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Exploring Critical Success Factors of the Redesigned Military Transitioning Program

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Troy State University, 1993

BS, Benedict College, 1986

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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Abstract

A task force commissioned by President Obama overhauled the U.S. Military Transitioning Program (MTP) in 2012-2013. U.S. veterans have continued to struggle with military transitions following the MTP restructuring. The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the critical success factors of the MTP after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region. The problem studied was that there was no indication that the redesigned MTP was effective in helping officers transition to the civilian workforce. The study included 3 research questions and semistructured interviews were the primary means to collect data. Schlossberg's 4S transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory comprised the conceptual framework. Data analysis included content analysis and the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method. The findings in this study emphasized the importance of several critical success factors of the redesigned MTP: its focus on transition preparedness, its practical applications, individual counseling, and the knowledge and education obtained while attending the MTP. Senior leaders responsible for the MTP can benefit from this study by understanding the challenges the participants encountered while attending the MTP. Implications for social change include informing U.S. government leaders of the MTP of the need for continued improvements to MTP processes, services, and programs to aid transitioning veterans seeking civilian employment.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends. My family and friends were with me from the beginning of this doctoral journey to its very end, which required a tremendous amount of time, commitment, dedication, sacrifice, and prayers to accomplish. I specifically dedicate it to my mom, Sarah Jane, who made the ultimate sacrifice when she took me to college and obligated funds she did not have at the time in 1982 and enrolled me. I dedicate the completion of this dissertation to you. To my family, I extend a special thank you for your encouragement, thoughts, and prayers. To my dearest friends who said they were proud of me or that I could accomplish this or any goal: I thank you so much for your support and words of encouragement. I have been truly blessed with family and friends who only wanted the best for me, and it was through their encouragement, prayers, and faith that I was able to accomplish this goal. And, finally, we accomplish all things through God. I prayed to God often that this would be a successful journey and my prayers were answered.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Changes to the Military Transitioning Program (MTP) in the United States in recent years have been significant. For instance, the MTP underwent a major restructure in 2012, and a major component of its redesign was the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS) program (U.S. Department of Defense [DoD] TAP, 2014c). In this study, the term MTP refers to the TAP, and the terms veteran and military service member are interchangeable. The restructured MTP is the result of an effort to improve the transitioning efforts of separating and retiring veterans who seek civilian employment after the military. This study involved exploring the perceptions of Transition GPS from the perspective of the military officers studied.

The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain whether changes made to the restructured transitioning program aided military officers with their transition to the civilian workforce. The study was designed to provide an awareness of the current transitioning strategies that may aid thousands of veterans who are still seeking employment. The results of this study provide information that is beneficial to veterans who are transitioning to the civilian sector, thereby potentially narrowing the gap between military organizations and corporate organizations. The results of this study is intended to inform senior leadership responsible for MTPs of the findings to aid in the continued refinement of processes and services, so that improvements to the program benefit retired veterans seeking civilian employment.

Major sections that follow in Chapter 1 include the background of the study, which includes a discussion on the redesigned MTP, a review of the problem statement

and purpose of this study, and the research questions used to guide the study. The

conceptual framework comprises Schlossberg's 4 S theory, identity theory, and work-role

transition theory. Lastly, the chapter includes a description of the nature, assumptions,

limitations, and significance of the study.

Background of the Study

After U.S. military service members retire, veterans interested in pursuing

employment after transitioning enter a civilian job market that is significantly different

from the military's structured organizational environment. King (2011) stated that

military service members severely underestimate the vast changes that occur as a result of

transitioning from the military, which involves considerably more than a change in

occupation. While in transition from the military, veterans need to identify prospects and

seek employment differently in the civilian sector (King, 2011). They need to network,

build and submit resumes, attend job fairs, interviews, and compete for available jobs in a

competitive market alongside other transitioning military personnel. Additionally,

cultural differences exist between military and private organizations, and the MTP has

historically not adequately prepared veterans for the differences they encounter during a

civilian job search or while employed in the civilian sector (Morin, 2011). These cultural

differences are not unique to any one military department, nor are the challenges of the

phenomenon of military transitioning peculiar to any one military department (King,

2011).

Military transitioning, the central phenomenon that was the focus of this study,

occurs among each branch of the U.S. military services: the Army, Navy, Marines, and

Air Force. This study did not include Coast Guard members in its scope; even though the U.S. Coast Guard is a branch of the military during wartime or as directed by the president of the United States, it operates substantially differently from the other branches and was thus excluded. Different offices of the four military services under study facilitate the MTP, each with different names. Military services transitioning offices are located in:

- the Airmen and Family Readiness Center (Air Force),

- the Army Career and Alumni Program (Army),

- the Command Career Counselor at the Fleet and Family Support Center (Navy), and

- the Career Resource Management Center/Transition and Employment Assistance Program Center (Marine Corps; Farley, 2010).

Researchers at Prudential Financial (2012) noted that not all veterans receive transition support and that the veterans who attended transitioning programs had mixed experiences of the MTP. For example, 66% of veterans acknowledged that they obtained support or training for transitioning to the civilian workforce, and 33% stated that did not receive any training (Prudential Financial, 2012). Only 24% indicated that their chain of command (leaders) prepared them for postseparation employment, and four out of 10 individuals indicated that they received encouragement to use their installation's educational resources (Prudential Financial, 2012). This dissertation study was designed

in part to determine whether or not the redesigned MTP was a more viable resource to transitioning veterans and more beneficial to their posttransitioning efforts.

Several studies have criticized the MTP. Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, and Bailie (2014) contended that the MTP was not effective, and unemployment among veterans was continuously high. Faurer et al. also indicated that a redesign of the MTP was directed by President Obama while he visited the Washington Navy Yard, District of Columbia, in August 2011. Although top management at the DoD and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) led the efforts on the redesign of the MTP, the redesigned program was a collaboration among several organizations: U.S. Department of Labor (DoL), DVA, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Small Business Administration, and U.S. Office of Personnel Management (Faurer et al., 2014).

For the purposes of this study, I defined military officers in military transition as including those in the process of transitioning or retiring from U.S. active duty military service who were within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from military service. This period corresponds to military veterans who were still trying to bridge the gap of career transition from the military to the private sector and found employment after retirement to be a significant challenge (Prudential Financial, 2012).

For military service members in transition, the redesigned program provides an opportunity for veterans to use resources and services that should help with their reintegration. The objectives of the restructured program are to:

- adopt career readiness standards (CRSs) for transitioning service members,

- implement a redesigned transitioning program curriculum (Transition GPS),

- implement a capstone event, and

- implement a military life cycle transition (MLCT) model (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012).

The restructured program was designed to comply with the Veterans Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act of 2011, which mandated that all service members discharged or released from active duty having served 180 continuous days on active duty under Title 10, U.S.C. would participate in preseparation counseling, DVA briefings, and the DoL employment workshop (DoL, 2014b). The redesigned MTP represents an effort to prepare the thousands of veterans still seeking employment opportunities after the military as a result of military downsizing and fewer military forces deployed worldwide. Because no previous studies have assessed the revised MTP's effectiveness, this study was designed to address this research gap and whether or not the MTP has aided veterans to transition successfully to the civilian sector since its redesign.

Problem Statement

U.S. military service members experience significant challenges as they transition from the military and seek employment in the civilian sector. After serving 20 or more years on active duty, a successful transition at the midlife stage to a new job or career is often sought by veterans for financial, personal, or professional reasons. The legacy MTP (1990s–2011) provided veterans with tools such as resume writing and job search skills, but many participating veterans still struggled and were frequently underprepared to transition successfully to the civilian workforce (Abrams, Faulkner, & Nierenberg, 2013;

Baruch & Quick, 2009; King, 2011; Prudential Financial, 2012; Veterans Enterprise, 2013).

As of March 2013, more than 750,000 U.S. veterans were without jobs and seeking work, including 207,000 post-September 11 veterans (White House, 2014d). This number is likely to significantly increase as the drawdown continues in Afghanistan and more military personnel transition over the next few years (White House, 2014d). In testimony before Congress in November 2012, John Moran, deputy assistant secretary for Veterans' Employment & Training Service (VETS), mentioned that more than 1.5 million veterans, or about 300,000 veterans per year, were likely to separate from the military between 2012 and 2017 (DoL, 2014b). Moran further declared that it would be challenging for the current civilian workforce system to meet the increased employment demands of these veterans (DoL, 2014b). These factors suggest that an increased emphasis on strategies aimed at helping veterans in their transition is especially beneficial.

Researchers have conducted studies in which veterans expressed concerns about postmilitary transition (Herasingh, 2014; King, 2011; McAllister, Mackey, Hackney, & Perrewe, 2015; Moton, 2014; Prudential Financial, 2012). The finding of a study conducted by researchers at Prudential Financial (2012) that involved surveying more than 2,400 veterans was that veterans worried about finding employment in a posttransition environment. For instance, significant percentages of veterans have expressed concerns about finding a meaningful job (80%), how their military skills translated to the civilian sector (58%), and cultural barriers (45%) in the civilian sector

(Prudential Financial, 2012). King (2011) contended that veterans seek employment in a competitive civilian environment that is vastly different from the hierarchical organizational structure of the military. This added transition difficulty is increased when military veterans try to bridge the gap of career transition to the civilian sector during a tough economic and uncertain organizational climate (Faurer et al., 2014; Robertson, 2013).

The redesigned MTP emphasizes improving the career readiness of service members at separation or retirement (DoD TAP, 2014c). Referred to as reverse boot camp, the goal of the Transition GPS program is to improve the transitioning efforts of separating and retiring veterans who seek civilian employment after the military (Ruiz, 2012). The redesigned MTP includes an increase from 3 to 5 workshop days and focused modules related to financial planning and employment after the military, including optional days for veterans to talk with counselors and experts (Ruiz, 2012). Since its full implementation in December 2013, a formal evaluation of the redesigned MTP from the perspective of military officers had not taken place prior to this study (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Gaiter, 2015; Robertson & Brott, 2014).

I conducted this study to discover U.S. military officers' perceptions of the critical success factors in order to ascertain which changes might aid in the refinement of the MTP for transitioning military personnel. The specific problem investigated by this study was that there was no indication that the redesigned MTP had been effective in helping U.S. military officers' transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Military transitioning generally refers to the process of retiring or transitioning from the military

and in this study included only military officers within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from military service. This study contributes to social change by providing an awareness of perceived critical success factors and military officers' experiences regarding assistance from MTPs in their transition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the critical success factors of the MTP after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region (NCR). I specifically requested that the participants describe their perceptions of critical success factors of the MTP since the implementation of the DoD Transition GPS program. The intended goal of this study was to ascertain whether or not the restructured transitioning program aided military officers' successful transition to the civilian sector.

There are several major research gaps related to U.S. veterans' reentry into the civilian workforce. Several researchers have explored the transitioning experiences of veterans with service-connected disabilities (Koenig et al., 2014; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011) and veterans making the transition to higher education (Furtek, 2012; Jones, 2013; Kirchner, Coryell, & Biniecki, 2014). However, at the time of this study, research was lacking in the area of examining career transition from the perspective of how the redesigned MTP has helped service members successfully transition to the civilian workforce (Faurer et al., 2014). Faurer et al. (2014) emphasized that the impending drawdown of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and a $1.05 trillion reduced budget over 10 years to align with a postwar military environment will cause a significant reduction in

force of active duty military personnel from the military services, making it timely and important to address this research gap. Although the improvements made to the MTP were vast, Faurer et al. (2014) underlined the need for further refinement of the program to ensure the redesigned program achieves its intended goals of helping veterans to transition to civilian life successfully. I conducted this phenomenological study to gain insights from U.S. military officers with lived experiences of military transitioning to discover how the restructured MTP aided them in their transition to the civilian sector.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

In this study, I explored how U.S. military officers in the NCR described their military transitioning experience after the restructuring of the MTP. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of the participants under study. Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers use the phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of participants who shared an experience as well as capture a description of that experience. I used this to understand the experiences of the 20 military officers who participated in the study. The following research questions were used to guide my exploration of the phenomenon of military transitioning to gain a perspective or meaning of the participants' experience.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of U.S. military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region?

RQ2: What do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

RQ3: What do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in this study consisted of three theories: Schlossberg's 4S theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory. Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transition theories served as the conceptual lens to examine career transition at different stages occurring over time. Schlossberg's transition model addresses work transitions, and researchers have used it extensively in research related to transitioning (Johnston, Fletcher, Ginn, & Stein, 2010; Robertson & Brott, 2013; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Schlossberg (2011) noted that retirement transition is an anticipated change that occurs at some stage in a person's life, which is why it is important to understand the impact of transition on people's lives.

Schlossberg's 4S theory describes four variables: (a) *situation*, referring to what was happening at the time of transition; (b) *self*, referring to whom it was happening to at the time of transition; (c) *support*, referring to what help was available; and (d) *strategies*, referring to how the person copes (Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). I used the *situation* to provide an assessment of what was happening from the military officers' perspective as they made the decision to transition from the military or

transitioned to the civilian sector. I used the *self* to provide an assessment of the

participants' outlook of their self and sense of purpose as they related to transitioning. I

used the *support* to provide information on available resources (people, processes,

documents, and so on) that contribute to the perceived success of the restructured MTP.

Finally, I used the *strategies* to consider the changes to the situation and to change the

meaning of the situation, that is, looking at the changes to the MTP and determining what

improvements to the MTP were necessary since its restructure. Consequently, this

framework served as a structure to analyze military officers' lived experiences of

transitioning from the military to the civilian sector since the redesign of the MTP.

The identity theories (social, role, and organizational) provided context to discuss

how individuals identify with self, group, or organization as well as connect with their

professional roles. Tajfel (1981) contended that in social identity theory, individuals

identify with a certain social category or group within an organization. In this context, the

basis of military service members' social identity is their military career as they adapt and

adjust to norms, customs, and life in the military. Stryker (1987) espoused that role

identity theory develops as a result of individuals' occupation of a particular role, such as

the role veterans occupy as part of a military organization. Foote (1951) and Brown

(1969) theorized that with organizational identity theory, a relationship forms between

the individual and the organization. As such, individuals share similar goals, display

loyalty, and view themselves in relation to the organization (Griepentrog, Harold, Holtz,

Klimoski, & Marsh, 2012). The relationship to the components of identity theory

translates to the work-role adjustment that veterans need to make as they change jobs after serving in the military.

The theory of work-role transition was suitable to frame the discussion of military transition. Nicholson (1984) reasoned that work-role transition is a change in job status that includes key changes in job content. As veterans leave the military to begin a new career, they need to make work-role adjustments from their prior military role to prepare for a new career in the civilian sector (Nicholson, 1984). As military service members transition from the military, they leave a military-centric work environment that they identify with and join an environment that requires adjustments in terms of roles, routines, and organizational culture. The three theories that related to the research questions served as a lens to understand some of the challenges the veterans encountered as they transitioned to the civilian workforce. A more thorough explanation of the theories that framed this study appears in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

Phenomenological research was the selected design for the study because of my interest in obtaining an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences of military transition. Patton (2015) contended that phenomenology captures and describes how individuals experience a phenomenon, which includes their perceptions, feelings, and sense making of the phenomenon. In choosing phenomenology, my objective was to select the most appropriate design, and the phenomenological design involved using descriptive (Husserl, 2014) and interpretive (Heidegger, 2010) or hermeneutic analyses. As noted by van Manen (2014), the term phenomenology is synonymous with

hermeneutic or interpretive-descriptive phenomenology (p. 26). Therefore, I conducted hermeneutic phenomenology to capture the individuality of the participants' military transitioning experience of the redesigned MTP.

The other phenomenological methods considered were heuristic, transcendental, existential, and empirical, but they were not suitable for this study. For instance, heuristic phenomenology involves obtaining an autobiographic description of the researcher and the research participants (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (2009) noted that transcendental phenomenology is not a human consciousness, but a "pure, essential consciousness" (p. 88). For reasons such as the examples provided, hermeneutic or descriptive and interpretive inquiry were the methods selected that aligned best with this study.

The central phenomenon of the study was military transitioning. The primary focus of the study was to describe military officers' transitioning challenges and successes and to document their perspectives of the redesigned transitioning program to discover trends and themes during data analysis. The study included military officers who had experienced the phenomenon of military transitioning. The qualitative, phenomenological inquiry involved semistructured interviews to document military officers' lived experiences of military transition. Asking open-ended questions, observing military officers' behavior, and reviewing documentation, I was able to capture the participants' shared experiences with the phenomenon.

As noted by Patton (2015) a unit of analysis (i.e., individual, group, and so on) is necessary in a study; military officers were the unit of analysis in this study. The data collected were from military officers while they were in their natural setting. As the

research instrument of this study, I collected data using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). The military officers responded to interview questions in an interview protocol designed to answer the research questions.

The sample for this study consisted of 20 military officers that included 10 males and 10 females. Six military officers were within 6 months or less of transition and 14 military officers had transitioned or retired from the military. Using purposeful sampling, I recruited military officers from a population in the NCR through networking, LinkedIn, and job fairs to provide rich descriptions of their experiences with military transition.

The sampling criteria for the military officers were as follows: (a) within 6 months of retirement to within 1 year posttransition from the military services, (b) transitioned through the redesigned MTP after December 2013, and (c) a military officer with at least 20 years of active duty service. The interview with the participants was face-to-face at the participant's location or at a location mutually determined by the participant and me. Coding, identifying themes, and interpreting data were part of the data analysis procedures. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo, aided in organizing the data and in the data analysis.

Several qualitative research designs underwent review and consideration for this study, including narrative inquiry, ethnographic research, grounded theory, and case study research, but phenomenology research emerged as the best approach to answer the research questions. The primary focus of narrative inquiry is to explore and document an individual's life story and reporting the story in narrative form (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Ethnographic research involves studying the behavior of a group whose members share a common culture over time (Simon & Goes, 2013).

In grounded theory, the aim is to derive a theory of a process or action after immersing oneself in the data (Patton, 2015). Case study research generally involves exploring a bounded system and understanding what occurred using multiple data collection techniques over time (Patton, 2015, p. 259). Phenomenological research was the inquiry of choice because of my interest in exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of military transitioning from military officers' perspective. The next section includes the definitions of key terms used in the study.

Definitions

Active duty: Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States (Cornell University Law School, 2014).

Discharged: A complete severance from all military status gained by the enlistment or induction concerned (Hill, Lawhorne-Scott, & Philpott, 2013).

Military departments: In the context of this study, the U.S. Department of the Army, the U.S. Department of the Navy, and the U.S. Department of the Air Force (Cornell University Law School, 2014).

Military transition: The transition process of veterans who are about to retire or retired from the military and plan to seek employment as a civilian.

Military transitioning program: In the context of this study, this term is used to refer synonymously to the Transition Assistance Program.

Military veteran: A man or woman who served but is currently not serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Pretransition: The transition stage of retiring military officers who are within 6 months of retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR.

Posttransition: The transition stage of retired military officers who are within 1-year postretirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR.

Retired military: Military service members who served 20 or more years on active duty and retired from active duty military service (Hill et al., 2013).

Separating: Being discharged or released from active duty (Hill et al., 2013).

Transitioning: A major event that happens in one's life such as a job or career change (e.g., retirement; Schlossberg, 2011).

Transition Assistance Program (TAP): A program established by Congress in the 1990s to assist veterans during their transition from military to civilian life by offering services such as job-search assistance (Library of Congress, 2014).

Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS): The redesigned transitioning program for separating and retiring U.S. military service members. Transition GPS consist of a 5-day series of training sessions and workshops, including a 3-day Department of Labor employment workshop (DoD TAP, 2014c).

Transition services refer to preseparation counseling, a Department of Labor employment workshop, a Department of Veterans Affairs benefits briefing, and a

Department of Veterans Affairs Disabled Transition Assistance Program (Hill et al., 2013).

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD): An executive branch department of the U.S. federal government that provides the military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of the United States (DoD, 2015).

U.S. Department of Labor (DoL): A U.S. federal government agency charged with preparing the U.S. workforce for new and better jobs and that has responsibility for the employment workshop for transitioning veterans (DoL, 2015).

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA): A U.S. federal government agency whose personnel administer a variety of benefits and services that provide financial and other forms of assistance to service members, veterans, and their dependents and survivors (DVA, 2015).

Assumptions

This study included several assumptions. Simon and Goes (2013) noted that assumptions are entities, details, or situations that are potentially beyond a researcher's control, but if they cease to exist, the study's relevancy would be in question. Based on my experience as a retired military officer who transitioned through the legacy MTP, I assumed that the participants were willing to share their transitioning experience of the redesigned program. Additionally, I assumed that military transitioning was a topic of interest to the military volunteers of this study. That being the case, I assumed that the participants recruited met the criteria of this study, had explicit knowledge of the subject, and would answer the interview questions honestly and truthfully with regard to their

transitioning experiences. I asked the participants to be honest and truthful in their response and assured them that their responses would remain confidential and that the transcripts would remain secure in a controlled environment, such as a locked file cabinet, and destroyed after a period of 5 years after publication of the dissertation.

In addition, participants volunteered to participate in the study. The second assumption was that the participants in the study would comprise a representative sample of males and females, that is, 10 males and 10 females. Participant selection occurred through a purposeful and criterion sampling of individuals who had experienced the phenomenon of military transitioning. I purposely sampled military officers through various means, such as through networking, LinkedIn, or job fairs. Because this research was qualitative, the assumptions, viewed through a subjective lens, was from the perspective of the study participants. The next section includes the scope and delimitations of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

I selected the methodology and conceptual framework for this study. Simon and Goes (2013) noted that delimitations result from specific choices made by a researcher. The delimitations of a study refer to the confines, scope, and boundaries of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). The scope of the phenomenological research consisted of semistructured interviews with retired and retiring military officers residing in the NCR. The inclusion criteria were retired and retiring military officers rather than veterans who separated from military service. The study also involved researching a purposeful sample of 20 individuals, seven females and 13 males, who experienced military transitioning

within the NCR, which includes counties in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Maryland according to the National Capital Planning Act of 1952 (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2014). The representative sample of veterans comprised the ranks of major to general officer who shared the common experience of transitioning from an MTP.

The conceptual framework consisted of the 4S transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory. This framework related to the study, was appropriate for this research, provided context for the study, and aligned with the purpose and the goals of this research. The findings are not transferable to all MTPs. I used rich descriptive data and variation in participant selection so the readers can make judgments on the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A review of the literature identified challenges that military service members encounter as they transition from the military.

The narrow focus of the research was on discovering U.S. military officers' perceptions of critical success factors related to their military transitioning experiences so that the findings might aid in the MTPs' continued enhancement. The decision to concentrate on participants within the NCR was due to convenience, as I reside within the NCR. Another reason for selecting the NCR was that all the branches of the military are in this geographical area, and a large population of veterans' transition and begin their second career in the NCR. The delimitation to interview only military officers who had transitioned through the redesigned MTP was an attempt to isolate the study from existing studies dealing with transitioning veterans with disabilities or veterans who transitioned to an institution of higher learning.

Limitations

This section includes the limitations of the study, that is, the potential weaknesses of the study. As a part of this qualitative research, I conducted interviews to explore the lived experiences of military officers' transition through the MTP and retiring from active duty service. Therefore, the study is not generalizable to a larger population of military retirees. Results from the study apply only to those military officers who transitioned through the redesigned program in the NCR. The sample size for the study was 20 military officers. During data collection, all the participants recruited for the study may have chosen not to participate, which would have resulted in a smaller sample that was beyond the researcher's control. I retired from the military and I brought my personal experiences and biases of the transitioning process to the study; however, being aware of my bias and of how to mitigate it was necessary in this study. The study included several validation strategies to limit potential weaknesses.

Validation techniques such as member checks, researcher bias, and peer review helped to ensure trustworthiness in the research. For example, during member checking, I sent the participants a copy of their transcribed interview and asked them to verify that the responses provided were accurate and not a misrepresentation of their intended meaning. My subjectivity or bias was a threat to the validity of the study, as I had prior experience with military transitioning (Maxwell, 2013). Clarifying my bias at the beginning of the study provided context for my beliefs and perceptions of this topic.

Transferability and dependability are also two areas that I addressed in the study. In qualitative research, transferability refers to whether the findings are transferable to a

different context while retaining the meaning of the completed study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To control for this limitation, I obtained rich descriptions, research methods, and descriptive details such as direct quotes from the participants. Further, dependability or reliability was necessary for credibility and validity in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail and triangulation were two strategies used to establish dependability. I used NVivo to assist with the audit trail. Triangulation or cross-checking data through different sources and methods helped to validate findings (Maxwell, 2013). The validation strategies or techniques used aided in the validation and reliability of the qualitative study.

Significance of the Study

The discussion of the significance of the study includes terms significant to practice, theory, and social change. The significance to practice refers to how the study contributes to advancing practice or policy. The significance to theory identifies the potential contributions of the study that advance knowledge in the management discipline. The significance to social change describes potential implications for positive social change. The following section includes an explanation of the significance of the study to practice.

Significance to Practice

The practical significance of this study was the potential to provide information to separating and retiring military personnel, military transitioning locations, and other organizations about the participants' perceptions of the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP. The primary reason for conducting the study was to explore and

document U.S. military officers' experiences of the MTP in helping them transition from the military to the civilian workforce. This study holds significant implications for transition counselors who work with transitioning veterans at the MTPs. For instance, results of this study is valuable for transition counselors as they help veterans gauge their emotional and practical readiness to career transition, such as preretirement planning and loss of military community (Robertson & Brott, 2013).

The study findings also provides critical insights from the perspective of the participants regarding how DoD leaders can continue to improve the MTP since its restructuring to help veterans reintegrate into the civilian labor force (McAllister et al., 2015). For instance, the participants believed that the MTP should have a seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences, more emphasis on networking, and targeted classes prior to transitioning. Hence, the findings are beneficial for DoD, DVA, and DoL senior leaders who are sponsors of the MTPs as they continue to refine and strengthen this program for all retiring veterans. Further, the study contributes to the literature on military transitioning for the academic community and to the readers of the study.

Significance to Theory

The problem under study was that the MTP was ineffective in aiding retiring service members in a successful transition from the military to the civilian sector. This research contributes to the body of knowledge needed to address the phenomenon of military transition by examining and describing the perceptions of military officers concerning their lived experiences of transitioning after the restructure of the MTP. The study contributes to the empirical literature related to transition theory, identity theory,

and work-role transition theory and its significance to veterans in career transition. The significance of the 4S transition theory to this study was that military transition is a complex event that requires scholars and practitioners to have a greater understanding of how these factors contribute to veterans' successful career transition.

More research in the area of identity strain or job stress and how it affects veterans as they transition to the civilian workforce would be a benefit to transition counselors and scholars conducting future research in this area (McAllister et al., 2015). Donaldson, Earl, and Muratore (2010) noted that current research on retirement adjustment should extend beyond health, wealth, and retirement planning. In this context, the study contributes to work-role transition theory and the important role of business leaders and transition counselors in helping veterans transition to the civilian workplace.

The three theories (i.e., transition, identity, and work-role transition) used as a framework in this study provided a unique way to examine veterans in transition. The sponsors and facilitators of the MTP benefit from this research, which includes the participants' insights regarding the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP. Additionally, research related to the theories of this study contributes to the social, behavioral, and organizational literature related to military transition. Military officers are an understudied population, and providing data from their viewpoint on the established problem contributed to existing research (Baruch & Quick, 2007, 2009). Further, the study also contributes to the scholarly literature related to transition, identity, and work-role transition theories in the management field.

Significance to Social Change

The implications for positive social change include providing an awareness of perceived critical success factors and military officers' experiences regarding assistance from MTPs in their transition. Sharing the challenges and successes of transitioning as experienced by the participants under study provides information to aid the thousands of military veterans' still unemployed and seeking employment postretirement. Limited research exists in this area since the restructure of the MTP (Faurer et al., 2014).

