maintain linguistic consistency and facilitate comprehension, this search was confined to articles published in the English language. This detailed and focused search ensured a thorough and quality literature review.

The research endeavor encompassed various reputable databases, including Academic Search Complete, EBSCO ebooks, Gale Academic OneFile Select, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Ebook Central, Google Scholar, Sage Journals, and government labor data repositories. Ensuring the authenticity and rigor of the literature was a pivotal aspect of this approach, and to this end, Ulrich's Periodical Directory, a trusted resource available through the Walden University Library database, was employed to verify the peer-reviewed status of the identified publications.

The keyword selection for the literature search was thoughtfully curated to encompass a broad spectrum of pertinent topics. These keywords included terms such as *veteran workplace*, *military members*, *jobs for military members*, *transitioning issues for military members*, *military transition*, *transition out of the military*, *after the military*, and *military transition to civilian life*. This inexhaustible set of keywords was large enough to allow for a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of the topic. The terms have been combined to ensure that exhaustive search is carried out for relevant information that helps in the literature review. Nevertheless, the scarce recent works included in the literature review did not necessitate citations of older studies inducing those that were published before 2020. Through this extensive research process, only the top sources were used to better understand the struggles and potentials that veterans experience at this critical career transition time.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is underpinned by two theories: MCT theory and the turnover contamination theory. The MCT is used to describe the difficulties veterans are facing in

transitioning from combat zones into civilian life (Bergman et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2017). Research in the late 20th century revealed the problems veterans face including unemployment, homelessness, poor healthcare access, post-traumatic stress issues, and strained family relations in the process of reintegration (Karre et al., 2024). In the face of a rising trend of veterans coming back from the Gulf War, there arose a need for a theoretical model to be used in reintegration. Demers et al. (2011) developed theories for MCT between 2004 and 2011 to show the experience transition points of military and civilian lifestyles.

The MCT theory has various propositions. Demers et al. (2011) postulated that veterans from a deterministic background of military life might pose psychological and practical challenges as they adapt to individual independence and sovereignty in non-military contexts. Culture shock may challenge transitioning veterans in having to relearn civilian life protocols, values, and traditions different from those in the military. According to Adler and Castro (2019), returning service members have operational problems regarding reconnection with families, building new social support communities, and adjusting to the inevitable changes in family routines upon repatriation to their domicile country. Lastly, Karre et al. (2024) noted that the shifts in personal identity and life purpose a veteran has to deal with can be tough. All these thoughts underpin the basic ground to understand how exactly the veterans reintegrate within the MCT framework.

The MCT theory, as applied in the study at the center, has been used in previous research to explore veteran experiences. As an example, Karre et al. (2024) built on a revised conceptual framework about the MCT theory, which was later applied in one

longitudinal well-being assessment of a big sample of post-9/11 veterans for 2.5 years, finding out that when measured through the lens of the MCT theory, veterans keep experiencing mixed outcomes over time in various life domains. Also, Bergman et al. (2020) adopted the MCT theory to explore the experiences of veterans in relation to community integration. Results identified by interviewees based on the MCT structure revealed facilitators and barriers to community integration for them during their transition. The studies showed how the MCT theory serves as a guide to delving into the various points in the veterans' transition experiences. In both of those studies, the MCT theory helped in providing a systematic measure of veteran transitions across various life domains over time.

The other theory, the turnover contagion theory, emerged as an attempt to understand resignations that seem to influence one another as opposed to happening on an independent basis (Hom et al., 2012). The theory identifies a cluster of organizational turnover and how individual social factors might affect retention in the process of social contagion (Hom et al., 2012; Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). The theory suggests two mechanisms for linked attrition: Social processes focus on the fact that quitting employees may shape the intentions of coworkers either directly, by normatively influencing them, or by comparison and learning, like options from observing others leave (Porter & Rigby, 2021). The second structural impact concern is where a greater influence of losing colleagues is in terms of increasing workload or decreasing support on the island from the departures, hence feelings of motivation and commitment in work units (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). This contention, to an extent, is invariable to the

assumption that separating such interdependent work units structurally alleviates these contagion effects (Porter & Rigby, 2021). Beyond the measures linked to social comparison and learning, the theory provides insight into how turnover contagion may occur for a non-independent decision to resign.

The theory of turnover contagion has had very limited application in employee retention research targeted at veterans' employment retention. It has, however, found application in other fields. Haran and Niederman (2022) used the theory in a study focused on the influence of the theory on turnover intentions and behavior and found high correlations with supervisory justice, job satisfaction, and family support in explaining 37% of the variance in intentions and 27% in actual behavior. McCluskey (2023) also used the theory, showing how turnover affected trust within schools, setting out a self-impelling cycle of distrust among the staff and instigating leadership. A further increase in turnover cases would cause a school culture breakdown, which would be followed by low operational efficiency and ignite the cycle. These studies showed that the theory could be applied as a theoretical framework in studies as the theory helped reveal that the interventions to fight the turnover contagion have to be based on increased trust, support, and stability such that the spread of turnover is stopped.

Although several theoretical frameworks can be applicable to this study, I focused on the MCT theory and the turnover contagion theory. The other theories that could be included in this study are organizational socialization theory and occupational stress Theory. Organizational socialization theory bases its premise on the process of how employees can acquire norms and behavior to be integrated within an organization

(Spagnoli, 2020). This may have been apt in this study toward the acquisition of how the prior military adjusts to the places of civilian work. However, it does not get into their behavior in the shift from military life or highlight how people shift from military life or the factors influencing the dropping out of duty (Alessandri et al., 2020). According to Berg's (2022) occupational stress theory, stress comes from environmental and organizational pressures. While job stress is a fundamental concern for retention, this theory covers just as importantly the individual challenges in adaptation and encompasses social factors that have an effect on retention, such as turnover contagion (Krigbaum et al., 2020). Compared to MCT theory, it focuses on the transition from military structures and identities. On its part, turnover contagion explains the social factors affecting retention within the workgroups. In integration, these perspectives provide for a holistic understanding of veterans' reintegration and sustainability in civilian employment.

The MCT theory and the turnover contagion theory were optimal theoretical frameworks for this study on employment retention challenges among veterans transitioning from foreign assignments to jobs within the United States. The MCT offers a model that is useful for understanding the psychological, social, and occupational barriers to moving from the military way of doing things to civilian life and work. Veterans returning from overseas postings have difficulty adjusting to new structures, norms, and support systems. This is supportive of what is generally being found regarding positive-negative experiences in the present study when veterans are assimilated into new civilian jobs. Further, the turnover contagion theory is used to explore elements that may enable an employee to remain in his job and offer a way of

looking at how social dynamics at work may influence individual decisions about staying in employment. For these veterans, acclimation into new civilian workplaces that might lie beyond the firm, certainly peer actions, and networks of support must be factors that influence their ability to maintain these new positions. Therefore, using these theories was optimal to better understand how veterans transition into employment after overseas service.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Veteran Transition to Civilian Life**

The transition from service to civilian is likely to be a considerable transition experienced by veterans. When an individual transition from military life to civilian life, an individual takes on totally new identities, roles, and support systems outside of the structure of military life (Kleykamp et al., 2021). It is during this period of re-integration when some major changes are made, reflected upon, and corrected both in the environment, social networks, and in the sense of purpose, role, and daily routine (Joseph et al., 2023). Many times, a veteran has to make key adaptations to reconcile his military identity and skill set with civilian society over a long period. This section will touch on some general issues that veterans face once they leave the military and start setting up their new lives in the non-military world.

#### ***The Transition from Military to Civilian Life***

The first stage of adjustment that is experienced by veterans as they are discharged is struggling to align their military identity with the new civilian roles. In the study conducted by Oh et al. (2021), many veterans were found to face an identity crisis

when changing from a regimented life in the military to the independence of civilian life. The veterans, plunged into a different environment, feel incapable of putting to good use their specialized military qualities and leadership traits in civilian careers or educational endeavors. Moreover, Flack and Kite (2021) stated that the defeated veteran in the earliest phases of transition feels a sense of loss in perspective to leave their well-defined roles, titles, and comradeship. The studies show that the re-adaptation to civil life at the onset bears catastrophic psychological and practical hindrances when the veterans try to reconcile their deeply acquired military identity and the civilian roles and duties that lay in uncertainty. Many veterans have difficulty in transitioning from military to civilian life, as most of them have no keen sense of who they are or what purpose to move on with after retiring from military duty.

Many veterans just leaving military service experience a lack of organized assistance and camaraderie in civilian life. A recent study determined that the majority of discharged veterans reported experiencing, to a great extent, the loss of companionship and social support they used to have while serving in the military after leaving military service (Guthrie-Gower & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022). Shepherd et al. (2021) described that it is not only the difficulties related to civilian structures; they also find it hard moving around the civilian structures without clear leadership and resources to follow up on what they used to do in the military. As they move further away from their military patterns, they also become more stressed, anxious, and insulated. These studies show the various difficulties faced by transitioning veterans as they move out from the more-structured military environment into the less-structured civilian environment and move away from

the usual support systems. Notably, most veterans are bound to struggle once they leave their military roles and try to blend with the routine civilian life.

One of the most substantial adjustments is the change in working conditions for those veterans who are transitioning into a different job in civilian life. Most veterans have a hard time fitting into civilian places of work, which are seen to be very flexible and loose in structure, unlike the military culture based on instant obedience (Alonso et al., 2021). At times, this military discipline was found to be at loggerheads with the demands of a number of civilian roles, which were otherwise self-motivated and flexible in nature. In a new study of post-9/11 veterans by Young et al. (2022), most described civilian jobs after a tight military schedule, with some level of difficulty due to the flexibility in the new routine. For most veterans, private sector duties did come with a sense of degenerative lack of preparation for the uncertainty. These findings give insights that while military personnel learn technical skills in the military, they culturally must change in preparation for the different organizational cultures they will encounter in civilian jobs, including adjustments of one's personal and professional lives for transitioning.

