


2018

# Gulf War Era II Veterans' Cognitive Information Processing and the Civilian Employment Transition

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# Walden University

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2018

Abstract

Gulf-War-Era-II Veterans' Cognitive Information Processing and the Civilian

Employment Transition

by

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MS, American Military University, 2006

BA, Southern Illinois University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Management & Leadership

Walden University

February 2018

## Abstract

Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans have made professional contributions to the civilian workforce since returning from Iraq and Afghanistan combat operations. Service members in California encounter transition issues related to employment and adjusting their self-identity in the civilian employment culture. These complexities have led to career problems. Using Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, and Lenz's theory of cognitive information processing and Mincer & Becker's theory of human capital, the purpose of this phenomenological study was designed to provide a holistic account of the lived experiences of 11 Gulf War era II veterans who have successfully integrated into civilian employment with a focus on mitigating factors and decision making processes.

Purposeful sampling and semistructured interviews were completed with Los Angeles Gulf-War-era-II veterans employed as civilians for more than 1 year. Data collected were analyzed using the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method. Five themes emerged from the data represented the transitional experiences of the participant veterans': (a) presence of self-validating values, (b) love of country and social responsibility, (c) importance of veteran networking and social support, (d) continued self-improvement, and (e) self-awareness to adapt to decision-making skills required in civilian employment. The findings identified the phenomenon that veterans evolved personally and professionally after securing meaningful civilian jobs and continued to adapt using career problem solving. This study contributes to the positive social change by aggregating resources for employment stability for veterans, increasing dialogue regarding veteran career transitions, and increasing awareness of veteran human capital values in civilian employment.

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## Dedication

This research is dedicated to every Gulf-War-era-II veteran that has the courage to change careers, employers that trust the contributions that veterans make, philanthropists and nonprofit organizations that customize veterans services, and the families that support veterans during and after their conversion from combat to the civilian workforce. I would like to thank my miracle twins, Maximus and Maxine, for providing me the continued motivation to be the best Mom on Earth. To my Grandmother Juanita who is 95 years strong, still driving, and fully independent: Thank you for believing in me and demonstrating that strength and determination conquers all things. To my husband, Benjamin: Thank you for making me stronger when I grew weary during this process. You inspired me to keep moving forward. To my spiritual sisters, colleagues, and supporters you reminded me that this project has always been larger than current issues and encouraged me to seek remedy to tomorrow's hurdles. I thank God for all of you. To my brother Charleston, who created the healthiest sibling competition and encouraged me to succeed in changing the world: You will always be my motivation. Rest in peace little brother and I will take it from here.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for protecting me, helping me through my recovery, and providing me the strength to become a change agent for my comrades. I would like that thank the tireless volunteers, organizations, researchers, and families that remain dedicated to transitioning veterans throughout the United States. Your efforts are greatly appreciated and you enable veterans to contribute their service to America after they leave the military. I would like to thank my Committee Chairperson Professor Frances Goldman and Committee Chair Member Professor Mark DeVirgilio.

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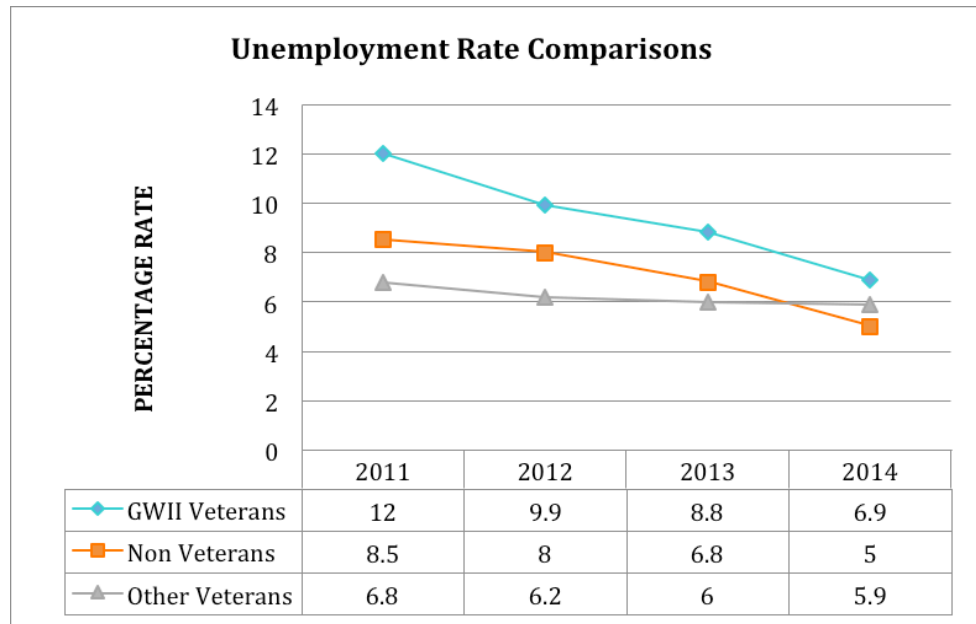
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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since 2001, Gulf-War-era-II (GWII) veterans have been one of the most impacted populations to experience economic and transitional adjustments related to career changes and military downsizing. In 2015, 3.2 million U.S. veterans who served during the Gulf-War-era-II faced transitional adjustments their first 3 years of reintegration into civilian employment (Department of Labor, 2015; Phillips, Braud, Andrews, & Bullock, 2007). A decrease in military forces guarantees that more veterans need to incorporate into civilian life without sacrificing the ability of America to respond to threats (Department of Defense, 2011). Veteran employment is critical to national security, as stable and supportive civilian employment enables reservists and guardsman to serve (Berglass & Harrell, 2011).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), unemployment among the post 9/11 generation of veterans has been on a steady decline. In 2012, the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans was 9.9%, in 2013, the rate was 8.8%, and in 2014, the unemployment rate was 6.9% (Department of Labor, 2015). As indicated in Figure 1, although Gulf-War-era-II veterans are obtaining employment, the unemployment rate for this population is higher than other veteran groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The Gulf-War-era-II veteran's unemployment is an issue. Research to understand the lived experiences of veterans who have been successful in the transition can help build a knowledge base of tools for veterans and employers.



*Figure 1.* Unemployment rate for WWII veterans, non-veterans, and other era veterans.

### Background of the Study

Over the past 5 years, several initiatives and programs such as Executive Order 13518 and the Veteran Employment Initiative that focus on increasing awareness of veteran employment and educational needs have been instrumental in decreasing the high veteran unemployment rate (Collins et al., 2014). These initiatives concentrated on reducing the high unemployment rate for Gulf-War-era-II veterans such as the preliminary exit Transition Assistance Program (TAP), now converted to the Transition Goals Plans Success (GPS), and the Federal Hiring Preferences/ Special Hiring Authorities (National Career Development Association, 2014). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) defined the term *transition* as “any event resulting in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 39). Employment outcomes for the

Post 9/11 veteran populations can be unpredictable when addressing various transitioning issues.

California has a high concentration of transitioning Gulf-War-era-II veterans, due to its proximity to several military bases and surpasses all other states with the highest number of former servicemembers (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Department of Labor, 2015). Californian WWII veterans in Los Angeles expect to find meaningful employment after they leave the military possess limited information about civilian employment acquisition and retention (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; West & Kregel, 2014). Morin (2011) noted that 79% of women veterans and 73% of men veterans identify that their military experience has assisted the more responsible roles in civilian employment while 74% of women and 73% of male Gulf-War-era-II veterans indicated that the military was useful in preparing them for a civilian career (Patton & Parker, 2011). The information obtained in this research could answer questions regarding the reintegration of veterans into the civilian workforce and analyze the impact of contributions that California Gulf-War-era-II veterans bring to the workforce.

All veterans' programs begin with transitional programs that cover identification of transferable skills that align military occupations and specializations with civilian employment opportunities (Collins et al., 2014). The Transition GPS is the mandatory 5-day conversion training for all departing service members to prepare them for the civilian workforce. In 2013, a \$14 million allocation from the Department of Labor and another \$122 million from the Department of Defense supported employment programs. In previous years, the success of the TAP centered on the number of service members



who completed the program rather than on the transferability of the services provided to assist in the transition. The TAP overhauled in November 2012 to the Transition GPS, which focuses on career readiness standards and individualized career transferability options (Department of Labor, 2014). The combination of career-readiness programs and hiring preferences provide a competitive preference and possible aide in direct appointment requirements in federal hiring, based on military service. There are also educational initiatives that include the Post 9/11 GI Bill that provides additional funds for education and living expenses while Post 9/11 veterans pursue their education (Collins et al., 2014).

Veterans with service-connected disabilities have resources to support them in overcoming career-transitioning obstacles, such as the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP), which provides direct support to veterans and employers in local labor markets (Collins et al., 2014). Veterans who have benefited from training and development during their military service possess a wide variety of teamwork and leadership skill experiences, and motivation skills that apply to the civilian workforce (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Veterans seek purposeful employment that allows them to continue their service to America and actively seek jobs that can enable them to contribute to meaningful employment (National Career Development Association, 2014).

Among veterans who served during the Gulf-War-era-II, nearly 928,000 reported having a service-connected disability (Department of Labor, 2015). Veterans are struggling to navigate and find work within the U.S. labor market while dealing with the

transition from military to civilian life. Cognitive behavioral techniques and interpersonal problem solving skills assist Gulf-War-era-II veterans to adjust to civilian life (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). There appears to be a significant professional knowledge gap between work-seeking veterans and employers (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012; King, 2012). Despite the negative stigma of the emotional impact of traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress on career reintegration success, Gulf-War-era-II veterans are attaining employment (Prudential Financial, 2012). In August 2014, in addition to civilian employment, 31% of employed veterans with a disability worked in federal, state, or local government work, compared to 18% of nonveterans with disabilities (Department of Labor, 2015; Dortch, 2012).

### **Problem Statement**

Gulf-War-era-II veterans are struggling with employment acquisition and job retention in civilian employment (Hall, Kimberly, Harrell, Stewart, & Fisher, 2015). Veteran employment data for California reflects that unemployment is an ongoing issue due to the complexity of the transition of military and civilian cultures that was not present for previous generations of veterans (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Due to the limited literature related to the Gulf-War-era-II veterans' transition successes and stability in civilian employment, investigating and exploring career sustaining behaviors and decision-making skills can aid in understanding the key elements to success for this population of veterans.

There have been studies that identify the problems that lead to high unemployment for veterans. One study found that there are five factors that can predict a

difficult transition for Gulf-War-era-II veterans who include having a traumatic experience while serving, being injured, serving in a combat environment, serving with someone who was killed or injured, and serving in the post-9/11 era (Kukla, Bonfils, & Salyers, 2015). Financial difficulties and lack of employment can present adverse mental and physical aggravation of health problems, demonstrating a need for promoting meaningful employment to enhance veterans' quality of life after combat (Elbogen, Johnson, Wagner, Newton, & Beckham, 2012).

Veterans have difficulties operating in civilian cultures without hierarchical structures and defined career paths (Hall et al., 2015). Although there has been extensive research on the importance of pre-separation planning and postmilitary employment transitioning, there is limited research on the stability and performance of Gulf-War-era-II veterans in civilian employment roles (Morin, 2011).

The unemployment rate of veterans affects businesses. Employers have noticed the high turnover rate for veterans and developed executive-level engagement processes to foster and cultivate veteran integration into their organizations (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012). Employers promote the hiring of veterans for their years of leadership experience and propensity for respect, authority, and loyalty (Bullock, Braud, Andrews, & Phillips, 2009; Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Hall et al., 2015).

The unemployment rate warrants a review and analysis of long-term employment skills and patterns that can secure employment stability for Gulf-War-era-II veterans (Office of Personnel Management, 2011). The transition from military to civilian workforce can be a complicated adjustment that involves changing structures,

employment cultures, and life roles (National Career Development Association, 2014). An analysis of how career problem solving skills and career decision-making can affect the unemployment rate can assist in understanding the problem of unemployment among WWII veterans.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans during the transition into civilian employment. The goal was to understand what career problem solving and decision making skills contribute to the stability of transitioned Gulf-War-era-II veterans. Career problems can vary based on marital status, educational level, transferrable skills, physical condition, support networks, and coping skills (Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Kukla et al., 2015). This phenomenological study can possibly raise an awareness of the challenges of employment transitioning career problems, and offer insight into the essential career decision making skills are instrumental to the civilian workforce integration through the lens of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have overcome career barriers. In some cases, these challenges contributed to the higher unemployment rate for Gulf-War-era-II veterans (Castro & Kintzle, 2017; Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). Through this research, new or alternative approaches can be considered to address difficulties that impede successful career transitions for veterans.

The National Career Development Association (2014) identified that transitional Gulf-War-era-II veterans need assistance in bridging the cultural differences in the workplace in order to change careers (National Career Development Association, 2014).

Veterans have difficulty adjusting to an environment with less day-to-day urgency, fewer responsibilities, and less responsibility than that demonstrated in the military (Hall et al., 2015). Assimilation through cognitive information processing (CIP) can improve by identifying, challenging, altering, and acting on their career-related thinking to address mental injuries that would prove to be barriers to maintaining employment (Bullock et al., 2009; Grantz, 2007).

The motivations to hire veterans answer calls for corporate social responsibility, and the *support-the-troops* goodwill that exists in American society (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012). Although this has drawn attention to the employment needs of the veteran population, and to corporate America's drive to give back, all indications are that this motivation is insufficient to sustain enduring employer commitments (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012). Hiring veterans should not be a charitable endeavor but a continuous pursuit of hiring qualified candidates that can increase diversity in the workplace (Hall et al. , 2015).

Hiring Gulf-War-era-II veterans is more than a call to patriotism (Chicas, Maiden, Oh, Young, & Wilcox, 2012). Clemens and Milsom (2008) conducted one of the very few case studies to examine the CIP of veterans and uncovered the positive outcome of CIP to assist career counselors in preparing veterans success integration into the civilian workplace. It is my intention to examine the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have attained civilian positions despite self-identified career problems.

## **Research Questions**

Because phenomenological research questions focus on what a population experiences and how they experience it (Creswell, 2007), the following research questions assist in this study:

RQ1: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities experienced by Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned into civilian employment?

RQ2: What are the perceived skills necessary to navigate the transition from military combat exposure to civilian employment?

RQ3: What are the career decision-making experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who contribute to the resolution of career problems during their transitions to civilian employment roles?

Research has demonstrated the first year of employment can be the most difficult because many veterans quit their civilian jobs within the first year of employment (Elbogen et al., 2012). The veterans interviewed were employed for more than 1 year.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study provided the foundation to understand career problem solving and career decision-making skills that Gulf-War-era-II veterans demonstrated during their transition into civilian employment. This research study was grounded in two theories: CIP (Peterson et al., 2004; Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2002) and the theory of human capital (HC) (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Teachman & Tedrow, 2004) used to explain various labor market phenomena, such as income

differences, the trajectory of earning's over an individual's life, investments in education, on-the-job training, experience, training, and career advancements.

The theory of CIP was applicable to the study because there are several factors and strategies examined to improve the integration during the transition from a current career state and desired career state (Peterson et al., 2008; Bertoch, Lenz, Reardon, & Peterson, 2014). As returning combat veterans adjust into civilian jobs, understanding how the civilian workforce differs from the military culture can lead to the successfully transition into a stable civilian workplace (Bertoch et al., 2014; Mezirow, 2000). The CIP approach was developed to address career problems and decision-making skills to support career choices (Peterson et al., 2008; Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2002). The three basic career processing principles of cognitive information processing include self-knowledge and occupational knowledge (knowledge domain), the decision-making process (decision-making domain), and the ability to adapt throughout career problem solving and career decision-making (executive processing domain) (Sampson et al., 2004).