The results of this study include information to assist veterans in their successful transition to the civilian sector, thereby narrowing the gap between military organizations and corporate organizations. Problems with skills translation, negative stereotypes of veterans associated with the effects of combat stress, or acclimation are some of the challenges associated with veterans gaining civilian employment (Harrell & Berglass, 2012). Veterans who are aware of strategies such as transitioning to military-friendly companies, networking, preretirement planning, and take advantage of all available resources and support provided by the MTP are generally successful in their postretirement transition (Abrams et al., 2013; Huebner & Royal, 2013; Jacques, 2014).

As a result of this study, senior leaders of the DoD, DoL, and DVA responsible for MTPs could use the findings to refine processes, expand services, and improve programs that benefit retired veterans seeking civilian employment. For example, DoD should provide more on-base access for private sector recruiting on base, encourage veterans to register early in the Veterans Employment Center (VEC) so they can dialogue with potential employers, and expand training and internship programs, which allows

service members to participate in employment training in a civilian work environment (Hall et al., 2014). Future researchers might use the findings as a foundation from which to examine identified trends in further detail. The findings of this research contribute information that is valuable to the population of veterans who transition to society in general.

Summary and Transition

U.S. veterans are transitioning to the civilian sector in increasing numbers and seek jobs in the civilian sector. With the U.S. military returning to postwar numbers, transitioning veterans are seeking civilian employment in an uncertain civilian environment (Faurer et al., 2014; Robertson, 2013). As U.S. veterans separate and retire, and seek employment in the civilian workforce; they need the concerted efforts of, and support from, transition counselors, business leaders, and government sponsors of the MTP to aid them in their successful transition. Since the restructuring of the MTP in 2013, the scholarly literature has been limited regarding whether changes made to the redesigned MTP aided veterans with their transition to the civilian sector (Faurer et al., 2014). This qualitative phenomenological study contributes to the scholarly literature in this area. Twenty retired and retiring military officers who transitioned in the NCR participated as volunteers in this study and described their lived experiences since the redesign of the MTP. The three research questions chosen for this study were suitable for exploring the phenomenon of military transitioning by gaining a perspective or the meaning of the participants' experience.

The conceptual framework in this study served as a structure to analyze veterans' transition through the three lenses: 4S transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory. The potential contributions of this study include providing awareness and information to transition counselors and senior leaders who sponsor the MTP for separating and retiring veterans. The implications for social change include contributing to refining and strengthening the MTP for all retiring veterans.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes an examination of relevant literature regarding U.S. veterans transitioning from the military to the civilian sector at the midlife stage. This investigation of military transitions in the scholarly literature was designed to create a better understanding of what critical factors aided veterans in their successful transition. The specific problem investigated by this study was that there was no indication at the time of this study that the redesigned MTP has been effective in helping military officers transition to the civilian workforce successfully. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the critical success factors of the MTP after the redesign based on the perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the NCR. I reviewed the literature with the intent of examining the central phenomenon, which was military transition.

Substantive literature exists on U.S. military or veterans' transitioning. Veterans transition to institutions of higher learning, teaching, the civilian sector, and entrepreneurship. However, U.S. veterans seeking to return to the civilian workforce after transitioning from the military encounter significant challenges in making the successful transition (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). The review of the literature includes (a) an examination of Schlossberg's 4S theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory, which served as the conceptual framework for this study, and (b) a review of the transitional stages of the military transition related to the transition process for military officers transitioning from the

military to the civilian sector. Also highlighted are challenges experienced with retirement transition and strategies veterans should employ to help them transition.

Literature Search Strategy

For the literature review, I reviewed approximately 150 peer-reviewed scholarly articles, academic journals, and scholarly books. I also reviewed government websites, documents, and reports related to military transitioning and the conceptual framework of the study. The Library of Congress and the Walden Library databases were useful for finding scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles and published dissertations. In addition, I obtained literature through EBSCOhost interfaces accessed through the Walden University Library by accessing the Thoreau Database, Business Management Complete, ProQuest, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Education Research Complete, ABI Inform Complete, SocINDEX, PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete, and others.

I reviewed literature and publications relevant to the topic of the transition of military veterans to the civilian sector. I also specifically reviewed literature related to the conceptual framework of the study: theories related to Schlossberg's transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory. The key search terms included *military and transition* or *veterans and transition*, *veterans and transition and civilian*, *military and transition and civilian*, *Schlossberg 4S theory*, *transition theory, identity theory*, *organizational theory*, *social role theory*, and *work-role transition theory*. The combinations of search terms used were *military transitioning* or *veterans transitioning*, *Transition Assistance Program*, and *Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS)*. I used the Google Scholar search engine to identify additional literature relevant to the study

topic. Furthermore, I obtained literature (e.g., interviews, reports, and descriptions) from several government websites, including the DoD, DoL, and DVA, that pertained to the redesigned MTP. Additional resources were located by reviewing the reference lists for articles that I consulted.

I searched the extant literature from a broad and then a narrow perspective using a single term or a combination of terms related to the military to civilian transition, the theories relevant to this study, and the methodology. For example, the search of the literature in the Walden University Thoreau database began with a search using the Boolean search phrase *military AND transition*, *veterans AND transition*, and *Transition Assistance Program*. The terms yielded over 10,000 (1939-2015), 5,000 (1929-2015), and 96 (1990-2015) results, respectively.

The next step was to narrow the search for extant literature between 2010 and 2015. The results yielded 4,000, 2,100, and 17 results, respectively. After narrowing the search parameters further, the Boolean search phrase included three terms, *veterans AND transition AND civilian*. This search yielded 74 results. I scanned the articles and found 10 articles relevant to the topic of military to civilian transition. Similarly, the Boolean search phrase *military AND transition AND civilian* yielded 240 results. I scanned the articles and found 30 articles relevant to this topic.

The same process of searching broadly and then narrowing the search for extant literature published between 2010 and 2015 took place using the Google Scholar search engine and searching the Library of Congress databases. For instance, I searched through Google Scholar for articles pertaining to identity theory that would be germane to this

study. A broad search of the term *identity theory* yielded more than 12 million results. I then narrowed the search and included more search phrases. For example, I narrowed the search to 2015 articles using the phrases identity theory and military to civilian transition, which yielded over 1,000 results. Another narrower search included the term *workplace*, which, when added to the previous phrase, yielded 260 results. I continued my search for articles through Google Scholar and the Library of Congress databases (ProQuest Military Collection, ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost—Military and Government Collection, and PsychINFO) for germane literature relevant to this study.

The rule regarding limiting the years of publication to 2010-2015 did not apply to literature pertaining to theories or methodology wherein I sought to retrieve the origin or source of the theory referenced in this study. Several articles published in Canada and the United Kingdom were relevant and were used in study. My review of the literature consisted of dissertations, books, and testimonies from DoD leaders on the redesigned transition program. Additionally, I reviewed scholarly articles and literature from government websites. The scope of my literature review included scholarly articles, government website searches, related reports, and books. Of the literature pertaining to this study, 30 books, 65 articles, and relevant information from government websites comprised the literature germane to this study. Of the studies reviewed, more than 75% were qualitative. This iterative process was crucial for searching and retrieving articles appropriate for this literature review and qualitative study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study included Schlossberg's 4S theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory. Several scholars have shaped transition theory, including Adams, Hayes, and Hopson (1977); Schlossberg (1981); and Bridges (1991). Schlossberg's 4S (situation, self, support, and strategy) theory provides context for retirement transition and indicates the need for transition counselors, resources, strategies, and programs to assist retirees, including veterans, with transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Schlossberg's theory of adult transitioning served as the conceptual lens to examine the career transitioning of veterans at different stages occurring over time.

The second theory used in this study, identity theory, relates to transition theory and helped to explain the behavior and challenges of veterans as they transition to a civilian career yet retain their social, role, and organizational identities (Brown, 1969; Foote, 1951; Stryker, 1987; Tajfel, 1981) that are particular to the military. The third theory used in this study, work-role transition theory (Nicholson, 1984), also relates to identity theory and transition theory. As veterans leave the military to begin a new career, making work-role adjustments are beneficial as they transition from their prior military role to prepare for a new career in the civilian sector. Thus, the three theories discussed in the next sections of this literature review illustrate how researchers have applied the theories in ways similar to this study.

Schlossberg 4S Theory

The Schlossberg 4S theory was an important component of the conceptual framework of the study to understand the challenges that veterans encounter as they transition to the civilian workforce. Goodman and Anderson (2012) defined transition as an event or nonevent resulting in change. The 4S model comprises four elements (i.e., situation, self, support, and strategies) that influence individuals' ability to manage their transition. The first element, *situation*, refers to an individual's situation at transition, that is, what was happening from the military officers' perspective as they made the decision to transition from the military or transitioned to the civilian sector. The second element, *self*, refers to the personal and demographic characteristics, as well as the psychological resources of the individuals in the situation, that is, to whom it was happening. The third element, *support*, refers to the help available to veterans as they transition to civilian life. The last of the four major elements of the 4S system is *strategies*, which refers to three types of coping strategies: those that (a) modify or change the situation, (b) change the meaning of the situation, or (c) manage the stress of the situation.

Researchers have widely used the Schlossberg 4S theory and it has been specifically used to study the difficulties and challenges that veterans encounter as they transition from the military (Gaiter, 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Johnston et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2011). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found that a better transition was necessary for veterans at institutions of higher learning and found the 4S model instrumental in identifying the assets, resources, and challenges veterans encounter as they transition into student veterans. Although Griffin and Gilbert (2015) focused on how institutions can

influence student veterans' transitions, the larger implication of their findings was that systems and policies changes were necessary to help facilitate veterans' successful transition.

Gaiter (2015) examined correlations between career adaptability, transition confidence, and transition readiness of veterans who transitioned from the military to the civilian sector. Using the 4S transition model in the study, Gaiter (2015) found that counselors and researchers would benefit from using this model as they sought to help veterans in transition or to examine the transition process of veterans. By learning the merits of the 4S transition theory, transition counselors can help retiring veterans understand that transition is a life event that occurs over time, whether or not they anticipated this change (Schlossberg, 2011). Additionally, knowledge of this theory empowers transition counselors to better help veterans assess how they can best cope with the change.

Several factors suggest that leaders at the DoD, DoL, and DVA should consider further improving the redesigned MTP in an effort to help transitioning service members succeed in civilian society. Using the 4S transition theory and a sample of 12 participants, Johnston et al. (2010) identified several themes common to the members' experience and found that the participants experienced challenges associated with retirement transition. Additionally, Johnston et al. found that concerns about identity and 4S model elements were relational to veterans as they transitioned and found that more research were necessary for this area. Moreover, Johnston et al. (2010) examined an organization in which veterans were enrolled in an MTP prior to transitioning from the military, finding

that intrapersonal psychosocial skills and interpersonal resources inherent within the 4S model were assets to help veterans maneuver the emotional difficulties associated with retirement transition. Additionally, Johnston et al. contended that the broader issue associated with identity and the 4S model is similar among individuals in career transition.

In this study, employing Schlossberg's model contributed to understanding how the elements of self, situation, support, and strategies help individuals to cope with career transition. Thus, the 4S model served as a basis for exploring the transition experience of the participants. Johnston et al. focused on members enrolled in an MTP and provided additional literature to explore the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP. Ryan et al. (2011) conducted research on an institution of higher learning and presented academic advisors the 4S framework. Ryan et al. suggested that those college and university advisors who had an increased awareness of this context were better able to provide student veterans with the support needed as they pursued higher education. The current study also involved exploring how the elements of the 4S transition theory influenced service members' behavior toward the MTP and what if any resources might help to improve the redesigned MTP.

Identity Theories

This section discusses identity theory and the social, role, and organization theories that contribute to it. Based on their research, Powell and Baker (2014) contended that identity theory was the overarching platform for several ideas used to explain both human self and behavior regarding personal identities. Powell and Baker contended that

identity theory originated from Mead's (1934) categorization of the "I" and the "me,"
which conceives that the human self was aware of its self because of its interactions with
other human beings (p. 1407). Desrochers, Andreassi, and Thompson (2004) contended
that Stryker coined identity theory, which has the self and the roles that one occupies as a
focus. Several scholars and researchers examined the importance of identity as it relates
to human behavior (Demers, 2011; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; Petriglieri, 2011).
Drawing from prior research, Herman and Yarwood (2014) explored the postmilitary
identities of veterans who transitioned to civilian life and found that veterans experienced
a sense of loss and separation or were in a liminal state or between transitional identities
in an attempt to recapture the self and sense of belonging to the military community.

Demers (2011) corroborated the sense of loss and separation experienced by
retiring veterans and found that veterans had problems reintegrating into civilian life after
a war. Demers found that veterans felt wedged between both the civilian and the military
cultures, and as a result experienced stress, alienation, and an identity crisis. Refinement
of the MTP that has a focus on psychological resources aid veterans' reintegration into
the civilian culture and community (Anderson et al., 2012; Demers, 2011). Accordingly,
Schlossberg (2011) found three aspects of a psychological portfolio relate to resources
individuals need as they transition to retirement: (a) a person's identity, (b) relationships,
and (c) sense of purpose. Although both the personal and demographic characteristics and
the psychological resources are complex in terms of their relationships between the
aspects of self, opportunities exist for individuals to obtain support and implement
strategies to help them cope with transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Petriglieri (2011) examined threats to individual identities and noted that identity assumes different forms: (a) altering its level of importance, (b) changing the meaning associated with the identity, (c) exiting or abandoning the identity, and (d) acquiring a new identity. Petriglieri found that leaving one's professional identity, in this respect a military occupational identity, was less challenging if an alternative one was available for transitioning. The loss of one's professional identity potentially results in the loss of one's social identity.

The identity theory as it related to the current study meant counselors and sponsors of the MTP needed to understand how service members associated their identity with their military career and the impact the association had on their transition from the military to civilian society. Powell and Baker (2014) contended that Mead's and Stryker's identity theories and Tajfel's social identity theory are still relevant. Future research on identity theory and its correlation with service members' transition experience contributes to the psychology literature. Powell and Baker's literature on identity theory included an emphasis on Mead's position that individuals self-identify with their social and role identities. In exploring the transition experiences of service members, it was helpful to transition counselors to understand how veterans perceive themselves based on the identity theory (Powell & Baker, 2014). Thus, understanding how veterans identify themselves in the transition process should be useful for transition counselors and sponsors of the MTP.

Social Identity Theory. Military service members typically view themselves based on their professional identity associated with military culture. Within the social

identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), individuals define themselves based on different and varying aspects of the self within the organization. That is, they identify with a certain social category or group and not with other categories or groups (Tajfel, 1981). Based on the research of several authors, social identity is an issue for veterans as they seek to transition (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Griepentrog et al., 2012; McAllister et al., 2015). Burkhart and Hogan (2015) conducted research through social modes to gain female veterans' perspectives of transitioning experiences and found that identity was a factor for the participants when they transitioned to the civilian sector. From their research, Burkhart and Hogan (2015) found that participants attempted to retain their identity after military transition through reconnections with the military, veteran groups, and their military friends.

Griepentrog et al. (2012) contended that individuals lose their identity of self and begin to identify with the group. This issue was of particular interest in this study because military veterans with 20 or more years form social identities that lead to similar attitudes, values, and behaviors of this social group. Griepentrog et al. contended that individuals who have strong ties with an organization, in this case a military organization, experiences a sense of loss when leaving the organization. McAllister et al. (2015) conducted research using social media to explore the identity strain (job stress) of veterans as a result of their reintegration in the civilian work environment. McAllister et al. found that the level of veterans' identity stress correlates with the service members' rank, that is, the higher their rank, the lower the potential for identity strain. Furthermore, military leaders with low identity strain possessed high levels of political skill, which was

a resource for veterans who intend to reintegrate into the civilian workforce (McAllister et al., 2015). Thus, military service members identify with their social group and their roles within the military culture (Redmond et al., 2015).

      Role Identity Theory. Categories or groups identify social identity, whereas identity theory links to role behavior. Stryker (1987) theorized that identity develops from individuals occupying, executing, and accepting a particular role. That role is a student, military veteran, organizational leader, and so on. Related to this study, Robertson (2011) conducted research and found that professional identities with a higher level of importance guide behavior more than the identity with a lower level of importance, which Robertson noted had significance for organizational leaders, and that organizational leaders should adopt strategies that reinforce professional identity. Based on their research, Grote and Hall (2013) found that identifying with a role implies that individuals interact with others to achieve, satisfy, and fulfill expectations.

      The differences between role identity theory and social identity theory as they relate to military service members was that the focus of social identity was on self and its similarity to others within the group (Grote & Hall, 2013). Grote and Hall (2013) found that role identity develops because individuals view their *self* as different from others occupying other roles. For instance, veterans identify with their roles in a military organization and their interaction with other veterans (Grote & Hall, 2013). As veterans transition from one role and social group, they attempt to establish a new role over a period of time (Schlossberg, 2011). Ray and Heaslip (2011) found that transitioning from one's primary identity, for example from a service member to a retired veteran, is

complex and generally pose problems as the individual transitions to civilian life. As a result, more training and awareness of the complexities of transition associated with social and role identity are necessary to assist veterans in their transition to civilian life.

Organizational Identity Theory. The idea of organizational identity has existed for several decades. Although both Foote (1951) and Brown (1969) examined identification in organizations, Brown theorized that organizational identity was a relationship between the individual and the organization, whereas Foote studied it from a theory of motivation context. Brown contended that the foundational aspects of organizational identity were the individuals' connection to the organization. That is, they feel an allegiance to the organization, share similar organizational goals, and identify themselves within the organization. In this sense, individuals share a sense of belonging and other common characteristics (e.g., shared beliefs and values) toward the organization (Brunger, Serrato, & Ogden, 2013; Chen, 2014; Griepentrog et al., 2012). In addition, organizational identity relates to social identity, whereas individuals see themselves in relation to the organization (Griepentrog et al., 2012).

Chen (2014) studied organizational identity and found a correlation between the organizational leaders' beliefs, values, and practices within the organizations and the employees' identity (e.g., make sense of or buy in) with the organization. Chen found that a positive organizational identity rooted in virtues aids organizations in being successful. Griepentrog et al. (2012) conducted research at a military recruiting organization to gain the perspectives of individuals whom recruiters were recruiting into military service. Griepentrog et al. found that organizational identity starts at recruitment, and those who

identify with the employing organization also shared values similar to those of the organization. Organizational leaders who are aware of how identity factors into the behaviors of job seekers would understand its significance to their organization's success.

Organizational identity plays a role as veterans seek future employment. For instance, as veterans retire and transition to the civilian sector, they seek jobs in occupational environments where they feel comfortable or find continuity with their previous occupation (Brunger et al., 2013). Veterans also strive to find jobs that are similar to the roles they had when they departed from the military, including working and interacting with groups and individuals with similarities to their own. As individuals change jobs, they should be aware that a period of work-role transition and adjustment might be necessary as they transition from the military to the civilian workforce. As military service members integrate into a military organization and their occupational specialties, they assume social, role, and organizational identities that are particular to the military.

The identity theories were significant as a foundation as I explored service members' perceptions of how the MTP contributed to their successful transition into civilian society. Thoits (2011) posited that social, role, and organizational theories comprise the fundamental premise that self-conceptualization and community share an influence of the other. Thoits clarified the interconnection of the theories and provided an explanation of military resistance to outdated transition procedures. Brunger et al. (2013) conducted a study with 11 ex-service members and indicated that a loss of self during the transition was one constant theme among the 11 participants. Brunger et al. also used the

phenomenological approach to explore the transition experience of service members. The study conducted by Brunger et al. was relevant to framing the current research, especially considering the participants' experience served as the basis of the study.

Theory of Work Role Transitions

To help frame the discussion regarding transitioning from the military to the civilian sector in this section, I discuss the theory of work-role transitions. Nicholson (1984) defined work-role transition as "any change in employment status and any major change in job content" (p. 174). As veterans leave the military to begin a new career, they need to make work-role adjustments from their prior military role to prepare for a new career in the civilian sector. Nicholson found that the transition and the organizational socialization literature illuminated several outcomes: (a) coping with the stress of change, (b) identity changes, and (c) behavioral outcomes as a consequence of adapting to a new environment.

From my search of the Walden databases and Google Scholar, recent scholarly literature on the theory of work-role transition as it relates to this study was lacking (Bell, 2015; Curl & Ingram, 2013; Donaldson et al., 2010; Robertson & Brott, 2014). Bell (2015) explored how the work-role transition influenced the professional identity and culture of corporate managers in career transition. Of the sample of 12 participants, Bell (2015) found that cognitive decision making, intentionality, and affective responses were different for males and females in the study. Bell's (2015) research provided the context that career transition was manageable when individuals have decision-making capacity and opportunities, but more challenging when individuals experience a loss of their social

status, identity, or social support. Based on their empirical research on stress and coping literature, Donaldson et al. (2010) found that a sense of mastery or personal control was a key predictor of how individuals adjusted to retirement. Mastery refers to having control over what occurs in one's life. That is, individuals who maintained a sense of control were better able to cope with stressors.

Curl and Ingram (2013) found that anticipatory socialization was a good predictor of successful retirement transition and individuals engaged in anticipatory socialization, which includes informal retirement planning and psychological planning, are more ready for career change. Conversely, Donaldson et al. (2010) contended that the relationship between retirement planning and retirement adjustment was not clear, but they emphasized that research supported the belief that planning for retirement contributes positively to one's successful adaptation to retirement. Curl and Ingram provided awareness to counselors and retirees about the importance of retirement planning or about how failing to plan negatively affects individuals' transition to retirement.

As veterans adjust to retirement, they need to incorporate certain factors to aid them in their transition. Donaldson et al. (2010) found that resources, planning, and personal control or mastery influence retirement adjustment. The examples of resources include income, health, and social support. Robertson and Brott (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 90 former veterans who transitioned to teaching careers and found that a correlation exists between control, confidence, and readiness to transition and life satisfaction. Additionally, Donaldson et al. found that individuals whose incomes were higher experienced improved retirement adjustment, although inadequate income and

financial stress linked to negative retirement experiences. As far back as 1984, Nicholson contended that the work-role transition theory helped to explain that changes occur in one's role requirements during career transition and adjustment was necessary for the self and identity of veterans in transition. Nonetheless, individuals, organizations, and transition counselors play a crucial part in making work-role transitions from the military to civilian employment successful.

Military Officers in the National Capital Region

The demographic population used in the study was 20 military officers in the NCR. The career of a military officer spans two decades or more (Hill et al., 2013) and ends near the midlife transition age, that is, around age 42 (Levinson, 1986), which takes into consideration their rank at retirement. Curl and Ingram (2013) emphasized that individuals with higher education, income, and occupational status who anticipate retirement are more ready for retirement transition. For instance, military officers typically enter the military with an undergraduate or advanced degree, depending on the service member's profession, such as a military doctor (Air Force, 2014; Redmond et al., 2015). Based on a report conducted by the Pew Research Center, military officers and those who graduated from college were more likely to adjust to a life after the military than those with only a high school diploma (Morin, 2011). Additionally, a military officer's pay at retirement at 2014 rates ranges from approximately $4,200 to over $12,000 per month in the grades of lieutenant colonels to general officers, respectively (Defense Finance & Accounting Service, 2015).

Of the more than 237,000 military officers on active duty, less than 1% holds the rank of one- to four-star general officers (Parrish, 2011). Researchers from the Center for Housing Policy contended that homeownership costs are higher in Washington, DC, than in cities such as New York City, New York, and San Francisco, California (National Housing Conference, 2015). With the loss of housing and subsistence funding when a military service member retires, many military officers seek employment as a financial necessity (Williams, 2012). Studying the population of military officers in the NCR served as an opportunity to examine the lived experiences of military officers who transitioned to the private sector.

Military officers possess valuable skills for postemployment jobs. Leadership, decision making, teamwork, and the ability to work under stress are valuable skills for veterans as they seek civilian sector employment (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). For some veterans, employability is not the overriding factor; rather, finding the right job after transitioning is a factor for these veterans (Johnston et al., 2010). Some military officers seek employment after retirement to maintain the same standard of living, to alleviate financial concerns, or because it provides meaning and purpose to their lives (Baruch & Quick, 2007). Because military officers, including general officers, end their military career at the midlife range, they still intend to work and pursue a second career (Baruch & Quick, 2007). Military officers are an understudied population in the scholarly literature and brought a unique perspective of their transitioning experience to this study.

Military Transition

Military officers transition from the military for different reasons and at different points in time. In this study, military transitioning is defined as the process of transitioning and retiring of military officers from active duty military service, such as participating in preretirement activities. This phenomenological study involved determining the essence of the lived experiences of military officers who experienced military transitioning. The study included the Schlossberg 4S theory. The 4S theory, as explained by Schlossberg (2011), includes resources that individuals, in this case military officers going through transition from the military to the civilian sector, can apply to make their transition a success.

Researchers use the 4S transition theory to describe what military personnel encounter as they go through military transition. Specifically, I described what was happening while the participants were preparing to retire (situation), to whom was it happening (self), what help was available during the MTP or was the individual receiving other types of social support (support), and how the individual coped as he or she transitioned to the civilian sector (strategies; Anderson et al., 2012). The military transitional stages (i.e., transition to retirement, transition program, and transition to the civilian sector) align with Schlossberg's 4S theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory.

Transition to Retirement

Transition to retirement from a military context underwent evaluation in terms of the variables *situation* and *self*. That is, the military service members assessed their

situation (what was happening) and measured *self* (to whom was it happening; Schlossberg, 2011). In assessing the *situation*, veterans must factor situation variables such as trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment (Anderson et al., 2012). These factors are assets or liabilities to military members in transition (Anderson et al., 2012). A description of each of the situational variables as it relates to the military service member in transition to retirement follows.

Transitioning is an event that alters or changes one's life. For military officers, the trigger event setting off the transition is a decision made voluntarily or involuntarily by the veteran or institutional leaders. For example, there was an increase of military personnel because of the Gulf War I (August 1990–August 2001) and beyond and subsequently a drawdown of forces following the Iraqi War (Collins et al., 2014). With the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, military leaders also reduced the number of military personnel on active duty (Faurer et al., 2014). And in some instances, reduction in force was the method used to retire military officers involuntarily (Faurer et al., 2014).

Timing is a factor in the transition to retirement because military personnel need to decide the right time to retire (Schlossberg, 2011). If individuals anticipate the transition, they have control over when to retire. Being able to make the decision to retire is beneficial to individuals' health and well-being as they transition from the workforce (Donaldson et al., 2010). In preparing for retirement, veterans' interpretation of role change, whether it was a positive or negative change, influences their transition (Anderson et al., 2012). In this case, role change means that veterans intended to move

from the military organization to a civilian organization. Thus, the retirement from the military was a permanent change for veterans.

Although veterans have experienced transitions relating to learning from previous jobs, their experiences could transfer to new roles. However, veteran retirement is dissimilar as a result of a change in roles, assumptions, and relationships (Schlossberg, 2011). Retiring veterans must also contend with concurrent stress and decide how they manage multiple stressors such as family issues and job loss during the time of transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Who or what is responsible for the transition becomes the basis of a veteran's assessment of the situation, whether positive, negative, or benign (Anderson et al., 2012). The *who* or *what* of the situation affects veterans' view of themselves and their current environment.

The variable *self* connotes both personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. For instance, personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, culture, and stage of life have a direct correlation with how individuals evaluate life (Anderson et al., 2012). The socioeconomic status of military officers at retirement varies based on their rank, how well they planned financially, and where they intend to live. Although military officers come from different ethnic backgrounds, the military culture, standards, and approximate age at retirement are applicable to all officers of their respective service.

The personal and demographic characteristics factor into how veterans view their inner self at this stage in the transition. Psychological resources, including ego development, commitment and values, spirituality and resilience, and mental health,

directly influence how individuals cope with transitioning (Anderson et al., 2012). Military officers, especially general officers, have high levels of authority, have significant leadership responsibilities, and command large military organizations with huge budgets and numerous personnel (Baruch & Quick, 2009). As military officers retire, the psychological resources employed while on active duty are still a part of the officers' psychological profile and identity as they begin their transition and will likely need adjustments as they move to a civilian career.