Mental health problems mostly affect transitioning veterans, making the transition back to civilian life quite challenging. Undiagnosed psychological conditions such as PTSD affect social relations and the work tenure of the subject negatively as they go back to the civilian workforce (Proescher et al., 2022). This only creates more stress and struggle to have a new sense of purpose outside of the military. The unemployment rates and feelings of isolation are driven by the failure to establish a good civilian identity

separate from their military status (Ward, 2020). Based on these studies, the unaddressed presence of mental health issues and a loss of a military identity that many veterans have adhered to for such a long time can drastically impair the psychological adjustment to life after service. At an early stage, these problems become center stage, and challenging good transitioning from veterans to civilians.

### ***Employment Challenges for Veterans***

Despite valuable skills, veterans face difficulties in translating their military experience to civilian job roles. A qualitative study by Dexter (2020) found that recently discharged veterans reported challenges in highlighting their relevant qualifications for private-sector jobs. The employed veterans struggled to communicate how abilities learned through diverse military roles, such as leadership and technical training, applied to corporate needs. Stull et al. (2020) noted that hiring managers did not always recognize transferable skills attained through military roles and training. The study revealed that civilians had a limited understanding of how capabilities developed through various duties linked to transferable qualifications fitting private sector demands. This research suggests that while veterans separate with highly developed soft and technical skills, effectively relaying how military-cultivated qualifications materially contribute to business needs remains an initial obstacle after transitioning into the civilian labor force.

Some of the negative stereotypes associated with military experience may create hindrances that impede job opportunities for veterans. For example, a study by Ward (2020) found that veterans looking for federal jobs had fallen victim to discrimination because of their military identity, despite being equally qualified for the same position

compared to other candidates who were not veterans. Some of the associated risks that typically form part of veterans' application include military-related disabilities and deployments due to risks, availability, and health issues (Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). The studies postulate that misunderstandings and biases conceived relative to vigorous military service may indeed inappropriately influence a veteran's employment despite suitability for the position.

Transitioning veterans feel underutilized in civilian jobs, hence low satisfaction and job commitment. Mael et al. (2022) argued that the veterans were frustrated with basic civilian supporting roles that could not offer leadership and technical expertise from the military service. This mismatch resulted in dissatisfaction and a feeling of displeasure with how well their jobs were done and how long they held onto such type of work. Similarly, Romaniuk et al. (2023) found that veterans who left jobs quickly were dissatisfied with repetitiveness in tasks that did not give them opportunities to exercise their range of skills. This unchallenging type of work appeared to demoralize veterans, who then felt that their jobs were below them, underutilized, and like outsiders involved in business rather than really involved in it. These studies suggested that when veterans perceive that their responsibilities at work are beneath what they are trained to do and do not utilize their military-derived skills to the fullest, this lessens satisfaction and may incubate commitment deficiency.

### **The Role of Overseas Deployments in Veteran Employment Challenges**

Some of the issues associated with the veterans' barriers to employment stem from military activities overseas (Cardow et al., 2021). Military operations overseas

subject the veterans to different skills and experiences, contrary to those required of military personnel in their country (Shepherd et al., 2021). While this is the case, it presents challenges, more so with regard to work. This section seeks to reflect on how the situations and challenges based on overseas jobs impact the veterans' barriers to employment.

### ***Impact of Deployment on Skill Transferability***

International deployments come with unique abilities and skills that are not clearly understood by non-military employers. What becomes quite difficult is convincing a private sector recruiter that the skills that were learned on overseas missions, such as crisis management in collaboration with local governments, are pertinent in his business enterprise when such an individual does not fully understand the military operations carried out abroad (Minnis, 2020). The difficulty affects their undertaking to transition their military background into civilian job environments. Roy et al. (2020) also provided that veterans have cross-cultural skills developed through cross-country deployments, foreign language proficiency, and adaptability, which frequently escape civilian hiring managers who are seeing international assignments for the first time. With these deployments having no parallels in non-military positions, the unique skills that come in handy within the military and self-security forces force veterans to seek help in translating such obscure skills for proper presentation on their resumes. This further complicates the articulation of acquired expertise into the language of typical job requirements.

Veterans find it challenging to transfer leadership and combat skills gained from their military roles to civilian jobs. As depicted by Dexter (2020), veterans who have served in combat overseas face a hard time relating how they acquired their knowledge of tactics and leadership gained under pressure to human resource professionals. Those in charge of non-military hiring hardly understand or even know the roles played by a military person, thus making it hard for one to spell out transferable skills, for instance, clearly, project management, critical thinking, or quick decision-making acquired from battlefield experience. Other findings by Becker et al. (2023) also yielded that former officers could not understand how their high levels of expertise in operational management could fit the language utilized in the job description. Equally, to communicate effectively with these advanced leadership and crisis management skills that any veteran develops amidst a wartime environment, they need to present their qualifications in circumstances that can be well understood by persons who are not part of the military realm.

Transitioning veterans experience the challenge of articulating the skills they obtained in the military to a civilian employer. According to the research by Tao and Campbell (2020), veterans had a lot of difficulty laying out their qualifications to most of the private employers. Veterans who found the work experienced struggles in expressing how these learned military skills, including technical and leadership training, would be enhanced within a company. Another study by Stull et al. (2020) indicated that hiring managers have little recognition of the transferable skills acquired through military experience. The general perception of how military skills can be used in corporate is

hazy. Having valuable soft skills and technical skills that veterans may be able to handle at work as members of a team, they face hostility on how the skills meet business needs as they transition to civilian jobs.

### ***Psychological and Social Effects of Deployment***

The stressors faced by veterans after deployment mar their performance at work and relationships with others. According to Shor et al. (2022), mental health problems often go unnoticed and can interfere with how new veterans function on the job. If not taken care of, the undiagnosed mental disorders can extensively disrupt them from working effectively. The health problems and mental diseases, either directly or indirectly, will end up affecting the physical fitness of the veterans. Besides, Cramm et al. (2020) noted that social isolation and ruptured relations with friends and family also enhance the lousy reentrance of veterans to civilian life. The risks faced during operational duties continue into the period after military service ends. Therefore, relational complications associated with intimated deployment hardships worsen re-adaptation difficulties resulting from military discharge.

Mental health support is a crucial yet mostly neglected dimension within the working environment. LePage (2020) provided that if untreated depression and PTSD are unrecognized by employers, they would largely impact how veterans are likely to retain their jobs. As such, without psychiatric illness initiatives driven by companies, sustainability could be jeopardized. Moreover, Stevenson et al. (2023) demonstrated that the lack of mental health resources in workplaces was yet another hindrance, as veterans avoided seeking help secretly to prevent stigma. These studies show that the lack of help

is one of the big reasons for delay in therapy; hence, it further undermines other adjustment issues. Notably, workplaces emerge ignorant and too unprepared to deal with invisible injuries experienced by veterans, which are indispensable to their professional performance.

Moreover, the challenges in social reintegration worsen the difficulties in creating vital professional links for transitioning service members. As Ward (2020) described, veterans, despite being guided in the process of networking, find themselves alienated from the majority of civilian communities, hence making it hard to build the requisite relationships key to the advancement of their careers. Similarly, Becker et al. (2022) argue that the lack of social skills could hinder individuals from building interpersonal connections, which may further prevent them from networking post-service. These challenges can act as impediments to effectively navigating relationships, seeking practical advice and linking up to extremely privileged career networks. To gain the vocational support like others, it is imperative to engage in the reconstruction exercises that aim at establishing such social structures.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Veteran Employment Outcomes**

Transitioning veterans are faced with serious problems that are incorporated into their procedures for reintegrating into civilian workforce (Becker et al., 2023). Strategies aimed at heightening job opportunities and sustainability of veterans are considered in this section. These can involve individual, organizational, and community approaches, all of which are necessary to support veterans, improve the quality of work life and increase morale.

### ***Organizational Best Practices***

Organizations apply a lot of measures and vocational cultures that help veterans get oriented on the job. Kirchner et al. (2020) described that veterans prefer organizations that take into consideration military service and hires veterans, for example, by accepting military certificates instead of education certificates. As reported by Rudstam et al. (2020), veterans seek accommodations, such as paid time off and excused absences for medical appointments, can offset the challenges of sudden readjustments and improve employee retention. Besides that, the research substantiated the need for the designing of a hiring process based on the experience of the military and the provision of a supportive system managing the choices that are the reason of the stressors of veterans. Organizations that adopt this high-level recognition and flexibility give veterans, especially those with very special barriers, the opportunity to be in a much better position to seek and secure sustainable employment opportunities.

Appreciation of insights from the diverse expertise and background that each veteran brings helps polish efficiency and morale within the civilian workforce. Hayes et al. (2020) outlined that employees would improve their job effectiveness and job satisfaction if they believed that their leadership, flexibility, and analytical skills nurtured while in the military were respected and put into use in their jobs. They further tended to show more involvement when the diverse expertise was accorded respect by veterans. Alonso et al. (2021) established that organizations that knew the skills employees developed in their service in the military lower the staff turnover, with such organizations displaying better performance, higher productivity within the organization, and generally

a high-quality work environment. These studies show that appreciating veteran employees encourages the identification of different abilities that veterans acquire during service and that will be useful in other jobs, hence helping in identifying key employee indicators. Thus, the invaluable worth of adaptability may be harnessed to the full, giving meaning to much-needed self-esteem for commitment and making results.

Initiate mentorship programs that pair a veteran with an experienced civilian employee to help cushion these traumatic transitions. A recent study by Perkins et al. (2020) found that new veteran employees usually pair better when mentored. They went further to explain that when introduced to an already existing contact, veterans have an easier time adapting to unfamiliar company culture. Meanwhile, Shepherd et al. (2021) found that veterans adapt to different operational practices better when they are introduced to already-existing contacts than otherwise. These studies showed that mentorship hastens the adaptation process by reducing the learning curve to reach the stage of mastery of the various public behavioral practices. By preempting this adjustment process through dynamic support systems that show veterans the implicit norms and procedures of the workplace, the new entrants quickly accelerate performance change and integration in work settings.