The human capital theory corresponds to any stock of knowledge, training, or experience that the worker has (innate or acquired) that contributes to their productivity in the workplace (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958). Transitioning veterans have to develop skills that can assist them in overcoming career problems and difficulties during their transition while capitalizing on their military experience and education (Brown, Bimrose, & Hughes, 2012). A transcendental phenomenology study affords the opportunity for the researcher to see the experience exactly as the participant believes it exists (Moustakas,

1994). The demonstration of workforce attributes can potentially lead to career advancements (Bertoch, Lenz, Reardon, & Peterson, 2014). The human capital in organizations represents the stock of human assets that consists of knowledge, skills, experience, education, and workforce attributes that contributes to the productivity of the workforce (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958).

### **Nature of the Study**

This phenomenological study was used to understand how Gulf-War-era-II veterans cope with the transition from military service to civilian employment. Data collected through semistructured interviews were utilized to analyze three areas of the veterans' transition: military exposure, personal adjustments, and professional observations during their transition. The data were analyzed with the traditional text analysis method to identify repetitive data and emergent themes. A clear understanding of the experiences common to Gulf-War-era-II veterans can lead to an increased diversity in the workplace and long-term employment stability.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of the terms used throughout this study.

*Career problem:* A career problem is defined as a gap between an existing state of affairs and an ideal state of affairs. The gap may be between an existing state (knowing I need to make a choice) and an ideal state (knowing I made a good choice). A career problem is defined as a gap between an existing state of affairs and an ideal state of affairs. The gap may be between an existing state (knowing I need to make a choice) and



an ideal state (knowing I made a good choice). Common gaps in career problem solving involve occupational choice, program of study choice, and employment choice (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2002).

*Career problem solving:* A complex set of thought processes involved in acknowledging a gap, analyzing its causes, formulating alternative courses of action, and selecting an alternative to reduce the gap (Peterson et al., 2004).

*Career decision making:* A process that personifies an individual's career choice and the commitment to follow the necessary steps to implement and sustain the career choice; choosing the best option in a timely manner, even in ambiguous situations and without assistance when appropriate (Peterson et al., 2004; Office of Personnel Management, 2015).

*Cognitive information processing (CIP):* An approach that was developed by Peterson, Lenz, and Reardon (1992) the cognitive information processing approach is depicted as a pyramid that moves from knowledge as the base, decision-making in the center, and impressions of decision-making and greater self-awareness as the tip of the pyramid. The goal is to guide career success with the integration of self-knowledge and occupational knowledge (Peterson et al., 2004).

*Gulf-War-era-II (Post/911) Veterans:* A veteran is “a person who served in active duty military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from duty under conditions other than dishonorable” (Department of the Army, 2007). In 2011, about 2.4 million of the nation's veterans had served during Gulf-War-era-II (Department of Labor,

2011). For the purpose of this research, post 9/11 veterans are Gulf-War-era-II veterans who served on active duty from September 2001 to present.

*Handling work stress:* Functions under pressure; remains composed under pressure and during high-stress situations; manages frustration and acts as a calming and settling influence on others (Office of Personnel Management, 2015).

*Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or Posttraumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD):* PTSD can occur after a person has been through a traumatic event. It can occur in civilians and in veterans. PTSD is a prevalent combat injury in several military conflicts. The prevalence of PTSD in Gulf-War-era-II veterans is 13.8% (Center for Military Health Policy and Research, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, it was assumed that the participants answered questions with accurate information and that they were capable of being introspective while reporting their experiences. Secondly, because there has been little information about the successful experiences of veterans, it was assumed that the significance of this study will add to the existing body of literature regarding WWII veterans. The fact that the Gulf-War-era-II veterans have maintained employment was indicative of a positive factor of performance. Thirdly, the open-ended interview questions were designed for each participant to provide additional clarifications through follow up questions that assisted in uncovering expanded information. It was assumed that information gained from the perspectives of employed Gulf-War-era-II veterans could uncover social change

implications to improve retention, accelerate new hires, and leverage the contributions of Gulf-War-era-II veterans (King, 2011).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Creswell (2007) identified that one of the best ways to eliminate problems during qualitative studies is to define weakness and delimitations. The three delimitations of this study are (a) a sample size of 11 Gulf-War-era-II veterans from a single geographic area in Southern California, (b) the data self-reported by the veterans, and (c) the results may not be similar to the experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans in other states. The population was purposefully sampled to understand the experiences and discover patterns (Patton, 2002). The study is not generalizable to all Gulf-War-era-II veterans, but my findings may fill a gap in literature, inform future research, and generate dialogue regarding the successful military to civilian employment transition.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study had a number of limitations that may not be able to adequately address all of the themes discovered in a larger study related to the transition of Gulf-War-era-II veterans. Although the participant pool for this qualitative research was small, it was ideal in understanding the leading causes of career problems for combat veterans and how those needs were addressed after no less than 1 year of civilian employment (Moustakas, 1994).

An additional limitation was this research was conducted at one moment in time. The research did not follow their development over time. The successful employment status of the veterans was examined in real time. This research was conducted in

Southern California. The Gulf-War-era-II veterans in this study were not asked to disclose any disabilities but some disclosed this information at their own discretion. The veteran disabilities discussed in this research were not the emphasis of the research but were perceived as a career barrier for some interviewed veterans. Future research will need to examine career barriers for all veterans who enter into the civilian workforce (Berglass & Harrell, 2012).

### **Social Change Implications**

The results of this study can have several implications for social change. While adding to the literature on Gulf-War-era-II veteran transitioning, the findings from this study could educate policy makers of effective means to eliminate employment barriers that are associated with transitional career problems. This study can also possibly assist scholars in understanding the high unemployment rate of Gulf-War-era-II veterans and provide a compelling basis to encourage employers to recruit veterans (Hall et al., 2015; Prudential Financial, 2012; Zivin et al., 2012). This study can lead to social and political conversations about the positive long-term reintegration of Gulf-War-era-II veterans into civilian careers and the potential creation of transitional reference tools for employers.

Career adaptability of transitioning veterans can lead to long-term success and mitigate career problems (Brown et al., 2012). The increased awareness of the Gulf-War-era-II veterans and program initiatives will inevitably require program evaluations, and in the interim, it may be beneficial to identify solutions in the workplace that can sustain long-term stability for employers and veterans. Employers promote the hiring of veterans for their years of leadership experience and propensity for respect, authority, and loyalty

(Bullock et al., 2009; Clemens & Milsom, 2008). Despite all of these positive qualities, career problems are causing unemployment for veterans. This study can review those career problems and can identify data that can be used to overcome those problems and decrease the unemployment rate.

Finally, businesses can aid in the adoption of strategic approaches to increase the advancements of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who can increase the diversity in the civilian workplace and integrate high levels of effective communication and organizational skills (Chica et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2014). Several researchers have examined the initial transitions of service members into obtaining employment (Burnett-Zeiglar et al., 2011; Morin, 2011), but there is limited data on identifying which elements facilitate successful career acquisition, retention, and upward career mobility.

### **Summary**

The first chapter was an introduction to the background of employment changes and challenges for Gulf-War-era-II during their career transitions. Chapter 1 also included an overview of the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the two important theories to the study. The research questions were identified, the semistructured interview methodology, and the potential social change implications were introduced. Chapter 2 includes the literature review that examines challenges regarding Gulf-War-era-II veteran retention and outcomes after career placement, the theoretical framework, along with past research on the military-to-civilian transition process. Chapter 3 contains the methodology of the qualitative research study and demonstrated the methods used for the study to include the participants, instrumentation, ethical

considerations, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and identifies areas the increase the trustworthiness of the study. In Chapter 4, I included the research setting, participant selection, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, themes, study results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I included the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for action, social change implications, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans during the transition from military service into civilian employment. I reviewed current literature related to the military career transition, career problems that contributed to the unemployment rate of veterans, and the decision-making skills required to successfully move through the transition process. In this chapter, I present a review of the literature related to the transition and the educational adjustments that assist in the transition. A discussion of the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework on which the study is based, is addressed before the literature review. This discussion provided a brief description of the lens through which data gathered in the study will be analyzed and systematically presented.

### **Literature Research Strategy**

This literature review primarily included peer-reviewed articles and studies that examined career changes and transitioning models for adults within the past 5 years. A search for literature completed utilizing online academic databases, including the Military & Government Collection, ProQuest, Google Scholar, EBSCO host, SociIndex databases, and various federal research databases such as Bureau of Labor Statistics that provided peer-reviewed journals and research. The research was limited to the past 5 years to ensure that the application of the finding was relevant. The following keywords were used: *Gulf-War-era-II veterans, cognitive information processing, human capital theory, veteran transition, veteran education, veteran employment, and communication.*

A review of the literature was done to gain a better understanding of the context for the research problem and to provide an overview of the framework that guides analysis of data gathered through interviews and group discussions.

### **Structure of the Review**

The following topics will be covered in this chapter: an overview of the transition of Gulf-War-era-II veterans into civilian workforce, the translation of military skills, veteran employment satisfaction, and the prevalent career problems that Gulf-War-era-II face during the transition. The conceptual framework reviews human capital theory (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Sofoluwe, Shokunbi, Raimi, & Ajewole, 2013; Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015) and cognitive information processing and how these theories were examined to understand the decision-making skills during career transitions. In addition, literature on policy issues and initiatives, stakeholder contributions, and research methods that have had a significant impact in addressing veteran transition issues is reviewed, including employer satisfaction, education, and employment initiatives.

### **The Veteran Transition to Civilian Workforce**

The transition from military service to civilian life can be a challenging experience for most veterans (Buzzetta & Rowe, 2012; Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Hoge, 2010). Such difficulties arise because of the contrasts in the environment between regions of war and areas without conflict. In war zones, military service members are in constant danger, schedules are specific and rigid, and each move and decision they make may affect the entire troop and the battle they are waging (Hoge, 2010). As veterans transition



into civilian life, they often feel frustrated and depressed because their existence seems mundane and their decisions and actions inconsequential (Buzzetta & Rowe, 2012; Hoge, 2010). Many veterans are unable to identify with society and lack the necessary core competencies or soft skills, such as cultural awareness and civilian interpersonal traits, needed for civilian employment. These issues can create career barriers for veterans seeking employment (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Hogan, R. Chamorro-Premuzic, & Kaiser, 2013; Hoge, 2010; Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014; Robertson & Brott, 2014).

There are several areas of career barriers related to transitioning veterans to include mental and physical changes, education pursuits, and gender differences. As demonstrated in the literature, many veterans suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and combat stress (Hoge, 2010; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Robertson & Brott, 2014). There was a significant increase in the prevalence of PTSD with Gulf War era II veterans, compared to previous conflict combat veterans (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). These disorder and injuries could be a barrier for veteran employment stability. From 2007 to 2012, there has been more awareness for transitioning combat veterans than there has ever been in the past (Berglass & Harrell, 2012).

Gender differences also serve as a barrier. Women now serving increasingly in combat roles and combat-related positions are exposed to unpredictable risks to their mental and physical health that could lead to career problems postdeployment (Fontana et al., 2010). Research related to women veterans indicates that they experience the same challenges regarding the workplace as men but that there is an added degree of transition

regarding fractured family interactions with children and spouses, employers' misconceptions, and adjustments to civilian life (GAO, 2011; Berglass & Harrell, 2012). The Department of Veterans Affairs (2015) indicated that there are additional challenges that can affect women Gulf-War-era-II veterans to include the lack of respect and recognition for their service in comparison to their male veteran counterparts. Additional gender-specific issues include the availability of gender-specific medical and/or psychiatric care and treatment during the employment transition has required government oversight and revisions since the Gulf-War-era-II (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

The retention rate for veterans hired into civilian employment after combat was 73% for veterans and 74% for disabled veterans in California (Department of Labor, 2012). According to a survey conducted by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA, 2012) of approximately 4,000 veterans interviewed in January 2012 who served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn, over 80% surveyed were employed. Forty percent of the veterans were full-time employees, and 18% were students and were preparing to enter the workforce after completing school. In analyzing those veterans who were employed, 37% were employed by the federal government and were more satisfied with the opportunity to utilize their military skills and abilities than compensation or benefits. The study conducted by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (2012), demonstrated an appreciation of the veteran's ability to communicate and integrate into the civilian workforce.

IAVA (2012) also showed that the top employment choice of surveyed veterans was government work and that veterans perceived their workplace as being veteran-friendly with supportive networks of veterans. The employment data within government agencies showed the highest percentage of veterans as new hires in more than 20 years, where veterans today make up 28.5% of all new employees (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2012). These statistics provide evidence of the increased support for veterans and concerted efforts from both the private sector and the government to employ veterans across sectors and various industries (Hall et al., 2014; West & Kregel, 2014).

While there has been an increase in veteran employment in recent years, there have also been issues in veterans' transitioning and retention into the civilian workforce. Additional veterans obstacles to employment stability include physical and psychological service-related injuries, the translation and communication of military experience, cultural differences in communication and corporate rules, the lack of a chain of command, and clearly identified career advancement paths (IAVA, 2013).

There is a gap in the literature regarding Gulf-War-era-II veterans' performance and their ability to overcome barriers to sustaining employment. During the initial period of culture shock that military veterans experience, cognitive information processing (Bullock et al., 2009; Robertson & Brott, 2014) and human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958; Sofoluwe et al., 2013; Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015) can provide a framework for veterans' building confidence in their ability to manage the new changes and loss of their military career through the application of cognitive skills. There is a connection between the human capital qualifications for civilian employment and the

veteran's ability to perform when hired in civilian employment. The preliminary hiring factors of human capital may not be sufficient to ensure long-term employment. The data obtained in this research may identify key characteristics of veterans, assist in the analysis of transitional skills desired by hiring employers, and possibly understand employment retention factors from the veterans' perspectives.

### **Translation of Military Skills in the Civilian Workforce**

Veterans are notable for their excellent teamwork and leadership skills, commitment to their work and employers, flexibility, integrity, and ability to work in a culturally diverse environment (Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, & Fisher, 2014). Before entering the civilian workforce, Gulf-War-era-II veterans can develop preconceived notions of management, leadership, and teamwork by employers and veterans who may not align the military culture with the civilian workforce (King, 2012). One of the most helpful tools for assisting service members to accelerate their learning in civilian employment is the ability to translate clearly an organization's culture into concrete meaning (King, 2012).

Military veterans have experience in changing identities and assimilation from military service that is contrary to individualistic values. Veterans convey their perceptions to their civilian leaders to gauge understanding and identify cultural integration milestones that reflect a different culture than that of the military (King, 2012). Although the previous attributes can be useful in civilian culture, there is a learning curve to reintegrate into civilian employment. Communication between veterans

and employers can lead to increased understanding in the midst of cultural variations (Clemens & Milson, 2008; King, 2012).

Veterans are valuable assets to civilian employers (Clemens & Milson, 2008). Military identity follows the values of duty, honor, loyalty, and commitment to comrades, unit, and nation. It promotes self-sacrifice, discipline, aggressive determination, obedience to authority, and belief in a merit-based rewards system (Collins, 2008). The primary reasons that employers hire veterans are loyalty, experience, discipline, and leadership. In a research survey conducted by the USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families (2012), more than 85% of potential employers for veterans agreed that veterans are disciplined, make good leaders, work well in teams, and bring cross-cultural experiences to the workplace.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America research team (2012) asked company representatives to identify their rationale for hiring, retiring, and advancing military personnel. Veterans in medical and intelligence fields have higher long run earnings than their civilian counterparts (Martorell et al., 2014). The outcome of the IAVA (2012) research identified strong leadership ability, communication skills, strong personal integrity, ability to allocate and manage resources well, the recognition of problems and the implementation of solutions, and ability to persevere in the face of obstacles (Hunt & Fitzgerald, 2013).