Military retirement begins after veterans have served on active duty for 20 or more years. As veterans make the decision to retire, they are making a career transition to end their active duty military service based on their life situation (Kuk, 2012). Preparing for successful transition means that veterans should have goals, plans, and strategies, which involves much more than having a financial plan (Johnston et al., 2010; Kuk, 2012; Robertson & Brott, 2013). Additionally, transition to retirement has an effect on veterans' internal self because they are experiencing the transition. This requires the veteran to take control of the situation and use the support structure provided by the government institutions to begin their transition to retirement.

A military service member who is anticipating retirement can begin making retirement plans 2 years prior to their projected retirement date. Anderson et al. (2012) contended that the timespan for transitioning ranges from 6 months to 2 years as individuals move through a major transition such as retirement, which supports the time frame for when military service members who are retiring can attend an MTP, that is, a Transition GPS workshop. In this way, veterans can begin assessing their situation, self,

and type of support needed and determine what coping strategies they need as they change from one major work-life transition to another work life in the civilian sector.

As military officers begin preparing to transition, they need to consider differences in organizational culture, external environment, financial planning, and other challenges related to military transitioning. Additionally, veterans should be ready to ask questions of transition counselors before making the transition. Before attending an MTP, military service members usually have a trigger event that starts the transition process. The next section includes a discussion on the individual transition plan (ITP).

Individual Transition Plan

Military service members can have preseparation counseling before leaving the military. For military service members who intend to retire, the trigger event is DoD Form 2648, Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist (Hill et al., 2013). The checklist enables military service members to make decisions about which benefits and services they wish to receive and serves as a basis for developing the ITP (Defense Manpower & Data Center, 2014; Hill et al., 2013). Codified under 10 U.S.C. 1142, the completion of the Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist must occur at least 90 days before retirement for veterans anticipating retirement or as soon as possible for veterans who experienced unanticipated retirements such as those affected by a reduction in force (DoD TAP, 2014c). With the assistance of transition counselors or other subject matter experts, veterans can attain the professional guidance needed to develop an ITP based on situational factors (Anderson et al., 2012) to begin their transition to a new career (Hill et al., 2013).

In a statement on the redesigned transition program, Susan Kelly asserted that as veterans work through the ITP, they must also be cognizant of their family circumstances, housing, finances, employment, personal networks, training and education, military experience, and transition milestones (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). Because transition is a complex change for veterans, the newly designed ITP should assist veterans with their career goals postretirement. However, other situational factors must receive consideration. In the transition to retirement, education and counseling are available for transitioning veterans, as addressed in the following section.

Education and Counseling

Preretirement education and counseling are important as veterans prepare for retirement. Preretirement education refers to relevant information that assist future retirees with transitioning. Topics such as economics, health, and benefits issues align with retirees' ITP and introduce them to the full range of programs and services available. Preretirement counseling refers to the assistance retirees receive to help them cope with the transition to retirement. Preretirement counseling is available through military services departments' transition counselors (Hill et al., 2013). Based on a study conducted by researchers at Prudential Financial, approximately 56% of veterans indicated that they were not ready to transition to civilian life; however, their readiness to transition increased with awareness gained through retirement counseling (Prudential Financial, 2012). Through preretirement education and counseling, veterans can receive

the support they need to analyze their situation and self so they are ready to transition to retirement.

Transition counselors assist and educate veterans on services and programs available to them before transitioning to retirement. Susan Kelly, director of the Transition to Veterans Program Office, contended that the redesigned MTP provides veterans with opportunities to meet with counselors one on one or in small group discussions (Vergun, 2012). In addition, the Veterans Affairs Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling (White House, 2014e) as well as a range of social and psychological services, including professional counseling for veterans returning from combat zones and employment counseling. Kelly emphasized the need for professional counseling sessions because veterans are familiar with living and working in a structured environment (Vergun, 2012). Veterans should become aware of what services are available to them to help them adjust to transition in a different environment.

An awareness of the education and counseling needs of veterans should help to identify strengths that could be useful in transition. In a qualitative study conducted in the United Kingdom, Zarecky (2014) examined how using positive psychology strength approaches would aid military members in transitioning to the civilian sector. Specifically, Zarecky sought to understand how identifying the personal strengths of military personnel could help veterans develop a better sense of self, which help them choose the right career after retirement.

Among the results presented in the study, Zarecky found that military veterans would need to reconcile their authentic self and military self, that veterans lacked civilian

culture awareness, and that several military values (i.e., courage, integrity, leadership, loyalty, discipline, and selfless commitment to others) were transferable strengths veterans bring to the civilian job sector. Thus, veterans sought to retain the positive aspects of their military identity, including their values and behaviors (Zarecky, 2014), which indicates that transition counseling should help military veterans see the value of their military strengths as they begin to embark on a career change or seek further career development.

Transition counselors have an opportunity to expose veterans to educational opportunities and listen to the veterans' life experiences. Robertson and Brott (2013) noted that education was a viable means to assist veterans preparing for a career transition and noted services offered through the Veterans Administration. To assist midlife career veterans with transitioning, Huebner and Royal (2013) stressed that counselors listen to veterans' stories to include their peak experiences and their proudest moments of their military career. In this way, the counseling session helps the veterans to discover meaning from their experiences that assist them as they transition to a new career (Huebner & Royal, 2013). Moreover, counselors should be aware of education and vocational rehabilitation benefits for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

Ostovary and Dapprich (2011) noted that the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration provide a service to the population of veteran retirees. Therefore, education and counseling on a myriad of relevant topics, including training opportunities, are services available to help veterans with their transition to retirement. In addition, education and counseling sessions provide veterans the

opportunity to discuss differences in organizational culture between the military and the civilian sector.

Military Culture versus Civilian Culture

Military service members enter the military through training. Military officers become commissioned officers after completing a military service academy, officer training school, or a Reserve Officer Training Center program. It is through a structured learning environment that military officers learn socially acceptable norms, values, beliefs, customs, and so on that they adopt and becomes part of their cultural identity (Koenig et al., 2014; Redmond et al., 2015).

Within this unique cultural identity and hierarchical structured system, veterans communicate through their own language and have shared beliefs, values, rituals, and customs, which Ray and Heaslip (2011) contended represent a cultural group. Additionally, the military has a history of tradition infused with value, honor, and commitment to comrades, unit, and country (Demers, 2011; Redmond et al., 2015). The military environment plays a substantial role in building an organization that provides meaning, perspective, and information for service members (Rausch, 2014). Furthermore, military organizations have a disciplined system where service members must follow orders, obey their chain of command, and comply with policies and procedures (Demers, 2011). From the onset of military service members' career, they learn what it means to be in the military and as a result lose their civilian identity to the military way of being.

Although the civilian sector has a structural organization with rules, policies, and standards, there are differences between military and civilian cultures. Stone and Stone

(2014) posited that hiring authorities often perceive that there are differences in the cultures of civilian and military organizations. Among these differences, Stone and Stone wrote that civilian organizations reflect the general values inclusive of a culture in the United States. That is, the civilian organizations haves a democratic organizational structure with flexible rules and processes, shared decision making, and individualized freedom (Stone & Stone, 2014).

Because of these differences, veterans' role expectations and behaviors are not consistent with the roles required in civilian organizations (Stone & Stone, 2014). However, Stone and Stone contended that veterans would be open to learning different roles and behaviors through using socialization and training programs, which indicates that veterans, counselors, human resources managers, and leaders underestimate the cultural differences between military and civilian sectors, thus contributing to the challenges veterans encounter when transitioning to the civilian sector.

After serving for 20 years or more in the military, the veterans' experiences of military culture are internal to the individual. As military service members begin their transition, the individual (self) who they were while in the military still exists as they plan for retirement and seek employment in the civilian sector. Therefore, veterans need to understand that cultural barriers exist and learn about these differences before leaving the military (King, 2011).

Based on a study of active duty and reserve component veterans conducted by researchers at Prudential Financial (2012), 48% of veterans surveyed worried that civilian employers would not understand military culture, and 32% felt that veterans intimidated

nonveteran coworkers. Nonetheless, because there are differences in the military and civilian organizational culture, future employers perceive themselves as having concerns about military veterans assuming leadership roles. For instance, military officers, in particular those in higher grades, are used to giving orders and typically possess an autocratic leadership style, which is ineffective in civilian organizations and not congruent in an organization where civilian leaders are perceived to encourage rather than control their employees. The next section includes a description of cultural differences.

   Assessing cultural differences. The military's traditional career system has major differences from the contemporary career system in the civilian sector (see Table 1). For example, officers under a traditional career system receive promotions based on merit, performance, and tenure (Baruch & Quick, 2009). In addition, military officers must follow a policy that supports continued growth, development, and assumption of more responsibilities as they receive promotions; otherwise, they must retire (Baruch & Quick, 2009). King (2011) indicated that senior officers are normally closer to the mission in terms of understanding goals and understanding how to drive desired outcomes (p. 25). However, that perspective differs among individuals further down the organizational chain.

   When military service members retire, they move from an organizational system that is stable to one that is dynamic or has fewer boundaries (Baruch & Quick, 2009). A boundaryless career develops as individuals work for countless employers and change jobs as well as occupations (Baruch & Quick, 2009). As military officers transition from

retirement to the civilian workforce, they move from a structured organization to a boundaryless one.

Other distinctions existed between the military culture and the civilian culture. For example, the military departments' mission aligns with the DoD's mission of deterring war and protecting America's security (DoD, 2014a). King (2011) contended that the mission should reflect the value of the employee and customer in the civilian sector, but the mission tends to be less substantial and has multiple purposes. Another disparity was that the civilian sector's primary objective is to make a profit so they can remain in business (King, 2011) and the military does not exist for this reason. Thus, the military has a culture that distinctly values its mission, traditions, and laws. An outline of the major differences between the traditional career system of the military and contemporary career systems appears in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Military Careers versus Contemporary Business Careers

	Typical characteristics of military careers	Typical characteristics of contemporary business careers
Environment	Stable	Dynamic
Career choice being made	Once, at early career age	Continuously, at various career crossroads
Main career responsibility lies with	The organization	The individual
Career horizon (workplace)	Single organization until (early) retirement	Several organizations
Career horizon (time)	Long	Short
Employer expect/employee give	Loyalty and commitment	Long time working hours
Employer give/employee expect	Job security	Investment in employability
Progress criteria	Advance according to merit and tenure	Advance according to results and knowledge
Success means	Winning the tournament, i.e., progress on the ranks ladder	Inner feeling of achievement
Training	Formal programs, generalist	On the job, company specific, sometimes ad hoc

Note. From "Setting Sail in a New Direction: Career Transitions of U.S. Navy Admirals to the Civilian Sector," by Y. Baruch and J. C. Quick, 2009, *Personnel Review, 38*(3), p. 272. Copyright 2004 by Y. Baruch. Adapted with permission.

In addition, motivations for civilian employees include extrinsic factors such as perquisites, raises, and bonuses; conversely, motivations for military members include intrinsic rewards such as service, loyalty, and defending the nation (King, 2011). Furthermore, military officers must have at minimum a bachelor's degree to be commissioned officers (Air Force, 2014). Although there are a number of distinctions, the primary distinction is that military officers leave a stable cultural environment for one

that is dynamic and boundaryless, which require veterans to prepare for the cultural differences of the external environment they encounter in the civilian sector.

External Environment

Preparing for retirement means that veterans need to consider their external environment as they begin the transition. Military officers work in environments based on their occupational specialty, unit, branch of service, and so on (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Additionally, these individuals either work or live on military installations or near military bases throughout the world. Within the military environment, military officers receive funding for housing and have access to medical treatment facilities and recreation centers. As they prepare for transition, they need to assess the external environment in terms of situational variables such as control, role change, concurrent stress, and assessment.

As veterans make the decision to retire, they have control of the situation if they plan the decision; however, there are issues beyond veterans' control. Anderson et al. (2012) noted that as individuals move into their new roles, they might experience marginality as they are transitioning into a different work environment. They are not who they were, and they are unclear whom they should be and what others expect of them (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 185). Learning about the differences in the organizational environment from a transition counselor during the MTP might help veterans prepare for a different environment.

Financial Planning

Financial planning means military service members should manage financial expectations while preparing for transition. For example, veterans should assess factors that impact their readiness to retire such as a change in living expenses and cash flow after retirement (Tannahill, 2013). The current military retirement system provides its members a retirement pension at 20 years based on the income earned the last 3 years of active duty (Hill et al., 2013). For military veterans, this equates to approximately 50% of their salary, which does not include the tax-free money provided to veterans for housing and subsistence allowance while on active duty (Hill et al., 2013). Thus, as veterans plan for retirement, they should also consider the federal and state taxes (as applicable) deducted from their pay.

Robertson (2013) examined military members who transitioned to the teaching profession as a second occupation. From her research, she contended that individuals in transition not only experienced financial loss but also a loss of identity. She noted that veterans who are in transition for long durations might experience loss of household income that affect their financial situation (Robertson, 2013). Counselors should familiarize themselves with military benefits as they prepare veterans for the transition (Robertson, 2013). The redesigned MTP should aid veterans in assessing their financial readiness prior to retirement.

Financial planning is important as veterans prepare for retirement. Chen (2011) contended that having financial resources is the foundation of life-career reengagement. The life-career reengagement framework presumes that retirees have adequate financial

support as they enter retirement. In the redesigned Transition GPS program, the financial

planning seminar provides service members with information and tools needed to identify

financial responsibilities, obligations, and goals after transitioning from the military

(DoD TAP, 2014c). After veterans complete the financial planning module, they build an

integrated 12-month postseparation budget that takes into account their employment,

education, and training goals (DoD TAP, 2014c). The changes made to the redesigned

MTP, including financial planning, should help veterans with the challenges and

complexities of transitioning.

Challenges with Transition to Retirement

Other challenges related to the transition to retirement affect the military

transition. For example, military personnel undergo frequent relocations throughout their

military career. In a qualitative study, Clemens and Milsom (2008) emphasized that

relationships of a professional and social nature develop because of the time an individual

spends in one location. Thus, moving every 2 to 4 years is a challenge to service

members learning about potential job openings through professional or social networks.

For instance, moving frequently makes it difficult for service members to establish and

maintain professional or social networks while serving on active duty (Clemens &

Milsom, 2008). Remaining in a location over time contributes to an individual finding a

job after retirement. In addition, Clemens and Milsom found that military service

members gain substantial knowledge and experience while in the military, although they

lack self-knowledge and occupational expertise specific to the civilian workforce.

Veterans also experience challenges with translating their military skills into civilian language. Arendt and Sapp (2014) contended that veterans need to translate their skills and experience into a language that civilian employers can understand. In a qualitative study, Arendt and Sapp examined five resumes veterans used to communicate their skills when applying for jobs postretirement. Based on the results of the study, three themes emerged: (a) veterans used military jargon that was unfamiliar to civilian employers, (b) veterans de-emphasized or buried their skills in their resumes, and (c) veterans did not highlight leadership and management experiences in the resume. Not properly translating their skills can result in missed job opportunities (Arendt & Sapp, 2014; Hall et al., 2014). Although veterans can use the Veterans Employment Center (VEC) website for job skills translation and Verification of Military Experience and Training, which translates their military skills into civilian language, veterans need to ensure they translate those skills on their resumes for civilian employers to understand.

Veterans experience challenges in the civilian sector that they did not encounter in the military. For example, veterans experience challenges with career decision making and managing change (Furbish, 2014). Hall et al. (2014) contended that veterans encounter challenges in the corporate environment because veterans are used to the military hierarchy and a command structure that is clearly understood. Additionally, Hall et al. noted that veterans experienced challenges adjusting to an environment that provided fewer responsibilities, less authority, and less urgency than what they experienced while serving in the military. Stone and Stone (2014) found that veterans had a difficult time transitioning because many employers perceived them to have a mental

disability. This finding indicated the need for more empirical research to understand the stereotypes or stigmas attributed to veterans (Stone & Stone, 2014).

Accordingly, Brunger et al. (2013) contended that interrelationships exist among many of the problems that veterans experience during transition to civilian life. That is, veterans experience a sense of loss during transition and are trying to bridge the gap between the liminal stages of these two continuums (Brunger et al., 2013). In a qualitative study, Ahern et al. (2015) investigated the challenges that veterans returning from war experienced as they transitioned to civilian life. Through an inductive thematic analysis method and in-depth interviews with 24 veterans, Ahern et al. developed three central themes. One theme, normal is alien, comprised the perceptions of 19 out of 24 veterans who felt disconnected from their family and friends who did not share the experience of military service.

Veterans, including veterans with disabilities, experience challenges with transitioning; therefore, continued focus on factors that influence veterans' readjustment to the civilian sector should undergo further exploration (Brunger et al.). Hence, veterans in military transition require collaborative resources from providers relating to employment, income, health, social support, and stress (MacLean et al., 2014). After transitioning to retirement, the next step is taking advantage of the MTP to determine what support veterans require to help them in their transitioning efforts.

Military Transitioning Program

All retiring military personnel have access to the MTP to assist them in preparing for transition to the civilian sector. As a consequence of the military drawdown from the

Iraqi War in the early 1990s, Congress initiated the Military Personnel Transition Act of

1990, which enacted the TAP, referred to in this study as the MTP (Library of Congress,

2014). The MTP, enacted in the 1990s, provides employment and job training services to

aid military service members with their transition (Library of Congress, 2014). The

Military Personnel Transition Assistance Act of 1990 required services to assist military

service members in integrating, adapting, and transitioning to civilian life (Library of

Congress, 2014). The act also required that veterans receive a briefing on the benefits and

services provided through this program.

      To prepare veterans for transition to the civilian sector, each branch of the

military has preseparation counseling services available at its military locations to aid

separating and retiring veterans. Congress established the MTP because of the significant

reductions in military force levels expected after Gulf War I (Collins et al., 2014; DoL,

2014c). Additionally, transitioning veterans had skills such as combat arms that did not

easily translate to the civilian sector.

      The DoD Directive 1335.35 established policy and assigned responsibilities for

the MTP to help veterans who intend to separate or retire from the military return to

civilian life. During the 1990s, the administration of the MTP occurred through the

coordinated efforts of the DoD, U.S. Department of Transportation, DoL, and DVA. The

redesigned MTP (Transition GPS) includes collaboration with the DoL, DVA, U.S.

Department of Education, U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Office of

Personnel Management (DoD TAP, 2014c). DoD TAP (2014c) leaders proclaimed that

the Transition GPS was an "outcome-based, modular curriculum with standardized

learning objectives" (p. 1) designed with the purpose of better preparing service members to transition to civilian life and to the civilian workforce.

Before implementation of Transition GPS, the redesigned MTP, deficiencies existed in the legacy MTP. In an audit of the legacy MTP in 2010, Elliot Lewis, assistant inspector general at the DoL, found deficiencies in the DoL VETS workshop (DoL, 2014e). For example, Lewis found (a) no management controls and policies to document and confirm that participants reported as served actually received service, (b) no measurable performance goals and outcomes to evaluate program effectiveness, and (c) no contracting oversight of TAP (DoL, 2014e). Lewis noted that these deficiencies weakened the ability of VETS leaders to ascertain whether VETS personnel provided a first-rate program to support veterans in their transition from military to civilian employment (DoL, 2014e).

Similar to the first Gulf War era (August 1990–August 2001), more emphasis was on the transitioning program as a result of the impending drawdown of forces from Afghanistan (i.e., Gulf War II era, September 2001 forward). John Moran, deputy assistant secretary for VETS, stated that over 2.6 million separating and retiring veterans received training and service through DoL employment workshops (DoL, 2014b). Moran indicated that in 2012, DoL personnel conducted more than 4,500 employment workshops to over 160,000 participants in the United States and overseas. Restructuring the MTP into a high-quality and effective program was essential to helping veterans transition to the civilian workforce.

Effectiveness of Transitioning Program

In August 2011, while visiting the Washington Navy Yard, President Obama discussed the overhaul of the transitioning program led by a joint task force from the DoD and DVA (Cloud, 2014). The task force's objective was to develop a career-ready military and design a reverse boot camp for separating and retiring service members (Collins et al., 2014). The legacy MTP lacked the personalized training and counseling necessary for veterans to succeed in the civilian sector (Cloud, 2014). The design of the new curriculum was to assist transitioning veterans and provide veterans with tools needed to transition successfully (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). The fully implemented employment workshop was in place, along with Transition GPS, by the end of 2013 (DoL, 2014d).

In the review of literature, I did not find any studies or scholarly literature that addressed the effectiveness of the redesigned transitioning program. However, I reviewed scholarly articles, studies, and surveys in which researchers discussed the ineffectiveness of the MTP (Faurer et al., 2014; Johnston et al., 2010; Prudential Financial, 2012) in helping veterans transition to the civilian workforce. Because literature was lacking on the effectiveness of the redesigned transitioning program, this phenomenological study involved gaining insights from the participants who transitioned through the redesigned program and gained employment in the private sector. Through the insights of these participants, I gained an understanding of what military officers perceive as similar to and different from the legacy MTP and the restructured MTP. In addition, I gained an understanding of what the participants perceive to be critical success factors of the

redesigned program that aided them in their transition. Further, I gained insights from the

review of the literature of the legacy and the redesigned transitioning program. The

following section includes a comparison of the legacy and redesigned MTP.

Comparison of Legacy and Redesigned Transitioning Program

The legacy MTP (1990s-2011) provided retiring veterans with preseparation

counseling, civilian employment information, and veterans benefits briefings and

facilitated and sponsored workshops conducted by the DVA (DoL, 2014c; Military One

Source, 2014). There are similarities and differences between the legacy and the

redesigned MTP. For example, both programs required that veterans complete the

mandatory preseparation counseling checklist, develop a transition plan, and attend DVA

briefings and DoL workshops to aid in the transition. However, the primary focus of the

legacy MTP was on job search strategies, resumes, and DVA benefits.

Although the intent of the legacy MTP was to assist veterans in their transition to

the civilian sector, the program was ineffective in providing this service (King, 2011;

Prudential Financial, 2012; Veterans Enterprise, 2013). The redesigned MTP increased

the number of workshop days from 3 to 5 days and included 2 optional days to provide

tailored workshops for veterans interested in higher education, business ventures, or

career transition (Collins et al., 2014). Additionally, veterans gained opportunities to

discuss these career options one-on-one with transition counselors. Figure 1 shows a

concept map with a comparison of the legacy and the redesigned MTP.

Legacy, 1990s	Comparison	Redesigned MTP, 2013
3-day Workshop • Individual Development Plan • VA Benefits Briefing • Department of Labor Employment Workshop	2 additional workshop days + optional days Tailored Workshop Focus on transition to civilian workforce	5-day Workshop • Individual Transition Plan • Resilient Transitions • Military-to-Civilian Skills Review (MOC Crosswalk) • Financial Planning • VA Benefits Briefing • Department of Labor Employment Workshop 2 Optional Days • Higher Education • Business Venture • Career transition

Figure 1. Comparison of the legacy and redesigned MTPs.

Full implementation of the major changes to the redesigned MTP occurred in

December 2013 and resulted in enhancements to the interagency transitioning program,

and full implementation of the optional tracks occurred in March 2014 (Collins et al.,

2014). A $104 million budget in Fiscal Year 2014 assisted service members in transition

to civilian life after more than 10 years of war (White House, 2014e). The redesigned

MTP 5-day Transition GPS workshop includes (a) ITP preparation, (b) resilient

transitions, (c) Military Occupational Code (MOC) crosswalk, (d) financial planning, (e)

DVA benefits briefing, and (f) DoL Employment Workshop (DoL, 2014c).

The focus of the first 2 days of the workshop was core curriculum training, that is,

personal finances, family adjustments, DVA benefits, and mentorship. The focus of the

final 3 days was the DoL employment workshop, which includes resume writing,

practicing job interviews, job search practice, and using social media. The 2 optional days were for veterans interested in college, returning to the workforce, or pursuing a business.

Several transition modules can aid veterans in their transition. The resilient transition module provides participants with self elements such as transition stress, family considerations, and the value of a mentor. Veterans can use the MOC crosswalk module to translate military skills, training, and experience into credentialing suitable for civilian jobs (DoD TAP, 2014c). Upon completion of the MOC crosswalk module, veterans can demonstrate that their military occupation experience translates to civilian sector skills as well as identify any gaps in their training or experience that prevent them from achieving their personal goals (DoD TAP, 2014c).

Two DVA benefits briefings inform the transitioning veterans of their benefits, such as post-9/11 education, eBenefits, health care, and other DVA benefits and services (DoD TAP, 2014c). At the conclusion of the modules, veterans learn how to apply for services and programs for which they are eligible. Included in this redesigned program is a capstone event to verify that transitioning service members obtained CRSs that show they are ready for their civilian careers.

Veterans must attend preseparation counseling before attending the 5-day Transition GPS workshop. In addition, participants continually update the ITP throughout the 5-day workshop. Susan Kelly reported that the workshop was interactive and participants receive encouragement to bring their laptop, tablet, or iPad for researching and completing MTP activities (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). Three additional 2-day sessions are available for transitioning military members who wish to (a)

pursue a higher education degree, (b) obtain a technical certification, or (c) start a business (DoD TAP, 2014c).

The higher education session has topics to address educational goals, education funding, how to research a school, and how to apply to a college or university. The technical training session instructors provide veterans with additional technical training and job-ready skills that aid in choosing the right training or college program. In the entrepreneurship session, veterans learn about the challenges, benefits, and realities of entrepreneurship and the stages of owning a business. DoL (2014c) researchers indicated that within each of these sessions, service members can gain additional assistance from education and vocational counselors or receive a connection to a small business owner who served as a mentor to assist them with their business venture. The mandatory capstone event ensures transitioning military members have completed all CRSs required by the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act and Veterans Employment Initiative.

The DoD Instruction 1332.36 authorizes the release of separating and retiring service members from duty to complete the Transition GPS Workshop in its entirety. Service members with a DoD Form 2648 dated November 21, 2012, or after must attend all elements of the DoD TAP, unless otherwise exempted because they already have a job awaiting them upon retirement or they have enrolled in college or university. Service members who qualify for an exemption still have the option to participate and receive encouragement to attend the workshop. Service members who qualify for an exemption and elect not to participate in the DoL Employment Workshop must formally request the

exemption and document their decision on DD Form 2958, Service Member CRS/ITP

Checklist.

       The redesigned MTP complies with the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire

Heroes Act of 2011. The act mandates that all service members released from active duty

who served 180 continuous days or more on active duty under Title 10, U.S.C.,

participate in preseparation counseling, DVA benefits briefings, and a DoL employment

workshop (DoL, 2014c). Faurer et al. (2014) noted that the redesigned program provides

more one-on-one counseling, more follow-up, separate tracts for those wanting to go to

college or start a business, and a greater focus on the process of getting a job. The

transformation of the legacy program to Transition GPS significantly expanded the

services and support to veterans who are separating and retiring from the military. The

next section includes a description of the MLCT model.