### ***Policy and Program Development***

Developing policies aimed at correcting some of the problems that come with veterans in long-term employment retention is vital. Past studies have identified issues related to the lack of experience in support for Guard/Reserve commitments, support in accommodation for service-caused injuries/illnesses, and understanding of military

culture from employers (Dexter,2020; Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). Supportive policies might be put in place that will trim the attrition among veterans. A comprehensive policy fixation is necessary for establishing fair standards at work needed to address broad systemic barriers to career continuity and general well-being among veterans (Perkins et al., 2020). Comprehensive protections strengthen attachment by affirming the accommodation of national duty regardless of employer.

The government and non-profit settings support the most significant backbone in efforts to support veteran employment transitions. As the programs increased such enrollments, it was also a pathway into new industries, considering their situations of having financial stress to get an education (Maguire et al., 2022). The programs, combined with initiatives to help translate their resumes and offer access to networking, increased the number of placements into various jobs (Tao & Campbell, 2020). These studies suggest that the public and non-government bodies help reduce the hiring barriers with tuition assistance that reduces career shifts, or agencies provide all types of guidance services and better communication of qualifications to varied sectors. Synchronized efforts refocus trained professionals on opportunities that correlate with their interests and skills.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction among Veterans is an important factor in their successful transition and retention in civilian employment. Research shows Veterans with no prior civilian work experience report lower job satisfaction than those with workplace experience outside the military (Shue et al., 2021). However, meaningful work and

feeling a sense of purpose are also important contributors to job satisfaction for Veterans, regardless of work challenges (Grimell, 2019). Facilitating successful transitions for Veterans through support programs and strategies can help address difficulties in adapting to new work cultures and enhancing job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction refers to a Veteran's positive emotional state resulting from their appraisal of their job or career experience in the civilian sector following transition from military service (Pedersen & Wieser, 2021). Satisfaction involves the sense of purpose, fulfillment and enjoyment they derive from the work they perform after leaving the armed forces (Shue et al., 2021). Higher job satisfaction corresponds to positive feelings about different facets of their employment such as the job itself, supervisor relationships, compensation or work-life balance.

The research by Shue et al. (2021) suggests a difference in job satisfaction between Veterans with prior civilian job experience and those who had never worked in the civilian sector. This disparity in job satisfaction could be attributed to various factors, including the challenges Veterans face in adapting to a new work environment outside the military. Pedersen and Wieser (2021) stated that many Veterans who leave their first civilian job do so within the first year of employment. This high turnover rate among Veterans in their initial civilian jobs can be attributed to various factors. These reasons for leaving a job can include difficulties transitioning from military to civilian work culture, misunderstandings about job expectations, and challenges completing tasks within expected timelines.

Grimell (2019) discussed the concept of job satisfaction among Veterans, emphasizing the importance of finding meaning and fulfillment in one's work. For many Veterans, job satisfaction is intertwined with the sense of purpose and fulfillment they derive from their employment. However, the study also highlights the reality that some Veterans may not have the opportunity to secure their preferred jobs, and they may prioritize working as a means to reintegrate into civilian life and regain a sense of normalcy. These studies collectively illuminate the complexities of Veterans' job satisfaction during their transition to civilian employment. The challenges they face in adapting to civilian work environments and the significance of meaningful work in their lives underscore the need for comprehensive support and strategies to facilitate successful transitions and job retention for Veterans.

### **Withdrawal Behavior**

Withdrawn behaviors in the workplace can occur when individuals become mentally, physically, and emotionally disconnected from their organization (Nauman et al., 2021). These behaviors can take different forms, such as absenteeism, insubordination, burnout, and even employee resignation. When employees exhibit withdrawn behaviors, they become less productive and show signs of disengagement from their work (Afrahi et al., 2022). Absenteeism, for instance, involves employees frequently missing work, which not only disrupts productivity but also indicates a lack of commitment to their responsibilities (Shepherd et al., 2021). Insubordination can manifest as employees refusing to follow orders or instructions, further eroding their connection to the organization. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and

reduced job satisfaction, often results from prolonged stress and overwork, leading employees to withdraw from their roles. In severe cases, employees may leave the organization altogether, contributing to turnover.

Withdrawn behaviors can have detrimental effects on both individual employees and the organization as a whole. Employees experiencing such behaviors may suffer from decreased job satisfaction, increased stress, and impaired mental health (Shue et al., 2021). At the organizational level, these behaviors can lead to decreased productivity, increased turnover, and a negative work culture. Organizations should foster a positive work environment that promotes employee engagement, well-being, and satisfaction to address and mitigate withdrawn behaviors (Sokol et al., 2021). This may include providing opportunities for skill development, recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions, and addressing sources of stress and burnout. By proactively addressing these issues, organizations can reduce withdrawn behaviors and create a more productive and positive workplace.

Employee absenteeism and lateness can cause a ripple effect on the workplace, as described by the turnover contagion theory (Hommelhoff et al., 2021; LePage, 2020). When an employee consistently fails to show up for work or arrives late, it can disrupt the workflow and place additional burdens on their colleagues, who must pick up the slack. Over time, this can lead to resentment among coworkers and potentially result in lower overall productivity and increased feelings of burnout. Turnover Contagion Theory suggests that negative behaviors, such as absenteeism, can spread among employees, impacting the morale and engagement of the entire team (LePage, 2020). It is not just the

direct consequences of the absent employee's actions but also the indirect effects on their coworkers that can be problematic.

Leadership's response to absenteeism and related issues can also influence the work environment. When leadership feels compelled to implement policies and procedures to address absenteeism, it can create anxiety and stress among employees (Armstrong, 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). Employees may perceive these policies as punitive or fear their job security is at risk. This can further contribute to workplace stress and tension. Open and transparent communication is essential in mitigating these issues. Leadership should proactively engage with employees to understand their concerns, provide support, and address any underlying causes of absenteeism or reduced productivity (Mael et al., 2022). By fostering a culture of open communication, leaders can reduce anxiety, build trust, and create a supportive work environment that encourages employees to seek assistance when needed. Leaders must recognize that sudden employee productivity or attendance changes may indicate underlying personal or work-related challenges. Instead of punitive measures, a compassionate and supportive approach can help employees overcome these challenges and contribute positively to the organization.

### **Gap in Literature**

Previous research has explored the process of transitioning from being a military to a civilian employee in general, but a need remained for a focused study regarding the challenges veterans had to face upon their return from foreign deployments (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on how male

veterans continue to remain employed while transitioning to a new civilian job in the first 2 years after returning from deployment. This points out the fact that the current literature does not expand on the specific challenges that veterans have to keep their existing jobs in this period following overseas deployment. According to Armstrong (2023), comprehensive scholarship may not reckon with the way overseas factors impinge on long-term stability of a career. The dearth of studies in this area indicates an important need for deeper research about what problems of retention actually exist among veterans of post-deployment in order to identify differences that may warrant specific tailor-made solutions.

Current literature research in this area is not adequate to identify the unique challenges veterans face as they return from overseas deployments. Thomas (2023) highlighted that supportive programs related to readjustment difficulties are generally linked with deploying stress into another country. This has huge implications for the way veterans adjust to civilian life and how the complexities of deployment come together, representing an imperative need for deeper exploration into the understanding of these effects. This need has to be addressed through the notion of a deployed need, with specific needs that might manifest in veterans and thereby require tailored understanding and solutions. Thereby, more focused research should be undertaken to have better insight into this matter and harbor a subsequent targeted solution.

Understanding employment retention difficulties for these veterans has been a way forward in establishing successful integration support and strategies. As Minnis (2020) described, reducing veteran turnover is only poised to involve a lot of detailed

evaluation of how foreign service experiences impact the development of career tracks to, in turn, develop focused programs. The determination of an effective means depends on the type of information to be picked. This underscores the importance of a diversity of specialized research designed to fill in the knowledge gap that exists and improve customized initiatives that prompt the implications of veterans rising in the long term for the civilian labor market.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The transition from military service to civilian life presents many challenges for veterans. As they leave behind the highly structured life and stable career of the military, veterans often struggle with developing a new identity outside of their military role (Oh et al., 2021; Guthrie-Gower & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022). They lose the strong social support networks within the military and have difficulty integrating into civilian communities (Cramm et al., 2020; Ward, 2020). Mental health issues like PTSD that developed during or were exacerbated by military service can negatively affect employment if left untreated (Proescher et al., 2022; Stevenson et al., 2023).

Veterans also face challenges translating their military skills and experience into civilian job qualifications that employers understand and value (Dexter, 2020; Stull et al., 2020). Biases against veterans can also negatively influence hiring decisions (Ward, 2020; Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). Feelings of underutilization in civilian jobs that do not tap into veterans' full skillsets can reduce job satisfaction and commitment over time (Mael et al., 2022; Romaniuk et al., 2023). For veterans returning from overseas deployments, additional difficulties include articulating the unique skills gained abroad

and having employers recognize their value (Dexter, 2020; Roy et al., 2020). Health issues and mental health problems developed during deployment may also hinder employment if not addressed (Proescher et al., 2022; Shor et al., 2022). Overall, the literature identifies gaps in understanding the specific challenges for veterans transitioning after foreign deployments (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). The next chapter, Chapter 3, will discuss the methodology that will be employed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the employment retention experiences of veterans transitioning to a civilian position in the United States after an overseas assignment. This study describes the challenges that veterans face during the transitional period and some determinants of their ability to hold employment over the 2 years following the redeployment from overseas duties. Veterans face huge hurdles in the transition from military work settings to civilian work settings (Alonso et al., 2021). Some of these veterans may also experience problems with getting or keeping jobs in the civilian environment because of the difficult transition from military to civilian life. Studies have indicated that, compared with other groups, veterans are often put at a disadvantage in obtaining and keeping jobs in civilian environments (Mael et al., 2022; Ward, 2020). This research was conducted to contribute to an understanding of the process of transition for this group and may find ways in which better support and later retention of veterans back in their jobs as civilians after international service can be realized.