Academic research from the fields of business, psychology, sociology indicate that decision making strongly links characteristics that are representative of military veterans enhanced performance and organizational advantage in the context of a

competitive business environment (Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families, 2012). Veterans equipped with both technical and nontechnical experience such as leadership, teamwork, team building, critical thinking, and stress management bring diversity to the workplace but do not always have the social interaction abilities (Hall et al., 2014).

Training and deployment experience teaches veterans across all military branches the importance of leadership and obedience, as well as commitment and duty (Hall et al., 2014). The U.S. Air Force defines leadership as “the art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the assigned mission” (Department of the Air Force, 2006, p. 1). Similarly, the U.S. Army defines leadership as “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and the motivation to accomplish the mission and improving the organization (Department of the Army, 2006, p. 2).

The U.S. Army identifies eight core leadership competencies of military personnel: (a) leads others, (b) extends influence beyond the chain of command, (c) leads by example, (d) communicates, (e) creates a positive organizational climate, (f) prepares self, (g) develops others, and (h) gets results (Department of the Army, 2007, Field Manual 6-22). These skills can be essential in civilian employment that requires personnel to take on more responsibilities with fewer employees due to budgetary restrictions. Veterans have proven to succeed, as veterans are capable of making decisions to ensure that the integrity of the mission remains a priority even when plans and circumstances do not turn out as predicted (Hartley, 2012).

While civilians develop leadership, it is worth noting that military leadership has several characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of leadership and that the experiences of military personnel teach them specific leadership skills that may be difficult to acquire theoretically through training. Specifically, the operational environments within which military personnel work (for example, areas of war and conflict) along with the demands and requirements of the job, drive and shape the performance of military personnel (Morath, Leonard, & Zaccaro, 2011). As a result, military personnel and leaders develop a unique set of tactical and leadership skills which can be described as displaying an unprecedented lethality, complexity, and tempo (Morath et al., 2011). Contemporary military leaders are thus able to execute a diverse array of missions in innovative and transitional conditions (Morath et al., 2011). They are also able to analyze terrains and situations, formulate plans and attacks, arrive at decisions, and adjust to unforeseen circumstances (Morath et al., 2011).

The complexity of contemporary military operations stems from an uncertainty of opponent and mission, as uprisings and conflicts arise from isolated places and for diverse reasons (Halpin, 2011). As a result, military personnel are trained to fight without knowing whom they will potentially fight (Halpin, 2011). Such uncertainty not only trains military personnel and leaders to be prepared for numerous circumstances but also to coordinate and collaborate with civilian populations such as coalition forces and nongovernmental organizations (Halpin, 2011). Through such interactions, military personnel learn adequate social skills necessary to handle effective and efficient professional discussions to complete a mission. Thus, military personnel can adapt to any

unknown situation as well as be able to communicate effectively to civilians. In the retail industry, this could be a crucial skill as anything could happen, and sales staff should be always prepared. Sales staff members need to be able to communicate with the customers.

Additionally, most military personnel are notably fast learners and easy to train due to their common personality trait of conscientiousness. This personality trait is a product of military training that includes disciplined approaches, dutifulness, and dependability (Duffy et al., 2015; Morath et al., 2011). As technologies change, deployed personnel need to learn to use new devices, techniques, and machinery often without specific formal training (Morath et al., 2011). Such experiences develop the ability to explore a novel tool or concept and use them when the need arises.

Lastly, military personnel exhibit exemplary work ethics (King, 2012). As military personnel train to obey and maintain the integrity of their unit and the mission, they must behave and act in such manner that they accomplish missions. As such, military personnel are known to act *above and beyond the call of duty* (Jennings & Hannah, 2011). This trait can prove useful in the civilian work setting especially when personal efforts and sacrifices are necessary for the success of a project, business plan, or investment.

### **Veteran Employment Satisfaction**

Veterans who return to work have a higher level of life satisfaction and adjust better than veterans without a job (National Council on Disability, 2010). According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2012), the current trend among veterans is to change



jobs twice within the first 3 years of civilian employment. Newly hired veterans typically leave their new employment within the first eighteen months and exit interviews indicate that *lack of fit* is the most commonly explained reason (King, 2012). The underlying cause for such feelings of unfitness stems from difficulties in adjusting or transitioning from the structure of military work to civilian work and lifestyle. Work decisions strongly correlate positive effects, self-evaluations, person, work meaning, job satisfaction, and optimism (Duffy et al., 2015). On average, it takes veterans three employment experiences to find the right job. The veterans' first two jobs tend to be situations that meet their needs in terms of income and geography, while the third job meets the professional goals and allows room for promotional growth (Dillion, 2007; Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012).

In Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (2012), a survey reflected the dissatisfaction of transitioning veterans to include the following:

- Their job does not use enough of the veteran's skills and abilities.
- Their job pays less than veterans believe they should be earning.
- Their job does not match veterans' experience level.
- Their job is not as meaningful to veterans (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, 2012).

Employment retention and sustained hiring goals are important to maintain a lower unemployment rate for Gulf-War-era-II veterans who are currently returning from service obligations. This career problem is a gap that does not associate the ideal job satisfaction with the career that connects the relationships and motivation for the service

member. Veterans can lack a sense of purpose when comparing their new employment areas of responsibility to their military service (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Veterans also indicate that they see differences in the values of civilian employees that devalue teamwork, commitment, and loyalty to others compared to the comrades in the military (Boutelle, 2011). This gap in employment stability serves as a driving force toward change, problem solving, and seeking assistance (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002).

The employment transition can have various social obstacles for veterans. Abrams and Kennedy (2015) identified that 49% of veterans have had colleagues make false assumptions about them based on the fact that they served in the military to include: (a) veterans have violent tendencies, (b) are gun enthusiasts, (c) automatically have PTSD, (d) have killed someone in combat, and are (e) politically conservative. These preconceived notions can cause social integration obstacles that veterans may need to overcome while transitioning into a new employment culture. When a service member exits the military during a period of high unemployment, civilian earnings are substantially lower. There has also been significant research that reflects both current service members and veterans earn more than demographically comparable civilians in long-term positions (Marotrell et al., 2014).

The five steps of decision making in cognitive information processing can possibly alleviate or improve the coping skills and communication related to combat injuries such as Post Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury. There are three tiers of cognitive information processing that include: (a) self-knowledge and occupational

knowledge as the foundation, (b) the decision making skills domain, and (c) the executive processing domain. This study will seek to understand the career decision making domains related to communication, analysis, synthesis, valuing, and executing decisions in the workplace (Sampson et al., 2004; Osborne, 2014). The application of cognitive information processing can yield more positive perspectives, gain a better understanding of their abilities and strengths, and subsequently increase positive outcomes through social interactions (Burnett-Ziegler et al., 2011). Career transition variables such as readiness, confidence, control, perceived support, and decision independence can increase or decrease based on a veteran's life satisfaction (Robertson & Brott, 2014).

### **Veteran Career Problems**

Employers encounter challenges in identifying and recruiting veteran job candidates, before their transition from military to the civilian workforce (Hall et al., 2015). Despite the employer support for the needs of the veterans, employers also want employees they can depend on and can work effectively. Employers have identified that they are concerned about the performance potential of combat veterans and those they may experience transition challenges that could affect their work performance (King, 2012). The sensitive nature of the population prevents exploratory questions that can violate the rights of the veterans in the workplace. During the veteran transition, employers indicated the presence of time related factors to adapt to the civilian workforce, concerns about mental health issues, the need for veterans to take time off for mental or medical appointments, concerns about cognitive disabilities related to military service, difficulty connecting and communicating with civilian co-workers, and

difficulties with anger or violence. These employers add that these concerns mattered (King, 2012).

Although the vast majority of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn veterans believe that their military career was rewarding and had favorable outcomes (such as learning how to work with others and building self-confidence), 44% report readjustment difficulties, 47% outbursts of anger, 49% PTSD, and 32% an occasional loss of interest in daily activities (Morin, 2011). When comparing veterans employed with and without disabilities, the Department of Labor (2015) reported that service connected disabled veterans have an unemployment rate of 8.4 percent compared to veterans without disabilities at 5.9 percent unemployed. In this research, I hope to uncover the career challenges overcome by employed veterans and consequently understand the opportunities that have created employment stability such as long-term employment development plans.

The reliability of employment for veterans is being examined to identify how cognitive information processing has contributed to their finding the correct employment fit and overcoming employment barriers to execute career decisions in their new professional positions (Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Phillips, et al., 2007; Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004).

In some instances, employers are concerned when they read about the type of work performed in the military and the expertise of the veteran. Even though many veterans have the training to perform a wide variety of occupations, the private sector, may not know how to recognize this training due to terminology differences and

application (King, 2011; U.S. House of Representatives, 2012). During the integration process these difference can become a communication barrier for the veteran, the employer, and the new civilian employment environment. Employers may find it difficult to determine whether a veterans' military experience can effectively transfer into a particular civilian job (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Sniezek, 2012).

### **Invisible Combat Wounds**

Stigmas related to mental health issues generalize the veteran community appear to play a meaningful role in employment stability (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2014). In a study conducted by Burnett-Ziegler et al. (2011), mental health may not be as significant a deterrent to employment for WWII veterans and veterans exposed to combat and trauma were more likely to be employed (Dortch, 2012). Although disability discrimination is against the law, employers have expressed concerns with hiring combat injured veterans due to their lack of knowledge in accommodating workers with PTSD and TBI, as well as in rules of disclosure regarding such issues (Rudstam, Gower, & Cook, 2012). Additionally, some employers showed reluctance because of their uncertainty about the likelihood of individuals with PTSD exhibiting violent behavior in the workplace (Rudstam et al., 2012). The social stigma attached to psychosocial and mental health issues often de-motivate veterans from seeking employment for fear of rejection (Strong et al., 2014).

In August 2011, about 3.0 million veterans reported having a service-connected disability (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Despite the signature wounds, such as Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the success of military

veterans in transitioning into civilian work demonstrated by a retention rate of 75% in the State of California (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). In a survey from the Society for Human Resource Management, for example, nearly half of the employers who responded (46 percent) said they believed that PTSD and other mental issues would be a problem in hiring veterans. Among those who worked with veterans, however, just 13 percent reported problems with people with PTSD in their organizations (SHRM as cited by Ainspan, 2011).

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Theory of Human Capital**

There are several components of the human capital related to employability of individuals. Human capital increases a worker's productivity in workplace tasks, for the organization, and in addressing several workplace situations. Human capital theory encompasses the ability of personnel to perform in the workplace based on their acquired knowledge, education, experience, training, and mentoring (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Shultz, 1971). Human capital theory analyzes the ability to adapt in a changing environment. The human capital theory demonstrates that productivity can be increased through higher education training that promotes access to a range of skills and knowledge to promote a lifetime learning and economic security (Mincer, 1958; Shultz, 1971).

Previous researchers explored the human capital of veterans. Smith, Marsh, and Segal (2012) found that military service of World War II veterans afforded them significant employment advantages through their early and middle working years. Mani (2013) compared experience of male and female veterans and non-veterans in their pay in

the federal civil service. Mani used regression models based on the human capital model and data years before and after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The down-turn in our economic climate has had a negative effective of military veterans earnings as well as their peers Military veterans accept jobs that are respectable but earn less pay than their military careers provided (Martorell et al., 2014). The gender-based wage gap for nonveterans group who worked decreased while the pay for veterans who did not work in the Department of Defense (DOD) grew. This suggests that veterans experienced a wider gender-wage gap when they do not work in the DOD.

Several factors of the human capital theory were considered in this study. This study analyzes if the education, wage differentials, and training of Gulf-War-era-II veterans contribute to their ability to overcome career problems. The theory of human capital suggests that these veterans have human capital because of their experiences as a soldier and in combat (Mani, 2013). Education and training for military personnel that are transitioning into the new civilian employment can be difficult to connect due to the difference in culture and criteria. The ability of the employer and the veteran to understand the transferability of military and civilian education and training can lead to employment stability. Mincer (1958) identified that the human capital theory can also increase the quality of education and income-contributing investments could account for improvements in quality of life, valuations, and economic stability.

### **Key Components of the Human Capital Theory**

There are three key components that define the human capital theory: education, training, and attitudes towards work (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961). The

investment in education is an aspect of human capital that needs to be considered when considering the transition between employment cultures. The analysis of the educational background of an employee is important and very informative in terms of assessing human capital (Becker, 1975; Sofuluwe et al., 2013; Vomberg et al., 2015). In relation to education, the school quality also affects human capital. The number of years of schooling and the quality of education provided in the schooling are important factors that influence human capital of individuals and can influence their earning potentials (Sofuluwe et al., 2013; Vomberg et al., 2015). In the context of the military, some veterans are already graduates, while some have not yet completed their degrees. The investment of the military personnel encouraged the pursuit of educational goals to increase professional upward mobility in the military.

According to the human capital theory, an investment in education does not guarantee advancements, higher pay, or productivity in future positions (Thurow, 1975; Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015). A study conducted by Kleykamp (2013) explored the different aspects that would affect post-9/11 veterans when they reintegrate to society. Kleykamp (2013) deduced three aspects that encourage veterans to reintegrate: financial issues related to unemployment, earning potential, and college success. The pursuit of employment to minimize the negative impact of these problems can motivate veterans to make themselves more marketable by improving their education endeavors and promote the transferability of their military experience. These aspects reflect the human capital theory utilizing the reasoning that veterans have a variety of characteristics



as part of human capital investments that become an incentive for veterans to contribute those assets to the civilian workforce (Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015).

According to the human capital theory (Thurow, 1975; Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015), discrimination can result from incomplete or inaccurate information of employers regarding the veteran population. Because veteran status indicates high productivity relative to non-veterans, employers will pay higher wages if productivity increased (Sofuluwe et al., 2013). The transferability of military experience to civilian skills can potentially cause wage differences among industries for veterans (Clemens & Milson, 2008; King, 2012; U. S. Department of Labor, 2014). Employers “value of human capital can be influenced by a multitude of sources, such as a firm’s strategy and technologies” (p. 35) that means an employee’s potential to contribute using new technology and state-of-the-art training acquired through the military to invest in civilian employment (Snell & Dean, 1992). Although Gulf-War-era-II veterans accept jobs, where they received salaries less than the pay they received in the military, the jobs generally accrue larger earning gains. The literature demonstrates that the wage differences do not create significant career problems (Martorell et al., 2014).

Training is one component of human capital that workers acquire after educational pursuits that customize their contributions to work environments (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Shultz, 1971). The orientation and training is usually associated with a specific set of skills for a specific industry (Sofuluwe et al., 2013; Vomberg et al., 2015). Training is usually a joint investment by organizations and individuals to maintain competitive advantages. During the transition from military to civilian employment,

training is inevitable to adjust to the multiple cultures (King, 2012; Martorell et al., 2014; Sofuluwe et al., 2013; Vomberg et al., 2015). Human capital can be increased during the investment of training in the workplace and promotes access to a range of skills and knowledge, especially the capacity to learn (OECD, 2007). The transferability of skills obtained in training in the military can become a positive attribute in civilian employment. The uniqueness of an employee's skills and capabilities are critical requirements for gaining a competitive advantage in career mobility (Ulrich & Lake, 1991).