Military Life Cycle Transition Model

       Leaders at the DoD designed the MLCT model to assist service members in

preparing for transition earlier in their career. The MLCT model began in Fiscal Year

2015. The MLCT model provides service members with touch points throughout their

career, which enables them to align their military career with their civilian goals (DoD

TAP, 2014b). See Figure 2 for the MLCT model.
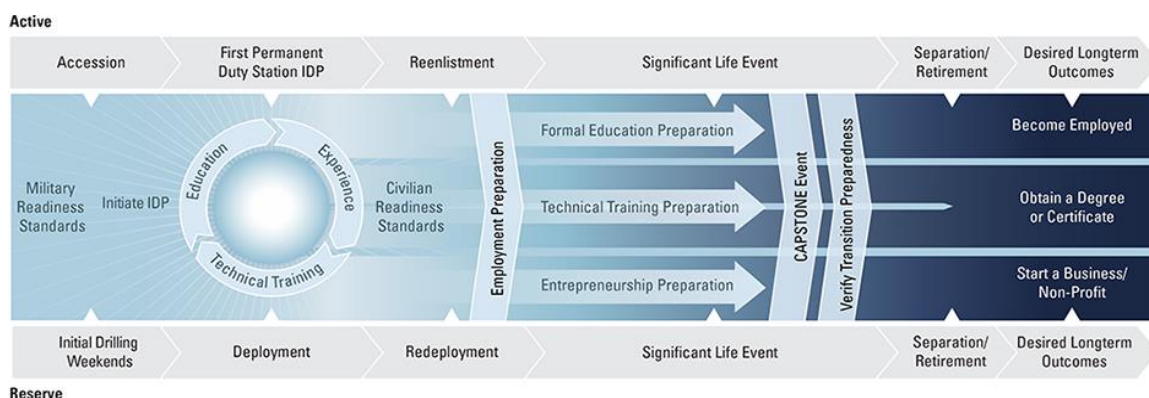
Figure 2. Military life cycle transition model. Copied from *DoD Transition Assistance Program*, by DoD TAP (2014b). Copyright 2015 by DoD TAP.

Based on the premise of the MLCT model, veterans gain awareness of CRSs they must meet before separating or retiring. Additionally, veterans need to remain engaged during their military careers to map, refine, and achieve both their military and their postmilitary transition goals for employment, higher education, or entrepreneurship (DoD TAP, 2014b). DoD TAP (2014b) leaders contended that the MLCT model enables service members to have a carefully planned and organized transition that empowers them to make informed career decisions as well as work toward advancing their personal goals. Although DoD leaders are still defining the MLCT model, it provides a potential career map for future retirees to conduct transition planning earlier in their career, including planning for higher education or technical certifications, financial planning, and learning job skills that are essential for transition to the civilian workforce. The next section includes a discussion on transitioning to the civilian workforce.

Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce

The redesigned MTP includes many new tools and websites to help service members in their transition to civilian life. After the MTP, the next stage was determining

what strategies in the form of resources and support the veterans needed to aid their transition to the civilian workforce. The DVA and DoL leaders and their representatives provide veterans with ongoing resources and support long after transitioning through the MTP and retiring from the military. The section that follows includes resources and support that benefit veterans after they transition from the military.

Resources and Support

Resources and support are available to veterans as they make the transition to the civilian sector, including books such *as Life After the Military Handbook* (Hill et al., 2013) and *Networking for Veterans* (Abrams et al., 2013). Websites include Joining Forces (White House, 2014d), eBenefits (DVA, 2014a), and VETS (DoL, 2014c). Researchers for the Government Accountability Office (2014) investigated DoD and DVA programs that address the effects of combat and transition to civilian life. The GAO researchers identified 87 programs conducted by the DoD and DVA leaders and their representatives to assist veterans to civilian life. The types of services include education assistance, employment assistance, and counseling (GAO, 2014). Resources and support to veterans vary depending on which government organization was providing support.

Personnel at the DoD, DVA, DoL, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, U.S. Small Business Administration, and VEC and websites such as eBenefits provide essential information to assist veterans in their transition to the civilian sector. Through the creation of the VEC, launched by First Lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, the VEC is an online government source for employers committed to hiring veterans (White House, 2014c). Additionally, the VEC has a skills translator tool to help

veterans translate their military skills into language that civilian employers can understand (White House, 2014c). The VEC is a hiring source with more than 1.5 million public and private sector jobs. Employers of the VEC made the commitment to hire more than 150,000 individuals from the military community (White House, 2014c). A direct link exists between the VEC and the eBenefits web portal that allows veterans seeking jobs to search the job bank for employment.

The eBenefits web portal is a service of the DoD and DVA. In March 2007, Executive Order 13426 established the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors and recommended creating the eBenefits web portal (eBenefits, 2014). The eBenefits portal provides a central place for veterans to access their benefits and apply for benefits such as compensation, education, health, and insurance (eBenefits, 2014). For example, through eBenefits, veterans can access documents such as their official military file, DVA letters, and medical records. Additionally, veterans can apply for benefits such as disability compensation and a DVA home loan certificate of eligibility. Accordingly, the eBenefits (2014) employment center page provides veterans with information, tools, and strategies on (a) job search; (b) career tools such as a military skills translator and a profile and resume builder; and (c) employment resources and services such as training and vocational resources, education, counseling and disability, and technology assistance.

U.S. Department of Defense. The DoD leadership sponsors the redesigned MTP, employs millions of employees, and provides resources and support to retiring veterans. The DoD history dates back to before the Revolutionary War in 1775. It is the oldest and

largest government agency in the United States (DoD, 2014a). Additionally, as the largest

federal employer of veterans, the DoD has approximately 700 different occupations

(DoD, 2014a). The DoD has more than 1.4 million men and women on active duty and

718,000 civilian employees (DoD, 2014a). There are more than 237,000 active duty

officers in the military (White House, 2014b). Through the DoD, the Transition to

Veterans Program Office provides transition assistance policy and program oversight to

help veterans in their transition. The goals of this office are to (a) revitalize the DoD TAP

to meet the needs of the nation, (b) strengthen partner collaboration to improve service

member career readiness, and (c) institutionalize the service member MTP into the

military culture (DoD TAP, 2014a). The redesigned MTP helps separating and retiring

veterans in their transition to the civilian sector (DoD, 2014b). The intent is to help

veterans be career ready prior to retiring from the military.

　　　　With collaborating partners such as the DVA and DoL, the DoD leaders and their

representatives provide separating and retiring veterans with information and skills to

meet the DoD CRS (see Table 2). DoD TAP (2014a) leaders noted that CRS was the tool

used in the DoD to measure veterans' preparedness for a civilian career. The CRS has

common and specific standards as well as associated products based on service members'

determined goals. Achieving the CRS demonstrates that veterans are ready to pursue

posttransition goals (DoD TAP, 2014a). Additionally, CRS capitalizes on the skills and

experiences service members already possess and aligns to employment or technical

training and education competency areas. Moreover, the Military Services Command

leadership verifies that veterans have met CRS before leaving active duty. The goal and

intent was to ensure veterans leaving active duty have the skills and knowledge needed to transition to the civilian sector successfully.

Table 2

Career Readiness Standards

Core curriculum	Employment workshop	Accessing higher education track	Career technical training track
Completed Individual Transition Plan	Received a Gold Card Certificate for DoL American Job Centers	Completed a standardized individual assessment tool to assess aptitudes, interests, strengths, and skills	Completed a standardized individual assessment tool to assess aptitudes, interests, strengths, and skills,
Prepare a 12-month post-separation budget reflecting personal and family goals			
Registered on eBenefits	Completed a job application package including resume, reference list, two job applications or received a job offer letter	Completed a college or university application or received an acceptance letter	Completed a technical training application or received an acceptance letter
Documented participation in Continuum of Military Service Opportunity Counseling			
Documented requirements and eligibility for licensure, certification, and apprenticeship among the relevant civilian occupation, if applicable		Completed a comparison of higher education options	Completed a comparison of technical training institution choices
Completed an assessment tool to identify interests		Confirmed one-on-one counseling with a college or university advisor	Confirmed one-on-one counseling with technical training institution advisor

Note. Adapted from "Transition to Veterans Program Office" by U.S. Department of Defense (2014b). Retrieved from http://prhome.defense.gov/RFM/TVPO. Data are in the public domain.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The DVA is the largest health care system in the United States and provides health care and benefits to military veterans. The DVA provides resources and support in the form of education and training benefits through the GI Bill (Collins et al., 2014). The GI Bill provides educational assistance programs to help veterans with transition adjustment to the private sector (Collins et al., 2014). Retired military officers who serve 20 years or more typically have a master's degree, but some choose to pursue higher education before starting a second career.

Veterans can transition to colleges and universities using the Post-9/11 GI Bill (DVA, 2014b). Retired veterans interested in pursuing higher education learn about their eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill through the DVA Education and Training web page (DVA, 2014b). Individuals who served on active duty after September 10, 2001, are eligible to receive this benefit.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides 36 months or less of education benefits payable for 15 years after the veteran retire from active duty (DVA, 2014b). Colleges and universities that participate in a Yellow Ribbon Program provide additional funds to veterans' education program without charging the GI Bill entitlement. Through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans receive a monthly housing allowance, an annual books and supplies stipend, and a one-time rural benefit payment from the DVA. The DVA also has other tools to help student veterans.

Leaders at the DVA also created three new mobile applications. The mobile applications (GI Bill Comparison tools, Factors to Consider When Choosing a School, and CareerScope) enable student veterans to capitalize on their education benefits (DVA, 2014b). For veterans with service-connected disabilities, the DVA provides assistance through its Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program (DVA, 2014c). Program staff members provide service-disabled veterans assistance with job training, job searches, resume development, and starting a business (Cloud, 2014). Further, program staff members assist veterans with severe disabilities who are unable to work in a traditional employment environment (DVA, 2014c). These are some examples of the ways the DVA assists veterans who intend to return to work after the military.

U.S. Department of Labor. The DoL has resources such as VETS and the American Job Centers for transitioning service members and veterans. Through DoL VETS, separating and retiring veterans can obtain resources and expertise needed to pursue a career and attain the most from their employment opportunities (DoL, 2014a). VETS aids veterans through services provided at American Job Centers, whereas grants provided to state workforce agencies fund staff dedicated to support veterans. DoL (2014a) leaders contended that state workforce agencies perform two functions to help veterans transition to the civilian workforce by providing (a) services that address major barriers to employment and (b) employment outreach to local businesses. Consequently, VETS serves as a way to address the needs of veterans by providing employment services and resources to veterans and veterans with disabilities. For veterans who have experienced significant barriers to employment, VETS staff members strive to provide reemployment services for retired veterans to enable them to transition into civilian careers successfully.

Veterans Strategies for Successful Transition

Veterans should employ several strategies to make the successful transition to the civilian workforce. For example, Jacques (2014) interviewed an Air Force veteran who transitioned to a communications position at Thomas Reuters. The veteran made two recommendations for successful transition: (a) veterans should transition to a company that values their military experience and (b) veterans should recognize the value of their military experience and use it to build credibility and relationships in a postmilitary environment (Jacques, 2014). Transitioning veterans should take advantage of the

government organizations that provide assistance and support and the websites created to assist transitioning veterans such as Joining Forces and VETS (Robertson & Brott, 2013). In addition, discussing transition concerns with counselors help soothe service members' fears about postretirement (Huebner & Royal, 2013). Service members should exercise all opportunities available to help them, including networking, to transition from the military to the civilian sector.

Networking is a strategy that leads to veterans' successful transition to the civilian workforce. Abrams et al. (2013) noted that networking is an effective technique to use when job hunting, even in a competitive job market. The unemployment rate for veterans remains higher than the national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Networking refers to establishing relationships to build trust. Opportunities to network should include fellow veterans, friends, and previous employers. Abrams et al. emphasized that a benefit of networking is that it leads to potential job opportunities by learning about a future job posting or gaining an interview with the decision makers. However, networking does not land the job. Individuals need to make the case to the hiring authority regarding why they should get the job (Abrams et al., 2013).

Networking has opened doors for retiring veterans. Additionally, as veterans seek different opportunities, they need to maintain contact with their network as well as establish new contacts (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). A change in mental models, taking control of their future career, networking, and using available resources are positive strategies that help with transition.

Critical Success Factors of Redesigned Transitioning Program

Based on a review of literature related to the redesigned MTP, many positive changes benefit veterans transitioning to the civilian sector. Faurer et al. (2014) found that the redesigned MTP provides more personalized one-on-one assistance, but noted that veterans with combat-related jobs skills did not transfer well in the civilian workforce; therefore, more tailored counseling and extensive workshops are necessary to assist these veterans. The redesigned program has increased transition workshop days from 3 days to 5 days and includes 2 additional options days for veterans to pursue their professional goals (DoD TAP, 2014b). More emphasis is on providing one-on-one counseling to veterans during planning for retirement and while attending the MTP (House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). With tailored career tracks (i.e., education, technical training, and entrepreneurship), veterans have the opportunity to pursue the next phase in their midlife career.

Other recommendations are provided to help veterans transition to the civilian workforce. Faurer et al. (2014) contended that the following recommendations would assist with unemployment: (a) an increased DoL budget for veterans, (b) mandating the MTP for all transitioning veterans, (c) improving workshop availability times, (d) providing an official federally supported system of certifying or licensing military skills, (e) using talented facilitators and local human resource professionals to co-facilitate the MTP classes and workshops, (f) standardized civilian job descriptions, and (g) improved understanding of the skills translator on military.com. Additionally, Faurer et al. contended that there are disconnects between the individuals who provide oversight and

conduct the MTP and the veterans the program serves. That is, both the overseer and the

retiring veteran are not entirely aware of the other's needs and offerings. In this study, I

provided additional insight from the interviews with the military officers by answering

the research question regarding what military officers perceive to be the critical success

factors of the restructured MTP that aid in transitioning from the military to the civilian

sector based on their experiences of military transition.

Gap in Literature

Researchers have yet to explore the lived experiences of military officers

transitioning through the redesigned MTP to gain their perspective of the critical success

factors of this program. This study addresses that gap. The number of unemployed

veterans between the ages of 35 and 64 was 450,000 in 2013 (Bureau of Labor Statistics,

2014), and a significant number of veterans continue to transition due to the downsizing

of the forces in Afghanistan. Providing awareness of the transitioning program and its

benefits provides information to assist all veterans seeking to transition successfully to

the civilian sector. Additionally, research in this area provides awareness that help

transitioning veterans to understand the impact of this life transition and help to identify

what strategies help them cope with this significant change.

<div align="center">

Summary and Conclusions

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The review of the academic literature related to military transition was primarily

on veterans making the transition to higher education, teaching, and nursing or a military-

to-civilian transition in general. I reviewed several databases (i.e., Google Scholar,

Walden databases, and Library of Congress databases) on the topic of military transition,

specifically, the redesigned MTP. There was a notable gap in the scholarly literature on whether the redesigned MTP has helped officers in their transition to the civilian workforce. However, with the recent changes instituted into the redesigned MTP, the focus on veterans making the successful transition to the civilian sector has increased (Collins et al., 2014; Faurer et al., 2014; GAO, 2014; White House, 2014d). For instance, the GAO highlighted 87 programs managed through DoD or DVA, such as the MTP, that is helpful for veterans transitioning to the private sector. Additionally, a focus of the White House was helping veterans obtain the education, training, and support needed as they transitioned from the military (Levardi, 2014). Levardi further noted that more work was necessary to ensure veterans continue to find jobs after retirement.

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of retiring and retired military officers regarding the redesigned transitioning program; this research design was appropriate given the challenges that veterans encounter as they seek employment in the private sector. Additionally, the discussion on Schlossberg's 4S transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory served as a framework to understand and explore some of the challenges and difficulties veterans come across when transitioning to the civilian sector.

To coincide with the changes to the MTP, the sponsors of the DoD, DVA, and DoL provided valuable resources and support that are available to veterans as they make the transition to the civilian sector. However, more research in this area is needed on how MTPs can best support separating and retiring veterans as they transition to the civilian workforce.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the critical success factors of the U.S. Military Transitioning Program (MTP) after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region (NCR). The study involved exploring military officers' perspectives of redesigned MTPs through phenomenological research. Specifically, participants described their perceptions of critical success factors of the MTP after Department of Defense (DoD) leaders transformed the MTP for separating and retiring veterans. I used data gathered from the qualitative study to answer the research questions. The results of this study provide information to veterans to help them in a successful transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

This chapter includes a discussion on the research design and rationale. I then provide a description of my role as the researcher and a thorough discussion of the research methodology, including the participant selection process, sampling, data collection, and data analysis strategies. Also addressed are the issue of trustworthiness through internal and external validity and ethical considerations, including protecting the rights of the participants under study.

Research Design and Rationale

I selected a qualitative, phenomenological research design as the most suitable design for this study. Patton (2015) contended that qualitative inquiry is an inductive research paradigm that contributes to the illuminating of meaning, studying how things work, and capturing stories to understand people's perspective and experiences (p. 12). A

qualitative research method was especially appropriate for my study because it served as a method to explore and understand meaning from the participants' perspective of the central phenomenon of the study, which was military transition (Maxwell, 2013). A quantitative research method would not have been appropriate for this study because it is a deductive research design used to test theory and involves collecting numerical data to derive a statistical outcome (Simon & Goes, 2013). Using a qualitative approach enabled me to conduct the study in its natural setting consisting sites of the participants' choosing, such as a library, a conference room, or another private meeting room. A qualitative research method was suitable to achieve the purpose of the study and answer the research questions. Further, the relatively small sample size allowed for an analysis from the individuals' perspective so that I could interpret and report an understanding of the events, actions, and meaning, as suggested by Maxwell (2013).

Research Design

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method (Simon & Goes, 2013). Phenomenological research takes into consideration the values of individuals' experience and their consciousness of the world. In choosing phenomenological research for this study, my aim was to select the most appropriate design; phenomenology involves using descriptive (Husserl, 2014) or interpretive (Heidegger, 2010) analyses. Researchers conducting descriptive or interpretive phenomenological inquiry have an interest in capturing the individuality of events (Yin, 2011), namely exploring how individuals perceive or interpret a situation (Reiners, 2012). Additionally, phenomenologists seek to determine the meaning of one's lived experiences (Reiners, 2012), which is only

answerable by individuals who experienced the phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Thus, phenomenology was the ideal choice because the focus of the study was to explore

the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP as experienced by the research

participants.

A qualitative, phenomenology inquiry was the appropriate design for this study

because my focus was to understand the lived experiences of military officers

transitioning from the military. Moustakas (1994) posited that phenomenology inquiry

would aid in describing what participants experienced and how they experienced it. This

approach was suitable for capturing the stories and understanding the participants'

perspectives and experiences of the military transition (Patton, 2015). The rationale for

the qualitative design compared to other qualitative approaches appears in the following

section.

Rationale for the Design

I considered and rejected several alternate qualitative research approaches:

narrative, grounded theory, ethnographic research, and case study research. For instance,

the narrative approach received consideration, but its focus is on examining an

individual's life through detailed stories (Patton, 2015). Instead, the focus of

phenomenology is on capturing the essence of one's lived experiences or making sense of

human beings' experience of a situation or phenomenon (Patton, 2015). In this study, I

wanted to obtain a deeper understanding of the transitioning experiences from the

perspectives of the military officers.

Grounded theory was not suitable for this research because its emphasis is on developing a theory constructed from the composed data, as noted by Moustakas (1994). Further, ethnography inquiry was not the right approach for this research because it involves exploring the culture of a group of individuals, in particular their behavior in their natural setting (Simon & Goes, 2013). As a methodology, the focus of case study research is on studying a single case or multiple cases such as an event, situation, or individuals (Patton, 2015). I selected the qualitative, phenomenological approach because of my interest in gaining an in-depth understanding of military officers' lived experiences of transitioning to the private sector through the redesigned MTP.

The foci of the informal interview process that I used were exploring the military officers' transitioning experiences and describing the essence of their experiences. I used three open-ended primary research questions to guide my gathering information from the participants based on their lived experiences.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of U.S. military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region?

RQ2: What do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

RQ3: What do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

I posed a series of interview questions related to the primary research questions to the participants (see Appendix A). The interview questions helped to answer the three research questions as well as to ensure content validity.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was to interview participants, collect and organize data, and interpret the results from the data collected. My focus was on understanding military officers' transitioning experiences or the essence of their experiences as they leave the military for the civilian sector (Patton, 2015). In phenomenological research, semistructured interviews are the primary method used by researchers who act as the instrument for the research. The study included interviews with the research participants at a location of their choosing, such as a library, conference room, or other meeting room. I conducted interviews with each of the participants involved with the study, taking steps to observe them in a natural setting.

I recorded information in a journal pertaining to the participants' observed behavior, the voice and tone of the participants, and how engaged the participants were with the research study and answered the interview questions. The participants could choose to end their participation in the study at any time or not to answer an interview question. I asked the participants for their permission to audio record the interviews at the interview site.

The participants received a copy of the interview questions in advance and a request to respond to the questions. As I recruited participants, I made an effort to limit the number of individuals I knew from prior personal relationships. However, I knew

several potential participants from prior social interaction such as attending a work-related conference where military officers were present. Nonetheless, no participants were part of a supervisory or instructor relationship in which I had power over them. Additionally, I did not conduct interviews with personnel who work in my organization. I currently work with the federal government as a civilian employee but have no supervisory responsibility. My role as the researcher was to focus on the participants and remain objective in this process. Although my background was similar to others who have transitioned from the military to the civilian sector, individuals experience and interpret their transition experiences differently.

My pertinent background for this study is that I had previously retired from the military after serving 20 years and transitioned through the legacy MTP before leaving military service in 2008. Although I used the MTP and remembered details based upon my experiences of military transitioning, I made every effort to separate my transitioning experiences from those of the participants. To prevent research bias from occurring in this phenomenological study, the study included bracketing/epoché, as recommended by Moustakas (1994). I also used an interview protocol as part of the interview process when meeting with the participants (see Appendix A). Additionally, I used a journal to record my thoughts and beliefs during this process to assist me in remaining open and receptive as the research participants described their military transitioning experiences.

Research Methodology

The methodology section includes a description and justification for the participant selection and sampling strategy. In addition, the section includes the criteria

the participants met to participate in the study. A discussion on instrumentation in terms of data collection also ensues.

Participant Selection Logic

The study involved recruiting military officers who experienced the phenomenon of military transitioning to participate. Patton (2015) emphasized the need for a unit of analysis in a study. Yin (2011) contended that the unit refers to an individual, organization, or other entity. Military officers were the unit of analysis in this study. The data came from military officers while they were in their natural setting. Additionally, the study involved observing the participants based on how the setting affected them (Patton, 2015). I selected the military officers based on the following criteria: (a) within 6 months of retiring or (b) had retired within 1 year from one of the four military branches in the NCR. The participants were retiring or retired military officers in the ranks of majors to general officers, and purposeful sampling was suitable for answering the research problem and questions.

Sampling Strategy

Participants recruited were a purposeful sampling of military officers. The military officers volunteered to participate in this study via LinkedIn, by networking, or while attending job fairs in the NCR. The sampling size consisted of 20 military officers. Six military officers were transitioning through the MTP at the time of the study. Additionally, 14 military officers had transitioned or retired from the military service and were working or seeking employment with industry or the government in the NCR.

Several researchers have expressed their views on appropriate sample sizes for a qualitative study. Researchers such as Yin (2011) and Patton (2015) contended that sample sizes vary from small units to large units. For example, Yin indicated that the number of participants in a study easily ranges from 25 to 50 units. Patton (2015) contended that researchers can value obtaining in-depth information from a small sample, especially if the data obtained are information rich (p. 311). For example, through the in-depth observation of his two children, Piaget contributed immensely to the understanding of how children think (Patton, 2015). Similarly, Freud created the clinical method of psychoanalysis based on a sample size of less than 10 client cases (Patton, 2015). A small sample size is consistent with phenomenological studies, particularly in studies where semistructured interviews are used to collect data. Additionally, Patton contended that there are no guidelines relating to an appropriate sample in qualitative research. However, Patton noted that when considering the sample size, researchers should consider factors such as (a) what they want to know, (b) intent of the study, (c) ensuring credibility, and (d) time and resource constraints. Based on these factors, 20 participants was an appropriate sample size for this study.

The small sample size for the phenomenological inquiry allowed me to gather extensive detail and data about the individuals to explore the phenomenon under study. Because qualitative researchers try not to generalize data but rather to describe the essence of the participants' experience, in-depth interviews enabled me to capture the military officers' experiences. In addition, limiting the population size for the study

allowed me to focus on the purpose of the research study and ensure its usefulness and credibility to the academic community.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument chosen for this phenomenological study was researcher produced in the form of an interview questions using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). As the researcher, I was the instrument for collecting data from the participants under study. Patton (2015) contended that interviewing allows researchers to find out things that they cannot observe directly, as well as helps researchers to understand their observations. Because a human being cannot observe everything, interviewing enabled me as a qualitative researcher to explore the phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Patton, 2015). Through semistructured and in-depth interviewing, the participants responded to interview questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

I designed the interview questions to answer the three research questions and the interview included only questions relevant to the study to establish content validity. In addition, the study included several demographic questions such as age, gender, and tenure in the military. Other types of data collection instruments included a digital voice recorder for recording interview conversations and a camera for photos to capture the participants' site or location. Interviews and observations took place at the research participants' site or a location of their choosing.

Pilot Study

Researchers use pilot studies to aid in testing and refining instruments for a study. For instance, I conducted a pilot study to test and refine the fieldwork procedures, the interview questions, and the study methodology (Yin, 2011). Additionally, conducting the pilot study helped to establish content validity to ensure the responses to the interview questions would help me to answer the research questions and to ensure the questions covered only the topic under study. Further, testing the questions before the primary study helped to validate the research questions. The participants of the pilot study met the same criteria used in the final study: the military officers were (a) within 6 months of retiring or (b) had retired within 1 year from one of the four military branches in the NCR. The participants were retiring or retired military officers in the ranks of majors to general officers, and purposeful sampling was suitable for answering the research problem and questions.

The pilot study consisted of interviewing three participants using open-ended questions. I recruited the participants from LinkedIn and professional networking and provided them a copy of the interview questions. The individuals contacted via LinkedIn or professional networking received an informed consent form and interview questions via email. The participants were retired or retiring military officers who meet the criteria of the study (see Appendix A). I conducted face-to-face interviews so that I could identify and resolve potential problems with the research project prior to the primary study. In addition, I used the participants' responses to help determine whether the questions were difficult or easy to understand.

The comments, feedback, and recommendations from the study participants helped to improve the interview questions and study procedures. A modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method described by Moustakas (1994) served as the basis for the data analysis technique used for the pilot test. The focus was on developing a list of noteworthy statements and grouping the information into themes. I also considered the data analysis methods from Van Kaam but did not use them in the primary study. The information collected from the pilot study was not part of the main study.

Data Collection

In the phenomenological study, a semistructured interview was the primary method for collecting information-rich data from the participants. A document review and observations were qualitative techniques that were also a part of this study. Interviewing took place face-to-face with each participant at the participant's location or at a location mutually determined by the participant and me. An interview protocol with interview questions was the data collection method for the study.

I used the interview protocol to collect the data at a location of the participants' choosing. The interview protocol included the time of the interview, date, place, interviewer, interviewee, and research questions. The interview protocols used to collect the data were a pretransition protocol and a posttransition protocol (see Appendix A). The pretransition protocol was for interviewing retiring military officers who were 6 months or less from retirement and intended to transition to the civilian sector. The posttransition protocol was for interviewing military officers who were within 1-year postretirement from the military and were transitioning to the civilian sector.

The study included several different interviewing techniques such as face-to-face, phone, and email. The preferred method used was face-to-face so that I could capture the essence of the participants' lived experiences during the interview process. The length of the interview session was 30 to 60 minutes.

The data collection process began when I received permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; Approval #05-29-15-0336302) for this study. I ensured the participants' privacy during the data collection process to alleviate potential risks, and the locations used for interviewing participants were private and included only the participant and me. I did not disclose the participants' identity as part of the study. I used codes such as Participant 1 to identify participants. The interview protocol included requesting some demographic details, but only those that were necessary and important to this study. In addition, I did not identify organizational sites. I identified the participants through networking contacts, via LinkedIn, or by attending job fairs. I contacted potential participants through an email invitation letter (see Appendix B) to participate in the study as well as provide a consent form (see Appendix C).

Through face-to-face contact or through email, I asked individuals to participate in an in-depth interview on the topic of military transitioning. The military officers received the consent form through email. After they signed the consent form and returned it, the participants and I scheduled the interview at a mutually agreed upon time and at a site of the participants' choosing. I was able to record and subsequently hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the face-to-face interviews in a timely manner. After determining dates and times for the interviews, the interview process began. The length

of the interview session ranged between 30 and 60 minutes. After the interview session ended, the transcriptionist transcribed the recorded conversation and I sent the transcripts to the participants to validate before analyzing the data.