This chapter will outline the methodology of the study. The research methodology and the rationale for using the phenomenological approach will be discussed. The role of the researcher in this study will also be discussed. The Methodology subsection will include the participant selection procedure, data collection instruments to be used, recruitment, and technique of collecting data will be elaborated. Another section focuses on the pilot study conducted. Later, a description of how data collected were analyzed will be provided. This chapter also includes an examination of how the issues of

trustworthiness were addresses. This is followed by the scrutiny of set ethical protocols to protect the participants. Finally, this chapter will finish with a summary highlighting important components of the research methods.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The objective of this study was to investigate factors identified by veterans transitioning from overseas military deployments to civilian employment in the United States as barriers to acquiring civilian jobs and retaining these jobs. The main focus was how the veterans move from being a member of the military to serving missions overseas and transition into getting stable and appropriate employment as civilians in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study

- RQ 1: What positive and negative experiences do veterans have transitioning into their new jobs?
- RQ 2: What are the contributing factors for job retention?

Qualitative methodology was used in this study. A qualitative methodology is the most appropriate methodology for this study since this study seeks to understand the complexity of the experiences in the real life of the participants (Matos et al., 2023). According to Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez (2020), qualitative methodological work seeks depth rather than breadth, and satisfaction for issues of meaning rather than quantification, this is a line of investigation that closely aligns with this study. The focus of this study was to examine the experiences of veterans as they are transitioning to

civilian employment and what they perceive as the challenges they face during the transition. According to Jack and Phoenix (2022), this aligns with the focus of qualitative methodology on the real-life experiences of the participants. Therefore, qualitative methodology is the most appropriate methodology for this study.

Quantitative and mixed methodologies were considered but not selected for this study. According to Taherdoost (2021), while quantitative data could offer numerical statistics about the findings, it would lack in-depth detail to explain individual veterans' perspectives on transitioning from a posting overseas to working in a civilian job. Quantitative data fails to express the essence of personal experiences and to encase the challenges and environmental factors shaping any individual's transition (Matos et al., 2023). Mixed methodology helps explore the qualitative and quantitative aspects of a study (Taherdoost, 2021). While the qualitative aspect is appropriate for this study, the concepts being studied, that is the transition experiences and retention factors, are difficult to quantify hence the quantitative aspect of mixed methodology cannot be utilized in this study. The concept of this study requires a qualitative design to capture fully the complexity of the narratives enunciated in the respondents' experiences and also to have enriched insight about their joint switching from foreign military service to domestic civil work

A phenomenological research design was used in this study. Phenomenology is used to comprehend and outline the multi-faceted interpretations and experiences shared by different individuals in the same context (Williams, 2021). The objective of a phenomenological research design is to obtain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon

(Williams, 2021), which in this case is the experiences of military personnel transitioning to civilian employment. This research design aligns with the objective of this study, which was to explore the shared experiences that are enshrined between the various transition personnel without losing the richness that is peculiar to each of the individuals.

Other research designs such as narrative inquiry, grounded theory, and ethnography were considered for this study but not selected. The narrative inquiry was not appropriate for this study because it focuses on singular individual life stories relative to a certain time frame, without embodying the aspect of that time in history (Stavrou & Murphy, 2021). Grounded theory was also not applicable in this study since the intent is not structured to make a theory out of the collected data (Foley et al., 2021). Though the grounded theory would help in the development of a theory, the main purpose of the study was to draw a clear picture of how the research participants felt about the transition moment and not develop any theory. The ethnography research design was negated in consideration since it is oriented to the understanding of what the community values and does through direct observation and immersion in the lives of the study participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Since the focus of the study is on career transitions and not culture primarily, ethnography was considered not relevant for this study. Therefore, phenomenological research design is the most appropriate for this study.

### **Role of Researcher**

In conducting this study, the responsibilities of the researcher encompass a range of critical tasks making the researcher both an observer and participant. First, the researcher was tasked with recruiting suitable participants, a foundational step that

involves setting clear criteria, reaching out to potential participants, and ensuring they meet the eligibility requirements for the study. Once participants were identified, the researcher organized and scheduled interviews, ensuring a smooth and comfortable process for participants. During these interviews, the role of the researcher extended to data collection, encompassing the precise execution of the interview protocol, asking pertinent questions, and actively listening to participants' responses to facilitate open and honest sharing of their experiences. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted, involving tasks like transcribing interviews, coding responses, and identifying emerging themes or patterns. Finally, I documented the findings comprehensively, summarizing key insights, trends, and contextual interpretations.

I ensured that an ethical standard is maintained through effective communication with the participants and proper handling of the data collected. I practiced reflexivity to help recognize and supervise their background and commentary viewpoints impacting different aspects of the study. Reflexivity involves the use of a journal to record all reflections, assumptions, decisions, and reasons as to why a different method or approach was chosen (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). I also practiced bracketing by consciously withdrawing from their personal experiences as well as opinions regarding military transitions to meet participants' narratives with objectivity as well as neutrality (Shufutinsky, 2020). Practicing reflexivity and bracketing helps in reducing any impact that personal bias or preconceptions could be having on the data collection or analysis (Shufutinsky, 2020). The whole exercise of reflexivity, journaling, and bracketing makes the results of the study described credibly, reliably, and ethically.

## **Methodology**

This section of the study will explain in detail the methods applied in the research. In this section, the criteria for the selection of the participants and how veterans were recruited will be discussed. This section will then establish how the interview guide was developed and tested using a field test to enable the collection of data. This section will then describe the data collection process explaining how the participants and the researcher took part in the study.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The population for this study was veterans re-entering the civilian workforce. The target population for this study are male military veterans who within the last 2 years transitioned from an overseas deployment to their first civilian employment. A target population in qualitative research refers to a group of people that matches the characteristics needed for the study (Stratton, 2021). This group was chosen to gain insight from those who had recently gone through the transition to civilian employment. Purposive sampling was used for the selection of the participants. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is suitable when the researcher needs participants who meet a particular criterion. In this case, the participants had to be male veterans who have transitioned to civilian employment from overseas military deployment within 2 years. Those meeting these criteria were identified by sorting available data to the Veteran's Administration office in Dayton, Ohio. These will be crosschecked with military records also obtained from the office to confirm that indeed they meet the criterion of having served overseas before leaving military service. Between 10 and 15 subjects were the

intended sample to partake in this study. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), 10 participants are suitable for a qualitative study as it will facilitate sufficient data collection hence reaching data saturation. Data saturation can be recognized when further interviews start exposing no new ideas or themes in the pursuit of answering the research questions. A smaller number of participants for qualitative studies is appropriate since the objective is to gain detailed insight into individual experiences of data issues (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mason, 2010). The final number of participants in the current study was 20.

Invitations to recruit participants were posted on social media run and managed by the Veterans Administration in Dayton, Ohio. Any eligible veterans indicating their interest were asked to get in touch with me. Veterans who voluntarily accept to take part in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form after which an in-person or virtual interview was scheduled based on the availability of the participant. The participants were assigned pseudonyms rather than their real names. According to Wang et al. (2024), the use of pseudonyms in place of actual names enables confidentiality standards in that personal information will not be revealed throughout the study to ensure the highest standard in ethical research.

### **Instrumentation**

The data collection instrument to be utilized in this study will be an interview protocol developed by the researcher. For this qualitative phenomenological study that seeks to find a revelation of deep insights into experiences lived by the participants, interviews carried out are avenues providing a dialog-based means of the collection of details while maintaining a minimum level of homogeneity across all interviews. About

the interview questions for this study, the researcher will use semistructured interviews. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), the semistructured interviews will include open-ended questions to provide the participants with the flexibility to provide all the relevant details of their experiences.

Given the purpose of the study, a semistructured interview protocol best fits the study, since it helps address both the similarities as well as the differences of the transitional experience (Tierney et al., 2022). According to Ruslin et al. (2022), the semistructured interviews with open-ended questions will create room for the participant to give elaborative and detailed accounts of their situations. The interview questions will border both the positive side and negative sides of the veteran's transitions from the military to civilian employment, and all the experiences presented will connect to the factors that make an impact on the longevity of working for an employer. The interview questions will focus on capturing the need to apprehend this phenomenon of international military transition and post-military job retention, thus appropriating the interview questions to the exploration of research objectives and insight into the moral aspects of the lived experiences of military veterans.

To triangulate the primary data collection method, secondary data will also be collected. Triangulation in qualitative research refers to the use of different data sources to collect relevant data for the study hence enhancing the credibility of the study (Santos et al., 2020). The secondary data will be collected from the Veteran Association facility in Dayton, Ohio. The secondary data will include internal reports, existing literature available at the facility, and publicly available data from the United States Department of

Defense regarding the experiences of veterans transitioning to civilian employment. The putting together of the two sources of data that is data from the interviews and secondary data will facilitate the triangulation of information to ensure reliability in the findings. According to Santos et al. (2020), the triangulation approach ensures that different perceptions are converged through the two sources of data cementing the general conclusion of the research.

### **Field Test**

A field test to evaluate the developed interview protocol's effectiveness, and ensure its soundness prior to full study design will be conducted. The field test procedure will involve an attempt to modify the interview questions, check if the questions are being understood appropriately, and an estimation of the average period required for each of the interviews. The field test aims to make sure that the data collection designs and tools will be appropriate for deriving information to provide answers to the research questions (Taherdoost, 2021). According to Taherdoost (2021), during this phase, any major improvements in study protocols are worked on before testing on a bigger population in the main study.

A sub-group of 2-3 individuals based on meeting the inclusion criteria will be purposively sampled for the field test. The qualifying criteria will involve any ex-military personnel who have within the last 2 years completed an international mission and are currently in civilian employment, who agreed to be a part of this sample, and who are in the position to offer honest feedback. After acquiring Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the social media managed by the Veteran's Association

facility in Dayton will be used to advertise information about the research. Potential participants who are interested and found to meet the eligibility criteria will then be asked to contact the researcher by email or telephone to schedule the interviews.