### **Cognitive Information Processing**

Veterans have been exposed to the application of CIP through various steps in transitioning from combat (Chad, Ricksecker, Healy, Karlin, & Resick, 2012). Cognitive information processes help to resolve career problems in the transition from military to civilian career, assist in developing problem-solving skills, and improve decision-making skills before, during, and after career choices have been made (Bullock et al., 2009; Buzzetta & Rowe, 2012; Clemens & Milsom, 2008). Key factors in the design of organizations and humans' roles are the identification, recruitment, and placement of individuals in an organization and the creation of social learning environments that foster the behaviors needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization. The inability to relate or acknowledge placement in the organization can interfere with successful employment retention and cause loss of days from work. The CIP approach can help veterans build decision-making skills and better understand themselves and the world of work (Bullock et al., 2009).

The cognitive information processing (CIP) approach emphasizes the influence of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in the decision-making process regarding career development (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). The CIP is defined by four assumptions. First, it is assumed that cognitive processes (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011) affect making decisions regarding one's career. Specifically, disabling emotions and negative career thoughts warp or interfere with an individual's perceptions of self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, formulation of career options, and level of decidedness, which ultimately affects their ability to make confidently clear career decisions (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). Following this assumption, the CIP approach in career counseling puts the focus on identifying, assessing, and addressing distressing emotions and negative thoughts at the beginning of the career decision-making process (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011).

Gulf-War-era-II veterans integrate into long-term employment through cognitive information processing, self-knowledge, and occupational knowledge (Sampson et al., 2004). These awareness components subsequently result in learning how to process information to make decisions in new work environment, solve problems to overcome the impacts of physical and mental changes, and ultimately create a greater self-awareness (Peterson et al., 2002). The ongoing practices of self-evaluation and career decision-making are essential for career progression and stability. Robinson (2016) conducted a phenomenological research project that explored five female combat veterans in North Carolina that transitioned into civilian life and effectively obtained new information that contributed to the field of study regarding the veteran transition. The five themes

uncovered during the interviews were: (a) Reflection on Deployment, (b) Health Related Issues, (c) Support from Family and Comrades, (d) Environmental Concerns and Triggers, and (e) Readjusting Back into Family and Society Roles (Robinson, 2016).

There are many instances in an individual's life wherein career and life decisions are necessary. Examples of such circumstances include choosing an area of emphasis before high school, a major in the sophomore year of college, a professional job after college, postgraduate studies, and a mid-life career change (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). At the same time, individuals also need to consider other factors and challenges related to family and marital relationships, finances, health, leisure, and residence (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011).

Elbogen et al. (2012) found that adverse mental and physical problems can be associated with financial problems and directly demonstrates a need for establishing financial stability with meaningful employability to enhance the veterans' quality of life. The combination of these factors often creates a considerable amount of stress in individuals, characterized by distressing emotions and negative thoughts that distort their ability to make decisions. Financial stress has a direct relationship to employment stability for civilians and veterans. Instead of viewing career adaptability negatively, veterans can improve their ability to adapt by: (a) a challenging work environment, (b) updating the knowledge base of a new career and/or career environment, (c) social interactions with co-workers or networking and, (d) self-reflection (Brown et al., 2012).

## **Key Components of Cognitive Information Processing**

The cognitive information processing approach has been used to aid in solving career problems, make career decisions, and adapt individual skills to prevent and address future career problems. There are two fundamental components of Cognitive Information Processing model that includes the Pyramid of Information Processing and the Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, and Execution (CASVE) cycle (Peterson et al., 2004). The pyramid of information-processing domains is used to define and explain the components involved in a career decision (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). The most fundamental domains are the knowledge domains, which include self-knowledge and occupational knowledge. Self-knowledge refers to one's knowledge about one's interests, values, and capabilities, and occupational knowledge refers to one's knowledge about the industry of interest and specific occupations within that industry (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 2002; Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004).

On top of the knowledge domain, is the field of decision-making skills, which individuals develop and acquire by going through the CASVE decision-making cycle discussed below (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). At the apex of the information processing pyramid, is the executive processing domain, which involves the skills of self-talk, self-awareness, and control and monitoring (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). Career problem solving and decision-making are skills that can be learned and practiced with self-talk (Peterson, et al., 2004). Self-talk denotes the need to utilize internal conversations about one's decision-making abilities. Self-awareness refers to one's perception of one's capability to perform required tasks. Control and monitoring refers to the use of self-

awareness and understanding of the situation or issue in making and evaluating decisions (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). The apex domain involves metacognitive components that reassess and develop strategies by (a) the control of the selection of cognitive strategies to achieve a career goal and (b) the focus of the problem-solving strategy and its effectiveness to achieve the desired goal has been accomplished (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002; Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012).

### **Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, and Execution**

In Cognitive Information Processing (CIP), there are five steps in the decision-making process: Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, and Execution (CASVE) (Sampson et al., 2004). The CIP approach to counseling (Sampson et al., 2004) uses two central concepts: the pyramid of information-processing domains, and the CASVE cycle of decision-making (Osborne, 2014).

The CASVE cycle, is the decision-making cycle using the five stages of communication, analysis, synthesis, valuing and execution, and developed to aid individuals in making clear and informed decisions regarding life and career choices (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011; Osborne, 2014; Sampson et al., 2004). Communication involves identifying the gap between an individual's current position and the expected position after making career choices (Sampson et al., 2004). The second step, analysis, refers to the process wherein the individual identifies their role and value as an employee, as well as expectations from both job and career (Sampson et al., 2004). During the synthesis phase, one identifies, describes, and elaborates on the occupational options currently available (Sampson et al., 2004). After identifying top career advancement

options, the individual engages in valuing, conducts a cost-and-benefit analysis of these options, and subsequently matches perceived self-knowledge to these options, usually by ranking the options from being the most compatible to the least compatible to abilities, skills, and circumstances (Sampson et al., 2004). Finally, the individual carries out the decision by choosing a single best option resulting from the process (Sampson et al., 2004).

In order to increase self-knowledge of Gulf-War-era-II veterans, the cognitive information processing approach can be an efficient and familiar method to increase employment opportunities and performance after at least a year of civilian work experience (Bullock et al., 2009). The goal of CIP is to guide career seekers through developmental stages of self-knowledge and their new civilian occupation knowledge, identify how cognitive information processing can assist in decision-making, and create a greater self-awareness for the transitioning veteran (Buzzetta & Rowe, 2012; Stein-McCormick, Osborn, Hayden, & Van Hoose, 2013). This process can create strategies for problem-solving, assist in decision-making throughout re-integration and lead the way for career development (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002).

### **Public Policy Initiatives**

#### **Employers Investments to Assist Veterans in the Civilian Transition**

Employers that have hired veterans have access to several resources to assist in supporting their transitioning, primarily from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor. Many employers also create programs that are designed to ensure that veterans have the resources and the opportunities necessary to succeed at their jobs.

Companies offer mentoring programs, while others have community groups that provide networking and support specific to veterans (Berglass & Harrell, 2011). Although there have not been extensive program evaluations completed for the majority of the programs developed, statistics about veteran transition are continually updated by the Department of Veterans Affairs and other veteran organizations, and reflect a decrease in the unemployment rate (Blumke, 2011).

In a study conducted at the University of Chicago, there were several ways recommended to assist employers in empowering their veteran employees. Employers seek leadership and communication skills in veterans to include team building, relationship management, career management of other employees, and transparent decision-making skills as the most desirable traits (SHRM, 2011). When veterans are employed in civilian employment, the responsibility to retain and perform in the workplace becomes a shared encumbrance for the employer and the veteran employee. There are seven factors that facilitate employers in assisting veterans' employment adjustment

- Provide resources to managers and of veteran employees to eliminate and mitigate false assumptions in the workplace regarding veterans.
- Connect Veterans to both civilian and veteran mentors
- Connect veterans to philanthropic efforts outside of the veterans' work group
- Celebrate and demonstrate the presence of senior level veterans as role models
- Demonstrate the ready and willingness to accommodate disabilities and service for a smooth transition



- Create and conduct Employee Resource Groups with veterans and civilians
- Identify the impact and purpose of veterans in their new civilian employment roles and contributions within the company (Abrams & Kennedy, 2015; SHRM, 2011).

The ability to make decisions in the workplace requires confidence and a clear understanding of the workplace environment. The cost benefit of working to retain veteran employees and increase diversity in the workplace can improve with the collaborative efforts of veterans and employees to identify a means to circumvent barriers.

There has also been growth in programs to increase hiring of Gulf-War-era-II veterans since 2005. All branches of the military incorporate Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) that provide: (a) employment and training information within 180 days of separation, (b) service members and their spouses transition from military service to civilian employment, and (c) a three-day workshop to increase job search skills, enhance career decision-making skills, and translate their military occupations to civilian opportunities (Department of Labor, 2012). During this time, career counselors can identify and address barriers to civilian transition by training service members in intervention and coping methods (Phillips, et al., 2007).

Increases in veteran hiring for the Federal government demonstrates that 14 percent of employed veterans worked for the Federal government, compared with about 2 percent of employed nonveterans between 2009 and 2012 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), which provides evidence of the government's thrust to assist veterans in

transitioning into civilian work. Veterans with disabilities demonstrate that despite disabilities, these employees have a proven record of persevering under difficult circumstances. As mentioned earlier, disabled veterans have job skills that are directly applicable to many jobs, such as efficiency in training, collaborating with individuals and groups outside the company, and adjusting to unforeseen situations (Halpin, 2011; Jennings & Hannah, 2011; Morath et al., 2011).

### **Education Opportunities for Veterans**

This study will also examine if the increases in employment for veterans entice employers to hire or prepare veterans for career positions and civilian career advancement. There has been an increased emphasis placed on the veteran quest for education as a tool to improve professional aptitudes (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Education can also bridge the transition between the military and civilian life and increase a veteran's ability to compete with their peers. Educational investments and the GI Bill have also put Gulf-War-era-II veterans in a better position to reintegrate into civilian employment with male veteran's completion of advanced degrees of 10.4% and women veterans' completion of a graduate degree at 11% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Educational pursuits are also a transition to Gulf War Era veterans who undergo a shift in their personal and professional perspectives that empower them to question who they are in the civilian world and how they relate to the environment around them (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Schlossberg, 1984).

Veterans recently separated from military service earn lower wages and have lower incomes than their non-military peers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Veterans

return to civilian employment earning less than their civilian co-workers do despite possessing college degrees (IAVA, 2012). The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides education benefits to service members who have served on active duty for at least 90 days since September 10, 2001. Benefits are tiered according to the length of time served in the military, and may be used to pay for education and training programs taken at accredited colleges or universities or accredited non-college degree granting institutions. The tuition was calculated by the highest in-state tuition (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009). The premise behind the increase in education benefits for veterans is to increase their employability and assist in reintegration into civilian employment by recognizing that there are difficulties in readjusting to civilian life after serving (Dortch, 2012).

In one study, Post-9/11 GI Bill veterans indicated that they sought the following in higher education institutions: anonymity on campus, treatment as adults, a veteran's center for transition assistance, camaraderie, administrative help, college credit for military training and experience, and a stake in guidance of their future in college (Murphy, 2011). The study also revealed that even with the perceived lack of solutions for the listed needs, a knowledgeable and compassionate veteran liaison on campus could make college a successful venture for military veterans (Murphy, 2011).

Persky (2010) evaluated the needs of transitioning veterans in a community college setting and discovered that there were several new programs in place to facilitate success. Like civilians seeking employment, veterans have sought education in order to increase future income, marketability, mobility, and self-worth. The GI Bill specifically encourages veterans to pursue education to remain competitive for civilian employment,

gain transitional skills, and avert unemployment (Collins, Dilger, Dortch, Kapp, Lowrey, & Perl, 2014).

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) indicated that the proportion of college graduates among labor forces of WWII veterans (33%) and other veterans (30%) are lower than non veterans (36%). Furthermore, the current influx of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars provided an opportunity for educational institutions to participate in the economic recovery of the nation by: (a) streamlined programs and cognitive based services for veterans, (b) training faculty and counselors in issues that impact the education of veterans, (c) understanding the difficulties veterans face, and (d) knowing what it means to be a veteran-friendly institution. The overall recommendation of the study was the need to implement academic success through camaraderie and community support. This data further follows the trajectory of veterans to follow a sense of participative leadership in their ability to succeed in a college environment.

Challenges in our economy have created a more competitive environment for veterans seeking employment. Education has an impact on employability and makes veterans more marketable to civilian employers. It also helps veterans' transition into civilian life with support from one another as well as from their non-veteran peers. According to the Department of Labor (2014), over 80 percent of veterans have associates degrees or bachelor's degrees, but they still represent less than 11 % percent of the labor workforce.

### **Public Policy Issues**

Within the past 10 years, there have been significant public policy issues to include policy-funding issues for various programs and education program reviews. There is also ongoing research to resolve the high unemployment rate of Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans who include program evaluations, education increases, and training. A study that examined transition programs, conducted by RAND, identified that numerous programs do not collect and track enough information to evaluate their outcomes. Despite the lack of data, these programs had an emphasis on funding evaluations of several programs (Hall et al., 2014). Researchers have conducted extensive program evaluations, census data collection, and used various statistical methods to review unemployment and educational trends for recently discharged veterans.

In 2012, RAND researchers testified before the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs regarding veteran transition findings related to unemployment and educational pursuits (Stein-McCormick, Osborn, Hayden, & Van Hoose, 2013; Martorell et al., 2014). Program evaluations that have been conducted identified that not all of the transition programs meet their target to hire the number of veterans anticipated due to limited funding and identifying veterans needing employment resources (Guo, Pollack, & Bauman, 2016). Researchers have conducted extensive program evaluations, census data collection, and used various statistical methods to review unemployment and educational trends for recently discharged veterans.

In 2012, RAND researchers testified before the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs regarding veteran transition findings related to unemployment and educational

pursuits (Stein-McCormick, Osborn, Hayden, & Van Hoose, 2013; Martorell et al., 2014). In 2001 and 2009, there were financial tax incentives for employers to hire disabled veterans. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) made tax credit payment up to \$4800 to employers who hired disabled veterans recently discharged or unemployed for 6 months or more (Heaton, 2012). Based on RAND quantitative research between 2005-2007, the WOTC cost \$610 million and made a positive impact on the hiring of 32,000 veterans. Overall, the new tax credits results suggest that hiring tax credits can be a powerful and cost-effective policy tool to stimulate the hiring of veterans (Guo, Pollack, Bauman, & Bauman, 2016).

The increases in educational benefits have afforded many Gulf-War-era-II veterans to pursue alternative educational environments. Veterans who chose for-profit schools have been faced with high student debt, higher drop-out rates, and low postgraduate employment rates. In 2010, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions conducted reports regarding the concerns related to for profit schools aggressively recruiting and misleading veterans (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2011). The research from 2010 has led the way in policy review and programs for veterans.

Although there has been an emphasis on the importance of veteran education, some public policy issues interfere with the success of veterans in academia. During in-depth focus groups, interviews, and on-line surveys within the first year of the Post-911 GI Bill, findings suggest that for-profit schools provide the flexibility and services that veterans need during their transition, adult-oriented, require less time, transfer military experience, and are career oriented. When compared to traditional schools, for-profit

schools come with several disadvantages that compromise their effectiveness such as deceptive practices, low post-graduation employment rates and resources, and higher than the government criteria for the Post-911 GI Bill allocations (Steele, Salcedo, and Coley, 2011).