Follow-up might have been necessary if recruitment resulted in fewer than 20 participants or if a need for additional interviews emerged. Additional efforts through LinkedIn based on the criteria needed for the participants under study would have taken place if recruitment resulted in fewer than 20 participants. In addition, I recruited three individuals who met the definition of military transitioning who retired from my organization and transitioned through the redesigned MTP. However, no interviews took place at my organization. No follow-up interviews took place to clarify responses, although I followed up with participants so they could review their transcribed responses for member checking or to verify the accuracy of their responses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Furthermore, I made available to the participants a one- to two-page summary or verbal presentation at the conclusion of the study or a copy of the completed study.

Data Analysis Plan

Using an interview protocol and writing field notes was useful for managing and organizing the data collected for the study. Janesick (2011) recommended several management techniques appropriate for qualitative researchers such as reading transcripts, memoing data from field notes, taking pictures, and using short phrases or ideas that I found useful in this study. Accordingly, making sense of raw field notes and verbatim transcripts was an undertaking that required making sense out of the data

(Patton, 2015). Therefore, developing a coding scheme was the first step in data analysis. Patton (2015) contended that content analysis (i.e., identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the patterns of data) is appropriate for determining what content (e.g., observation and interviews) is significant.

In this qualitative study, coding, identifying themes, and interpreting data were part of the data analysis procedures. Through open coding, I established in vivo codes and themes from the raw data and examined the data in search of words and phrases that were similar in order to group the data into similar categories (Maxwell, 2013). I further segmented the interview data to compare the responses for similarities and differences, as well as named and identified conceptual categories wherein I grouped the observed phenomena.

I used NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, while organizing and analyzing the data. Using the software, I compared and contrasted the responses from the interview questions, developed codes, and noted themes and patterns. Axial coding allowed me to reexamine and reassemble the categories identified during open coding and determine the links or connections for the new data (Simon & Goes, 2013). Axial coding involved comparing and combining the new data to begin building a picture or conceptual model as well as to determine if enough data existed to support the interpretation (Simon & Goes, 2013).

The basis for the data analysis technique used was a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method described by Moustakas (1994) for the phenomenological analysis. The technique consists of seven steps:

1. Describe my personal experience with the central phenomenon as an effort to set aside my own personal experience so the focus can be on the study participants.

2. Develop a list of noteworthy statements.

3. Group the information into themes.

4. Write a textual description of the participant's experience with the phenomenon.

5. Write a structural description of how the experience happened that reflects the context and setting of where the participant experienced the phenomenon.

6. Write a description incorporating both textual and structural descriptions.

7. Conduct member checking and transcript review by performing a preliminary analysis prior to returning the transcript to the participants for review in a single or multiple sessions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Determining trustworthiness means determining the rigor of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that four criteria (e.g., credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) provided the lens for such rigor in a qualitative study. A discussion of the four criteria for determining trustworthiness in a qualitative study follows.

Credibility

Researchers can use different strategies to establish credibility in a study, including triangulation, member checks, saturation, reflexivity, and peer review. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that researchers can establish credibility when the findings

have value and believability. Establishing credibility in a study means ensuring its internal validity or controlling for validity threats (Maxwell, 2013). Establishing validity means addressing whether the questions measure what the researcher intends them to measure (Simon & Goes, 2013).

In a qualitative study, controlling for validity threats means identifying potential threats and describing ways to protect the study from invalidity (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking helps to ensure credibility (internal validity), which enables participants to verify that the transcribed information is correct (Simon & Goes, 2013). I conducted some preliminary analyses prior to giving the transcript to the respondents. The participants then reviewed the data and verified the accuracy and credibility of the information.

In this study, I was cognizant of saturation and the validation strategy of peer review. Saturation refers to the extent that no new themes or issues emerge as a researcher categorizes data or as a result of well-established and validated categories (Simon & Goes, 2013); that is, at saturation, there is no need for continued analysis. However, saturation was not a strategy used in this study because I used a sample of pretransition and posttransition officers and felt that there was a probability that new themes or issues emerge; therefore, I continued to interview participants based on the sample size of 20 individuals. The validation strategy of peer (colleague) review helped to gain an outside perspective of the interview transcripts, themes, and data analyses of the research. The method of peer review or debriefing enables feedback from a peer on

the progress of a study. I also addressed other validity concerns in the study such as external validity.

Transferability

The appropriate strategies to establish transferability (external validity) in a qualitative study include using rich descriptive data and variation in participant selection. Transferability refers to whether a researcher can transfer the findings to a different context while maintaining a base of information or rich description of the completed study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I described a rich description of the research so that the readers can make judgments on the context of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, creating rich descriptions of the research to include the research methods and raw data improves the transferability of the study (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). The study also included other descriptive details such as direct quotes from the participants and field notes on how I developed the themes from the data. I purposefully sampled the participants from among the four branches of military services, and the participants were both male and female and from a variety of military ranks.

Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative counterpart to reliability. Dependability refers to strategies such as audit trails and triangulation that researchers use to establish reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Maintaining an audit trail means involves keeping thorough notes or records of data, including my rationale for any methodological decisions made in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). NVivo was helpful in the audit trail because I had

access to a record of decisions made during data collection and analysis. Conducting

queries using NVivo also enabled me to audit findings, which helped with reliability.

Triangulation is another strategy used to establish dependability. Maxwell (2013)

contended that triangulation involves using multiple methods as a way of cross-checking

to determine whether different methods with varying strengths and limitations support a

single conclusion. Triangulation or cross-checking data consisted of using different

sources (e.g., retiring and retired military officers, notes and journals, and MTP

information) and different methods such as formal interviews, emails, and data collected

on the redesigned MTP to help validate findings (Maxwell, 2013). For example, the

participants discussed their perceptions of factors that helped them transition to the

civilian sector successfully in interviews. Additionally, I collected and analyzed data to

help identify emerging themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the qualitative counterpart to objectivity. Confirmability refers

to strategies such as reflexivity and triangulation established through an audit trail

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity means that a researcher maintains a reflective

journal that highlights the research conducted and includes personal thoughts, challenges,

and rationales for the decisions made (e.g., data collection and analysis) in the study

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, I made my written field notes (raw data),

methodological information, data synthesis, and so on available for audit purposes.

Because researchers are an integral part of the process in qualitative inquiry, it was

important that I did not influence how the interviewees' responded to the interview

questions; however, I endeavored to understand how my influence of the situation might have affected the validity of the study (Maxwell, 2013). Using a professional transcriptionist service helped me to ensure intercoder reliability.

Ethical Procedures

Before data collection began, the data process underwent review by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB process helped to ensure the research would conform to Walden University's ethical standards and to federal guidelines. Nathaniel (2010) posited that IRBs protect the rights of participants and consider ethical principles such as harm versus benefit, confidentiality, privacy, and respect for persons. Thus, the IRB's objective was to ensure the participants under study were not subject to undue stress and harm.

Ensuring ethical research standards was important in this study, and the research needed to comply with the ethical research standards noted by the National Institutes of Health (2012). Informed consent procedures and ensuring participants' confidentiality are ethical considerations that were necessary and relevant to this study (Patton, 2015). A consent form included information needed to inform participants of the purpose of collecting information for the study, the expected use of the information, the questions I would ask during the interview, and a discussion on how I would handle the responses, which included ensuring the confidentiality of the information (Patton, 2015). In addition, the consent form provided the participants with the study's procedure and information regarding risks and benefits of being in the study (see Appendix C). Because the focus of the interviews was on military service members who were approaching retirement or

retired, the participants were adults from the midlife stage whose ages ranged from 42 to about 60 years.

I informed the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that their information and participation would remain confidential, that is, known by me and not shared with anyone else. I asked them to sign and return the confidentiality statement (see Appendix D). I changed the participants' names to a unique participant identifier code assigned to each participant. A digital voice recorder was useful for recording the responses from the interviewees. A staff member from a professional transcriptionist service transcribed the data from the recorder, and I placed the data on a password-protected computer in my home. Audio recordings remained secure in a locked cabinet in my home office and I intend to destroy them after 5 years. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality statement (see Appendix E).

As a researcher, I communicated the purpose and the relevancy of the study to the participants and observed the participants to build trust, understand the culture, and verify information. I treated each participant with dignity and respect. I clarified my bias at the beginning of the study in Chapter 4. That is, through the process of bracketing, I addressed the bias and assumptions that I made in my approach to the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 included an explanation regarding why the qualitative phenomenological research design was most appropriate for this study. The main topics explored in this chapter were the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, research methodology, instrumentation, pilot study, data collection and data analysis,

issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. A qualitative research approach enables researchers to study the meaning of participants' lives, represent participants' views, explain and clarify events, and create new concepts (Yin, 2011). The purpose of the study was to explore military officers' perception of the critical success factors of the MTP following the redesign in the NCR. The phenomenological approach was the best method to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

The study included a sample size of 20 military officers who lived in the NCR. I methods of recruiting the officers included using LinkedIn, networking, or attending job fairs. Six participants were transitioning through the military transitioning program at the time of the study. Fourteen participants had transitioned or retired from the military service and were working or seeking employment with industry or the government in the NCR. The participants met the following criteria: (a) within 6 months of retiring or (b) had retired within 1 year from one of the four military branches in the NCR. The participants were retiring or retired military officers in the ranks of majors to general officers, and purposeful sampling was suitable for answering the research problem and questions.

The participants volunteered for this study. I recruited them based on their knowledge of the redesigned MTP and their willingness to share their experiences of how the MTP aided them in their transition from the military to the civilian sector. They participated in in-depth interviews and responded to interview questions in an interview protocol. I conducted a pilot study to test and refine the interview questions. The pilot

study consisted of three participants, and I used the same criteria for participation as in the final study.

The data collection strategy consisted of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to collect information-rich data from the participants. Data analysis involved using the interview protocol and field notes to manage and organize the data collected for the study. In this qualitative study, coding, identifying themes, and interpreting data were part of the data analysis procedures. The NVivo software was useful for organizing and analyzing the data. It was important, as the researcher of this study, that I ensured I caused no harm or stress to the participants, established trustworthiness in the study, and complied with ethical standards and federal guidelines.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the critical success factors of the U.S. Military Transitioning Program (MTP) after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region (NCR). The problem addressed was that there was no indication that the redesigned MTP was effective in helping officers transition successfully to the civilian workforce. The data gathered from the interviews were suitable for answering the primary research questions of this study:.

- RQ1: What are the lived experiences of U.S. military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region?

- RQ2: What do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

- RQ3: What do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector?

These research questions were designed to explore the phenomenon of military transitioning by gaining a perspective or meaning of the participants' experience. In this chapter, I discuss the pilot study, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis techniques employed in the study. I also include a description of the themes identified

and the associated categories. Finally, a discussion in the chapter includes the results from the data analysis conducted.

Bracketing

As the researcher and instrument of this study, I made every effort to separate my transitioning experiences from those of the participants. Researchers engage in bracketing or epoché process, according to Moustakas (1994), to set aside predispositions of the phenomenon under investigation. To prevent research bias from occurring in this phenomenological study, I engaged the bracketing or epoché process during data collection and data analysis. For example, I bracketed or set aside my beliefs and judgments regarding my military transitioning experiences while conducting, recording, and transcribing the participants' interviews. Through the process of bracketing, the focus of the research was directed on the meaning deriving from the data. Through the concept of bracketing or epoché, the focus of the research was on participants' interviews.

Through the epoché process, I created a reflective journal when I began data collection and wrote in the reflective journal for the 25-day period of data collection. Janesick (2011) emphasized that reflective journaling allow researchers to reflect on their role as a qualitative researcher. In the journal, I wrote about my personal experiences as a retired military officer and what it was like as I processed through the MTP. Through daily entries in the reflective journal, I was able to gain an enhanced understanding about myself, which enabled me to focus on the participants. For instance, I set aside my biases and assumptions so that I could examine the phenomenon of military transitioning through the perspectives of the participants under study (Moustakas, 1994).

After I provided the participants' background information on the research, I refrained from asking probing questions or making comments that supported my preconceptions of the central phenomenon of military transitioning. I used an interview protocol when I interviewed the participants, and using the reflective journal helped me remain open and receptive as the research participants described their military transitioning experiences. Additionally, I conducted each interview session with an open mind and consciously focused on the participants. It was also important that the respondents were in an environment of their choosing where they were comfortable and willing to share their experiences of military transitioning. Before each interview, I asked the participants if they were comfortable in the research setting and ready to begin the interview session. Thus, the epoché process helped ensure the participants and their perceptions were the focus of the study. The recordings and transcriptions aided the epoché process by enabling meaning from the respondents' interview to emerge.

Pilot Study

I used a pilot study to aid in testing and refining the instruments used in the final study. During the pilot study, two respondents were contacted through LinkedIn and the other respondent was recruited as a result of professional networking. Through LinkedIn, I searched for participants whose profile indicated that they were in transition from the military. I then sent the individuals an email with the participant recruitment letter (see Appendix B) and asked them if they had an interest in participating in the study. Through professional networking, current and former peers (i.e., active duty and retired military officers) were contacted via email and informed that I was conducting a qualitative study

regarding military transitioning. I provided the participant recruitment letters to 30 individuals through professional networking. The networking contacts also informed me of other individuals who met the criteria for participating in the study. I sent the potential respondents a participant recruitment letter to verify their interest in the study

The participants of the pilot study met the same criteria used in the final study: the military officers were (a) within 6 months of retiring or (b) had retired within the previous year from one of the four military branches in the NCR. Three respondents participated in semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Two retired military officers in the rank of lieutenant colonel and one retired colonel from the U.S. Army volunteered to participate following recruitment through LinkedIn and professional networking. The pilot participants received a participant recruitment letter, an informed consent form, and an interview protocol via email. All the pilot interviews took place face-to-face. A meeting time and location for the interview was determined by the participants. The location of one interview was a conference room setting in Newington, Virginia, and the other two interviews took place in libraries on Fort Belvoir's Army Installation, Virginia, and in Lorton, Virginia. Copies of the participant recruitment letter, consent form, and interview protocols are in the appendices.

I used a coding system to categorize similar data so that I could quickly find segments of information relating to a particular research question or theme (Miles et al., 2014). I coded and categorized the three pilot interviews to the interview protocol provided with each pilot interview. The participant codes used for the three pilot interviews were P001, P002, and P003, as suggested by Miles et al. (2014).

The pilot study was instrumental in identifying and resolving potential problems with the research project prior to the primary study. I made significant changes to the interview questions used in the main study based on the pilot study results. These changes included ensuring that the interview questions were the same for the two protocols, correcting word inconsistencies per protocol, expanding questions on the interview protocol, and adding the phrase *critical success factors* to applicable interview questions. The original interview protocol used in the pilot study, before the changes, can be found in Appendix F.

The comments, feedback, and recommendations from the pilot study participants aided in improving the interview questions and study procedures. A modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method as described by Moustakas (1994) served as the basis for the data analysis technique used for the pilot test. This method consisted of seven steps, and I used four of the steps in the study. First, I described my personal experience with the central phenomenon to the participants as an effort to set aside my own personal experience so the focus could be on the study participants. Second, I developed a list of noteworthy statements and grouped the information into themes. Third, NVivo 10 was an effective tool used to organize the data into categories and subcategories, and I reviewed the transcribed data from the pilot study. Fourth, I member-checked the transcribed data with the pilot study participants. The categories identified in the pilot study were the same categories used in the main study.

Research Setting

The research settings of the study consisted of face-to-face interviews held in conference or study rooms at public libraries in Fort Belvoir, Lorton, and Woodbridge, Virginia, with the specific location decided by each participant. Myself as the researcher and the participant were the only ones present during the face-to-face interviews. Eight interviews also took place via telephone to help accommodate some participants. All interviews involved either the pretransition or the posttransition protocol. A pretransition interview protocol was suitable when I interviewed participants who were within 6 months of retiring from the military. The posttransition interview protocol was suitable when I interviewed participants who were 1 year or less after retiring from military service.

No personal changes, budgetary cuts, or changes in the organizational direction or structure influenced the participants at the time of the study that might have influenced interpretations of the study results. The participants in the face-to-face interviews received a copy of the consent form via email and a copy of the consent form and confidentiality agreement at the research site. The participants whose interviews took place on the telephone received a copy of the consent form, confidentiality agreement, and interview protocol by email. The telephone respondents electronically signed the consent form.

Before each interview, I ensured the recorders, which included both an android phone and a digital recorder, were working. Three separate libraries served as locations for the face-to-face interviews. At the library in Fort Belvoir, Virginia the setting

consisted of a medium conference table with five chairs, and at another library in

Woodbridge, Virginia the study room used consisted of two chairs and a small work area.

The conference rooms selected by the participants also varied. For example, one room

had a large conference table with 12 chairs, and another conference room had a medium

table with four chairs.

After the participant and I determined a mutual time and location for the

interview, I called the libraries to schedule a room for the interview. There was no cost to

use the rooms at the library or the conference room. The participants interviewed by

phone indicated that they preferred a phone interview because of their work schedule and

traffic congestion in the NCR.

Demographics

The demographic information collected from the participants included age,

gender, rank, status (retiring/retired), military branch, years served, and career field. The

target sample size for this study was 20 participants, who are referred to below as P1-

P20. Seven females (35%) and 13 males (65%) participated; the age of the participants

ranged from 42 to 60. There were 10 lieutenant colonels, nine colonels, and one general

officer. Six officers were retiring (pretransition) and 14 officers were retired

(posttransition) as of June 2015. The career field of 40% of the recruited officers was

logistics, and the remaining 60% worked in field artillery, infantry, combat support,

nursing, human resources, engineering, and personnel. The demographic sample of

participants recruited for this research study is in Table 3.

Table 3

Demographic Overview

Participant	Age	Gender	Rank	Status	Branch	Years Served	Career Field
P01	55	Female	Colonel	Retiring	Army	30	Combat support
P02	42	Female	CW4	Retired	Army	22	Logistics
P03	54	Male	Colonel	Retired	Army	30	Infantry
P04	52	Male	CW5	Retired	Army	33	Field artillery
P05	52	Male	Lt Col	Retired	Air Force	32	Personnel
P06	47	Female	LTC	Retired	Army	21	Human resources
P07	43	Female	CDR	Retired	Navy	21	Nurse
P08	59	Male	Colonel	Retired	Air Force	28	Lab scientist
P09	44	Male	Lt Col	Retiring	Air Force	20	Logistics
P10	53	Male	Colonel	Retired	Army	30	Logistics
P11	51	Female	LTC	Retired	Army	30	Human resources
P12	54	Male	LTC	Retired	Army	31	Logistics
P13	51	Male	LTC	Retiring	Army	28	Chemical
P14	57	Female	Lt Gen	Retiring	Air Force	34	Logistics
P15	54	Male	Colonel	Retired	Air Force	28	Logistics
P16	44	Male	CDR	Retiring	Navy	21	Logistics
P17	52	Male	Colonel	Retired	Army	30	Information systems
P18	51	Male	Colonel	Retired	Air Force	27	Logistics
P19	60	Female	Captain	Retired	Navy	27	Nurse
P20	45	Male	LTC	Retiring	Army	26	Engineer

Note. $N = 20$. CW4 = lieutenant colonel, CW5 = colonel, Lt Col/LTC = lieutenant colonel, CDR = commander/lieutenant colonel equivalent, Lt Gen = lieutenant general.

Data Collection

Twenty retired or retiring military officers who transitioned through the military transitioning program in the NCR took part in this study. Semistructured interviews were the primary method used to collect information-rich data from the participants. The two

interviewing mediums used were 12 face-to-face interviews (60%) and eight telephone

interviews (40%). Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 18, and 20 were interviewed

at a conference room or a study room at a library. The participants and I mutually agreed

to the conference room or study room locations and the selected time of the interviews.

The interviews for Participants 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 19 took place on the

telephone from my home at a time and date determined by the participants.

An interview protocol with interview questions was the primary data collection

method used for this research study. The interview protocol included the time of the

interview, date and place, interviewee, and interview questions. The interview protocols

used to collect the data were a pretransition protocol and a posttransition protocol (see

Appendix A). Each participant answered a series of 11 (pretransition) or 12

(posttransition) interview questions. All participants participated in one interview, and the

interview session ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The interview session consisted of the

preliminary interview protocol actions and the recorded interview.

All the interviewees provided a complete response to each interview question.

They were asked to clarify or expound on their responses. They were also asked after

each interview question if they had any additional information to share. Several

participants provided succinct responses to the interview questions. Even though the

responses were succinct, the interviews included rich information that were beneficial in

answering the research questions. I used a Sony digital recorder and my telephone to

record each interview for playback and record keeping. I also reviewed documents and

made observations, which were qualitative data collection techniques used in this study.

The data collection process did not begin until I received permission from the Walden University IRB on May 29, 2015. After IRB approval, the duration of data collection was approximately 25 days. I used LinkedIn, networking, and job fairs as means to recruit participants. The majority of the participants came from recruitment efforts that involved LinkedIn (30%) and networking (50%). I also recruited individuals through snowballing (20%). I attended one job fair during the data collection time frame, but was unsuccessful in recruiting anyone who met the criteria of the study. I contacted all participants through an email invitation letter (see Appendix B), and they all received the consent form (see Appendix C) and confidentiality agreement (see Appendix D) via email as well.

I asked the participants to participate in an in-depth interview on the topic of military transitioning. All participants signed the consent forms electronically or in person prior to the interview. After determining dates and times for the interviews, the interview process started. All participants received an interviewee code name, such as Participant 1.

After the interview session, a transcriptionist or I transcribed the recorded interviews. The transcriptionist transcribed 15 interviews, and I transcribed five interviews. The decisions made on which interviews the transcriptionist or the researcher would transcribe were not random. The transcriptionist was busy transcribing early in the process, so I assisted in transcribing the interviews for Participants 6 and 7. I transcribed the last three interviews because the transcriptionist was unavailable. There were no differences in the transcription process between the transcriptionist and this researcher.

The software I used for transcribing was InqScribe. I used the same content format and structure that the transcriptionist used for transcribing the recorded interviews. I also interpreted the data before sending the data to the participants for member checking (Miles et al., 2014).

Based on a review of the proposed data collection plan, there were no variations to the data collected. Minor challenges occurred during data collection. In one case, two participants agreed to an interview but on the day of the interview, the individuals did not establish a time or did not respond to email or telephone messages. The other instance was when an individual showed up at the interview site but did not meet the criteria for this study. I did not interview these individuals for this study.

Data Analysis

Managing and organizing the data collected for the study involved using an interview protocol and written field notes. The basis for the data analysis technique used was a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method described by Moustakas (1994) for the phenomenological analysis (see Appendix G). The method provided a structured way to describe and categorize the interview data that was used in this study. The data was examined as stories from the participants. The study involved using inductive and deductive reasoning within three cyclical phases of coding (i.e., open coding, axial coding, and selective coding).

Inductive reasoning began with observing parts of the whole or units and ended with generalizations from the bottom up (Patton, 2015). Deductive reasoning began with generalizations and ended with parts of the whole or units from the top down (Patton,

2015). The first phase of this process was open coding, or line-by-line coding of the data, to develop descriptive themes and assign category titles (Maxwell, 2013). The phase also included in vivo coding or selecting specific words or phrases from the content for titling purposes.

The second phase was axial coding, which involved exploring patterns and emerging themes (Simon & Goes, 2013). In this phase, I began merging, clustering, retitling, and eliminating categories. The third phase in the process was selective or substantive coding, which involved interpreting and synthesizing the meaning of the data (Maxwell, 2013). This phase involved comparing and contrasting coded content and creating new themes, as well as additional merging, clustering, and eliminating categories. The coding process was a combination of all three phases.

The next step involved uploading 20 transcribed interviews into the NVivo software for coding. I renamed the files to take advantage of the sorting feature in NVivo 10. The NVivo software enabled the researcher to sort the content into coding reports alphabetically based on the titles of the interviews; for example, one document title for coding was Protocol: Post and Pre. I sorted the 20 titles alphabetically by protocol, then by gender within the protocol, then by age within gender, and so on. An example of the titling process for coding is as follows: Post_F_Age51_Army_LtColonel_P11.

Member checking was a validation strategy used to help ensure credibility in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During member checking, the participants received their transcribed interview and verified that the responses provided were accurate and not a misrepresentation of their intended meaning (Simon & Goes, 2013). Additionally,

through member checking, the participants were able to provide feedback on whether the formulation of the interview questions was correct and whether any adjustments to the interview protocol were necessary.

After each participant member checked the data, I emailed the transcribed interview data from each participant to an NVivo consultant to upload in the software. NVivo 10 was useful for organizing the data and data analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The software allowed for comparing and contrasting the responses from the participants' interview questions, as well as developing codes and noting themes and patterns. I obtained multiple coding reports (17 main nodes or categories with 334 subcategories) with coded responses resulting from the 20 interviews. Next, I read, compared, and interpreted the reports, which was a crucial step in the process.

Interview Questions and Associated Nodes

Seven nodes or categories created in NVivo 10 reflected the demographic interview protocol: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) when retire from military, (d) branch of military transitioning from, (e) military career field, (f) length served (years and month), and (g) grade/rank at retirement. Next, 12 categories created in NVivo 10 showed the combined pretransition and posttransition interview protocols. Twelve associated nodes initially related to the interview questions.

- Q01: Pretransition experiences – reason for retiring

- Q02: Preplanning activities

- Q03: MTP – Department of Defense

- Q04: MTP – Department of Labor

- Q05: MTP – Department of Veterans Affairs

- Q06: MTP redesign – Critical success factors

- Q07: Which aid veterans the most (MTP critical success factors)

- Q08: Benefits of restructured MTP – how helps you

- Q09: Challenges experienced transitioning

- Q10: Changes recommended to improve program

- Q11: Post transition experiences after retirement

- Q12: Anything else

After further refinement of the categories, which included merging and eliminating categories, six associated nodes emerged. Six questions were the same on both protocols, with an additional question asked of the posttransition veterans. I used the seven interview questions to answer the three research questions. The seven interview questions and the associated nodes related to each question are in Table 4.

Table 4

Interview Questions, Nodes, and Related Research Question

Interview Question	Associated Nodes	Corresponding Research Question
1	Preretirement transitioning experiences	RQ1
2	Preplanning transitioning activities	RQ1
3	Transition experiences with the MTP	RQ1
4	Critical success factors of the MTP	RQ2
5	Challenges experienced with the MTP	RQ3
6	Recommendations to improve the MTP	RQ3
7	Postretirement transitioning experiences	RQ1

Note. MTP = Military Transitioning Program.

The associated nodes in Table 4 emerged from the interview questions, research questions, and problem statement. The associated nodes provided a foundation for the data analysis process and aided in the categorization and identification of common themes based on the responses from the research participants. Content analysis and NVivo 10 were useful for identifying the common themes among the research participants' responses to the interview questions. The associated nodes aided in categorizing the identified themes in this study. Detailed responses related to the interview questions and themes are in the Research Study Findings section of this chapter.

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases identified during this study. During the interview process, all participants provided responses to the interview questions. At no time did a respondent ask that I omit an interview question or indicate he or she did not want to respond to an interview question. Phenomenological research serves to capture the experiences unique to each individual.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As the researcher, I used different strategies to establish credibility in the study. I used member checks following each interview that enabled participants to verify that I correctly stated the transcribed information (Simon & Goes, 2013). I also conducted some preliminary analyses prior to giving the transcript to the respondents. The

participants then reviewed the data to verify the accuracy and credibility of the information.

I was also cognizant of saturation and the validation strategy of peer review. However, saturation was not a strategy used in this study because I used a sample of pretransition and posttransition officers and felt that there was a probability that new themes or issues would emerge; therefore, I continued to interview participants based on the sample size of 20 individuals. The validation strategy of peer (colleague) review led to a different perspective of the interview transcripts, themes, and data analyses of the research. A colleague provided feedback on these areas as I continued to make progress in data collection and data analysis. External validity was also a validity concern addressed through the strategy of transferability.