A signed informed consent document, whereby the respondent agrees to be part of the participation, is availed and confirmed before the interview process. The informed consent form will contain information about the reason for the study, assurance regarding privacy, assurance about voluntary participation, and permission to record the interview. A semistructured interview with the participant will be conducted either in person or via Zoom according to the choice of the participant. The conversations will be taped for transcription and documentation. During field-testing, the researcher will ask respondents open-ended questions in the interview guide and participants will be encouraged to give feedback on question-wording, clarity, and flow. The interviews will be timed to give an estimate of the duration of the interview during the primary study.

The information regarding the feasibility of the interview guide and protocol will be collected regarding whether the participants will answer the questions correctly, and their recommendations regarding how the interview protocol and guide will be improved. Comments of the participants and research-based observations on body language and extent of participation will be reviewed in coordination with transcription. There will be an evaluation of the outcome from a panel of three experts on the subject. This group will review the interview questions, the feedback from the participants, and the research notes. The experts will recommend improved and modified interview guides and how the guide should be used based on the feedback that they will receive. The recommendations

that the panelists will recommend will be incorporated into the data collection tools and methods in recommendations made before conducting the main study. The updated protocols will then be used to interview the study participants.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The main study site for this research will be conducted at the Veterans Administration (VA) center located in Dayton, Ohio. The reason for selecting this site is because the researcher considers it easy to access. Both online and face-to-face semistructured interviews will be used for data collection. An information flyer will be availed and posted all over the Dayton Veteran's Association facility to carry out the pre-screening or participant recruitment process as per the set eligibility criteria for the study. In the flyer, interested prospective volunteers will be asked to call or email the researcher. If this method will not be sufficient to recruit the required 10 participants, then the remaining local organizations that help veterans will be given the flyers to help in participant recruitment for the sample range to be even more diversified.

A telephone screening interview will be conducted with the potential participants to guarantee that they meet the study's participant criteria. The criteria involve a male veteran who has transitioned from an overseas military assignment to a civilian job within the last 2 years. For qualified participants, an email with the informed consent document will be sent and they will be requested to set the interview date and time based on their convenience. The interview will either be in person or virtually via videoconferencing technology like Zoom or phone call. In addition, interview schedules will be designed to respect the time allocations of the participants and their duties without

any extra pressure. Each interview will last 60 minutes because this period is the most feasible for each participant to express their experiences in full dimension and also to avoid interview fatigue (Santhosh et al., 2021).

With the participant's permission, the researcher will record the interview process and also take detailed notes. Recordings and written note-taking will be labeled with pseudonyms to uphold the confidentiality of participants. The audio recording and the transcript will be stored in a password-protected computer that only the researcher can access to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participant's data. The written notes will also be kept in printed form in a locked filing cabinet. After the interview, the researcher will provide a debriefing and thank the participants for taking part in the study. The participant will be provided with the contact details of the researcher if any follow-up questions arise.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

This section will cover the issues of trustworthiness in the research including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for the study. Credibility refers to the truth value of the research findings (Stenfors et al., 2020). Transferability relates to the extent to which the results of the research could be applied or generalized to another setting (Nassaji, 2020). According to Stenfors et al. dependability refers to the justifiability of the research over time. According to Nassaji (2020), confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings well represent the characteristics of the respondents and not the opinions of the researcher. All measures that have been taken to

ensure the trustworthiness of the research based on each of the above elements will be elaborated.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in this research will be enhanced through implementing triangulation of data, member checks, and reflexivity in the process of research, this will ensure openness, and thus the information will be more reliable and trustworthy (Nassaji, 2020) Data will be triangulated to enhance credibility through the inclusion of primary data collected during participant interviews and the secondary data collected only from reports prepared by the Ohio Veteran Association facility with respect to the experience of the veterans as they seek to transition from service overseas into conventional service. Furthermore, credibility will be improved by checks through members that will include sharing the interview transcriptions, analytical themes, and conclusions with the participants to ask their views as to whether the presentations were accurate (Stenfors et al., 2020). The researcher will practice reflexivity by critical self-reflection on how their personal background and viewpoints are likely to influence varied phases of the research data analysis and interpretation.

### **Transferability**

Guarantees for the transferability of the research will be insured through an in-depth description and a variety of participant selections (Kaae & Traulsen, 2020). Thick descriptions will involve in-depth testimonies from veterans regarding their experiences after transitioning from foreign deployment in the military to working in the civilian workforce. According to Kaae and Traulsen, through giving detailed interviews, rich data

will be achieved on the setting and characteristics of events concerning the veterans then other researchers will be able to determine how the conclusions reached in this case of the presented veterans will be relevant to other events of military transition cases.

In relation to the samples of participants, purposive sampling will be employed to maximize representation that is diverse in the distribution of the various variables like branch of service, occupation, and length of service. This variability represents the demographic portion of the larger population of veterans adjusting from overseas deployments which enhances the transferability of the findings of the research. Also, detailed, methodological descriptions of the participant and setting of the research will make available knowledge to facilitate the transferability of the study findings. According to Kaae and Traulsen (2020), thick description and purposive selection of the participants will enhance the transferability of the results of the study.

### **Dependability**

An audit trail will be maintained very rigorously in the process of the study to record activities and decisions that might affect the dependability of findings (Nassaji, 2020). According to Nassaji (2020), this will be through the documentation of raw data that involves audio recording, interview transcripts, steps that will be done in the analysis and synthesis of data, keeping of process notes, and providing instrument development information. The audit trail may be checked by other individuals outside the study who may raise questions over the accuracy of findings and truth of the results hence ensuring the dependability of the results.

The researcher will also triangulate data to promote the dependability of the findings of the study (Stenfors et al., 2020). The primary data that will be collected during the semistructured interviews of the veterans will be augmented by secondary data that will be collected from reports at the Ohio Veteran Association facility. In such a way, it will be possible to cross-verify information and evaluate consistencies across different modes or sources of data generation. It strengthens the robustness of the findings over time. According to Stenfors, data triangulation together with maintaining an audit trail on the process of research, helps to establish dependability of the method of research and its interpretation. This affirms the findings and hence opens up chances for replication through similar participants in other alternative settings hence increasing the reliability of the proposed study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability in this research will be achieved through the researcher practicing reflexivity and through an audit trail. According to Jamie and Rathbone (2022), reflexivity aids in confirmability in that it becomes easier to reveal the theoretical and personal stance of the researcher thus eliminating biases. The researcher aims to provide findings that truly represent accounts of participants devoid of reflecting the researcher's personal inclinations by a scrutinized critique of how their own assumptions are related to the study. Keeping a reflexive process record also allows the verification of the reasoning with respect to methodologies and for the interpretations of results by other researchers (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). According to Lazard and McAvoy (2020), the use of reflexive methods further increases confirmability since it exposes how diverse efforts

are put in place to give an unbiased interpretation of the data compared to the perspective of the researcher. This also aids in objectivity in the research and attests that the results reflect the views of the respondents, devoid of bias or the possibility of the interests of the researcher.

The researcher will use an audit trail to compliment reflexivity to enhance confirmability. According to Nassaji (2020), the maintenance of an audit trail in detail assures other researchers how well the study has been conducted. This is achievable since an audit trail will be able to provide a systematic retracing of every step undertaken, which then points to the reasonableness of the study and the consistency with which the specific conclusions were reached (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). This is a signal that the findings can only be, in entirety, based on the collected data and not predisposed by the researcher.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The researcher will seek approval from the Walden University IRB before commencement. Interested participants will be recruited after the project has been approved by the IRB review board. The recruitment of interested parties will be carried out with the help of the Veteran Affairs Office in Dayton, Ohio. Through this office, the information regarding the study will be distributed to the veterans and the contact of the researcher will be given to all the interested parties. No data collection and analysis will take place before an official go-ahead from Walden University IRB. An informed consent form will be filled out by the participant, which shall detail the objective of the study and the contribution of the participant in this study, actions to be taken in case there are some

risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality, and right to withdraw from the study at any time (Bazzano et al., 2021). Participants will be required to sign the consent form before they can commence the interviews.

Data will be collected through an individual interview in a private video conference setting or through a face-to-face interview. Each participant will receive a unique pseudonym that will be devoid of any attribute that might lead to their identification in any summary of their interview. No recruitment documents will contain any forms of personal identification information. Data that may be used to disclose the identity of the research participants is only accessible to the lead researcher. Audio recordings and transcripts containing any participant-identifiable information will be kept in a password-protected computer. The physical consent forms and written notes will be filed separately and then locked in a filing cabinet. All the collected data will be maintained for the authorized duration of 5 years before a secure disposal process.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the qualitative phenomenological study of the experiences of veterans as they transition from military to civilian employment in the United States. In answering the clearly formulated research questions and objectives, the research strategy taken is a phenomenological qualitative method envisioned to explore the perceptions and experiences of the veterans. The chapter establishes the sample group and the participants who are the male veterans who have been repatriated from foreign military assignment relocation to their present civilian jobs within the past 2 years.

The chapter also emphasizes the utilization of semistructured interviews as the main approach for gathering data. In addition, the guidelines and instructions for interviews were developed and reviewed. The chapter establishes the ethics regulations that outline the protection of confidentiality and giving informed consent. The chapter outlines the details of how participants will be recruited, methods of data collection, and data analysis. It describes the use of thematic analysis and NVivo software in the data analysis process and generation of themes. This further sets a tone for the presentation of the study findings in Chapter 4 based on the themes that recur as derived from the encoding and the evaluation of interview information.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of veterans in the United States regarding employment retention after transitioning to civilian positions following their completion of overseas military assignments. I interviewed participants who described their civilian transition experiences as shaped by their overseas deployments or overseas assignments. They offered insight into how these experiences influence employment retention. Two research questions guided this study:

- RQ 1: What positive and negative experiences do veterans have transitioning into their new jobs?
- RQ 2: What are the contributing factors for job retention?