### **Research Methods Used in Literature**

Studies about veterans' transition to civilian life have included quantitative and qualitative methods. Researchers of this phenomenon prefer using quantitative research methods to investigate the unemployment problem of veterans. In line with the quantitative methods, researchers used various surveys. The wealth of information developed to identify information from veterans, policy makers, and employers were invaluable to the literature review. Most of the multivariate analysis and surveys used data from various government agencies provided extensive data about the investments that have been made to assist in the transition of combat veterans and effectiveness assessments of those programs (Chica et al., 2012; Department of Labor, 2015). There were several qualitative research projects that included interviews that demonstrated Gulf-War-era-II veterans have higher unemployment rates earlier in their post deployment and then decline over a 12-month period (Collins et al., 2014).

After 10 years of extensive veteran research, the RAND Corporation utilized surveys and questionnaires that provided rich information about barriers veterans face in transitioning into society regarding employment and education endeavors (Guo, Pollak, & Bauman, 2016; Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2011). The research conducted by RAND utilized census data and regional surveys to identify unemployment rates for veterans

were higher for GW Era II veterans but conversely uncovered that veterans earn more than comparable civilians when hired (Martorell et al., 2014). One quantitative report was based on telephone surveys of 1,965 deployed Gulf-War-era-II veterans indicated that the cost of PTSD within 2 years after a combat veteran returns to civilian life range between \$4.0 billion and \$6.2 billion and TBI costs ranged from \$591 million to \$910 million. This information was directly related to the inability to resolve employment barriers related to inadequate support systems and have lead to high suicide rates for many unemployed veterans (Ramchard et al., 2013). Quantitative research methods collect data from a large sample size. In this method, there are no rich details of the experiences of the participants about the phenomenon. In qualitative research, it is more comprehensive and more in-depth that could assist in public policy issues.

There is limited range and focus of qualitative research on Gulf-War-era-II veterans during the transition into civilian employment. However, a few qualitative studies provided a baseline for my research. Most of the multivariate analysis and surveys used data from various government agencies provided extensive data about the investments that have been made to assist in the transition of combat veterans and effectiveness assessments of those programs (Chica et al., 2012; Department of Labor, 2015). There were several qualitative research projects that included interviews that demonstrate Gulf-War-era-II veterans have higher unemployment rates earlier in their post deployment and then decline over a 12-month period (Collins et al., 2014). As a result, I will be using qualitative method for my study with a descriptive



phenomenological approach to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of veterans hired in stable employment.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature related to the research study. First, it introduced the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework of this study. The Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) approach to career problem solving emphasizes the influence of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in career decision-making (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). Within this approach, are the CIP Pyramid of Information Processing and the CASVE decision cycle, which helps individuals, makes clear and informed decisions regarding life and career choices (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011; Osborne, 2014). The present study will use both the CIP approach and the concept of human capital in aiding veterans to improve career outlook, especially in relation to their promotional pursuits.

The discussion on the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework, followed by a review of previous studies on the veteran transition into civilian life, emphasizes the efforts on their transition to the civilian workforce. The review showed that veterans often find difficulty adjusting to civilian life because of its stark differences from military life. To aid veterans in this transition, several institutions, including the Department of Veterans Affairs and several nongovernmental organizations, provide assistance in the form of special programs and training, and in helping, them identify employment opportunities. As a result, an increasing number of veterans continue to enter the civilian workforce and prove that their military experience translates into skills and competencies

useful in civilian work settings, such as leadership skills, versatility, and stability under pressure.

Veterans often find difficulty adjusting to work culture and processes in civilian employment. Making a successful transition requires a basic ability to recognize what competencies and skill adjustments essential to learn the new ones and applying those adjustments in one's job performance. Researchers have suggested the cognitive information processing (CIP) approach to help veterans develop the skills necessary for career decisions (Bullock et al., 2009, Clemens & Milsom, 2008; & Phillips et al., 2007). This suggests the primacy of adaptability in long-term career success is adaptability is the underlying capability that enables a manager to adjust his or her behavior to make successful transitions to higher and higher levels (Freeman, 2011).

Chapter 3 contains the methodology of the qualitative research study and demonstrate the method used for the study, the participants, instrumentation, ethical considerations, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and identifies areas the increase the validity and reliability of the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans during their transitions from military to civilian employment. There are gaps in knowledge regarding the performance, progression, and stability of career veterans in civilian employment once hired. In order to understand the successful transition, it was also important to acknowledge the career problems that could arise along the way to employment stability. This chapter details the significance of the (a) research questions, (b) research design and rationale, (c) methodology, (d) procedures for recruitment and participation, (e) data collection, (f) issues of trustworthiness, and (g) ethical procedures related to this topic.

According to Schram (2006), an interpretive lens is used when (a) documenting real events or cases defined by time and circumstance, (b) the researcher wishes to understand how participants in a real setting made sense and gave meaning to their life experiences, (c) the researcher desires an understanding of processes by which events and actions take place, and (d) identifying unanticipated or taken-for-granted influences and phenomena. This research can elaborate on veterans' experiences and the contexts or situations in which they transitioned (see Creswell, 2009). For many veterans, employment represents an important means through which to mitigate the uncertainty and culture-change associated with the life transition from military to civilian (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2014).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans during their transitions from military to civilian employment. Although alternative methods were considered to examine the employment integration process of Gulf-War-era-II veterans, I chose to explore the personal descriptions of the individual's phenomenon through the participants' perceptions (Creswell, 1994). This framework allowed the researcher to explore the participants' experiences instead of quantifying the occurrence of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

While preparing for this research, other research methods were considered but were not as beneficial as the phenomenological method for my study. Quantitative research is more helpful when there is a need to identify fact and the correlation of those facts. In this study, the quantitative research method would not allow for the comprehensive review of first-hand experiences (Patton, 1994). The first-hand experiences can provide in depth information related to the individual experiences of successfully transitioned veterans into civilian employment in an environment where unemployment for Gulf War era veterans has been a cultural concern (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). According to Yin (2003), the quantitative approach provides an answer to the numerical data regarding veterans' who successfully transitioned would not allow the examination of the factors that can arise during the transition.

Creswell (2007) identified several methods for qualitative research that include narrative, ethnography, and phenomenology. The narrative approach describes

chronological information regarding an individual's experience. In ethnographic research, the data is acquired through observation of the participants within their own cultural group (Creswell, 2007). This may have compromised their transition and the relationships with their employers. Due to the sensitivity of the research participants and the process of integration, participants may prefer to remain anonymous in their workplace. This consideration became evident that this method would cause more harm to the participants.

Phenomenological research methods will facilitate the illumination of the lived experiences and perceptions of transitioned veterans (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research is emergent rather than predetermined. This research will measure the contexts of the veterans' experiences, in their voices, and from their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The examination of the employment abilities that some Gulf-War-era-II veterans have developed to attain civilian employment despite career barriers such as cultural integration, communication, and medical /mental injuries can help identify how those challenges can impact the unemployment rate for this population (Chica et al., 2012).

Transcendental phenomenology is the best approach to this study as it reduces individual experiences into a description of the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Public policy and social science research has incorporated an increased amount of research that emphasizes the phenomenological approach to provide an understanding the lived experiences of various individual social circumstances. For example, Bennett (2015) interviewed 10 participants of the HUD Stabilization Program in Charlotte, North Carolina, to examine the benefits and barriers of the housing program. The focus of the

research conducted by Fleweling (2012) was to understand their experiences and transitional factors of 10 female spouses of combat veterans who returned from military combat exposure. The successful demonstration of the lived experiences of 10 or less participants provides a justification for this research decision to use the phenomenological approach to research (Bennett, 2015; Fleweling, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to support and guide this phenomenological exploration of transitioning GW era II veterans:

RQ1: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities experienced by Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned into civilian employment?

RQ2: What skills are necessary to navigate the transition from combat exposure to civilian employment?

RQ3: What are the decision-making experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who contribute to the resolution of career problems during their transition to civilian employment roles?

### **Role of the Researcher**

The interview process has to have a means of filtering and eliminating biases from the researcher. Moustakas (1994) identified epoche as the necessity to eliminate bias and personal prejudice in order to conduct research. In phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) confirmed that “epoche does not eliminate everything...only the natural attitude, the biases if everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality” (p. 85).

Epoche increases the awareness of potential bias and becomes a tool to enhance the credibility of the researcher.

The note-taking process increased the accuracy of the interviews because it prevented my natural inclination to recall facts of the interviews from memory. In order to increase accuracy, all of the interviews were audio recorded (with two digital recording devices), and epoche was used to eliminate preconceived conclusions and assumptions (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1994).

### **Methodology**

Phenomenological qualitative research cannot predict what will happen in the future; rather, it is an analysis that provides an in-depth understanding of past and current experiences of veterans (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenological approach allowed for the understanding of the overall professional experience of Gulf-War-era-II veterans in order to convey comprehensive descriptions and the essence of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research allowed for the exploratory review of a phenomenon as expressed through the lived experiences (Creswell, 2009). The experiences presented by the participants provided a more in-depth understanding of the interactions and evolution of transitioned veterans.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

In this research, the lived experiences of approximately 20 Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans employed in civilian positions between the ages of 24 and 34 years were reviewed to develop an understanding of their experiences. According the Bureau of

Labor Statistics (2015), Gulf-War-era-II veterans of this age group represent 54% of all WWII veterans and represent the majority of all veterans of this era.

A meeting with the California Veteran Collaborative Group assisted in identifying Gulf-War-era-II veterans who met the criteria for this research project with the assistance of the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A). California has the highest national rate of unemployed veterans at 39% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). This veteran collaborative group has employment enrichment meetings that included employers within the Los Angeles community with veterans as employees or as representatives from organizations that locate resources regarding veterans and career challenges associated with employment. Veterans' collaborative meetings are comprised of stakeholders and representatives from organizations, businesses, and agencies that serve veterans and their families in the Los Angeles area. A Letter of Cooperation (see Appendix B) was obtained from the California veteran collaborative group that assisted in identifying veterans to participate in the research study.

In order to identify participants, I conducted a presentation that identified the unemployment issues at the California Veteran Collaborative group. The opportunity to conduct the presentation provided access to veteran members that participated in Veteran Collaborative meetings that fit the criteria. The collaborative teams agreed to assist in identifying voluntary participants. After the first meeting, there was very little interaction with the Collaborative group. The snowball method became the main source of participants, and veteran referrals supplied the remaining nine interview volunteers. The participants were asked to volunteer for the research based on the following criteria: (a)



served in military positions since September 11, 2001 in combat roles in Iraq and/or Afghanistan conflicts, (b) currently employed in full-time roles in the civilian workforce, (c) were between the ages of 24 to 34 years of age, and (d) lived in the Los Angeles area of Southern California. Voluntary preliminary screening interviews established the suitability of the volunteers with the needs of the study in-person or via Skype. During this interview, explanations regarding the study's purpose, informed consent, confidentiality, and assurances that every effort was conducted to minimize harm from participating in the study. In order to establish rapport and comfort for the interview, I discuss the purpose for the research to the participants. It was also essential to reiterate that the interviews were completely confidential (Creswell, 2009).

In preparation for the research, I attended the monthly veteran meetings in the Los Angeles area. Many working groups specifically concentrate on career advancement. The open-ended question protocol allowed the participants to fully explore the topic from their own perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Padgett, 2004).

### **Instrumentation**

The intent of this phenomenological study was to utilize a self-designed interview guide with questions based on the research questions (see Appendix C). One way to provide more structure during an interview, while maintaining a relatively high degree of flexibility, was to use the interview guide strategy (Patton, 2002). Two specific questionnaires were used: a screening questionnaire, to substantiate inclusion in the research (Appendix D), and the interview questionnaire (Appendix E), which contains a set of semistructured questions related to the lived experiences of employed Gulf-War-

era-II veterans during their transition to civilian employment. The interviews were audio recorded, simultaneously transcribed with the use of Dragon Software, reviewed, and analyzed for interpretation. The recordings used an interview protocol for organizing the captured audio that included headings for each section of questions. This structure ensured that essential areas were explored to compare the lived experiences of the participants to the theories.

The individual interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The questions for the interviews (see Appendix C) included additional questions for clarification (Patton, 2002). It was important to utilize clearly structured questions that reduced misunderstandings and limited the need for follow-up questions. The informal conversational interview method would be unreliable because of the inconsistency in the interview questions that would make it difficult to code data (Creswell, 2007). In order to retain the information presented in the interviews, a reflective journal was utilized. A reflective journal promoted reflective thinking skills so that the retention of pertinent data was secured (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

### **Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to assist in identifying Gulf-War-era-II veterans and identify any patterns that may emerge from the perspectives of Gulf-War-era-II veterans. The purposeful selection of participants assisted the researcher in understanding the problem and the research questions presented (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The purposeful snowball sampling strategy was an effective technique in this study because the veteran community is a tight knit community and these methods provided access to

other veterans by taking advantage of referrals from veterans or veteran service providers. Snowball sampling identified cases of interests from veterans and veteran service providers who were aware of other veterans who can provide information-rich contributions related to the phenomenon of the veteran transition (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007, p.133). The participants of the Veteran Collaborative were those who have been exposed to veteran employees, employers, and programs that specifically dedicated to employing veterans.

### **Justification of the Number of Participants**

Effective face-to-face interviews uncover real feelings and issues and provide richer and more profound information than surveys (Maxwell, 2013). In this research, it was important to recruit 10 to 15 interview participants willing to openly and honestly share their story. Morse (1994) suggests at least six participants needed for a qualitative study. The qualitative sample size was determined by time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990). There were several factors used to determine the appropriate number of participants in a qualitative study to include saturation. This research reached saturation before reaching the anticipated 15 participants. Saturation is the amount of data collection does not provide any additional useful data to answer the research questions (Creswell, 1998; Padgett, 1998).

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

All of the participants of this research project were introduced to the study by verbal invitation, other research participants, or during a speaking event to address transitioning issues. Because research demonstrated that the assimilation process for

veterans can be demanding, finding participants that are willing to openly and honestly *share their story* was not a difficult task (Creswell, 2009). Some participants were affiliated with the selected California Veteran Collaborative Group. Once participants volunteered, it was easier to select the participants from the pool of interested veterans who responded via email. Follow-up emails were sent to confirm their attendance and participation in the interviews. All of the participants were assigned numbers to protect their identity (V1 through V11). The anonymity of the participants and their employers allowed an environment where the participants were willing to openly and honestly share their feedback without the fear that their comments could impact their employment and potential advancement within their organizations (Creswell, 2009).

An invitational email was sent to 15 potential participants that meet the research criteria. All of the participants received a complete overview of the research project and the informed consent letter (see Appendix E). The participants were afforded the option to terminate their participation at any time during the process. The informed consent (see Appendix E) outlined the purpose of the study, the process and the time needed to address the study, the risks and benefits of the study, and the methods that will be used to ensure the confidentiality of the businesses and their feedback. The participants were notified that the informed consent documentation will be retained for a maximum of seven years.

Remaining flexible and accessible to the research participants assisted in clarifying participant's questions regarding their participation in the study and increased their interest to participate. It was important to ensure a comfort level for the participants

that facilitated dialogue. The final email, one week before the interview, outlined the approximate 30 to 45 minutes interview timeframe and the location where the interviews will take place. There were additional phone calls to solidify the various discreet and private locations that fit into the participant's schedules. In addition to the use of a digital recorder, Dragon Naturally Speak was used to transcribe the data. Dragon Naturally Speak was an effective computer program that easily converted speech to text, and allowed the interview to be conducted and transcribed at the same time with 99% accuracy (Nuance, 2011). As an additional measure, I reviewed the text with the supplemental audio recording to ensure accuracy.