Transferability

Transferability (external validity) in a qualitative study includes using rich descriptive data and variation in participant selection. Transferability refers to whether a researcher can transfer the findings to a different context while maintaining a base of information appropriate to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used purposeful sampling and criterion sampling to select participants from among the four branches of military services. The participants were both male and female and from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The study included a rich description of the research so that readers can make judgments on the context of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All the research participants voluntarily participated in this study. The study also includes other descriptive details such as direct quotes from the participants and field

notes of how I developed the themes from the data. The findings of this study are not transferrable to all military veterans because I recruited only retiring and retired military officers as part of the sample. I did not make any changes to the transferability strategy from what I originally proposed in Chapter 3.

Dependability

The dependability strategy is the qualitative counterpart to reliability. Dependability refers to strategies such as audit trails and triangulation that researchers use to establish dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I maintained an audit trail by keeping thorough notes and records of the data and the research process. NVivo was useful in the audit trail because it provided a record of the raw data, transcribed interviews, and codes or categories of data and decisions made during data collection and analysis. I also conducted queries using NVivo, which was helpful with the audit trail and the reliability in this study.

Triangulation was another dependability strategy used in this study. Maxwell (2013) contended that triangulation involves using multiple methods as a way of cross-checking to determine whether different methods with varying strengths and limitations support a single conclusion. The triangulation or cross-checking of data consisted of using different sources. I interviewed and transcribed information from retiring and retired military officers, gathered notes and wrote reflections from each interview in a journal, and collected MTP information from government websites.

The methods used to help validate research findings included conducting formal interviews, sending emails to participants, and assembling data on the redesigned MTP

(Maxwell, 2013). The participants discussed their perceptions of critical success factors that helped them transition to the civilian sector successfully. The data I collected and analyzed led to identifying emerging themes. I did not make any changes to the dependability strategy from what I originally proposed in Chapter 3.

Confirmability

The confirmability strategy is the qualitative counterpart to objectivity. Confirmability refers to strategies such as reflexivity and triangulation established through an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher, I used the reflexivity strategy to help ensure confirmability in my study. I maintained a reflective journal that highlighted the research conducted and included personal thoughts, challenges, and rationales for the decisions made (e.g., data collection and analysis) in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The written field notes (raw data), methodological information, and data synthesis are available for auditing.

As the instrument of this research, it was important that I did not influence how the interviewees responded to the interview questions; therefore, writing an objective journal during this process helped reduce potential biases of this qualitative research study. Further, I used a professional transcriptionist service to ensure intercoder reliability. I did not make any changes to the confirmability strategy from what I originally proposed in Chapter 3.

Research Study Findings

The participants provided rich data as they responded to the interview questions related to the central phenomenon of military transitioning. The interview questions were

crucial for answering the research questions in this study. The organization of the

following sections includes the findings for Research Questions 1-3, which include the

interview questions with associated nodes and themes, participant responses to the

prevalent themes, and summary of the findings. The data provided support for each

finding (e.g., quotes from transcripts).

Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of U.S.

military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the

military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the National Capital Region?

Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, and 7 (see Appendix A) served as the basis to answer this

research question. The following section includes a discussion of the associated node and

prevalent themes regarding participants' preretirement transitioning experiences.

Interview Question 1 associated node and themes. Interview Question 1 was as

follows: Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to

include your reasons for retiring. The associated node to Interview Question 1 was

preretirement transitioning experiences. The associated node and prevalent themes for

Interview Question 1 follow.

Node: Preretirement transitioning experiences. Based on the Interview Question

1 associated node of preretirement transitioning experiences, I identified four themes:

personal experiences with transition, reasons for transitioning, self-initiated transitioning

activities, and started the transition process. The paragraphs that follow related to

preretirement transitioning experiences include the participants' descriptions of their

transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military, including their reasons for retiring. This section concludes with a summary of the associated node preretirement transitioning experiences.

The participants' responses to the associated node preretirement transitioning experiences (Interview Question 1) are shown in Table 5. The four prevalent themes, number of participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these themes are also shown. Following Table 5 are the themes, the study participant responses, and a summary of the associated node.

Table 5

Responses to Node Preretirement Transitioning Experiences

Prevalent theme	n	%
Personal experiences with transition	13	65
Reasons for transitioning	17	85
Self-initiated transitioning activities	13	65
Started the transition process	20	100

Note. $N = 20$.

Theme: Personal experiences with transition. Thirteen out of 20 participants (65%) shared their personal feelings as well as what they were feeling mentally and emotionally during preretirement transition. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, and 20 shared their feelings, which included stressful, pretty hectic, and feeling overwhelmed, or noted that their transition was not stressful. For example, Participant 10 stated, "My experience from the military preretirement was great. The last 2 years was excellent. They gave me a chance to do what I needed to do to transition." In contrast, Participant 6 stated,

My transition experience was pretty hectic. I retired sooner than I anticipated. I was given orders to relocate to Iowa with a report date of May 2015. My plan was to retire in 2016, so I did not want to make another move.

Theme: Reasons for transitioning. Seventeen out of 20 participants (85%) stated their reasons for transitioning (retiring) were voluntary. Participants 3, 8, and 10 stated that their reason for retiring were involuntary. For example, Participant 3 stated, "I had reached the mandatory retirement date, 30 years. And I wanted to stay longer, but they told me I had to retire." Participant 8 stated, "It wasn't really a 100% completely voluntary decision. The Air Force kind of helped me along. Basically I was asked to retire." Participant 11 stated, "By that time, I had already moved my family seven times and I just refused to move them again. I have an older daughter and I PCS'd [made a permanent change of station] with her between her 10th- and 11th-grade year. And it was traumatic."

Theme: Self-initiated transitioning activities. Fifteen out of 20 participants (75%) engaged in self-initiated transitioning activities prior to retirement. Participants 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 engaged in self-initiated activities that included financial planning (65%); received advice from friends, family, and colleagues regarding retirement (25%); conducted research and performed self-study (20%); began resume writing (20%); initiated job seeking (15%); talked with an image consultant (5%); processed medical records for DVA claims (5%); and sought counseling with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (5%). For example, Participant 7 stated,

I actually hired an image consultant and worked with her company and was

matched up with a colorist. I was also able to get some coaching and consulting

around makeup, hair, the style and branding. And so that was really a great

experience.

Participant 20 stated,

Prior to retiring in 2015, the family and I sat down and we set up a goal to

determine when would be the best time to retire for us. As part of the preparation,

we built a timeline and reexamined aspects of our life from financial, to

education, to how long my daughter will be in school. The other daughter is in

college. So, we pretty much tried to see when the best time would be to retire.

Theme: Started the transition process. Twenty out of 20 participants (100%)

started preretirement transitioning process prior to retiring. Participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10,

11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 20 started preretirement transition planning 2 or more years

before retirement. Participants 2, 14, 16, and 19 started preretirement transition planning

1 year to 18 months prior to retiring. Participants 3, 8, and 9 started transition planning 6

months or less before retiring. For example, Participant 1 stated,

A couple years ago, I was going to retire in 2012. I went through the transitioning

course at Fort Belvoir and it was all ranks and it was held in a big room over there

at the Barden Education Center. They give you a lot of the same information that I

got at this executive course.

Participant 12 stated,

I retired in 2014 and I thought about retirement when I was at one of my last

combat assignments. This was in 2010. I was on the cusp of making full bird

colonel so I was thinking whether I should retire if I do not make colonel. And if I

make colonel, am I going to continue on past 2014? So the board results came out

and I was not selected for colonel. So from that point, I realized that I really

needed to look at the other side of the spectrum, which is retiring from the

military.

   ***Summary of node: Preretirement transitioning experiences*.** Based on the study

participants' responses to Interview Question 1 related to preretirement transition

planning, the majority of the participants (85%) made the decision (voluntarily) to retire,

which helped them to plan financially and engage in self-initiated transitioning activities

prior to transitioning. However, 65% of the participants expressed feeling stressed and

overwhelmed as they prepared for transition to the civilian sector. Sixty-five percent of

the participants engaged in self-initiated transitioning activities (e.g., resume writing and

conducting research) as well as gained support from family, friends, and colleagues as

they prepared for retirement.

   All the participants started some type of preretirement transitioning activity prior

to retiring. Thirteen participants started the transition process 2 or more years before

retirement. Starting the preretirement transitioning process early allowed participants to

go through the MTP two or more times and learn about the different tools, resources, and

support available to them as they prepared to transition, as well as to engage in

preplanning transitioning activities. The following section includes the preplanning

transitioning activities associated node and a discussion on prevalent themes.

Interview Question 2 associated node and themes. Interview Question 2 was as

follows: Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job

seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc. The associated node to Interview

Question 2 was preplanning transitioning activities. The associated node and prevalent

themes for Interview Question 2 follow.

Node: Preplanning transitioning activities. Based on the Question 2 associated

node of preplanning transitioning activities, I identified four themes: no preplanning

transitioning activities, limited preplanning transitioning activities, primary preplanning

transitioning focus, and participation in MTP considered preplanning activity. The

paragraphs that follow include the participants' descriptions of their preplanning

transitioning activities before retirement, such as job searching, resume building, and

financial planning. This section concludes with a summary of the associated node

preplanning transitioning activities.

The participants' responses to associated node preplanning transitioning activities

(Interview Question 2) are shown in Table 6. The four prevalent themes, number of

participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these themes are also

shown. Following Table 6 are the themes, study participants' responses, and a summary

of the associated node.

Table 6

Responses to Node Preplanning Transitioning Activities

Prevalent Theme	*n*	*%*
No preplanning transitioning activities	5	25
Limited preplanning transitioning activities	3	15
Primary preplanning transitioning focus	12	60
Participation in Military Transitioning Program was primary preplanning activity	5	25

Note. N = 20.

     Theme: No preplanning transitioning activities. Five out of 20 respondents (25%; Participants 1, 2, 4, 8, and 19) did not perform any self-initiated preplanning transitioning activities prior to retiring from the military. Among these five study participants, participation in the MTP was their primary preplanning activity. For instance, Participant 1 stated, "I actually didn't do any preretirement planning." Participant 8 stated, "I had 5 months to do all of that. . . . It wasn't really a 100% voluntary decision."

     Theme: Limited preplanning transitioning activities. Three out of 20 participants (15%) engaged in limited preplanning transitioning activities. Participants 3, 10, and 13 performed activities related to developing a resume, job information gathering, talking to family, friends, and colleagues about retirement transition, and job seeking on websites prior to attending the MTP. For example, Participant 3 stated, "I would probably give myself a C-. I didn't do a lot of . . . I did resume gathering as an example." Participant 10 stated, "I did go online with USA Jobs several times, was contacted several times from the jobs I applied for, but it did not work out."

Theme: Primary preplanning transitioning focus. Twelve out of 20 participants (60%) stated that financial planning was their primary preplanning focus during transitioning. Participants 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 believed it was important to focus on saving financially and paying down debt prior to retiring from active duty. For example, Participant 18 stated, "Retired colonels make good money. That's good money in most places in this country except for Washington DC, Boston, Los Angeles, or Hawaii." Participant 6 stated, "I knew I was transitioning for the last 3 years. I have been setting myself up financially to ensure . . . we could live off the savings." In contrast, Participant 9 stated, "Resume building, the job searches, that didn't start in earnest for me until within the last couple months. And I'm within approximately 120 days of retirement now."

Theme: Participation in MTP primary preplanning activity. Five out of 20 participants (25%) stated that participation in the MTP was their primary preplanning activity before retiring from the military. Participants 2, 4, 6, 8, and 19 focused on preparing financially but primarily utilized the resources of MTP as they prepared to transition to the civilian sector. For example, Participant 2 stated, "I attended all of the transition classes offered. I took some of the classes more than once since I was more than 12 months from retiring." Participant 19 stated, "I decided to retire early and took the TAP class . . . which helps a person get focused as they prepare for transition."

Summary of node: Preplanning transitioning activities. Based on the Interview Question 2 responses from the study participants related to preplanning transitioning activities, 60% of the participants noted the importance of planning financially prior to

retiring. Fifteen percent of the participants engaged in limited preplanning activities, developed resumes, and talked with family, friends and colleagues about retirement transition. Additionally, 25% of the participants who conducted no preplanning transitioning activities felt that the MTPs' resources and support helped prepare them to transition from the military. The participants' responses correspond with the literature in that financial planning and other preplanning activities related to military transition should be a primary consideration as veterans prepare for transition. The following section includes a discussion on the transition experiences with the MTP associated node and prevalent themes.

Interview Question 3 associated node and themes. Interview Question 3 was as follows: Describe your experiences with the MTP during retirement transition such as services provided by the DoD, DoL, and DVA while participating in these services. The associated node to Interview Question 3 was transition experiences with the MTP. The Interview Question 3 associated node and prevalent themes follow.

Node: Transition experiences with MTP. Based on the Interview Question 3 associated node transition experiences with MTP, I identified four themes: transitioning experiences with specified programs, experiences with employment workshop, experiences with transition briefings and activities, and experiences with optional days provided. The paragraphs that follow related to transitioning experiences with MTP include participant descriptions of their experiences with the MTP during retirement transition such as services provided by the DoD, DoL, and DVA while participating in these services.

The participants' responses to associated node transition experiences with the

MTP (Interview Question 3) are shown in Table 7. The four prevalent themes, and

number of participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these themes

are also shown. Following Table 7 are the themes, study participants' responses, and a

summary of the associated node.

Table 7

Responses to Node Transition Experiences with MTP

Prevalent Theme	n	%
Transitioning experiences with specified programs	20	100
Experiences with employment workshop	20	100
Experiences with transition briefings and activities	20	100
Experiences with optional days provided	5	25

Note. N = 20.

Theme: Transitioning experiences with specified programs. All 20 participants

(100%) completed the MTP and noted their transitioning experiences with the MTP and

the specified programs administered by the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. The

participants' transitioning experiences with the DoD, DoL, and DVA programs were both

positive and negative as they related to attending the MTP. Participant 4 attended the

Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). Participant 4 stated, "I thought they [ACAP]

did a good job, especially to help people, for lack of a better word, de-program

themselves from using common military jargon and things of that nature."

Participant 11 also attended ACAP. Participant 11 stated, "I didn't feel like I was

prepared 100%. I got a quick overview, but it was nothing in-depth. I felt that I needed to

take it again because there was so much information." Participant 9 stated,

Regarding the Fleet and Family Service Center, I think the Fleet and Family Service Center offering was fantastic. I think it just touches the surface. Overall, I think it—they give you a lot of material. I think if people don't start the process early, it can be overwhelming.

Theme: Experiences with employment workshop. All 20 participants (100%) noted both positive and negative experiences related to the employment workshop sponsored by the DoL. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I think the DoL employment workshop was a good use of time. I did like the employment workshop because of the job search practice." Similarly, Participant 3 stated, "I think the resume writing, practicing job interviews and job search practice were good. I found those to be very informative." Participant 10 stated, "We did not have the DoL there. We did have people from the MTP there working with us on our resumes and practicing job interviews."

Theme: Experiences with transition briefings and activities. All 20 participants (100%) provided their experiences with transition briefings and activities. The participants noted both positive and negative experiences related to the transition briefings and activities provided at the MTP. Positive experiences of the transition briefings and activities included conducting mock interviews, dressing for success, writing resumes, and social media. The negative experiences with transition briefings and activities included some classes such as the resume writing or job search skills class was too fast or too short.

Participant 5 stated, "I thought the resume writing and practicing for interview sessions that they offered, I thought they were both beneficial to help veterans that were

leaving the military and going back to work in the civilian sector." Participant 8 stated, "I realized after the fact that most of the focus was on transition to private industry. And private industry thinks much different than the federal sector."

Theme: Experiences with optional days provided. Five out of 20 participants (25%) noted their experiences with the optional days (i.e., higher education, business venture, or career transition) provided during the MTP. The optional days were for veterans interested in college, returning to the workforce, or pursuing a business. Participants 2, 3, 7, 16, and 19 noted that the business courses for the career track of entrepreneurship were beneficial to individuals interested in starting their own business after retiring from the military. The participants did not comment on the optional day session for higher education or career transition.

Summary of node: Transition experiences with the MTP. Based on the Interview Question 3 responses from the study participants related to transition experiences with the MTP, all participants (100%) attended their military service specified programs (e.g., ACAP, TAP, or Executive TAP). The study participants noted both positive and negative experiences with the MTP. The participants related positive transition experiences with the MTPs' resources and services such as employment workshops, medical briefings, and Post 9-11 GI Bill briefings. The redesigned MTP provided seminars, briefings, and workshops that participants believed were instrumental in their transitioning efforts.

A negative aspect of the MTP was that the services' programs varied; therefore, not all participants had the same experiences of attending the Executive TAP, which for those who attended viewed Executive TAP as an excellent transitioning program.

Although the participants felt the MTP prepared them for the transition to the civilian

sector, they still experienced challenges transitioning through the MTP. The following

section includes a discussion of the postretirement transition experiences associated node

and its prevalent themes.

      Interview Question 7 associated node and themes. Interview Question 7 was as

follows: Describe your transitioning experiences from the military to the civilian sector

after retiring from active duty service. The associated node to Interview Question 7 was

postretirement transitioning experiences. The Interview Question 7 prevalent themes

follow.

      Node: Postretirement transitioning experiences. The Interview Question 7

associated node postretirement transitioning experiences included five themes: (a)

perceived expectations for those who have not returned to civilian employment, (b) work-

role adjustments in the civilian sector, (c) differences in military to civilian culture, (d)

resolved retirement anxiety prior to transition, and (e) perceived identity changes since

retirement. In the prevalent themes that follow related to postretirement transitioning

experiences, the participants described their transitioning experiences from the military to

the civilian sector after retiring from active duty service. Seven out of 20 study

participants (35%) returned to employment in the civilian sector after military retirement.

      The participants' responses to associated node postretirement transitioning

experiences, five prevalent themes, number of participants, and percentages of the 20

participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these themes are in Table

8. Following Table 8 are the themes, study participants' responses, and a summary of the associated node.

Table 8

Responses to Node Postretirement Transitioning Experiences

Prevalent Theme	*n*	%
Perceived expectations for those who have not returned to civilian employment	4	20
Work-role adjustments in the civilian sector	5	25
Differences in military and civilian culture	7	35
No retirement anxiety prior to transition	2	10
Perceived identity changes since retirement	7	35

Note. N = 20.

Theme: Perceived expectations of postretirement. Not employed at the time of this study, Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 provided their perceived expectations of postretirement transitioning. The participants perceived that there would be differences in organizational culture, challenges with identity changes, and challenges adjusting and adapting to a new environment. For example, Participant 5 stated,

> Your identity changes. In the military, we are used to putting on our ranks. I
>
> remember when I was in command, it was "Sir" to everything. . . . In the civilian
>
> world, I think you are just another person in the workforce.

Theme: Work-role adjustments in the civilian sector. Five out of 20 respondents (25%) noted the work-role adjustments that they made after transitioning. Participants 2, 8, 11, 12, and 18 noted changes such as no longer supervising, challenges of working as a contractor, or changes in job dynamics from managing people to managing a project or

emphasized that their transition was less stressful as a civilian. For example, Participant 18 stated,

> As part of that just happens to be my duty—my duties are not to manage a big thing, my duties are to go and win a big thing. And manage some things along the way. It's been hard making that adjustment.

Participant 11 stated,

> My work role has definitely changed. I'm not a supervisor. I'm a contractor, and in my agency, you might as well be the bottom of somebody's shoe as a contractor because they differentiate with the amount of space you're given to fit in, they differentiate with your work hours, with the benefits.

Theme: Differences in military and civilian culture. Seven out of 20 participants (35%) perceived major differences in the military versus the civilian culture. Participants 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, and 18 observed differences in work ethic, dissimilarities in one's emotional attachment to the mission, and noticeable variances in working with employees and employers who were never in the military. For example, Participant 18 stated,

> But because you are not pursuing the same end results, one's emotional attachment to it is a little different. One's loyalty to the corporation or loyalty to bottom line. It is harder to get excited about that, than one's loyalty to one's military mission to the defense of the nation.

Further, Participants 15 and 17 stated that they were not apprehensive regarding retiring because they made the decision to retire and did not place much emphasis on their identity as a military officer when they transitioned. For instance, Participant 17

stated, "My transition would be considered resolved. I did not go through a cultural shock transition because I made a decision to retire. Therefore, I was not apprehensive about transitioning into the civilian world."

Theme: Perceived identity changes since retirement. Seven out of 20 participants (35%) believed the changes to identity since retirement were psychological and psychosocial. For example, Participant 8 stated, "So you're just Joe Q. Citizen going to work. Completely different. That fraternal mentality is not there anymore." Participant 15 stated, "You have to have good, some friends to kind of help you with the transition because it is a psychological transition."

Summary of node: Postretirement transitioning experiences. Based on the study participants' responses related to postretirement transitioning experiences 25% of participants perceived differences in work-role adjustments, 35% saw differences in military to civilian culture, 10% experienced no anxiety to transition, 35% perceived there would be identity changes after retirement, and 20% had perceived expectations although they had not returned to work. The participants' lived experiences related to postretirement transitioning experiences varied. They had experienced or were expecting to experience differences in culture, identity, and work role when they transitioned from the military. The participants recognized that the military provided a structured environment and that they would need to relearn how to adjust to their civilian environment. The following section includes a discussion on Research Question 2, the interview questions, and prevalent themes.

Research Question 2 Findings

The second research question was as follows: What do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured Military Transitioning Program that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector? Interview Question 4 (see Appendix A) served as the basis to answer this research question. In the following section the critical success factors associated node and prevalent themes are discussed.

Interview Question 4 associated node and themes. Interview Question 4 was as follows: Based on your experiences with the MTP, describe critical success factors of the MTP. The associated node to Interview Question 4 was critical success factors of the MTP. The Interview Question 4 prevalent themes identified for critical success factors were several positive aspects of the MTP.

Node: Critical success factors of the MTP. Based on the Interview Question 4 associated node of critical success factors of the MTP, I identified eight themes. The eight themes were MTP in general, mandatory to complete CRS requirements, emphasis on transition preparedness, practical applications during seminars, small group focus of Executive MTP, one-on-one counseling opportunities, Veterans Affairs classes, and knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans. The themes were positive aspects of this associated node. In the prevalent themes that follow related to critical success factors of the MTP, the participants described the critical success factors of the MTP that aided them most in making the transition to the civilian sector.

The participants' responses to associated node critical success factors of MTP (Interview Question 4) are shown in Table 9. The eight prevalent themes, number of

participants, and percentages of the 20 participants who shared similar thoughts and

beliefs related to these themes are also shown. Following Table 9 are the themes, study

participants' responses and summary of the associated node.

Table 9

Responses to Node Critical Success Factors of MTP

Prevalent Theme	*n*	*%*
Positive aspects		
Military Transitioning Program in general	19	95
Mandatory to complete Career Readiness Standards requirements	9	45
Emphasis was on transition preparedness	13	65
Practical applications during seminars	16	80
Small group focus of Executive Military Transitioning Program	8	40
One-on-one counseling opportunities	9	45
Veterans Affairs classes beneficial	19	95
Knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans	14	70

Theme: MTP in general. As shown in Table 9, 19 out of 20 study participants

(95%) believed the MTP in general prepared them for transition to the civilian sector and

viewed different aspects of the program positively. Participant 11's thoughts on the MTP

were different based on the responses provided. For example, Participant 11 stated,

> I didn't use any of the things that they taught. I didn't use like the interview
>
> portion, it was very hard to practice interview skills if you're in a room with 60
>
> people and the room is maybe 15 by 15.

Participant 12 stated, "So, the program in my opinion is as strong as the people that run it.

You have some pretty committed people to make sure that we're prepared for the

transition."

Theme: Mandatory to complete CRS requirements. Nine out of 20 study participants (45%) perceived the mandatory CRS requirements of the MTP were a forcing mechanism that was critical as they transitioned to the civilian sector. Participants 1, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16, and 18 provided similar thoughts related to this theme. For example, Participant 15 stated, "It was a forcing function. It forced me. I knew about the transitioning services, but it forced me to go there, to make sure that I signed up for all the briefings which I found was very helpful." Participant 16 stated, "The fact is you make the transition program mandatory. The success factor is you're making people go through it. At least you get people thinking about retirement if they haven't even done that."

Theme: Emphasis was on transition preparedness. Thirteen out of 20 participants (65%) perceived that a success factor of the MTP was the emphasis placed on preparing them for transition to the civilian sector. Participants 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 provided similar thoughts related to this theme. For example, Participant 1 stated, "I would say that DoL's workshop I think was the most productive for me and gave me information that I needed to know to pursue a job on the outside as it relates to developing that civilian career." Participant 2 stated, "They teach you how to write resumes, how to dress for success, about Veterans Affairs benefits, and provided a lot of information for transitioning veterans at the education center. It was very valuable." Participant 14 stated,

> Probably one of the biggest ones is preparing the member for what I'll call the
> contrast between military employment and civilian employment. And that

includes everything from understanding the role of a resume, understanding the objective of job interviews, understanding the challenges and the differences with things like compensation negotiation.

Theme: Practical applications during seminars. Sixteen out of 20 study participants (80%) perceived that a success factor of the MTP was the practical applications such as job interview practices, job search practices, and writing a resume conducted during the seminars. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20 provided similar thoughts related to this theme. Participant 1 stated,

> I think the most helpful thing for me was the practical application and actually having to do the prework before you came in and the discussions with the instructors. And then you actually practiced applying it through interviews or introducing yourselves in the class.

Participant 7 stated,

> We did practice some interviewing. That was helpful, not from the standpoint in being prepared for an interview but it did help in terms of helping people talk about their leadership story and really started the conversation about what they want to do and tailored their conversation to match up with the job or the job posting that they found.

Theme: Small group focus of Executive MTP. Eight of the 20 study participants (40%) perceived that a success factor of the MTP was the small group focus of the Executive MTP. Participants 1, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, and 18 provided similar thoughts related to this theme. Participant 1 stated,

If they were able to fund smaller groups like they did for the senior leaders, for all

soldiers, I think that would be the biggest benefit. It is a benefit to have smaller

groups and allow them to actually write the resumes, practice their speeches, and

apply for jobs.

Participant 18 stated,

So for the Executive TAP, we spent 3 days doing that. And it was outstanding.

Again, I left that portion of the class with a written resume. We did interviews, we

did the elevator speech, they showed us how to use social media to help us. They

walked us through LinkedIn, things that I would never have done, so that portion

of the class was just incredibly invaluable. And the instructor was awesome.

Theme: One-on-one counseling opportunities. Nine out of the 20 (45%) study

participants perceived that a success factor of the MTP was the one-on-one counseling

sessions provided to veterans. Participants 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 19 provided

similar thoughts related to this theme. Participant 7 stated,

The counseling was pretty good. Looking at, you know, I can't think of my

counselor's name, but she was pretty informative. And you could tell that she was

very supportive of the soldier in this case. And doing all she could do to make

sure you were prepared.

Participant 16 stated, "They provided one-on-one counseling. This was pretty good also

in areas where you feel that you needed more help or you had additional questions."

Theme: Veterans Affairs classes beneficial. Nineteen out of 20 study participants

(95%) perceived that a success factor of the MTP was the Veterans Affairs education and

disability benefits briefings. The study participants stated that providing awareness of the

benefits that were available was beneficial. Participant 5 stated, "I listened to the

Veterans Affairs benefits class, which I thought was very beneficial because I learned

what I needed to take care of in terms of medical aspects prior to retirement." However,

Participant 11 stated,

> The veterans brief was again too short. . . . We had that briefing on a Friday. It
>
> was a snow day, and I think it was supposed to last all day, but he cut it short to
>
> like 4 hours. So it was rushed like everything else.