The focus was on how veterans transition from military service to serving overseas missions and then into stable and appropriate employment as civilians in the United States. In this chapter, I present the study setting, participant demographics, and the study procedures. The procedures for data collection and analysis are outlined prior to the discussion of strategies used to verify trustworthiness and the presentation of the study's results.

### **Research Setting**

The participants had completed at least one overseas tour prior to transitioning into civilian employment. Each had been employed in a civilian role for at least 1 year following their return from overseas. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and professional networking. Each participant selected a date and time that was

most convenient for their individual interview. All interviews were conducted in a single session. Data collection was facilitated through Microsoft Teams, which was selected for its secure platform, recording functionality, and built-in transcription capabilities. No personal or organizational factors were identified that influenced participants' experiences or affected the interpretation of the study's results at the time of data collection.

### **Demographics**

A total of 20 male veterans participated in the study. Of these, nine served in the U.S. Army, four in the U.S. Navy, four in the U.S. Air Force, and three in the Army National Guard. Three participants reported additional service in a secondary branch, including one in the U.S. Coast Guard and two in the Army National Guard. All participants had completed at least one overseas assignment prior to transitioning into civilian employment. Three participants had completed between 1 and 10 years of military service, seven had completed between 10 and 20 years, and 10 had served for more than 20 years. The youngest participant was 32 and the oldest was 72.

### **Data Collection**

Upon receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, I initiated the study by recruiting participants through Facebook and professional networking. To organize the scheduling process, I used Microsoft Teams to create calendar invitations, which allowed me to track participant contacts and their agreed-upon interview appointments. I sent out 25 initial invitations to 25 prior military members. All 25 potential participants responded positively and expressed willingness to participate in the study. I sent each of the 25

individuals a request to select a date and time that was most convenient for their interview. Of these, 20 participants confirmed a specific time for their session. Each of the 20 confirmed participants received a reminder 1 day prior to their scheduled interview to verify that the agreed-upon time remained convenient. Participants were instructed to indicate their consent by emailing the phrase “I Consent” upon agreeing to a date and time for their interview. I collected and filed all 20 consent emails prior to conducting the interviews. The overall process of recruiting participants and completing the interviews spanned approximately 6 weeks. All participants of the study were interviewed via Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes. I used Teams to audio-record all 20 participants. I interviewed each participant in a quiet room in my house so that others could not overhear our conversation.

Prior to each interview, participants provided verbal consent to be recorded, confirming their agreement at the start of the recording. Each interview began with participants sharing brief demographic and military service information, including total years of service, branch affiliation, and time spent deployed or overseas. A total of 12 structured questions were asked during each interview, with follow-up probes used as necessary to elicit additional detail. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to provide any further insights they deemed relevant. No deviations from the data collection procedures outlined in Chapter 3 occurred, and no unusual circumstances were encountered during the interviews.

## Data Analysis

Through the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) process, I moved from key participant statements to identify two primary themes that encapsulated the essence of the research questions. Each featured several subthemes and identified different experiences during the transition. Following the completion of 20 participant interviews, I utilized Microsoft Teams to access and review the recorded transcriptions. I engaged in repeated readings of each transcript to become fully immersed in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. Throughout the analysis, I highlighted words and phrases that occurred frequently among participants. I used Quirkos.com to identify themes between each participant. Table 1 displays the themes and subthemes for data analysis.

**Table 1**

*Themes and Subthemes for the Research Questions*

| Theme                        | Subtheme                             | Description   |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Transition Experiences (RQ1) | Military Skills Transfer             | Application of leadership and technical skills from military to civilian roles. |
|                              | Adjustment to Civilian Culture       | Adapting to less structured, less hierarchical environments.                    |
|                              | Mental Health and Emotional Impact   | Emotional challenges such as anxiety, depression, and loss of purpose.          |
|                              | Support Systems and Resources        | Importance of TAP, SkillBridge, VA programs, and family networks.               |
|                              | Expectations and Career Fit          | Misaligned or realistic expectations about pay, role, and meaning.              |
| Job Retention Factors (RQ2)  | Work Ethic and Discipline            | Persistence and reliability derived from military conditioning.                 |
|                              | Job Satisfaction and Work Conditions | Alignment of pay, mission, and work-life balance.                               |
|                              | Support Systems for Retention        | Family, peer, and organizational support that fosters stability.                |
|                              | Tenacity and Motivation              | Veterans' perseverance despite challenges or dissatisfaction.                   |
|                              | Organizational Understanding         | Employer flexibility, recognition, and inclusion of veterans' skills.           |

Once I populated the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, it was assessed that my themes show research data saturation. According to Rahimi (2024), saturation can be reached in data collection when no additional issues are identified and the data become repetitive and redundant, provided an adequate sample size is used. I utilized the counting of themes and codes that focus on transition experiences and job retention. This study consisted of a male veteran population; therefore, many of the subthemes focus on similar experiences in the context of veterans and their experiences. I determined I reached data saturation at 20 participants. After further analyzing the data in Microsoft Excel, I identified five subthemes related to the central theme. After the final review, I generated descriptions to describe the subthemes.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To increase trustworthiness, I offered each participant their transcripts. Additionally, I considered various perspectives to avoid making assumptions about participants' answers to the interview questions. I increased the trustworthiness of the study by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is established through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). These criteria are essential for ensuring the rigor, transparency, and integrity of the research process.

**Credibility**

Credibility was achieved through ongoing engagement with participants and the use of member checking to validate the accuracy of the interpreted data. After each interview, participants were provided the opportunity to review their transcribed responses to confirm that their experiences were accurately represented. This process enhanced the authenticity and reliability of the findings.

**Transferability**

Transferability was supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions of participants' backgrounds, including their branch of service, length of deployment, and experiences transitioning to civilian employment (Ahmed, 2024). These thorough accounts allow readers to determine the extent to which the findings may be applicable to other veteran populations and employment contexts.

**Dependability**

Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research process, including data collection, transcription, coding, and theme development. A comprehensive audit trail was kept to record research decisions and procedural changes, ensuring that the study could be replicated or reviewed for consistency (Ahmed, 2024).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability was established through a recording of the interview and debriefing, which allowed the researcher to examine personal biases and maintain objectivity throughout the study. These strategies ensured that the results accurately reflected the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's assumptions (Ahmed,

2024). Through these combined efforts, the study demonstrated rigor and upheld the standards of trustworthiness necessary for high-quality qualitative research. One potential bias self-identified was having prior knowledge and understanding of veterans and their experiences. To mitigate this bias, the interview questions were carefully developed to elicit participants' authentic observations and perspectives, ensuring that the data reflected their lived experiences rather than my assumptions. These strategies ensured that the findings accurately represented participants' voices and reinforced the overall credibility and integrity of the research (Ahmed, 2024). Through these combined efforts, the study maintained methodological rigor and upheld the standards of trustworthiness necessary for high-quality qualitative research.

### **Study Results**

In this section, the findings are presented as themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of veterans' interview data. The themes were developed based on the central focus of each research question, while the subthemes were identified through patterns and commonalities in participants' responses. To protect confidentiality, each veteran participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifier (e.g., V1-V20) instead of using their names or any other personally identifiable information. This approach ensured both anonymity and integrity in the presentation of the study's results.

The following sections are organized by research question and corresponding themes. Each theme captures a central aspect of veterans' experiences as they transition from overseas military deployment to civilian employment. Supporting quotations from participants are included to illustrate and validate each theme.

**Theme 1: Transition Experiences (RQ 1)**

The first major theme encompasses both the positive and negative aspects of veterans' experiences as they transitioned from military to civilian employment.

Participants described how their military background influenced their preparedness, the challenges they faced, and their perceptions of civilian work environments.

***Subtheme 1.1: Military Skills Transfer***

Participants reported that technical, leadership, and interpersonal skills acquired in the military facilitated their transition to civilian employment. Veterans who secured positions aligned with their military occupational specialties experienced smoother adaptation and greater satisfaction. V18 responded, "I went into the same kind of work I did in the Air Force, so the transition felt natural. My transition went smoother because my new job mirrored what I did overseas." V15 stated, "The Air Force trained me to handle pressure, and that helped me adapt fast." However, some veterans struggled to translate military experience into civilian terminology when preparing résumés or interviewing for positions. V19 expressed, "I had trouble putting my experience into civilian terms—they didn't understand what I actually did." Similarly, V5 said, "I knew how to lead a team, manage logistics, and meet missions—but I had no idea how to write that on a résumé."

***Subtheme 1.2: Adjustment to Civilian Culture***

Adapting to the less structured, less hierarchical nature of civilian workplaces posed a challenge for many participants. Veterans expressed difficulty adjusting to environments that lacked the mission-driven focus and camaraderie of military life.

Participants described cultural differences between the military and civilian sectors, including the slower decision-making and a lack of shared purpose. V2 noted, “People clock in and clock out. There’s no sense of mission.” V17 said, “It was strange not having a chain of command or that clear structure anymore. It’s hard when nobody gives you an order of the day—you have to figure it out yourself.” V19 responded, “In the civilian world, loyalty isn’t the same—you’re just an employee. The biggest shock was how little loyalty there was. In the military, your team has your back.” Participants emphasized that the absence of a unified purpose and team cohesion contributed to feelings of disconnection during the initial phase of employment. Yet, some found the change liberating, not having someone wake you up at 5 a.m. every day while deployed (V1).

### ***Subtheme 1.3: Mental Health and Emotional Impact***

Psychological and emotional adjustments emerged as a central concern during transition. Several veterans disclosed experiences with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, or depression, which affected their confidence and ability to adapt. Emotional readjustment, including anxiety, sleep disturbance, and loss of identity, emerged across interviews. V4 stated, “Talking to other vets who had been through it helped me realize I wasn’t the only one struggling.” V6 said, “The stress hit me months later—no uniform, no unit, no mission.” V14 noted, “I missed the sense of belonging. Civilian work felt lonely.” V16 responded, “I was screaming at night and had to seek counseling through the VA.”