This study obtained Gulf-War-era-II veterans perceptions related to their successfully attained employment in civilian roles using one-on-one interviews. In order to retain the information presented in the interviews, a digital recording device captured the verbal contributions for each participant. In addition to the recording devices, I annotated events in a reflective journal to capture non-verbal responses and body language incapable of being captured in an audio recording. A reflective journal promoted reflective thinking skills so that the retention of pertinent data was secured (Creswell, 2009). The audio recordings accurately captured everything stated during the interviews and visual notes were annotated. These measures communicated to the participants that what they were saying was important and valued (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Collection**

This study was aimed at understanding the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have successfully attained employment in civilian employment through

one-on-one interviews. In preparation for the interviews, the researcher conducted extensive research related to various military branch veterans and employment changes to ensure that the research questions were applicable to the research study and prepare for the analysis of emergent themes uncovered (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This study consisted of 11 semistructured interviews with open-ended questions that allowed for feedback and examination of the study participants (see Appendix E). The screening questionnaire (see Appendix D) ensured that the data collected covered the participant demographics and allowed the opportunity to selectively obtain emergent themes related to the employment transition phenomenon.

The open-ended question protocol allowed the participants to explore the topic from their own perspectives (Creswell, 2007). These questions were derived from the CIP approach to career decision making and the human capital theory during the transition from the military to civilian employment. The interview question matrix (see Appendix F) ensured the appropriate questions were developed to obtain relevant and rich data related to the research questions. During the interview process, it was important to acknowledge that the data collected can lead to new dimensions and perspectives that were not covered in the literature review (Patton, 2002). The open-ended question format allowed for additional emerging topics and afforded the opportunity for follow-up questions to understand these new developments.

The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes at various private locations. The interview discussions included the participant's thoughts and perceptions regarding their transitions, communications, analysis of self-knowledge, and the value of their

employment stability. Active interviewing assisted in gaining rapport with the Gulf-War-era-II veterans and allowed them the freedom to express their experiences in their own voices. Active interviewing demonstrated an interest in their feedback and denoted an understanding of their feedback (Patton, 2002). During the interviews, this showed participants that I acknowledged and understood their input. Correctly worded, open-ended questions helped to provide insight into the transition process and the positive outcomes of employment stability of the process (Creswell, 2009). The implementation of sub-research questions regarding the participants' military experiences, personal developmental journey during their transition, their civilian employment experiences, and professional development helped explore the diversity of their experiences.

Credibility for the feedback of the participants was established through member-checking and provided several opportunities for the participants to review and verify their transcripts (Creswell, 2009). The data collected during the interviews is protected on a memory device, password protected, and will be locked in my personal safe for 7 years. This physical control is valuable in ensuring that the participant's responses were protected.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In the process of analyzing the data, Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data was the best approach. This required a three-step process: (a) an evaluation of the relevant information collected during the interviews; (b) review of the notes taken during the interviews that pointed out key phrases; and (c) allowed for an analysis of the meanings of themes

related to Gulf-War-era-II veterans. The documenting of the reoccurring themes solidified the opportunity to identify overarching patterns during this analysis process.

This study focused on analyzing the veteran's experience of overcoming career problems and cultural comparisons between the military culture and their new civilian employment. In some cases, interviewed veterans identified that they did not have any significant difficulties during their transition and this provided discrepant case perspectives. The career problems that have been identified in the literature review were compared to the career problems. Since the research questions directly related to the lived experiences of the transitioned veterans' cognitive information processing and the impact of the human capital theory, all of the answers were reviewed and grouped by themes related to the challenges and the application of both theories. The data was clustered by similar responses and identified by themes. All of the responses were analyzed, coded, and divided into segments that can help understand some of the broader themes were uncovered (Creswell, 2009).

This study initially anticipated the use of the qualitative software program NVivo 11 to complete the qualitative data analysis and evaluate the interview transcripts. After careful review, hand coding was applicable and effectively utilized. Hand coding allowed me to analyze the data and group the participant's feedback into logical categories that brought meaning to the manuscripts. The purpose of interviewing Post 9-11 combat veterans was to find out things that we cannot directly observe (Patton, 1990, p. 278;



Patton, 2002). During this data aggregation process, I uncovered subcategories that identified additional perspectives and potential resolutions to veteran's career problems.

The process of coding the data included grouping the responses into categories using traditional text analysis. This process included (a) digital audio recordings of the data, (b) simultaneously transcribing the data using the Dragon Software, (c) the organization and categorizing of the data, (d) an analysis of the connections of influence of the uncovered themes, (e) uncovering the legitimacy of the ideas presented, and (f) reporting the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). During this process, I uncovered sub-categories helped identify additional perspectives and potential resolutions to veteran's career problems. Finally, I developed a written description of the phenomenon incorporating structural descriptions to describe the essence of the obtained lived occurrences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans (Creswell, 2007).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

This study used various types of strategies to enhance the validity of the research to include the following: Low-inference descriptors, data triangulation, and population feedback. In order to establish trustworthiness (See Table 1), the approaches implemented ensured an accurate depiction of the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have successfully re-integrated in the civilian workforce (Creswell, 2009).

Table 1

*Plan to Establish Trustworthiness in Current Research*

Criteria	Strategy
Credibility	The participants will be able to offer feedback and suggestions to ensure that the questions are beneficial to the research.  Data triangulation with the use of various career settings
Transferability	Purposeful sampling is the method used to select the sample population.  The same methods used to transcribe all interviews.
Dependability	Data Triangulation. Low Inference Descriptor  Use of audio recording to ensure accurate coding.  Subject Feedback re-checks for clarity.
Conformability	Member checking is important to ensure study interviews are accurate.  Reflexivity

**Credibility**

Data triangulation involves using various employment settings in order to increase validity of the study and used as a means to ensure comprehensive results that reflect the Post 911 combat veterans lived experiences of the professional civilian settings throughout the transition and current experiences (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). To minimize bias, it was important to eliminate preconceived ideas during data analysis

(Maxwell, 2013). In order to ensure validity, the triangulation of data sources used to verify the results and support the accuracy of themes that were uncovered during the interviews (Patton, 2002).

### **Transferability**

Transferability determines whether the findings from the research can be applied in a broader context. Negative case analysis will require that the characteristics of all interviews be reviewed to determine which common themes emerge. Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities; that the world is not an objective thing but a function of personal interaction and perception. The reliability of the data collected will rely on the objective feedback veterans who seek to maintain civilian career advancement and stability. Data triangulation can verify commonalities between participant's viewpoints in similar situations by comparing the consistency of similar career problems. This study can be replicated with other veterans in similar contexts, possibly be used to establish methods to form a unique interpretation of events, and develop solutions (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 2002).

### **Dependability**

Finally, the participant feedback assisted in clarifying documented ideas presented during the interviews for accuracy and ensured that I clearly interpreted the meaning of their statements. According to Creswell (2007), validity plays a significant role in a qualitative study in order to find the accuracy of the findings. In order to ensure that the research data was properly analyzed, negative case study analysis was conducted, which is the rechecking of the data and comparing patterns for verification purposes (Patton,

2002). Moustakas' (1994) technique of gathering and organizing qualitative data recommended an established protocol that ensures the research can be methodically replicated by other researchers.

### **Confirmability**

Member checking is a form of restating and summarizing what the research participant has stated to ensure accuracy. Member checking serves to decrease the incidence of incorrect data or incorrect interpretation of the data, with the overall goal of providing findings that are authentic (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Member checking was essential during interview process to ensure that the statements were documented correctly. It was important to eliminate bias by ensuring that the true nature and intent of the answers were clarified and remain open to make changes if any of the answers were misunderstood or misrepresented.

### **Ethical Procedures**

During the veteran transition, there is profound adjustment during the integration of the military culture into the civilian culture. It is important to transition and continue to work hard in their new capacity (Berglass & Harrell, 2012). This study did not disrupt the transitional progress or isolate veterans, but instead will help to establish the application of leading policies and practices that can enhance the communication and coping skills that can possibly lead to long-term employment in the civilian workplace.

Although this research discusses combat injuries, in order to protect the medical privacy of the participants, the study questions did not inquire about injuries related to their military service. Some veterans volunteered information about their combat injuries

and identified that they played a role in their transition and had a bearing on their success strategies while addressing career problems. Since the participants may disclose or revisit disturbing information, access and resources related to veterans counseling professionals were available during all interviews.

The research participant's rights and welfare were protected through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University that ensured the ethical practice and protection of all participants in research projects. The Walden University IRB criteria followed the three ethical principles: (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons. Walden's IRB evaluated the proposed data collection methods to ensure that the associated risks to the participants were minimized (Walden, 2015). The interviews were conducted after the approval of the research protocol, recruitment procedures, methodology, and interview questions to ensure the safety of the participants of the research.

In order to establish rapport and comfort for the interviews, it was important to explain to the participants the questions discussed and the purpose for the research. It was essential to reiterate that the interviews were kept confidential (Creswell, 2002). Since the veteran population were designated as a vulnerable population under the American with Disabilities Act (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012), it was important to provide access to the Veteran Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255, to confidentially address any emotional or psychological concerns that could have arisen during the interview. It was interesting that several veterans interviewed were not aware of the Veteran Crisis Hotline. To increase my awareness and educate myself regarding the protection of the

participants interviewed, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research for human research protections training (see Appendix G). All participants' rights were respected during the collection stage.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology utilized in this phenomenological qualitative research. There were several areas presented to identify the participants, how and why they are selected, the data collection process, data analysis methods, and reliability measures that will be used to understand the reintegration of Gulf-War-era-II veterans into civilian employment. Finally, this chapter discussed the suitability of the research design, ethical considerations, validity, credibility, and the transferability of the research methods. In Chapter 4, I included the research setting, participant selection, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, themes, study results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I included the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for action, social change implications, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II combat veteran's transition from military to civilian employment stability, address the gap in the literature, and to identify key factors that contribute to civilian employment stability of Gulf-War-era-II veterans. The Walden University Institutional Review Board approved my application for this study (approval # 07-11-17-0064672, expiration July 10, 2018). In this study, I used the phenomenological method to provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of Gulf War II era veterans as they transitioned into civilian employment roles.

This chapter describes the settings, participant selections, demographics related to the study, and the major themes regarding the transition experience uncovered during the data analysis process of statements and findings derived from the participant interviews. The following areas are included in this section: data collection, data analysis, description of patterns, relationships, and the study results are summarized to address the research questions and design.

For this study, all of the data was collected using semistructured, one-on-one interviews with 11 participants who voluntarily responded to a research flyer or were referred by Veteran Collaborative Meeting participants. The participants in this study consisted of honorably discharged Gulf-War-era-II veterans who met the following criteria: (a) served in the military since September 11, 2001 in the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts, (b) were currently employed full-time in the civilian workforce, (c) were between the ages of 24 to 34 years of age, and (d) lived in the Los Angeles area of

Southern California. The semistructured, open-ended interview questions were designed to obtain information regarding their transition into civilian employment experience.

To protect the identity of all of the participants, I created participant numbers (i.e., V1 for the first participant, V2 for the second participant, and so on). These codes assisted in protecting the anonymity of the participants and were used to report pertinent themes and comments from the interviews. A summary of the results and the interviews indicated the presence of critical factors that exist in the successful reintegration of Gulf-War-era-II veterans regarding cognitive information processing, management opportunities, financial stability, and quality of life factors.

### **Research Setting**

There were four communications with the participants before the face-to-face interview: the initial interest in participation email, the invitation to complete the screening questionnaire (see Appendix D), the presentation of the informed consent form (see Appendix C), and the coordination of interview arrangements via email or phone. All participants received and completed their consent forms at the research locations or via electronic format via email. Participants expressed interest in participating in the study by phone, in person, or by email.

The interviews occurred at various times to accommodate the participant's schedules. All face-to-face interviews included the participant and me in a private location to eliminate distractions. The privacy provided by the site selection ensured that interruptions would not prolong the interview process and provided discretion for the participants. Participants were advised that they could opt out of the interview at any time



and could elect to refrain from answering any questions that made them uncomfortable. The number to the Veteran Crisis Line was readily available at every interview. All participants collected the Veteran Crisis Line cards when departing the interviews. Some veterans were not aware that the Veteran Crisis Line was available to them.

### **Participant Selection**

This research project received approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board before data collection. Recruitment for the research was by open invitation at Veteran Collaborative Meetings in Los Angeles. After the Veteran's Collaborative meeting, I originally had six participants that demonstrated interest and participated in the screening process (see Appendix D), and two met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the study. The remaining participants were recruited via referrals through snowball sampling. I conducted 11 one-on-one interviews for this study. After an initial screening questionnaire, (see Appendix D) all participants met the inclusion criteria for the study (Creswell, 2007). The veteran participants were recruited from flyers presented at a California Veteran's Collaborative Meeting, met the study's inclusion criteria, and participated in one on one interviews regarding their transition from the military to civilian employment (Creswell, 2007).

Snowball sampling was essential to discovering additional potential participants that met the criterion by participants or veteran community referrals (Sadler et al., 2010). In Los Angeles, considerable effort and funding focuses on veteran outreach, and yet many organizations reported that they struggled to identify and connect with veterans (Castro, Kintzle, Hassan, 2014). Because veteran peers were the most effective outreach,

the procurement of interested participants in the research benefited from the snowball method.

### **Demographics**

From the 25 Gulf-War-era-II veterans initially contacted for the interviews, 11 veterans met the criteria and contributed to the study via interviews. The questionnaire produced seven male and four female participants (see Appendix D). The participants in this study agreed to present their experiences during their transition from military combat to civilian employment transition. The 11 participants were full-time paid employees in civilian employment, employed for more than 1 year, and resided in Los Angeles. The ages of the participants ranged from 31 to 34 years of age. The sectors they were employed in included real estate, government (State/ Federal), transportation, academia, entertainment, law enforcement/ security, oil industry, counseling, and logistics (see Table 2).

Human capital investments identify the benefit of education as an employable asset that increases worker productivity, higher income for the employees, and less costs associated with career development (Becker, 1975). The analysis of education attainment or the pursuit of an education for the participants interviewed confirmed that veterans have placed a high value on the transferability of education in preparation for employment (Collins et al., 2014). All of the interviewed veterans had various levels of education or actively enrolled in a college degree programs. The participants enrolled in school, utilized their Yellow Ribbon GI Bill program, a benefit earned from the military to pay for their education. The Yellow Ribbon Program, established by the Post-9/11

Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, allows higher learning institutions to fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed the established threshold of the Post-9-11 GI Bill (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). The participants identified that tuition assistance played heavily in their initial incentives to join the military.

Table 2

*Research Study Demographics*

Identifier	Age	Employment type
V1	31	Law enforcement-state
V2	35	Government-state
V3	33	Logistics
V4	34	Security
V5	34	Transportation
V6	33	Social worker (Veterans Affairs)
V7	34	Movie industry
V8	33	Government
V9	32	Oil industry
V10	34	Counselor
V11	34	Politician

**Data Collection**

To allow for saturation, 11 Los Angeles Gulf-War-era-II veterans participated in semistructured interviews to collect data regarding the transition from combat exposure

in the military to civilian employment. After the initial contact via email or telephone, all consent forms were completed and discussed. The location was determined based on the availability of the participants. The interviews were conducted in person or by video chat to accommodate the participant's availability. The participant's interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes and were audio-recorded using two audio devices with the participants' verbal and written consent. To maximize time during data review, I utilized the Dragon program that simultaneously transcribed the interviews, and a digital audio recorder to capture the interview. Follow-up interviews were requested and conducted after the transcribed data were reviewed to clarify any points presented by the participants. After the interviews and the 15-minute follow-up interviews, each participant reviewed their transcripts and provided the opportunity to address any points or ideas presented in their interviews for the accuracy.