Theme: Knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans. Fourteen

out of 20 study participants (70%) believed that the most critical success factor of the

MTP was the knowledge and education provided to veterans by the government-

sponsored MTP. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 believed this

factor helped them the most in making the transition to the civilian sector or civilian

employment. For example, Participant 2 stated, "Just education and information, which is

I think—that's what I got out of the whole transition program. They had everything that

you need to know to transition correctly. So just knowing." Participant 19 stated,

> The benefits are knowledge is power. The MTP shared a lot of important
>
> information that you can utilize, and they even gave you books that you can use to
>
> address, but it was so much information you can refer back to as you transition
>
> out of the military. And, if you needed to call and ask a question, you could.

Summary of node: Critical success factors of MTP. Based on Interview Question

4 responses from the study participants related to critical success factors of MTP, 95% of

the participants believed the MTP in general aided them in transitioning to the civilian sector. Although attending the MTP was a CRS requirement, 45% of the participants considered this forcing function critical to their transitioning preparedness. The MTP programs and seminars emphasized transition preparedness, and the participants viewed this to be a critical factor in their transition. Small group focus, one-on-one opportunities, and the Veterans Affairs classes were also factors that participants perceived to benefit them in career transition.

More important, 70% of the participants perceived the knowledge and education imparted to them during the MTP were invaluable as they prepared to transition to the civilian sector. There were many positive aspects of the MTP. The participants were able to take advantage of the support and services the MTP provided, which aided them in their transition to the civilian sector. For example, Participant 3 stated, "Having some place where you can go in and have access to government agencies was great." The following section includes a discussion on the interview questions and prevalent themes used to answer Research Question 3.

Research Question 3 Findings

The third research question was as follows: What do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured Military Transitioning Prorgam that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector? Interview Question 5 (see Appendix A) served as the basis to answer this research question. The following section includes a discussion on the challenges the participants' experienced with the MTP.

Interview Question 5 associated node and themes. Interview Question 5 was as

follows: Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning

through the MTP. The associated node to Interview Question 5 was challenges

experienced with the MTP. The Question 5 themes identified for challenges experienced

with MTP were several negative aspects of the MTP.

Node: Challenges experienced with MTP. Based on the associated node

challenges experienced with the MTP from Interview Question 5, I identified six themes:

information overload, balancing work and transition activities, class scheduling and

enrollment, unprepared for corporate environment, overbooked classes, and class content.

The themes were negative aspects of this associated node. The prevalent themes that

follow related to challenges experienced with the MTP include the participants'

descriptions of some of the challenges they experienced as a result of transitioning from

the military through the restructured MTP that hindered their transition to the civilian

sector.

The participants' responses to associated node challenges experienced with the

MTP are shown in Table 10. The six prevalent themes, number of participants, and

percentage of the 20 participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these

themes are also shown. Following Table 10 are the themes, study participants' responses,

and a summary of the associated node.

Table 10

Responses to Node Challenges Experienced With the MTP

Prevalent Theme	*n*	%
Negative aspects		
Information overload	7	35
Balancing work and transition activities	4	20
Class scheduling and enrollment	3	15
Unprepared for corporate environment	1	5
Overbooked classes	3	15
Class content	5	25
Challenges in general	3	15

Note. N = 20.

Theme: Information overload. Seven out of the 20 study participants (35%) believed the MTP provided too much information for the week-long transition program. Participants 3, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 19 shared similar thoughts related to this theme. For example, Participant 12 stated, "I think I would probably tailor it a little, because it was a wealth of information and it may have been a little too much information in a short period of time." Participant 19 stated,

> The only challenge I would say and it was probably for everyone was that it was so much information to try to absorb in 1 week. I would not recommend cutting out anything from the transitioning program. If anything, maybe it should be longer. I don't know. The challenge was trying to absorb all of the information in 1 week.

Theme: Balancing work and transition activities. Four out of 20 study participants (20%) stated that it was challenging to balance work and attend the MTP

classes and seminars. Participants 2, 9, 13, and 16 shared similar thoughts related to this response. Participant 2 stated,

> It certainly wasn't mandatory, but I had to cover down at work as I was transitioning. Like still be 100% focused on my position at work while I'm transitioning because it was personal for me because my job was very unique. It's not easy for a new person to catch on/master in 30 or 60 days.

Participant 9 stated, "A lot of it had to do with the pace of the work here. There's too much to do in the job that I have right now to concentrate on that [transition], but you've got to do it."

Theme: Class scheduling and enrollment. Three out of 20 study participants (15%) stated it was hard scheduling classes and enrolling in the MTP 2 years prior to retiring. Participants 5, 16, and 20 shared similar thoughts related to this response. Participant 5 stated, "I would say at the end, there was a challenge trying to get enrolled in the courses. I retired during a time when the military was involuntarily forcing a lot of people out of the military."

Theme: Class content. Five out of 20 study participants (25%) believed that several of the seminars were too fast, too in-depth, and not long enough; provided too much information; or were not targeted to the right audience, such as retiring officers. Participants 3, 11, 16, 18, and 20 shared similar responses. For example, Participant 18 stated,

I am sort of thinking about what I got out of that course that actually helped me make the transition. I found the transition actually very difficult and I'm not sure I got anything out of the coursework that helped make that transition any easier.

Participant 20 stated,

Therefore, for every class, maybe, 20 minutes of each was important for guys like me and the rest of the time we are just sitting there breathing air and just hoping that the class ends. Because it wasn't helping me a bit.

Theme: Overbooked classes. Three out of 20 study participants (15%) stated that a challenge that hindered transitioning was the overbooked classes. Participants 4, 5, and 11 shared similar thoughts on this response. Participant 11 stated,

And the room that we were in at Location A, it was a shoebox. And I think there were like 60 of us sitting side by side, not even three feet apart. I felt like I was in Basic Training all over again.

Participant 5 stated,

I would say at the end, there was a challenge trying to get enrolled in the courses. I retired during a time when the military was involuntarily forcing a lot of people out of the military. There were people retiring and then there were people that were being RIF'd [going through a reduction in force], so veterans were competing with service members who were being RIF'd and retiring and separating to attend the MTP.

Challenges in general. Three out of 20 participants (15%) shared other thoughts related to challenges with transitioning through the MTP. Participant 18 felt unprepared

for the corporate sector. He stated, "The transition program prepared me to get the job, but didn't prepare me to transition to be in that environment." Participant 11 felt she did not a gain a realistic employment outlook. She stated, "I think they were not realistic in letting us know what the employment outlook really is. I thought it would be easier to get a job than it was. I really did." Participants 4 and 14 stated that they still had problems with writing their resumes after transition. For example, Participant 14 stated, "Some of it is writing a resume. I still haven't finished that yet. I find that to be a challenge even though I got some good instruction on how to do that."

Summary of node: Challenges experienced with the MTPs. Based on the interview responses of the study participants related to challenges experienced with the MTPs, 35% of participants found that there was too much information to try to absorb in one week and 20% found it challenging to balance work and transition activities such as attending MTP classes because they still had their military job to perform. Furthermore, 15% found that it was difficult scheduling or enrolling in the MTP before retiring due to competing requirements with other veterans who were separating, retiring, or going through a reduction in force; 25% felt that the seminars were too fast, too slow, and not long enough; and 15% found the classes overbooked. Based on the findings, the participants' lived experiences related to challenges experienced with the MTP highlighted the need for continued refinement of the MTP to aid veterans in successfully transitioning to the civilian sector. The following section includes a discussion on perspectives from the participants on MTP improvements, interview question, and prevalent themes.

Interview Question 6 associated node and themes. Interview Question 6 was as follows: Explain what changes, if any, you would recommend that may improve the transitioning program for veterans. The associated node to Interview Question 6 was recommendations to improve the MTP. The prevalent themes identified for this node were several recommendations to improve aspects of the MTP.

Node: Recommendations to improve aspects of the MTP. Based on the Interview Question 6 associated node of recommendations to improve the MTP, I identified eight themes: seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences, tailored classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for transition, segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans, more emphasis on social media, better linkage between federal and state benefits for veterans, industry participation in the MTP, targeted classes prior to transitioning, and more emphasis on networking. The prevalent themes that follow relate to the participants' perceived recommendations to improve the MTP.

The participants' responses to associated node recommendation to improve the MTP (Interview Question 6) are shown in Table 11. The prevalent themes, number of participants, and percentages of the 20 participants who shared similar thoughts and beliefs related to these themes are also shown. Following Table 11 are the themes, study participants' responses, and a summary of the associated node.

Table 11

Responses to Node Recommendations to Improve the MTP

Prevalent Theme	*n*	%
Seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences	4	20
Tailored classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for transition	7	35
Segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans	3	15
More emphasis on social media	2	10
Better linkage between federal and state benefits for veterans	1	5
Industry participation in the Military Transitioning Program	3	15
Targeted classes prior to transitioning	5	25
More emphasis on networking	4	20

Note. N = 20.

Theme: Seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences. The

participants made several recommendations for improvements to the MTP. Participants 7,

8, 12, and 18 noted that a seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences would

be helpful to transitioning veterans. For example, Participant 18 stated,

I could see that the system is adjusting as it learns and gets feedback. Could it

have helped me prepare a little more for the emotional shocks that I was in?

Maybe. I don't know, and again, I don't know how common what I am feeling is.

Participant 8 stated, "Well, definitely a culture shock. No question about it. Even though

I'm still with the federal government, it's completely different."

Theme: Tailor classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for

transition. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 18, and 20 noted that the focus of classes should be

only the critical areas veterans' need. For example, Participant 6 stated, "I would

probably tailor it so that the focus would be only on the critical areas that a veteran would

need, and the other areas, I would probably put in a workbook or handout." Participant 3 stated,

>I found it challenging for me to understand fully how to go through—go to the websites and do all the MOC crosswalk all in—I can't even remember whether or not an entire day was allotted for that or just several hours.

Participant 15 recommended having "more opportunities for the—like the TAP classes, like the ETAP classes because I guess it's resource constrained but they only have them offered so many times per year."

Theme: Segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans. Participants 4, 7, and 17 believed that classes should be segmented for separating versus retiring veterans. For example, Participant 4 stated,

>If it's really for the person retiring or getting out, I think the military or the DoD would do its personnel benefit by trying to just at least bring this information up to new personnel, even though "Hey, I'm on my first enlistment."

Participant 17 stated, "I would recommend that they provide a more black and white template for those training programs that would be beneficial to the senior level officer as opposed to treating everyone or painting everyone with the same broad brush."

Theme: More emphasis on social media. Participants 7 and 18 believed there should be more emphasis on social media. For instance, Participant 7 stated,

>The other thing that I would add is social media. I think in the military, we don't have to use LinkedIn to network because the military is so small and we just network within our organization in a different way.

Participant 18 stated, "We did interviews, we did the elevator speech, they showed us how to use social media to help us. They walked us through LinkedIn, things that I would never have done."

Theme: Better linkage between federal and state benefits for veterans.
Participant 13 believed there should be a better connection between federal and state benefits for veterans. For example, Participant 13 stated,

> The course needs to also emphasize if a person's going to a certain state. It'd be nice if they connected them with the state that they're going to because there are a vast amount of benefits and there are people at the other end, as I spoke to on the phone, that are willing to assist the soldier or airman when they transition home.

Theme: Industry participation in the MTP. Participants 9, 10, and 11 believed that industry representatives should participate in the MTP. Participant 11 stated,

> I think it would be better if they bought in people from outside employment agencies so they can give us the real scoop on what our resumes look like and what our chances are at getting a job based on our skill sets while we're there.

Participant 9 stated,

> There are several, low thousands or more, major corporations that have veterans hiring programs. As yes, you can link up to those sites online. But actually having a HR [human resources] person from one of those major partners of industry, whether it's Apple or Maersk or other, walk in and say "Look we are—tell the truth about where they are with hiring veterans.

Theme: Targeted classes prior to transitioning. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 14 believed there should be targeted classes prior to transitioning. For example, Participant 14 stated, "And this is a great start at 2 years, but a lot of that stuff just degenerates. So if you can have something maybe at 1 year, could be virtual. At 6 months, it's again a sit-down thing." Participant 3 stated,

> I think I would say that the MTP during the 5-day TAP did a good job with the
> time allocated to do the MOC crosswalk and financial planning. But I would also
> say that that program could easily be a 2-week program. I found it challenging to
> understand fully how to go through—go to the websites and do all the MOC
> crosswalk all in . . . a few hours.

Theme: More emphasis on networking. Participants 8, 11, 14, and 15 believed there should be more emphasis on networking. Participant 8 stated, "Networking takes priority over anything else in terms of getting a job. It's who you know and who's willing to stick their neck out for you and say, 'Give that person a chance. I know 'em.'" Participant 15 stated,

> Networking, I would say, is probably the most important thing that, certainly in
> my case, that I did. And you've got to really hustle and get out there and look for
> a job. Don't assume it's going to come to you.

Participants 5, 16, and 19 provided no recommended improvement to the MTP.

Summary of node: Recommendations to improve the MTP. Based on the interview responses of the study participants related to recommendations to improve the MTP, there were areas noted for continued improvement of the MTP. For example,

adding a seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences would provide veterans awareness of cultural differences as they transition to civilian sector, which is vastly different from the structured military environment. Other recommendations such as tailoring classes or segmenting classes would help to retired and retiring veterans to focus on critical areas that they need as they transition. Further, having industry participate in the MTP might help veterans understand some of the hiring practices and learn about available job opportunities.

The participants believed that having targeted classes on some aspect of transitioning prior to attending the MTP would be beneficial to veterans and that emphasis on networking and social media should increase. The findings indicated that continued improvements and changes to the MTP are necessary to help veterans as they transition to the civilian sector. The following section includes a summary of the research findings.

Summary of Research Findings

I conducted this phenomenological study to answer the three research questions: What are the lived experiences of U.S. military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR, what do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured MTP that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector, and what do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured MTP that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector. The findings revealed 38 prevalent themes that emerged as crucial to answering the research questions.

In Research Question 1, the participants revealed their lived experiences with preretirement transitioning experiences, preplanning transitioning activities, transitioning experiences through the MTP, and postretirement transitioning experiences. The findings from Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, and 7 and the 21 themes identified were appropriate to answer Research Question 1. The need emerged for preplanning and participating in the MTP to help veterans in their transition. Feeling prepared made the participants feel more at ease with the transition process. Participants still expressed feeling uncertain or overwhelmed as they prepared to transition.

Based on the findings, participants who evaluated their preretirement situation, prepared themselves for retirement using all available resources and support, and learned what strategies such as networking were available to them felt prepared to transition to the civilian sector. The findings also indicated that the participants recognized that there were differences in military culture, that they would have to make work-role adjustments as they transitioned to the civilian workforce and that there would be changes to their identity.

The findings from Interview Questions 4 and the eight themes identified were appropriate to answer Research Question 2. The findings highlighted the importance of the MTP in helping veterans transition to the civilian sector. Making the attendance at the MTP a mandatory requirement ensured the participants learned about crucial resources and support that would aid them in their transition to the civilian sector. The participants emphasized that the knowledge and education they received from the MTP by the government-sponsored program was instrumental in their successful transition.

The findings from Interview Questions 5 and 6 and the eight themes identified were appropriate to answer Research Question 3. The findings indicated several challenges of the restructured MTP and the participants' recommendations for MTP improvements. Ninety-five percent of the participants viewed the MTP as helping them prepare for transition, although the participants experienced challenges enrolling in the MTP and leaving their job to attend the MTP and thought that some of the class content needed improving. The findings also made recommendations to improve the MTP. For example, the participants recommended tailoring or segmenting classes to focus only on the critical areas that retiring veterans need as they transition. They also suggested that more emphasis on social media and networking, as well as industry participation in the MTP would improve the transitioning program for veterans.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 4 included a summary of the study results. I also included in this chapter a discussion on bracketing, the pilot study, the research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the research study results. Further, the chapter included a description of the common themes discovered during the data analysis process. The data collected from the interviews were suitable for answering the three research questions associated with this study. The 20 participants provided rich information to six core interview questions that were instrumental in answering the three research questions. The participants shared their perceptions, thoughts, and experiences related to preretirement and postretirement transition, preplanning transitioning activities,

transitioning experiences with the MTP to include critical success factors and challenges, and recommendations to improve the MTP.

The first research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of U.S. military officers who are within 6 months of retirement to 1 year after retirement from the military and are transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR? Prevalent themes included personal experiences with transition, no preplanning transitioning activities, and perceived expectations for those who have not returned to civilian employment. The findings indicated the need for preplanning and participating in the MTP to help veterans in their transition. The findings also indicated that the participants would need to make personal and professional adjustments as a result of differences in civilian culture and make identity and work-role adjustments as they transitioned to the civilian workforce.

The second research question was as follows: What do U.S. military officers perceive as critical success factors of the restructured MTP that aid their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector? Prevalent themes included mandatory to complete CRS requirements, emphasis on transition preparedness, and small group focus of the Executive MTP. The findings indicated the importance of the MTP in helping veterans transition to the civilian sector.

The third research question was as follows: What do U.S. military officers perceive as challenges of the restructured MTP that hinder their transitioning from the military to the civilian sector? Six prevalent themes were identified: information overload, need to balance work and transition activities, class scheduling and enrollment, unprepared for corporate environment, overbooked classes, and class content.

Participants also shared their perspectives for improving the MTP. The eight themes were seminar on military to civilian cultural differences, tailored classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for transition, segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans, more emphasis on social media, better connection between federal and state benefits for veterans, industry participation in seminars, targeted classes prior to transitioning, and more emphasis on networking.

The findings indicated that there were still challenges with the redesigned MTP and that areas of the MTP still need improvement to help veterans with their transition to the civilian sector.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the

critical success factors of the U.S. Military Transitioning Program (MTP) after the

redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian

sector in the National Capital Region (NCR). The 20 participants included retiring and

retired U.S. military officers from three military services in the NCR who experienced

the central phenomenon of military transitioning. The phenomenological study was

conducted to capture military officers' transitioning challenges and successes and to

document their perspectives of the redesigned transitioning program to discover trends

and themes during data analysis.

The key findings of the research study were the prevalent themes among the study

participants' responses to the interview questions that supported the three research

questions. Seventeen identified themes related to Research Question 1 (see Table 5, 6, 7

and 8) were based on four associated nodes: preretirement transitioning experiences,

preplanning transitioning activities, and postretirement transitioning experiences. The

four identified themes related to associated node preretirement transitioning experiences

were:

- personal experiences with transition

- reasons for transitioning

- self-initiated transitioning activities, and

- started the transition process.

The four themes related to associated node preplanning transitioning activities were:

- no preplanning transitioning activities

- limited preplanning transitioning activities

- primary preplanning transitioning focus, and

- participation in military transitioning program was primary preplanning activity.

The four themes related to associated node transition experiences with military transitioning program were:

- transitioning experiences with specified programs

- experiences with employment workshop

- experiences with transition briefings and activities, and

- experiences with optional days provided.

The five themes related to associated node postretirement transitioning experiences were:

- perceived expectations for those who have not returned to civilian employment

- work-role adjustments in the civilian sector

- differences in military and civilian culture

- no retirement anxiety prior to transition, and

- perceived identity changes since retirement.

The eight identified themes related to Question 2 (see Table 9) based on the associated node of critical success factors of the MTP were:

- MTP in general

- mandatory to complete CRS requirements

- emphasis was on transition preparedness

- practical applications during seminars

- small group focus of Executive MTP

- one-on-one counseling opportunities

- veterans affairs classes beneficial

- knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans.

Five identified themes were related to Research Question 3 (see Table 10) based on associated node challenges experienced with the MTP:

- information overload

- balancing work and transition activities

- class scheduling and enrollment

- unprepared for corporate environment

- overbooked classes, and class content.

The eight identified themes related to recommendations (see Table 11) to improve the MTP were:

- seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences

- tailored classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for transition

- segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans

- more emphasis on social media

- better linkage between federal and state benefits for veterans

- industry participation in the military transitioning program

- targeted classes prior to transitioning, and

- more emphasis on networking

Interpretation of Findings

The study findings generally confirmed the findings of related research identified in the literature review. The literature in Chapter 2 included descriptions of significant changes made to the MTP during its restructure in 2013 and how the changes aimed to improve veterans' transitions to the civilian sector (Cloud, 2014; Faurer et al., 2014; GAO, 2014; House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012; White House, 2014b). The findings showed that 19 out of 20 retiring and retired military officers (95%) noted that the MTP aided them in transitioning from the military to the civilian sector.

For instance, Participant 5 stated, "I thought that the resume writing and practicing for job interviews were both beneficial to help veterans that were leaving the military and going back to work in the civilian sector." Conversely, Participant 11 stated, "It was too crowded to do anything. It was very hard to practice interview skills if you are in a room with 60 people and the room is maybe 15 by 15." However, Participant 11 was the only individual who responded differently and did not believe that the MTP prepared them for transition to the civilian sector. The discussion of findings is divided into several sections:

- an interpretation of the findings based on preretirement transitioning experiences,

- preplanning transitioning activities,

- postretirement transitioning experiences,

- critical success factors of the MTP,

- challenges experienced with the MTP, and

- recommendations to improve the MTP.

Preretirement Transitioning Experiences

Schlossberg (2011) contended that assessing the situation and measuring self are variables that are assets or liabilities as military members start the transition process. The findings supported this theory. The participants relayed what was happening (situation) and to whom it was happening (self). The preretirement transitioning experiences varied among the research study participants regarding four themes: personal experiences with transition, their reasons for transitioning, self-initiated transitioning activities, and when they started the transition process.

For example, 65% of the study participants discussed their personal experiences with transition, that is, how they felt mentally and emotionally before retiring. The study participants' reasons for transitioning were mostly voluntary (85%), which supported Donaldson et al.'s (2010) statement that being able to make the decision to retire is beneficial to individuals' health and well-being as they make the transition. In the theme of self-initiated transitioning activities, 75% of the participants engaged in financial planning; retirement discussions with colleagues, family, and friends; research; resume writing; job seeking; and other activities prior to retirement. This corroborated Donaldson

et al.'s finding that resources, planning, and personal control influence one's retirement adjustment. In this instance, resources included financial, health, and social support.

All the participants began preretirement transition planning through the MTP from 6 months or less to more than 2 years prior to retiring. This finding complied with the congressional mandate that requires all veterans to attend the MTP prior to separating or retiring from active duty service (Library of Congress, 2014). The MTP was described as valuable by 95% of the veterans as they prepared for retirement transition.

Preplanning Transitioning Activities

The associated categories of preplanning transitioning activities were no preplanning transitioning activities, limited preplanning transitioning activities, primary preplanning transitioning focus, and participation in MTP was primary preplanning activity. Prior to retiring, 60% of the participants focused primarily on financial planning, whereas 15% engaged in limited preplanning activities, and 25% engaged in no preplanning activities or enrolled in the MTP as their primary preplanning activity. As explained by Curl and Ingram (2013), individuals engaged in anticipatory socialization, that is, informal retirement planning and psychological planning were likely better prepared for career transition. Engaging in informal retirement planning such as financial planning, job seeking, and resume building prior to retiring is vital for veterans retiring in the NCR. The findings of the study generally confirmed the literature in this subject area.

Postretirement Transitioning Experiences

The associated category of postretirement transitioning experiences aligned with the conceptual framework of the study: 4S theory, identity theory, and work-role

transition theory. The identified themes were (a) perceived experiences for those who have not returned to civilian employment, (b) work-role adjustments in the civilian sector, (c) differences in military to civilian culture, and (d) resolved retirement anxiety prior to transition. These themes confirmed the importance of how the 4S theory contribute to understanding the challenges that veterans encounter in transitioning (Gaiter, 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Johnston et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2011). Attaining a greater understanding of identity theories such as social, role, and organizational theory should aid veterans in their postretirement adjustment to life after the military (Anderson et al., 2012; Robertson, 2011; Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Chen, 2014; Demers, 2011). The work-role transition theory benefits veterans as well as counselors and government sponsors of the MTP in gaining an understanding of the dynamics and intricacies of service members' transition to the civilian sector (Curl & Ingram, 2013; Donaldson et al., 2010). The findings of the study aided in confirming the literature review related to the 4S theory, identity theory and work-role transition theory.

The retiring military officer participants indicated that there would be differences in organization culture, identity challenges, and adjusting to life after the military. For instance, Participant 4 stated, "I have found just by talking and through general interaction and observation that the civilian sector is completely different. I think it will be harder to integrate into the civilian sector." Of those who retired and returned to the workforce (35%), veterans' experienced both positive and negative changes while making the transition to civilian employment. They noted differences in military and civilian cultures such as work ethic, attachment to the mission, and working with

employees and employers who were not familiar with military culture. They also noted

that identity changes affected them both psychologically and psychosocially as they

relate to military transitioning. The next section includes findings from the literature and

research on critical success factors.

Critical Success Factors of the MTP

The associated category related to critical success factors of the MTP included

eight themes. Ninety-five percent of the participants indicated that the MTP in general

prepared them for transitioning to the civilian sector. They also noted positive aspects of

the MTP, which included (a) mandatory requirement to complete CRS (45%), (b) the

emphasis that the MTP placed on transition preparedness (65%), (c) practical applications

during seminars (80%), (d) the small group focus of the Executive MTP (40%), (e) the

one-on-one counseling opportunities (45%), (f) the Veterans Affairs classes were

beneficial (95%), and (g) the knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans

(70%).

From the literature, the objective of the redesigned Transition GPS was to develop

career-ready military members as they retired with the intent to reenter the civilian

workforce (Cloud, 2014; Collins et al., 2014; DoL, 2014d). With more personalized one-

on-one counseling, 5 days of transition workshops, and tailored career tracks, the

veterans gained tools to aid them in the transition from the military (DoD TAP, 2014b;

Faurer et al., 2014; House Committee on Veterans Affairs, 2012). Based on the research

findings, the resources, support, and tools provided to veterans aided 95% of them in

their transition to the civilian sector. The findings from the study confirmed the research

in the literature review as it relates to the positive changes made to the redesigned MTP. The findings of the research on challenges experienced with the MTP follow.

Challenges Experienced with the MTP

The associated category related to challenges experienced with the MTP included six identified themes. The identified themes were negative aspects of the MTP that participants viewed as challenges for veterans preparing for career transition. The study participants noted (a) the MTP provided too much information for the week-long transition course (35%), (b) participants had problems balancing their work commitment and attendance at the MTP (20%), (c) class scheduling and enrollment were difficult at times (15%), (d) class content was too fast, too in-depth, or not long enough; (e) information was not targeted to the right audience (25%), and (f) the classes were overbooked (15%). Four participants shared challenges in general (20%).

Participant 18 still felt unprepared for the corporate sector. Participant 11 felt she did not gain a realistic employment outlook, and Participants 4 and 14 still had problems writing their resumes after transition. The challenges noted in this section also help to extend knowledge in this area of military transitioning through the lived experiences of the retiring and retired military. Translating military skills into skills that the civilian community understands is crucial (Arendt & Sapp, 2014). Additionally, continued focus on factors that influence veterans' readjustment is critical (Brunger et al., 2013). The findings from the study confirmed the research in the literature review that veterans continue to experience challenges with the transition to retirement.

Recommended Improvements from Participants' Perspective

The participants recommended several improvements for the MTP that divided into eight identified themes. The participants provided responses to Interview Question 6. The identified themes were from the participants' perspective of how to improve the MTP for retiring veterans. From the findings, the study participants' thoughts were the MTP should (a) conduct a seminar on military versus civilian cultural differences (20%); tailor classes to focus only on critical areas veterans need for transition (35%); segment classes for separating veterans versus retiring veterans (15%); place more emphasis on social media at the MTP (10%); have a better link between federal and state benefits available for veterans (5%); invite industry to participate in the MTP (15%); hold targeted classes prior to transitioning (25%); and place more emphasis on networking (20%).