Others described feelings of isolation and a diminished sense of purpose after leaving military service. Veterans emphasized the importance of mental health resources and counseling in supporting emotional stability throughout the transition process. Several highlighted that counseling or peer support was essential in this stage.

***Subtheme 1.4: Support Systems and Resources***

Structured support systems, such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), SkillBridge, and VA resources, played a critical role in successful reintegration. Participants also cited mentorship and family encouragement as essential for maintaining resilience. Formal programs and informal support systems played a major role in positive transitions. V9 noted, “SkillBridge opened doors. Without it, I’d have been lost.” V19 also mentioned, “Having mentors who had already transitioned helped me see what to expect. TAP gave me the basics, but networking with other officers got me my first real job” V20 expressed, “My wife was my biggest support system; she kept me grounded. My spouse and family kept me grounded when I started over.”

Those who actively utilized available programs or peer connections described greater confidence and preparedness entering civilian employment. However, others reported uneven access or quality of programs: “The TAP class felt outdated—nobody explained how to translate our experience to private-sector work” (V11).

***Subtheme 1.5: Expectations and Career Fit***

Veterans’ expectations regarding salary, status, and workplace culture significantly influenced their satisfaction. Some participants entered civilian employment, anticipating comparable pay or leadership roles, leading to initial frustration. V12 said, “I

thought I'd jump right into management. Instead, I started near entry level." V19 noted, "My coach told me I could make \$300,000 a year. Reality hit hard when I saw the real salaries." Conversely, participants who sought purpose-driven careers that mirrored the mission-oriented nature of military service reported higher fulfillment and stronger adjustment. V15 said, "Finding a job with a purpose, not just a paycheck, made all the difference."

## **Theme 2: Job Retention Factors (RQ 2)**

The second major theme identifies the key factors that influenced veterans' ability to sustain long-term employment. Participants emphasized the enduring impact of military values—discipline, perseverance, and loyalty—as well as the importance of supportive work environments and leadership recognition. This theme addresses the personal, relational, and organizational influences that contributed to sustained civilian employment.

### ***Subtheme 2.1: Work Ethic and Discipline***

Veterans consistently attributed their job stability to the discipline, accountability, and reliability instilled through military service. Across the sample, military discipline was a core factor in job retention. V8 stated, "You don't need to motivate veterans—they're already wired to finish the mission." V18 said, "No one has to push me to work—I show up early and stay late because that's how I was trained." V19 expressed, "Even when I didn't like the job, I stayed committed because quitting wasn't an option. I may not love the job, but I'll never quit on my team." This ingrained work ethic fostered resilience and dependability, traits often recognized and valued by civilian employers.

***Subtheme 2.2: Job Satisfaction and Work Conditions***

Job satisfaction was strongly associated with retention. Veterans reported that stable pay, supportive leadership, work-life balance, and opportunities for advancement contributed to sustained employment. V13 said, “Good leadership makes or breaks retention—simple as that.” V15 responded, “I stayed because the mission made sense to me.” V17 stated, “Having a set schedule and being home at night really helped me stick with the job. Being home with my family every night instead of deployed was worth everything” V18 noted, “When the mission matched my values, I was motivated to stay.” (V18). Veterans highlighted the significance of meaningful work that aligns with their personal values and sense of service. When satisfaction declined, burnout or misalignment led to turnover. V14 said, “COVID changed everything. I was working 80-hour weeks; I knew it was time to go.”

***Subtheme 2.3: Support Systems for Retention***

Emotional and social supports were essential to long-term career stability. Family encouragement, veteran-friendly workplaces, and peer connections helped veterans maintain motivation and commitment. Ongoing support from family, peers, and veteran-friendly workplaces increased retention. Organizations that lacked understanding of military culture saw higher frustration and attrition. V4 said, “My church and community kept me balanced.” V5 noted, “Working with other vets means I don’t have to explain myself all the time.” V16 stated, “My wife and church family helped me stay level-headed through everything.” V19 responded, “Working around other veterans made me feel like part of a team again.”

***Subtheme 2.4: Tenacity and Motivation***

Participants described perseverance as a defining factor in job retention. Many remained in roles out of loyalty to their teams or a desire to see projects succeed, even when faced with challenges. V10 noted, “It’s that sense of mission—we always finish what we start.” V15 responded, “I loved the job and the people. I loved my team too much to leave, even when the job got tough. That’s what kept me there for 19 years.” V19 stated, “Even when the franchise was failing, I poured in my own savings to keep it going. I’m not wired to give up. If something’s hard, I just push harder.” This intrinsic motivation reflects veterans’ deep-seated commitment to mission and service, even outside the military.

***Subtheme 2.5: Organizational Understanding***

Participants emphasized that successful retention depended not only on veterans’ attributes but also on employers’ understanding of military experience. When supervisors demonstrated flexibility, mentorship, and recognized veterans’ skills and value, retention improved. V16 said, “I wish more organizations trained managers on how to lead veterans.” V17 responded, “Having a supervisor who understood my experience made a huge difference. My supervisor was also a veteran; he understood when I needed time to adapt” V18 noted, “Companies that ‘get’ us keep us.” V19 mentioned, “Employers need to be flexible and realize the value of our leadership and teamwork.” Workplaces that cultivate inclusive cultures and recognize veterans’ strengths foster a greater sense of belonging and commitment.

## Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study, which revealed that veterans' transitions from military to civilian employment were influenced by both structural and emotional factors. Positive experiences included the ability to apply transferable skills, maintain discipline, and find purpose in new roles. Conversely, negative experiences stemmed from cultural dissonance, mental health challenges, and unmet career expectations.

Job retention was primarily associated with veterans' strong work ethic, family and organizational support, and alignment between personal values and workplace culture. When employers demonstrated understanding and appreciation of veterans' unique experiences, retention outcomes improved significantly.

Overall, the findings indicated that veterans' transition experiences are multifaceted, encompassing professional, cultural, and emotional dimensions. Facilitators of success included leadership and technical skill transfer, adaptability, and self-discipline, while challenges were linked to identity shifts, psychological adjustment, and the absence of structured civilian environments. With regard to job retention (RQ2), veterans sustained long-term employment through intrinsic motivation, perseverance, family and peer support, and workplaces that valued their military background. Across both research questions, a recurring theme was the enduring influence of military identity—its structure, loyalty, and sense of purpose—which continued to shape veterans' approaches to career adjustment and longevity.

All 20 participants provided valuable insight into their experiences transitioning from military service to civilian employment. These findings align with existing research on veteran reintegration, further contributing to the understanding of factors influencing post-service employment outcomes. Chapter 5 will present an interpretation of these findings, discuss the study's limitations, and offer recommendations for future research as well as implications for promoting positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 4 presented the findings from this phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of 20 U.S. military veterans transitioning from overseas service to civilian employment and the factors contributing to long-term job retention. Two central research questions guided this study:

- RQ 1: What positive and negative experiences do veterans have transitioning into their new jobs?
- RQ 2: What are the contributing factors for job retention?

The findings revealed two overarching themes—transition experiences and job retention factors—each supported by multiple subthemes that captured the complexity of veterans’ adjustment processes.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the findings through the lens of MTT (Schlossberg, 2011) and integrates them with the relevant literature. This discussion highlights how the veterans’ lived experiences correspond with the four domains of MTT—situation, self, support, and strategies—and expands on prior research examining post-service reintegration and employment retention (Ahmed, 2024; Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Keeling et al., 2019; Kintzle et al., 2018; Zogas, 2017). The chapter concludes with limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The study’s findings build on and extend the body of knowledge surrounding veteran transition and retention by revealing how veterans’ situational contexts, self-

concepts, support systems, and coping strategies interact to influence post-service adaptation. This study confirmed current research, such as Passmore's (2019) study, regarding the effects of mindful interventions, their applications to various populations, theoretical mechanisms, and practical implications, similar to other investigations. According to Passmore, MBIs contribute to improvements in mental and physical health, as well as cognitive and affective factors, and even interpersonal outcomes. Using MTT as a guiding framework, these results confirm that successful transitions rely not only on professional skills but also on psychological resilience, social support, and identity reconstruction (Schlossberg, 2011).

### **Transition Experiences (RQ 1)**

The first research question explored the positive and negative experiences that veterans encountered during their transition from military to civilian employment. These experiences reflected the Situation and Self domains of MTT, emphasizing contextual and personal factors that shape adaptation.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Military Skills Transfer***

Consistent with existing literature, this study found that the transfer of military-acquired skills—such as leadership, discipline, and adaptability—facilitated veterans' success in civilian roles (Ahmed, 2024; Jones, 2022). Participants who obtained jobs aligned with their military occupational specialties reported smoother transitions and greater satisfaction. However, several veterans faced challenges in translating their military experience into civilian terms, a finding that supports prior research indicating

that miscommunication of skills often hinders employment opportunities (Smith & Garcia, 2021).

### ***Subtheme 2: Adjustment to Civilian Culture***

Adjusting to a less hierarchical and mission-focused civilian environment was a major challenge. Veterans expressed discomfort with the perceived lack of structure, teamwork, and shared purpose. As Vago and Silbersweig's (2012) S-ART model of adaptation suggests, reestablishing one's sense of self and agency is central to post-military identity reconstruction. Participants who cultivated flexibility and patience reported more successful adjustments.

### ***Subtheme 3: Mental Health and Emotional Impact***

Emotional readjustment challenges were commonly cited, with several participants describing depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress symptoms following separation. This mirrors findings from Thompson (2020), who noted that unresolved psychological distress often hampers reintegration. Veterans who engaged in therapy or peer counseling reported more stable transitions, emphasizing the importance of accessible mental health resources.

### ***Subtheme 4: Support Systems and Resources***

Institutional and social supports were essential facilitators of successful transition. Participants highlighted the transition assistance program (TAP), SkillBridge, and VA resources as beneficial, though many indicated uneven quality or lack of customization. Family and peer support consistently emerged as stabilizing factors. This finding

reinforces prior studies (Kintzle et al., 2018; Zogas, 2017) emphasizing the protective role of social connectedness during reintegration.