The interview questions designed for this qualitative study narrowed the objective and focused the relevancy of the data collected in the study of the lived experiences of transitioning veterans into civilian employment (Creswell, 2009). The participants received a copy of the questions in advance with the consent form (Appendix C). Each participant was asked the same open-ended interview questions (Appendix E) regarding their employment transition experiences to ensure consistency in the information collected.

I also took notes regarding body language and facial expressions that could provide additional information during the interview. Although I recorded personal notes regarding my impressions of data obtained, I reserved judgment until all data was

collected and analyzed. It was important to set aside personal experiences and possible biases for the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2009). It was also important to review the data from the research on the same day as the interview to increase accurate recall and understand my notes.

### **Data Analysis**

A modified version of the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method (SCK method), as described by Moustakas (1994) and phenomenological reduction, served as the basis for the data analysis technique used in this study. The SCK method guided my focus of creating a list of statements provided during the interviews and grouping them into themes. This technique consists of seven steps:

1. Describe my personal experience with the central phenomenon as an effort to set aside my own experiences 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 before returning the transcript to the participants for review in a single or multiple sessions.

I also used the three steps of phenomenological reduction that included (a) epoche, (b) horizontalization of the collected data, and (c) the examination of the data to develop textural descriptions of the participant's experiences about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is a conscious process of identifying naturally occurring thoughts and preventing those ideas from interfering in the data obtained during the research (Moustakas, 1994). During the first step, I did not compare my experiences to the participant's experiences by using epoche to manage potential bias. The second step of phenomenological reduction allowed the researcher to develop statements that were reflective of information obtained regarding the participant's experiences. The final step of phenomenological reduction was to compile the statements into a list of themes. This process allowed me to develop categories or themes that adequately reflected information obtained during the interviews into a cohesive depiction of the combined experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

Data management was a critical element in ensuring the accuracy of the data analysis. Each participant was assigned a V code (V1-V11) to categorize their files related to their interviews, notes, and recordings, interview protocol documents, and transcripts. This organization technique helped to increase efficiency and analysis of the interviews. During the data management process, I utilized the Dragon transcription program that assisted in time management, data analysis, and file organization. According to Patton (2002), it is essential to keep additional files and back-ups of the raw data and transcripts. All of this information was password protected and organized for review.

Initially, I was prepared to utilize the software program NVivo 11 to complete the analysis. After reviewing the transcript data, I hand coded the data to analyze the information obtained during the interviews. After probing the transcripts to understand the statements made by the participants, I then checked the secondary recorded audio for the accuracy of the transcripts. I identified key text segments and generated codes for these. The next step was to sort the codes into themes. The final step was to refine, define, and identify the themes.

The Dragon program created a transcript of all of the interviews. The first step of analysis was to review the combination of my notes and the audio recordings to ensure that the transcribed data was accurate. The second step involved manually coding the data to identify themes and repetitive ideas in the data. Thirdly, I created a matrix with keywords, phrases, and quotes. Several studies utilize the phenomenological method to identify repetitive themes from the data collected from the essence statements regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth step was to combine the coded data into similar themes and identify the correlation among the keywords and their meanings. The final step of the data analysis was to explain the phenomenon from the data collected from the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Allowing the participants to review the questions before the interview enhanced the credibility in the study. This allowed the participants to think about their answers and collect their thoughts before the interview. During the interview, I remained open to

questions and feedback regarding the study. The structure provided by following the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994) provided additional credibility during this study. I followed and maintained the integrity of the IRB guidelines throughout the process to protect the interests of the participants. The Walden IRB guidelines ensured that the participants' privacy was protected and they were not put under any psychological trauma during the acquisition of the data for the research.

### **Transferability**

Purposeful sampling was an added benefit to ensure that the information provided in the interviews reflected events related to the same phenomenon. Note taking assisted in ensuring that I captured a descriptive detail of the lived experiences as told by the participants (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful snowball sampling afforded a balanced representation of interviewees by various branches of military service, nonspecific civilian employment sectors, and 1 year or more of time in new civilian jobs. The diversity in civilian employment for the transitioned veterans and all inclusiveness of military branches increased transferability in the study (Maxwell, 2013). A high level of transferability ensured that the detailed and thick descriptions provided by the participants described their transition into civilian employment via several reviews of interview transcripts, audio reviews to secure contextualized theme development (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).



**Dependability**

Dependability is the qualitative equivalent of reliability in a quantitative study. Triangulation is a strategy to establish dependability by using multiple methods to support conclusions. The review of the interviews using field notes (raw data), audio recordings, and Dragon transcripts ensured dependability with the use of multiple formats to collect the data. Identifying emerging themes (see Tables 4 to 7) and cross-checking information with the participants assisted in validating the information obtained when themes were uncovered (Maxwell, 2013). The participant's willingness to be available for clarification questions was instrumental in the dependability of this study. The participants understood the importance of accuracy and remained available for clarification purposes.

**Confirmability**

The ability to re-state and clarify information during the interviews was critical in ensuring accuracy. It also provided an additional level of respect and repertoire with the participants who stated that they appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences. V2, V4, V7 and V9 all felt that that they were providing an additional service to the success of future veterans by participating in research related to understanding veterans. It was important that I did not influence how the interviewees' responded to the questions asked in the interview, to account for changes that could alter the descriptions collected during the research. The participants were provided the opportunity to review the interview transcripts following the interviews. This allowed for authentic feedback that uncovered transition experiences within the veteran community. Due to the sensitive

nature of topics uncovered relating to combat exposure, there was no need to request additional clarity for some questions regarding their combat experience or physical disabilities so that the participants would not have to deal with potential distress.

### **Study Results**

The results of this phenomenological research endeavor produced 20 transcripts from the 11 participants that allowed me to uncover several significant working themes. The transcripts included data collected during the initial interviews and the follow up interviews. The transcendental phenomenological research method was most applicable because it added dimensions to study of human experiences through qualitative research. The inquiry of the lived experiences of the military to civilian employment veterans provided opportunities to understand how they perceived and experienced their career transition (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Research Questions**

The framework consisted of two theories: (a) cognitive information processing and (b) the human capital theory. The research questions were the foundation for understanding the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veteran's employment transition experiences and the tools used to develop employment longevity. The population of the veterans interviewed had been in their job for more than 1 year, lived in Los Angeles, and returned to civilian employment after combat exposure.

The phenomenological research design was created to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities experienced by Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned into civilian employment?

RQ2: What skills are necessary to navigate the transition from military combat exposure to civilian employment?

RQ3: What are the decision-making experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have effectively resolved career problems during their transition to new employment roles?

The theoretical framework helped to limit the scope of the data collected and defining the relevant framework. The research questions guided the areas covered in the study (see Appendix F). The interpretation of the data collected (from the interviews) assisted in understanding concepts and themes, revealed the essence of the lived experiences of the 11 veterans, and corroborated the theoretical assumptions of this study.

### **Research Questions Results**

The overall understanding of the military veteran transition from combat service to civilian employment was captured utilizing three research questions in this study. The data analysis and findings revealed that the study respondents were active participants in their employment conversions and were able to convey significant information about their lived experiences. The literature review assisted in identifying gaps and relating themes that were uncovered during this study. It was important to include various types of civilian professions and learn that the veteran experiences were similar regardless of the classification of the new employment.

Based on the literature, the CIP paradigm provides the opportunity to increase self-awareness, gain factual information about their civilian jobs, and learn how to make informed decisions and resolve problems in the workplace (Sampson et al., 2009). The results of the interviewed veterans clearly demonstrated 60% veterans dealing with high emotions and regret after leaving the military. V4 stated, “it is hard trying to figure out your value in the civilian world, when the military gave you specific benchmark to prove who you are. That is not transferrable in civilian jobs.” The understanding of their human capital value became a collaborative effort between the civilian employer and the veterans to ensure a clear understanding of short and long-term career goals.

Research Question 1 for this study: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities experienced by Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned into civilian employment? Interview Questions 1, 2, 3 assisted in the development of themes related to how military attributes and critical skills that affected the veteran transition to civilian employment. This information was essential in determining what advantages or disadvantages the veterans acquired before the start of their new civilian employment. Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, 9, and 12 were utilized to interpret the personal and professional development and experiences of the veterans during their transition into civilian employment. The findings of the interviews identified that the transition is not limited to a particular timeframe but considered as several critical skills required to adjust to the continuous changes of the new career. The participants’ military experience provided them advantages related to time management, project completion, and reliability. The interviews revealed that the participants possessed the fortitude to

continue eliminate identified career barriers with the acquisition of education and credentials to compensate for their civilian work experience.

Research Question 2 for this study: What are the perceived skills necessary to navigate the transition from military combat exposure to civilian employment? Interview Questions 7 and 9 were instrumental in understanding the personal development, challenges, and opportunities required in the new work environment to effectively adapt the transition from the military to civilian employment stability. Interview Questions 11 and 12 helped to understand the relevant occupational knowledge and decision-making characteristics that invigorated self-knowledge assessments during several stages of the transition. The veterans identified the importance of occupational knowledge to navigate the civilian workforce in their current positions and during the pursuit of future career paths. The data acquired identified strategies and goals to establish stability using cognitive information processing skills to adapt.

Research Question 3 for this study: What are the career decision-making experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who contribute to the resolution of career problems during their transitions to civilian employment roles? The data collected to address Research Questions 1 and 2 allowed for the identification of perceived career problems, challenges, and opportunities. Interview Questions 11, 12, and 13 provided insight related to the self knowledge and occupational knowledge essential to navigate the workforce, circumvent career problems, and develop strategies to adapt in new civilian workforce roles. Some of the challenges presented during the research were financial aptitude issues that lead to career and personal problems, communication

challenges related to cultural differences, educational requirements, and understanding the new policies and regulations within the new workplace. The participants were continuously aware of their ability to contribute to the workforce and acknowledge resources provided by their employers that increase their human capital significance.

The common portrayal of opportunities identified during the data collection process was the positive impact of the military experience and adaptability during the transition into a new civilian culture. Many of the participants acknowledged challenges related to perspectives in communication, work ethics, and values related to military training. The attributes of military experience and acquiring education became an ongoing means to develop self-knowledge and occupational knowledge necessary to integrate civilian employment sustainability. All of the participants identified that their initial perspectives related to civilian employment were inaccurate and admitted that determination played a role in understanding occupational policy and structure. Critical skills in continuous self-knowledge development, commitments to financial obligations, and veteran networking were identified in the interviews as catalyst in the pursuit of civilian employment attainment and stability.

Contrastingly, there were several discrepant cases due to the high level of emotions attached to the veteran transition, the changes in environments, and the development of self-knowledge (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). Throughout the data analysis, I sought to uncover inconsistencies or conflicting statements in contextual explanations. Creswell (2009) identified discrepant cases as variation or exceptions in the data that counter emerging themes. During the interviews, these discrepant cases were

revelations to the participants in some cases. Two participants (V6 and V11) realized that they were trained to believe that failure was not an option in the military but reimagined ways they have adapted to change and overcame failure during their transition. Both participants stated that the civilian workforce viewed their determination as intimidating and distracting from the overall goals of the team. Both veterans (V6 and V11) identified that they did not have any more or less transition problems than their civilian counterparts.

There were 40% of interviewed veterans elated to be out of the military and made it clear that they would never return to the military. For two of the interviewed participants, they did not find value in their military experience and had resentment regarding what they perceived as time wasted during their service. V1 identified, if she “knew the civilian world paid more than the military and still afforded her the opportunity to serve the country, she would have gotten out years earlier.” These participants would have rather been in a civilian position that required less travelling. The majority of the veterans identified travelling as the most rewarding component of their military service.

### **Theme Analysis Results**

The developments of coding created several revisions and associations of themes. According to Creswell (2009), coding is the process of breaking down the interviews into smaller areas of information. While coding the data collected from the interviews, I grouped and labeled relevant comments. My focus was to identify elements that uncovered patterns in the overall transition phenomenon and any underlying patterns that

materialized. The themes materialized by data analysis after coding and cataloging ideas. The five themes developed included: (a) the presence of self-validating values, (b) love of country and social responsibility, (c) the value in veteran networking and social support, (d) continued self-improvement, and (e) self-awareness to adapt to the decision-making skills required in the civilian employment environments. Repetition and prevalence of the participants' insights provided the relevance of specific ideas and helped to identify trends in the experiences. A full description of the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process are discussed in the study results section of this chapter.

Three research questions guided the research to understand that lived experiences of the veteran military to civilian employment transition. The development of preliminary categories in this study ensured essential components of the research questions were examined during the interviews. The four preliminary categories included: (a) military experience, (b) transition personal development experiences, (c) civilian work environment experience, and (d) self-knowledge and occupational knowledge. These preliminary categories assisted in the organization of the data collected.

The revelation of the themes included merging and eliminating sub themes that were not significant to answering the research questions. The interview questions, categories, and associated research questions are displayed in Table 3.



Table 3

*Interview Questions, Categories, and Related Research Questions*

Interview question	Categories	Corresponding research question
1	Military Experience: Preliminary Transition Attributes & Critical Skills	RQ1
2	Military Experience: Preliminary Transition Attributes	RQ1
3	Military Experience: Preliminary Transition Attributes	RQ1
4	Personal Development Experience: Post Service Transition Decisions	RQ3
5	Personal Development Experience: Challenges and Opportunities	RQ1
6	Personal Development Experience: Challenges and Opportunities	RQ1
7	Work Environment Experience: Professional Skill Attributes, Challenges, and Opportunities	RQ1 & RQ2
8	Work Environment Experience: Critical Skills & Adaptability	RQ2
9	Work Environment Experience: Challenges and Opportunities	RQ1 & RQ2
10	Work Environment Experience: Critical Skills, Knowledge, and Decision-Making	RQ3
11	Self-Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge: Critical Skills and Decision-Making	RQ2 & RQ3
12	Self-Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge: Challenges, Opportunities, Critical Skills, and Decision-Making	RQ1 & RQ3
13	Self-Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge: Critical Skills and Decision-Making	RQ2 & RQ3

Thirteen semistructured interview questions (see Appendix E) guided the focus regarding the lived development experience interviews to address the research questions related to the participants: (a) military experience, (b) transition personal development

experiences, (c) civilian work environment experience, and (d) self-knowledge and occupational knowledge.

### **Military Experience**

There were questions posed to the participants to assist in identifying the participant's knowledge of self about their previous military service. The themes presented in this section addressed Research Questions 1 and 2. Table 4 identifies the primary themes and subsequent themes identified regarding the veteran's military experience: (a) stability/ foundation, (b) love of country, (c) career, and (d) self-respect and meaning.

Table 4

#### *Military Experience Category*

Theme identified	Number of participants
Provided a foundation	11
Love of country	11
Career instead of job	8
Self-respect and meaning	7

Note:  $N = 11$

#### ***Interview Questions 1. Why did you join the military?***

Several participants joined the military for similar reasons. The themes that were most prevalent from the participants' military service were the love of country, self-respect, and a stable foundation. There was no mention of other career options as

alternatives. There was a common theme of leaving their environment for "a better life." Several participants identified that if they had to work, "they would rather work at a job that gave them a sense of purpose and stability." V7 realized, "his lack of direction was leading him on the path to becoming nobody. So he signed up for the Marine Corp to help him become a man." It was interesting that the older veterans, V4 and V11 admitted that the military matured them in relation to being responsible and accountable.

V3 stated,

I joined the military to pursue a career. I never thought that I would do anything else. I needed to have a career to make my family proud and have a foundation for my future. I wanted to wake up one day and know that I prepared for my life and with a good foundation, I can provide a good life.