The literature review showed that the redesigned MTP was a dramatic overhaul; the results of this study show that the changes aided 95% of the participants transitioning from the military. However, new changes could continue to refine the MTP. For instance, Faurer et al. (2014) recommended using talented facilitators and local human resource professionals to co-facilitate the MTP classes and workshop. The findings from the study confirmed the findings in the literature review that continued refinement of the MTP was necessary to aid veterans in transition.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to trustworthiness arose from conducting the study. Limitations arose in the areas of in the areas of credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability. The rich description of the research might help leaders make

judgments on the context of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However,

transferability of the findings was a limitation because of the design, sample size, and

nature of the study. For dependability, an audit trail and triangulation were two strategies

I used to establish reliability in the study. I used NVivo to provide an audit trail, and

triangulating the data through different sources and methods helped validate findings

(Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). The validation strategies or techniques used aided in

the validation and reliability of the qualitative research effort.

To control for the limitation of credibility, the validation techniques of member

checks, researcher bias, and peer review aided in ensuring trustworthiness in the research.

For example, during member checking, the participants received their transcribed

interview and verified that the responses provided were accurate and not a

misrepresentation of their intended meaning. My researcher bias was a potential threat to

the validity of the study, as I had prior experience with military transitioning (Maxwell,

2013); therefore, I clarified my bias through bracketing and epoché at the beginning of

the study.

A limitation of the study not identified in the Chapter 1 was my use of snowball

sampling. I interviewed five respondents using this method. Four interviewees provided

the name of an individual who met the criteria (Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling was a

limitation because the interviewees were referring others to participate in the study,

which possibly influenced their participation. I assumed that the participants provided

truthful information regarding their military transitioning experiences. The validation

strategies used in the research served to limit potential weaknesses of the study's findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The topic of the first research question was retired and retiring military officers' lived experiences of transitioning from the military to the civilian sector. The research results were consistent with the findings that defined transition as a process that is more than a change in job or career (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). Although the participants' transitioning experiences were different for each individual, they described experiences that were similar among several themes. For example, some participants described their personal experiences with transitioning from the military as hectic, traumatic, and overwhelming, whereas other participants experienced no difficulties transitioning. The participants experienced differences in transition based on whether the decision to retire was voluntary or involuntary. If the decision to retire is voluntary, veterans should have control over their situation and plan accordingly for retirement transition.

Based on the literature, being able to anticipate retirement transition means that veterans have control over when to retire (Anderson et al., 2012). Having control over the decision to retire had a positive influence on their health and well-being as they transitioned (Donaldson et al., 2010). Donaldson et al. (2012) stressed the significance of control in promoting a healthier retirement adjustment. Having control over conditions of exit for retirement adjustment has important practical implications for veterans, policymakers, and employers (Donaldson et al., 2012). Based on the findings, 85% of the

participants' made the decision to retire, which allowed them to engage in self-initiated transitioning activities prior to transitioning.

Veterans also transition based on their life situation. Based on the findings in the study, 100% of the study participants planned financially for retirement, whereas 40% engaged in limited to no planning for retirement. Kuk (2012) contended that retirement transition planning means preparing for the unexpected, planning for financial security, focusing on your health, connecting with family and friends, and having a clear plan after retirement for pursuing professional and personal interests. Further research and exploration in this area of retirement transition planning would aid pretransition veterans as they prepare to leave military service.

The topic of the second research question was the perceived critical success factors of the restructured MTP that aided veterans in their transition. Based on the findings of the study, 95% of the participants had positive views of the redesigned MTP. The participants perceived that the knowledge and education imparted to them during the transition and the emphasis leaders of the MTP placed on preparing them for transition were critical success factors in their career transition.

The MTP provided the participants with one-on-one assistance, more workshop days, and optional days to pursue professional goals (DoD TAP, 2014b). However, Faurer et al. (2014) contended that the sponsors of the MTP and the individuals conducting the MTP were not completely aware of the needs of the veterans the MTP should be serving. Faurer et al. recommended further refinement of the program and more research conducted in this area. The transitioning program staffs who are in

different offices in each of the military services manage the MTP, and I noted that the overall experiences of the veterans differed based on which service conducted the MTP workshops. Thus, comparing or evaluating the MTPs was out of scope of this research because data collection did not allow for a comparison among the services' MTPs.

The topic of the third research question was the perceived challenges of the restructured MTP that hindered the participants' transition from the military to the civilian sector. Based on the findings, the participants encountered challenges with balancing work, participating in the MTP, and enrolling in the MTP and felt overloaded with too much information during the week-long program. Based on the literature, changes to the redesigned MTP were fully implemented in 2013 (Collins et al., 2014), and the sponsors of the MTP provide vital resources and support during the Transition GPS workshops to aid veterans in transition (DoL, 2014c).

The participants also made recommendations to improve the MTP. For example, the participants indicated that the MTP should have tailored classes focused only on the critical areas veterans need for transition. Hall et al. (2014) contended that continued refinement of the MTP was necessary to help veterans with their postretirement transition. Based on the research study results, the following are recommendations that could further expand the knowledge of military transitioning and work toward a greater depth in empirical research.

First, since qualitative research is subjective to an individual's interpretation, another researcher who codes the categories from the transcribed interviews potentially will produce somewhat different results that could serve to enrich the current study's

results. Employ a quantitative methodological approach with a survey that would be given to a larger population of separating and retiring veterans in the NCR who are transitioning from the military to the civilian sector. The researcher could investigate the postretirement transition of veterans' reintegration into the civilian workforce.

Second, the discussion on postretirement transition in this study included only how the MTP helped retiring and retired military officers in transition to the civilian sector or to civilian employment. The postretirement transitioning experiences from more interviewees who transitioned from the military to the civilian workforce potentially will yield richer results and different themes. Therefore, the data from this study could undergo additional investigation in further detail. Further research in the area of postretirement transition would aid senior leaders of the MTP in discovering some of the challenges and concerns veterans face after retirement as they seek or gain employment in industry or with the federal government.

Third, further research in the area of postretirement transition might aid veterans who experienced challenges after retirement related to identity, culture, and work-role transition. The review of the literature indicated retirement transition is much more complex than just changing jobs. Further research could involve investigating how social, role, and organizational identities factor into veterans reintegrating into civilian culture and the civilian workforce. As only a few participants of the current study discussed their perceived identity changes since retirement, further research is necessary in this area. Further research in this area might help researchers understand how service members

associate their identity with their military career and the impact of association in their transition from military to civilian cultures.

Fourth, further research could investigate military and cultural differences. Future research could involve exploring the differences in characteristics between the military and civilian cultures and the ways these differences impede veterans' postretirement transition to the civilian workforce. Further research could also involve examining the cultural distinctions between veterans leaving the stable structured environment of the military for an environment that had fewer boundaries in the civilian sector.

Fifth, future researchers could further examine the effect of work-role transitions on retired and separated veterans who returned to the civilian workforce. In particular, researchers could explore how veterans dealt with the stress of change, identity changes, and their behavioral outcomes as a result of adapting to a different environment. Although I focused on retiring and retired military officers in this study, future researchers could focus on officers and noncommissioned officers who are separating from the military to examine the challenges these veterans encounter during their postretirement transition

Sixth, the MLCT model served to help service members prepare for transition early in their career. The MLCT started in Fiscal Year 2015. A review of comments from study participants revealed they had general to no awareness of the MLCT. Researchers could examine how DoD leaders are using the model to aid veterans in making informed decisions at different touch points in their career versus waiting until 2 years before retirement to attend the MTP.

Future research could also involve an attempt to determine the right time in the MLTC to educate future retirees about financial planning, higher education, and learning civilian job skills. Future research could also involve determining what factors are most important for human resources managers or government employers as they make hiring decisions. Gaining an increased understanding of what factors employers use to hire employees would facilitate greater access to job opportunities for veterans. In the next section, I discuss the implications of this research.

Implications

In this section, I describe the potential impact for positive social change at different levels such as individual, organizational, and societal or policy. The implications for social change expressed in this study align with the research. I also describe theoretical and empirical implications and recommendations for practice.

Positive Social Change

The study's results are useful to policymakers and senior leaders who are sponsors of the MTP. The findings of the research study provided an awareness of the perceived critical success factors of the redesigned MTP, as well as the challenges associated with the current program. Sharing the challenges, successes, and recommendations of retiring and retired military officers transitioning experiences provide information to senior leaders of the MTP that is beneficial to assist the more than 500,000 military veterans still unemployed and seeking employment postretirement (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Research in this area since the restructure of the MTP is limited (Faurer et al., 2014). The findings of this study include information that is

useful to veterans seeking employment to civilian employment, to help narrow the gap between military organizations and corporate organizations.

For instance, company leaders value the qualities that potential veteran employees possess, such as leadership skills and teamwork. Veterans have a range of job-related skills that they bring to the civilian workplace, such as information technology, engineering, logistics, human resources, financial management, and security (Hall et al., 2014). However, veterans still face challenges finding employment in the civilian sector. Being aware of why some companies do not hire veterans, such as problems with skills translation, negative stereotypes of veterans associated with the effects of combat stress, or acclimation provides awareness to veterans regarding the challenges of gaining civilian employment (Harrell & Berglass, 2012). Also, veterans who are aware of strategies such as transitioning to military-friendly companies, networking, preretirement planning, and take advantage of all available resources and support of the MTP are generally successful in their postretirement transition (Abrams et al., 2013; Huebner & Royal, 2013; Jacques, 2014).

As a result of this study, senior leaders of the DoD, DoL, and DVA responsible for MTPs should refine processes, expand services, and improve programs to aid retired veterans seeking civilian employment. For example, DoD should provide more on-base access for private sector recruiting on base, encourage veterans to register early in the VEC so they can dialogue with potential employers, and expand training and internship programs, which allows service members to participate in employment training in a civilian work environment (Hall et al., 2014). Moreover, this study provides future

researchers with a foundation to examine identified trends in further detail. The findings

of this research contribute to the veteran population who continue to transition in the

community and society in general.

Theoretical Implications

The current study was meaningful in terms of its theoretical implications. The

research study contributes to advancing theory. The problem under study was that the

MTP was ineffective in aiding retiring service members in their successful transition

from the military to the civilian sector. This research contributes to the body of

knowledge needed to address the phenomenon of military transition by examining and

describing the perceptions of military officers concerning their lived experiences of

transitioning after the restructure of the MTP. The study contributes to the empirical

literature related to transition theory, identity theory, and work-role transition theory and

its significance to veterans in career transition. The significance of the 4S transition

theory to this study was that it places into context that military transition is a complex

event and requires scholars and practitioners to have a greater understanding of how these

factors contribute to veterans' successful career transition.

Identity strain or stress is potentially a subject of concern as 1 million veterans

retire and seek employment in the civilian workforce (McAllister et al., 2015). McAllister

et al. (2015) contended that veterans who retire and integrate into a new environment

might experience increased levels of stress if they do not feel equipped to transition

effectively. More research in the area of identity strain and of the ways it affects veterans

as they transition to the civilian workforce would be a benefit for transition counselors

and scholars conducting future research in this area (McAllister et al., 2015). Donaldson et al. (2010) suggested that current research should extend beyond health, wealth, and retirement planning in relation to retirement adjustment. In this context, this study contributes to work-role transition theory and the important role of business leaders and transition counselors in helping veterans transition to the civilian workplace.

The three theories used as a framework in this study (i.e., transition, identity, and work-role transition) served as a unique way to examine veterans in transition. The sponsors and facilitators of the MTP benefit from this research, which included the veteran participants' insights regarding critical success factors of the redesigned MTP. Additionally, research related to the theories of this study contributes to the social, behavioral, and organizational literature related to military transition. Military officers are an understudied population, and providing a perspective from their viewpoint on the established problem contributes to scholarly research related to military to civilian transition (Baruch & Quick, 2007, 2009). Further, the study also contributed to the scholarly literature related to transition, identity, and work-role transition theories in the management field**. The conceptual framework of this study supported a different way to explore and examine transition challenges, identity-related issues, and work-role adjustments encountered as service members' transition from the military.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study were the potential to provide information to separating and retiring military personnel, military transitioning locations, human resources management, and leaders in other organizations about the participants'

perceptions of the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP. The primary reason for conducting the study was to explore and document military officers' experiences of the MTP in helping them transition from the military to the civilian sector. This study holds significant implications for transition counselors who work with transitioning veterans at the MTPs. For instance, results of this study is valuable for transition counselors as they help veterans gauge their emotional and practical readiness to career transition, such as preretirement planning and loss of military community (Robertson & Brott, 2013).

Additionally, the study findings include critical insights into how DoD leaders can continue to improve the MTP since its restructuring to help veterans reintegrate into the civilian labor force (McAllister et al., 2015). Hence, the findings are beneficial for DoD, DVA, and DoL senior leaders who are sponsors of the MTPs as they continue to refine and strengthen the program for all retiring veterans. Further, this study contributes to the literature on military transitioning for the academic community and to the readers of this study.

Researcher Reflections

This phenomenological study involved exploring the critical success factors of the MTP after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the NCR. As with the study participants, I enrolled in and completed the MTP prior to retiring from active duty service. I reflected on the interviews and the dialogue with the participants, which reminded me of how much the legacy MTP has changed and how the redesigned MTP provides tools, resources, and

support that are crucial to veterans as they separate and retire from the military. I wished that I had the opportunity to go through the redesigned program.

I learned that the research process from the time IRB grants approval to conduct the study, through data collection and data analysis, to writing the findings and results is a laborious process but a rewarding experience. I had the opportunity to interview participants and heard similar transitioning experiences. During the interviews, it was challenging not to share my personal thoughts and opinions related to military transition, but I put aside those feelings so that the study would remain unbiased.

Several of the participants commented that they appreciated the opportunity to participate in an interview, and the interviews enhanced my experience as doctoral student. The participants provided rich data, and others who are embarking on military transition gain insights from and value from their transitioning experiences. As a result of this study, I have a greater appreciation and a better understanding of the importance of qualitative research. The knowledge that I have gained from this doctoral process has helped me develop as a researcher and will aid me as I continue future research in the area of military transitioning and other leadership-related research.

Conclusions

Military transitioning was the central phenomenon of the study. Military transitioning was the transitioning process that every veteran encounters at some period in his or her life. This phenomenological study included a goal of exploring the critical success factors of the redesigned MTP in an effort to provide awareness of the successes and challenges of the program as perceived by the participants. The participants under

study perceived the MTPs as a vital resource in their transition to the civilian sector. The findings of this study showed that the most critical success factors were the Veterans Affairs classes were beneficial, the practical applications during seminars, the emphasis within the MTP on transition preparedness, and the knowledge and education imparted to transitioning veterans.

The research study findings also showed that there are still challenges associated with the MTP that hinder successful transition to the civilian sector. The challenges are information overload, balancing work and transition activities, class scheduling and enrollment, unprepared for corporate environment, overbooked classes, and class content. The themes identified aided in answering the three research study questions.

The current research study contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to military to civilian retirement or reintegration to the civilian workforce. Senior leaders or sponsors of the MTP can use the findings from this study to help veterans overcome the challenges they still encounter as they transition from the military to the civilian sector. Future military retirees can use the findings and literature in this study to gain a richer understanding of the transitioning process and other factors such as identity and work-role transition that are important for a successful transition. Preplanning is vital to the transition process and includes financial planning, job seeking, and writing resumes. Veterans must plan accordingly in postretirement by using available resources and support such as the MTP, networking, and family and friends as they transition and seek employment in the civilian sector.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Details:
Interviewer _____
Interviewee_____
Interviewee Code-name_____
Interview Date/Time_____
Interview Location_____

Preliminary Interview Protocol Actions:
1. Verify that a signed and dated informed consent letter is collected prior to the interview.
2. Offer the participant a signed and dated copy of the informed consent letter.
3. Introduce the study, provide a short background of the researcher's connection to the study, and offer a signed and dated copy of the confidentiality agreement.
4. Inform the participant that the interview is being audio-recorded and will be transcribed by the researcher or a professional transcriptionist service.
5. Inform the participant that a copy of the results of the study will be made available to them if requested.

Demographic Interview Questions:

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

3. When are you retiring from the military?

4. What branch of the military are you transitioning from?

5. What is your military career field?

6. How long (years and month) have you served in the military?

7. What is your rank/grade at retirement?

Interview Questions (Pretransition Officers)

The following questions were asked of retired officers who were within six months of retirement from the military and were transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR.

1. Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to include your reasons for retiring? (RQ1)

2. Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc? (RQ1)

3. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Defense, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

4. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Labor, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

5. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, while participating in these services? For example: veterans benefits such as Post 9-11 GI Bill (RQ1)

6. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe critical success factors of the redesigned military transitioning program? (RQ2)

7. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe what critical success factors of the MTP will aid veterans most in making the transition to the civilian sector? (RQ2)

8. Explain some of the benefits of the restructured MTP and how it will help you in your transition from the military to the civilian sector? (RQ2)

9. Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning through the MTP? (RQ3)

10. Explain what changes, if any, you would recommend that may improve the military transitioning program for veterans? (RQ3)

11. Are there any additional information that you would like to share in regards to your transitioning experiences from the military as you begin your retirement transition to the civilian sector? (RQ1)

Interview Questions (Post-transition Officers)

The following questions were for retired officers who were within one-year postretirement from the military and were transitioning to the civilian sector in the NCR.

1. Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to include your reasons for retiring? (RQ1)

2. Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc? (RQ1)

3. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the DoD, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

4. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the DoL, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

5. Describe your experiences with the MTP during preretirement transition such as services provided by the DVA, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

6. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe critical success factors of the military transitioning program? (RQ2)

7. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe what critical success factors of the MTP aided you most in making the transition to civilian employment? (RQ2)

8. Explain some of the benefits of the restructured MTP and how it helped you in your transition from the military to the civilian sector? (RQ2)

9. Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning from the military through the MTP that hindered your transition to the civilian sector? (RQ3)

10. Based on your response to the previous question, explain what changes you would recommend to improve the military transitioning program for veterans? (RQ3)

11. Describe your transitioning experiences from the military to the civilian sector after retiring from active duty service (RQ1)

12. Are there any additional information that you would like to share in regards to your transitioning experiences from the military to the civilian sector after retiring from active duty service? (RQ1)

Interview Details:
Interviewer _____
Interviewee_____
Interviewee Code-name_____
Interview Date/Time_____
Interview Location_____

Preliminary Interview Protocol Actions:
1. Verify that a signed and dated informed consent letter is collected prior to the interview.
2. Offer the participant a signed and dated copy of the informed consent letter.
3. Introduce the study, provide a short background of the researcher's connection to the study, and offer a signed and dated copy of the confidentiality agreement.
4. Inform the participant that the interview is being audio-recorded and will be transcribed by the researcher or a professional transcriptionist service.
5. Inform the participant that a copy of the results of the study will be made available to them if requested.

Demographic Interview Questions:

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

3. When did you retire/are retiring from the military?

4. What branch of the military are you transitioning from?

5. What was your military career field?

6. How long (years and month) did you serve in the military?

7. What was your grade/rank at retirement?

<div align="center">Interview Questions</div>

Core questions for transitioning officers who are retiring or have retired from active duty service and intend to or have transitioned to the civilian workforce

1. Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to include your reasons for retiring? (RQ1)

2. Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc? (RQ1)

3. Describe your experiences with the Military Transitioning Program (MTP) during retirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Veterans Affairs, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

4. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe critical success factors of the MTP that aided you most in making the transition to the civilian sector? (RQ2)

5. Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning from the military through the restructured MTP that hindered your transition to the civilian sector? (RQ3)

6. Based on your response to the previous question, explain what changes you would recommend to improve the military transitioning program for veterans? (RQ3)

7. Describe your transitioning experiences from the military to the civilian sector after retiring from active duty service? (RQ1) (Post transition)

Appendix B: Participants Recruitment Letter

Posting Title: Participants needed for study on Military Transitioning through Redesigned program

Posting Description: I am currently attempting to recruit between 20 and 25 research participants for a study on military officers perceptions of critical success factors of military transitioning programs (MTP) post restructure in the National Capital Region.

The reason and benefit of the study: This academic study may potentially assist with the continual refinement of the MTP. Your participation in the study will be instrumental in providing an awareness of the current transitioning strategies that may help thousands of veterans still seeking employment in the civilian sector. Based on your experiences with military transitioning (retiring from active duty and seeking employment with the civilian sector), I would like to interview you in regards to your perceptions of the redesigned MTP and whether the changes to MTP facilitated a successful transition from the military to the civilian sector. The criteria for interviewee follows:

• Are you currently in transition (retiring) from the military and is within six months of retiring and one year after retiring from military service?

• Did you transition through the redesigned MTP after December 2013?

• Are you a military officer who is transitioning with at least 20 years of active duty service?

If you answered yes to all of the above questions, I would be interested in communicating with you regarding participation in the study. The goal of the study is to explore the lived experiences of military officers who transitioned from the military to the civilian sector. The primary focus of this study is the experience of the military officers in transition to retirement, military transitioning, and transition to the civilian sector. Since there has been limited research conducted that explores the transitioning experience of this population, an understanding of this experience from your perspective will be valuable to providing information that may be useful in refining the government support programs. Based on your experiences with military transitioning, again defined as a military officer who is within six months of retirement and one year after retiring from military service, I would like to interview you in regards to your perceptions of the redesigned MTP and whether the changes to MTP facilitated a successful transition from the military to the civilian sector.

Anyone meeting the above criteria interested in participating please contact me at: jean.ward@cox.net.

Provide your name, email and a contact number. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected! Your name will not be released to anyone.

I welcome the opportunity to discover your experiences with the redesigned military transitioning program.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

Exploring Critical Success Factors of the Redesigned Military Transitioning Program

Dear Respondent,

This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate in it. You are invited to participate in a research study designed to explore military officers' perception of critical success factors of military transitioning programs (MTP) post restructure in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Military officers who have experienced the phenomenon of military transitioning and meet the following criteria are invited to participate in this study:

(a) You transitioned through the redesigned MTP after December 2013,
(b) You are within six months of retirement and one year after retiring from military
(c) You are a military officer who has completed 20 or more years on active duty and have requested retirement as of June 2015.

This study is being conducted by Gloria J. Edwards, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. This research is not affiliated with my work profession and is being conducted solely in my role as a doctoral candidate. Please review the form in its entirety. I will respond to any questions you may have prior to you acting on this invitation to participate in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry will be to explore the critical success factors of the MTP after the redesign based on perceptions of 20 military officers intending to transition to the civilian sector in the NCR. Specifically, the participants will be asked to describe their perceptions of critical success factors of the MTPs since the implementation of the DoD Transition Goal Plans and Success program. The research from this study may provide critical insights into the effectiveness of the Transition GPS and help government leaders continue to improve upon the MTPs for retiring veterans.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher requiring no more than 30 – 60 minutes of your time. The population size of this study is 20 respondents

- Agree to have the interview audiotaped for later transcription and analysis by the researcher.
- Review a copy of the initial study findings and conclusions provided to you by the researcher and to provide the researcher with feedback on the accuracy of the findings and conclusions. The debriefing of the study should take less than 30 minutes.

Interview Questions:

The questions for the interview are as follows:

Core questions for post-transition officers who retired and intend to transition or have transitioned to the civilian workforce

1. Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to include your reasons for retiring? (RQ1)

2. Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc? (RQ1)

3. Describe your experiences with the Military Transitioning Program (MTP) during retirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Veterans Affairs, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

4. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe what aspect of the MTP aided you most in making the transition to civilian employment? (RQ2)

5. Explain some of the benefits of the restructured MTP that helped in your transition from the military to the civilian workforce? (RQ2)

6. Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning from the military through the restructured MTP that hindered your transition to the civilian workforce? (RQ3)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means, your decision of whether or not to participate in this study will be respected. The study is not associated with the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor or other government agencies. If you decide to participate in the study now, you may still change your mind later or stop participating in the study at any time.

A participant who is already known to this researcher may chose not to participate or stop participating at any time. Your declination or discontinuation of participation in this study will not have a negative impact on the relationship between the participant and this researcher.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or anxiety; however, being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The researcher will make every effort to minimize any discomfort during the interview. You have the option to refuse to answer any questions you consider intrusive or stressful. Though, if you feel stressed, Military One Source number offers stress management resources and they can be contacted at 1-800-342-9647.

Your participation in the study will provide you the opportunity to share your military transitioning experience. As a result of your participation, the findings of this study may be helpful in refining and strengthening the DoD MTPs for all retiring veterans.

Payment:

There is no payment or compensation for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Instead of using your name, your identity will be protected by using an identifier such as Participant 01. Data will be kept secure by storing and archiving information on a password protected computer that is only accessible by this researcher. Any hard copy information such as printed interview transcripts will be stored in a lockable file cabinet by the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5-years, as required by the University, then destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher of this study is Gloria J. Edwards. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at jean.ward@cox.net. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 1-800-925-3368, ext. 1210# or email address irb@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is **05-29-15-0336302** and it expires **May 28, 2016.**

I will provide you with a copy of this form to keep/print for your records.
Participation in this Study:

To participate in this study, please contact Gloria J. Edwards. Your participation will be kept confidential, which means your participation will only be known to this researcher and will not be shared with anyone. A signed confidentiality agreement between yourself and the researcher will be made available to you. You should keep a copy of this form. Upon your agreement to participate in the study, you and the researcher will be able to select a mutually agreeable place to conduct the interview. The researcher will meet with you outside of your office environment at a location that will be most comfortable to you. A copy of the study results will be made available to you at the conclusion of the study.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information, and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below or replying to this email, I consent to participate in the study and I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

_____

_____

The Uniform Electronic Transactions Act regulates electronic signatures. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be a person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Phenomenological study of military officers transitioning post restructure of the military transitioning program, I may have access to sensitive information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be harmful to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.

2. I will not in any way share, copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.

3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation.

4. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.

5. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification, or purging of confidential information.

6. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the research that I will perform.

7. I understand that violation of this agreement could have legal implications.

8. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Name**:** Gloria J. Edwards   Date: XXX

Signature: _____

Appendix E: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: _____

During the course of transcribing audio recordings of interviews for this research study entitled: "Exploring military officer's perceptions of critical success factors of military transitioning programs post restructure in the National Capital Region," I will have access to information which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.

2. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.

3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.

4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification, or purging of confidential information.

5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.

6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.

7. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview Questions – Pilot Study

Posttransition Interview Questions

Core questions for post transition officers who retired and intend to or have transitioned to the civilian workforce

1. Describe your transitioning experiences (preretirement) from the military to include your reasons for retiring? (RQ1)

2. Describe your preplanning transitioning activities before retirement such as job seeking; resume building, financial planning, etc? (RQ1)

3. Describe your experiences with the Military Transitioning Program (MTP) during retirement transition such as services provided by the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Veterans Affairs, while participating in these services? (RQ1)

4. Describe your lived experiences of transitioning from the military to the civilian sector after retiring from active duty service? (RQ1)

5. Describe your postretirement transitioning activities such as programs, websites, or other tools from the MTP that you believed were helpful for finding employment in the civilian sector? (RQ2)

6. Based on your experience with the MTP, describe what aspect of the MTP aided you most in making the transition to civilian employment? (RQ2)

7. Explain some of the benefits of the restructured MTP and how it helped in your transition from the military to the civilian sector? (RQ2)

8. Explain some of the challenges you experienced as a result of transitioning from the military through the restructured MTP that hindered your transition to the civilian sector? (RQ3)

9. Are there any additional information that you would like to share in regards to your transitioning experiences from the military to the civilian sector?

Appendix G: Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method

1. Describe my personal experience with the central phenomenon as an effort to set aside my own personal experience so the focus can be on the study participants.

2. Develop a list of noteworthy statements.

3. Group the information into themes.

4. Write a textual description of the participant's experience with the phenomenon.

5. Write a structural description of how the experience happened that reflects the context and setting of where the participant experienced the phenomenon.

6. Write a description incorporating both textual and structural descriptions.

7. Conduct member checking and transcript review by performing a preliminary analysis prior to returning the transcript to the participants for review in a single or multiple sessions.