#### ***Subtheme 5: Expectations and Career Fit***

Expectations surrounding salary, job responsibility, and professional identity strongly influenced veterans' satisfaction. Many experienced disillusionment when civilian roles failed to mirror the prestige or purpose of their military careers. However, participants who pursued purpose-driven work demonstrated higher motivation and fulfillment. These findings parallel Berglass and Harrell's (2012) assertion that alignment between personal values and career roles is crucial for long-term success.

#### **Job Retention Factors (RQ 2)**

The second research question explored the factors that contributed to sustained employment, corresponding with the Support and Strategies components of MTT. Veterans emphasized that discipline, resilience, loyalty, and purpose-driven engagement were essential to long-term success.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Work Ethic and Discipline***

Veterans consistently cited their military-instilled discipline, reliability, and accountability as key factors contributing to their retention. This aligns with Williams and Harper (2023), who identified perseverance as a distinguishing factor in veteran employee performance. The participants' consistent commitment to completing tasks despite challenges illustrated how military values transcend occupational boundaries.

***Subtheme 2: Job Satisfaction and Work Conditions***

Job satisfaction was linked to leadership quality, pay equity, and a sense of mission. Veterans tended to remain longer in organizations where they perceived respect, fair treatment, and alignment between their personal and organizational values.

Conversely, those encountering toxic leadership or excessive workload described burnout. These outcomes are consistent with organizational psychology findings that highlight the link between meaningful work and retention (Ahmed, 2024).

***Subtheme 3: Support Systems for Retention***

Support from family, coworkers, and veteran networks emerged as crucial in sustaining employment. Veterans employed in veteran-friendly organizations—where camaraderie and understanding of military culture existed—experienced less isolation and higher satisfaction. This aligns with the findings of Keeling et al. (2019), who demonstrated that peer mentorship enhances retention and morale.

***Subtheme 4: Tenacity and Motivation***

Participants frequently emphasized the importance of perseverance and intrinsic motivation in their ability to remain employed. Veterans equated their persistence in civilian roles with their sense of mission in service, demonstrating a continuity of purpose beyond uniformed duty. This psychological resilience aligns with Passmore's (2019) findings on mindfulness and adaptive persistence in professional transitions.

***Subtheme 5: Organizational Understanding***

Finally, veterans stressed the importance of employer awareness of military culture. Supervisors who acknowledged veterans' experience and offered mentorship

facilitated smoother integration and higher retention rates. Conversely, a lack of understanding or recognition led to dissatisfaction. This finding supports Ahmed's (2024) framework of trust-based organizational inclusion as essential for employee engagement.

### **Overall Interpretation**

The findings indicate that veterans' transitions are multidimensional, shaped by professional skills, psychological health, and social integration. While military-acquired competencies supported successful adaptation, emotional and identity challenges complicated the reintegration process. Veterans who found meaningful, purpose-driven civilian roles reported greater satisfaction and retention, reaffirming that purpose and belonging remain vital components of post-service identity. The enduring influence of military identity—its structure, loyalty, and sense of mission—continued to define how veterans approached civilian employment and career longevity. Veterans' experiences affirm MTT assertion that successful transitions depend on navigating the interplay among Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). The veterans in this study navigated these domains in complex, overlapping ways. Their situations (deployment history, service duration, and timing of separation) shaped readiness for transition. Their self-concept—rooted in discipline and leadership—remained a source of strength, yet also created tension in adapting to less structured environments. Support systems (both formal and informal) mediated these experiences, while adaptive strategies—persistence, reframing expectations, and seeking purpose—determined long-term success.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of 20 male veterans who volunteered to participate, which may not represent the broader veteran population. Participants were primarily located in the Midwest, limiting geographic diversity. Second, data collection relied on self-reported experiences, which may introduce recall or response bias. Third, while phenomenological inquiry provided deep insight into individual experiences, the findings are not generalizable to all veterans. Finally, as the researcher possessed prior military experience, reflexivity was necessary to mitigate potential bias; however, complete objectivity cannot be guaranteed.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings and limitations, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Expand demographic diversity:** Future studies should include a broader range of participants across different regions, branches, and post-service timeframes to capture diverse transition experiences.
2. **Longitudinal research:** Conducting longitudinal studies would provide insight into how veterans' perceptions and career outcomes evolve over time.
3. **Comparative studies:** Comparing veterans who participated in structured transition programs (e.g., TAP or SkillBridge) with those who did not could reveal program effectiveness.
4. **Employer perspectives:** Exploring civilian employers' attitudes toward hiring and retaining veterans could identify gaps in understanding and improve organizational practices.

5. Mental health integration: Further research should examine how access to counseling and peer support impacts employment stability and overall well-being among transitioning veterans.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The findings of this study hold significant implications for policy, organizations, and the broader community. Understanding veterans' transition experiences can guide employers, policymakers, and service organizations in developing veteran-centered employment programs that acknowledge both the strengths and challenges of post-service reintegration. Employers can foster more inclusive workplaces by offering mentorship, leadership development, and flexibility tailored to the unique needs of veterans. Policymakers may consider expanding transition programs to include training on emotional readiness and career alignment. It is important to advocate for enhanced federal and state-level funding for transition programs emphasizing mental health, career alignment, and long-term follow-up. Policies could incentivize employers to adopt veteran mentorship and leadership development initiatives. Additionally, mental health support should be integrated into career services to promote long-term well-being and retention. Employers can implement structured onboarding and mentorship programs that bridge cultural gaps and promote inclusion. Training human resources personnel in military cultural competency can enhance understanding and retention of veteran employees. Colleges and training institutions can collaborate with veteran organizations to design workforce programs tailored to veterans' transferable skills. Community partnerships can strengthen peer support networks and mental health outreach.

Facilitating successful transitions contributes to broader social stability by reducing veteran unemployment, homelessness, and mental health crises. Empowering veterans to thrive in civilian careers affirms their continued value to society. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to positive social change by facilitating smoother transitions, reducing unemployment and underemployment among veterans, and honoring their continued contributions to society through meaningful civilian careers.

### **Conclusions**

Chapter 5 provided an interpretation of the findings, highlighting the multifaceted nature of veterans' transitions and the factors influencing long-term job retention. The results demonstrated that military-acquired discipline, adaptability, and leadership skills are essential strengths that aid adjustment. However, challenges related to identity, culture, and mental health require ongoing support. Recommendations for future research emphasize expanding participant diversity, including employer perspectives, and integrating mental health support in employment transition services. The study's implications underscore the need for collaborative efforts among government agencies, organizations, and communities to enhance veterans' reintegration and promote sustainable employment outcomes.

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of U.S. military veterans transitioning from overseas military service to civilian employment and identified the factors that contribute to long-term job retention. The results illuminated the complex interplay between veterans' professional competencies, emotional adjustment, and cultural adaptation as they navigated civilian workplaces. The findings

revealed that the transition process is deeply influenced by veterans' ingrained sense of structure, mission, and loyalty—core elements of military identity that persist well beyond active duty. Positive aspects of the transition included the application of transferable skills, strong discipline, and leadership capabilities, which enabled many veterans to succeed in their new environments. However, the transition was also marked by challenges such as cultural dissonance, difficulties translating military experience into civilian language, and emotional strain associated with identity shifts and mental health concerns.

Job retention was found to be closely tied to veterans' intrinsic motivation, discipline, and resilience—attributes strengthened by military training. Veterans who experienced supportive family structures, peer networks, and veteran-friendly workplaces demonstrated higher levels of satisfaction and long-term employment stability. Importantly, when employers recognized and valued military experience, veterans reported stronger commitment and a greater sense of belonging. Collectively, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how structural and emotional factors shape veterans' transitions and retention outcomes. The study emphasizes the need for holistic transition programs that address not only career readiness but also mental health, identity reconstruction, and community integration.

The implications of this research extend to multiple sectors. For practitioners, the findings encourage the development of mentoring and training programs tailored to veterans' strengths. For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of expanding transition initiatives such as the TAP and SkillBridge to include post-employment follow-

up and mental health support. For researchers, the results underscore the need to further examine long-term adaptation and organizational practices that sustain veteran success in the civilian workforce.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms that the transition from military to civilian life is not a singular event but an ongoing process of reintegration, identity negotiation, and personal growth. Veterans possess invaluable skills and perspectives that can enhance civilian organizations when appropriately recognized and supported. By fostering environments that honor veterans' experiences, both employers and communities can promote positive social change, bridge cultural divides, and empower those who have served to thrive in their post-military careers.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol and Guide

### **Introduction**

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand veterans' experiences as they transition from overseas military deployment to civilian employment. Your insights will help provide valuable information about the challenges of this transition and the factors that influence job retention. Before we begin, I would like to highlight a few points:

- Your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time.
- All information will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of real names and other identifying details.
- With your permission, I would like to audio record our conversation to ensure accurate capturing of information. The recording will only be accessed by the researcher.
- The interview should take approximately 60 minutes. Please feel free to elaborate on your responses as much as you're comfortable.

Do you have any other questions before we get started?

### Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your military experience and deployment(s)?
2. What made you choose civilian employment after your deployment?
3. What was your experience like as you transitioned from military to civilian employment?
4. What challenges, if any, did you face during this transition period?
5. What resources or support systems helped you during your job search and early employment?
6. What factors do you think contributed to your ability to maintain your civilian job over the past 2 years?
7. What factors do you think might make it difficult for other veterans to maintain long-term civilian employment?
8. How, if at all, did your military experience help or hinder your transition to civilian employment?
9. What recommendations would you have for organizations supporting veteran job placement and retention?
10. What advice would you give to other veterans who are currently transitioning from military to civilian employment?
11. If you could change one thing about the transition process, what would it be and why?
12. Is there anything else you think would be important for me to understand about your transition experience?

**Closing Remarks**

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me today. Please feel free to contact me if you have any other thoughts or questions.