***Interview Questions 2. When and where did complete your combat service?***

All of the veterans served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn between the years of 2002 to 2015. The average tours of the veterans interviewed ranged from one to four tours. The regions the veterans identified as serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn in Iraq and Afghanistan included Abu Gharib, Bagdad, Kabul, Diwaniya, Fallujah, Mosul, Nasiriyah, Sadr City, Syrian border, and the Turkish Border.

***Interview Questions 3. Do you feel that your military service contributed to your success in life?***

All, except one participant, described great pride for their military service and credited the military experience with their current success. There was a consensus in that their military service was the foundation, stepping stone, or starting point for their entire life. The interviewed veterans identified that it was the best decision they have ever made for their futures.

V6 noted,

Although the military pushed the limits of my patience, it taught me to find the hidden value in tough situations. The lessons have carried over well into my civilian life. The military was a viable option to get employment, stability, and college money.

Several veterans stated that the military taught them to deal with any environment. V1 stated, " I gained the ability to adapt and overcome any circumstance with hard work." V8 identified, "The military taught me to push myself beyond my comfort zones and to persevere through adversity."

Contrastingly, V3 believes that "the ability to be successful is innate and had nothing to do with the military." V3 also stated, "he was focused on the money for college and the military afforded him that opportunity."

It was interesting to note that the participant's dedication to serve their country was the foundation of their determination to serve in public service career fields. Their commitment carried over to their civilian jobs and assisted in their ability to find

opportunity in civilian employment as public service human capital. This component became a mainstay in self-awareness and adaptability into a new environment by identifying commitment to country as a similarity among both cultures. The participants viewed their military service as an asset and validated their commitment to their new jobs.

### **Personal Experiences in the Transition to Civilian Employment**

The series of questions related to the veteran's transition explored the participants lived experiences related to their separation from the military and integration into the civilian workforce. The goal of CIP is to lead career adults through self-knowledge and occupational knowledge and to examine how they processed new information to make decisions, solve problems, and create a greater self-awareness (Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, and Lenz, 2002).

The questions allowed for the examination of personal emotional benchmarks and professional experiences to answer research question 1. Table 5 identifies the primary themes and themes identified regarding the veteran's transition: (a) financial responsibility; (b) wage difference issues; (c) communication challenges; and (e) new identity and self-worth assessments.

Table 5

*Transition Personal Development Experience Category*

Theme	Number identified
Financial responsibility-family	9
Wage differences	5
Communication challenges	9
New identity or self-worth	11

Note:  $N = 11$

***Interview Question 4. What motivated you to return to work after military service?***

There were several expectations among the veterans related to how soon they thought they could find a job after returning home. All of the participants stated that they were shocked when they did not immediately obtain a job. Some participants acknowledged that they tried several jobs that did not help them find value in their surviving combat.

V2 described,

I wanted to provide for my family and give them a better life than what I had growing up. The military provided me with an excellent foundation however the pay simply was not enough. So, I decided to get out of the military even though I was worried about how long it would take to start a new job or if I could find a new job.

V6 identified,

When I had to go to more than five interviews, I started to question if I could find another job. I wondered why they did not see how qualified and detail oriented the military thought I was. My last reviews in the military, represented a person that could accomplish anything. None of that transferred into the civilian world. It felt like I was starting all over again. I needed to prove my abilities in my new job and gain my new employer's confidence.

Participants V2 and V3 identified that they had tried to discuss their transition in an arena with other veterans but were "ridiculed for having found stable employment when other veterans were unemployed."

***Interview Question 5. Were there wage differences in comparison to your military pay at separation and your new employment?***

It was surprising to note that the wage differences varied throughout all interviewed veterans. One of the largest concerns was that there would be significant pay wage differences in comparison to the military. V2, V4, V5, and V8 all stated that they "make more in their civilian job than they did in the military" The government-employed veterans V1, V2, and V3 stated that they believed stability in their pay and position was the most enticing in their decision to accept the position.

V2 stated,

The wage difference was huge. I was excited to be at a mid-level leadership position and was still technically living below the poverty lines. When hired into my civilian career, I made much more money at an entry-level position. The promotion steps are the same but the pay is better.

V3 stated that he knew that the majority of his co-workers would be prior service military. The pay started at a lower amount and he quickly earned “time in grade” to move along the pay scale to a more comfortable pay rate that was more than his earnings in the military. He stated, “I didn’t understand that I needed to accept lower pay to earn higher pay in the long run [after more civilian experience]. My expectations were unreasonable.”

V7 stated,

Education was important, so I definitely went to school for 3 years after I got off active duty. I cut my paycheck in half, basically, and had to manage a little bit of a different lifestyle. I still probably spent more time [in school and off work] than I should have, but I had saved for it [the time off].

***Interview Question 6. What were you looking for in a career when you started your new occupation?***

Participants had similar interests in pursuing paramilitary job opportunities and complained about the time it takes to pursue jobs that required high scrutiny. Veterans V3, V5, V9, and V11 demonstrated a clear resentment for having to endure lengthy vetting process when they believed that their combat service and sacrifices should have demonstrated that they could continue to hold a security clearance and have been dedicated to America during their military service.

V7 shared,

I was looking for an opportunity to work with other veterans in a Mental Health setting. I was not sure how I was going to be able to do that initially so I focused



on gathering the tools to be able to obtain this job. I acquired my Masters Degree in Social Work from USC, I provided community service and outreach, and I connected with local veteran resource providers to understand where I can be the best asset. It was the only thing that made sense to me was to continue to serve others.

The data obtained in the interviews reflected economic adjustments by the veterans during the conversion to their civilian work life (Castro, Hassan, & Kintzle, 2015; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The findings of this research indicated an on-going adjustment from the need to serve in the military for financial stability to dealing with those same issues when returning to civilian employment. The themes uncovered reflected a need to ensure financial stability and purpose in life. The veterans identified that they found the fulfillment of life purpose in the military and spent a considerable amount of time seeking to understand how to re-invent themselves in civilian employment. Although the veterans did not specifically identify that their behavior were structured by cognitive information processing, their actions were clearly parallel to all components of the CASVE cycle. The veteran's use of the CASVE decision cycle in CIP utilized various steps after the military to improve their career outlook and ultimately accept their current positions (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011; Osborne, 2014).

### **Work Environment Experiences**

In an effort to address research question 3 and understand how Human Capital theory was demonstrated in this study, Table 6 identifies the primary themes and

subsequent themes identified regarding the veterans civilian work environment adjustment: (a) cultural differences; (b) veteran networking; (c) pursuit of paramilitary jobs; and (d) spent time independently reviewing new employer's policies. The outcomes of the research and themes validated that human capital leads to economic growth for the employees and the employers (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Teachman & Tedrow, 2004). Additionally, the themes uncovered in these interview questions also answered Research Question 2.

Table 6

*Work Experience Category*

Theme	Participant identified
Cultural differences	9
Networking	6
Looked for work that was paramilitary	8
Reviewing regulations, procedures, and policies	10

Note:  $N = 11$

***Interview Question 7. In what way does the organizational structure relate to teamwork and team building at your company compare to the military?***

Participants identified that they were not reluctant to participate in their civilian teams but that they noticed a difference in the levels of commitment. V8 identified, "maybe I have always taken the team concept a little too seriously over the years. I associate dedication to the team as paramount over personal needs and goals. In the

civilian world, it seems like personal advancement is the number one goal." V11 related his civilian experience in the following statement, "as a public servant team member, our job is to provide service to our clients and help them in any way that you can. If someone is focused on representing the integrity of the team, the professional advancement will be rewarded by the service provided."

V4 stated,

In my experience, the organizational teamwork and team building does not work as well as it did when I was in the military. Civilian employers try to adopt the standards used by the military, but the bottom line is that the military has been doing this from the beginning, so the culture is set in stone.

***Interview Question 8. Do you feel that you understand the organizational goals of the company?***

All of the participants identified that they "learned" to function in their new environment. They utilized resources available to read and understand that policies of their jobs and their job responsibilities. It is important to note that eight participants identified that they were reluctant to ask for assistance regarding policies.

V7 stated that "he did not want to appear to be unfit for the job by asking too many questions. It was important for him to find answers in the policy so that he knew the information was correct." All of the veterans stated that they recognized other veterans at work or in their community to seek guidance from in various situations. V5 stated, "Yes, I understand the organizational goals of my company they are pretty much the same everywhere you go: People, Service, and Profit." Later in the same interview

with V5, he described that he might have "over-simplified the organization for his comfort. It wasn't until I met with other veterans and realized that they were having some of the same associations related to cultural differences at their new jobs."

***Interview Question 9. How did you feel that your military experience impacts your professional aptitude to make decisions in your civilian job?***

The majority of the interview participants were relieved to know that their co-workers were supportive, inquisitive, and proud of their military service. Contrastingly, the feedback from the participants V4 identified, "he had experiences with co-workers that did not appreciate his military service. He stated that he chose not to engage or understand their perspective for fear of making it an issue in the workplace."

***Interview Question 10. Have you ever thought about quitting your job or what would make you quit?***

The interviewed veterans focused on taking care of family and financial obligations as a deterrent from quitting their jobs. All of the veterans wanted to leave their new jobs at one time or another and identified reasons from poor adjusting to frustration with communication differences. Although research demonstrated that the first year of employment for veterans have the highest turn-over rate, the interviewed participants acknowledged that they often would rather quit their job and return to the military (Elbogen et al., 2012). V8 left his first civilian job to become a real estate entrepreneur, and he credits, "the military for providing him the discipline and determined to make the change." V2 stated, "if he quit, he would have to look for another job. It was humiliating [during an interview] to discuss my military career and be

misunderstood. I would spend so much time trying to translate my experience to something in the civilian world.” The area of communication and translating skills became one of the areas in the research where the most discrepancies surfaced. The veterans who were able to relate their military experience to the needs of the new job responsibilities were able to assist the employers in relating their human capital.

In his interview, V11 stated,

I can only be effective and confident that I am making progress when I am a productive member of society. It is all that I know how to do. When I am not gainfully employed, I am depressed and upset, and I do not recognize myself.

Working keeps me stable and gives me purpose. I hope that I will never have a mundane job that I cannot find purpose in.

The answers provided by the participants confirmed the applicability of various components of Cognitive Information Processing during their transition for self-development and career problem solving (Bertoch, Lenz, Reardon, & Peterson, 2014, Mezirow, 2000). The participants indicated the presence of a military “mind-set” as their current state and their transition progressed into adapting to the civilian culture in the workplace. The communication, decision-making skills, and the occupational-knowledge appeared to be the most essential skills because the beginning of their transitions and are still relevant today.

### **Personal Experiences: Self-Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge**

The cognitive information processing approach to career problem solving and decision-making skills used to guide the following set of interview questions. In these

questions, it was important to identify the Gulf-War-era-II veteran's occupational knowledge of their new job and their awareness related to their abilities and experience during the transition into the new civilian job.

Table 7 identifies the primary themes and subsequent themes identified regarding the veteran's self-knowledge and occupational knowledge: (a) education; (b) communication; (c) self-awareness; (d) difficulty seeking assistance; and (e) veteran networking.

Table 7

*Self-Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge Category*

Theme	Participant identified
Education is important	9
Change approach to communication	10
Self-awareness	11
Difficult to ask for assistance	10
Veteran networking	8

Note:  $N = 11$

***Interview Question 11. Tell me about your work situation since you returned from combat service. Based on your education and experience, did you feel that you were capable of fulfilling the position?***

Various participants discussed their transition as being complex and experimental. There were six of the participants that indicated that they went through several jobs

before accepting their current position. V1, V2, V5, V6, V7, and V9 all measured their transition with their ability to perform their jobs or their ability to maintain their jobs I found that all participants were apologetic and remorseful about any time that they were not working, even if the time spent in personal development was for education or other types of adjusting. The finding of the research indicated that all participants identified networking with other veterans as an essential compass for decisions related to employment. There was a common theme that resources should be location based.

V1 described,

I believe I was looking for people to be a committed to rules and regulations as the military was. I felt like people who did not respect boundaries were not as serious as they need to be and I could not trust them. If I could not trust that they were serious about work, then I would not waste my time expecting anything from them. Later I learned that work has never been the most important in life and I needed to find my new purpose.

All participants found the pursuit of education as essential in being able to transition. The literature review reflected a high number of veterans pursuing education to prepare for civilian employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). There was only one participant, V5, who responded with "although education was important, he decided not to pursue traditional schooling and focus on obtaining transportation certifications." The use of the Post 9/11 GI Bill repeatedly identified as a transition tool. These benefits cover their tuition, books, supplies, and housing (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). V1 and V3 stated that they were glad that they started pursuing their education

while in the military because it provided them competitive advantages for employment opportunities. Several veterans described that having an education gave them more confidence to work in their field. V1 referred to his education as another element of common ground with his civilian peers. The courses taught in specializations are taught the same all over America.

V3 stated,

It may have provided them an edge over the highly competitive applicants for their current job. Education is universal. Even if an employer may not understand what I did in the military, but they understood my degree in Criminal Justice.

V2 identified,

My education was enough to get the job and my experience in the military was more than needed. A lot of my military experience did not transfer and I started to believe that it [military experience] was not relevant, at first. I began to understand that everything I learned in the military was transferrable. But I had to prove myself all over again in this new job.

***Interview Question 12. Are there any differences in the decision-making skills in the military compared to your civilian job?***

V1, V2, V3, V5, V6, V8, V9, and V10 identified the impact of their decisions in the military were immediate and life-threatening. They minimized decisions in the civilian employment as timely but conducted with less pressure or meaning. V2 stated, "Nothing is harder than saving your buddies lives." V3 stated, "some decisions are life



and death while on the civilian side it's you losing your job and income." Of course, that can be detrimental as well, but you would have time for making corrections or adjustments." Veterans interviewed were reluctant to open up to co-workers for fear of being categorized as unstable or damaged after military service.

V7 identified,

It influences EVERY decision. The way I move, the way I talk, the way I stand, and it is all how the military taught me. I try to keep a low profile, keep my head down and just work. I keep small talk to a minimum, but when I do end up socializing, I am very open and out there. This is very intimidating to those that cannot relate. They can only associate my experience or my service with movies that leave the individual experience.

V11 described,

I am not afraid to make difficult decisions promptly. I am also not afraid to be wrong; well, that is not accurate. I am afraid that a decision I make is the wrong one, but I am not afraid to admit I erred and to find a new way to handle a situation. Many people are so afraid of being wrong that they just do not act. I had to make a decision that could have led to the death of one of my soldiers, so the mundane decision that may lead to a slap on my wrist does not trouble me.

Several participants found that they believed that they were "over-qualified" for their civilian jobs because they did not value their civilian employment as much as their military service. V1 adamantly stated that she would "go back to the military if she could."

***Interview Question 13. What essential information did you need in your new work environment that prepared you to make informed decisions?***

This question produced a variety of themes. Veterans stated that they found ways to make informed decisions daily. While many veterans noted there could be more resources available to assist in the transition, V2, V5, and V9 described being more accountable as an individual and found that they worked harder than their civilian counterparts. There was a consensus among all of the participants who stated they did not know what they needed to prepare for their new civilian employment roles. The prevalent theme was the need for the veterans to complete daily self-analysis to adapt in the job responsibilities. The responses collected revealed communication as a key area of adjustments between the two cultures. The participants identified that communication skills and conflict resolution as an essential element, learned from the military, aided in their new civilian employment.

V11 shared,

I had the confidence to make decisions because there was less stress with the civilian decision process. I understood that it has always been my responsibility to acquire the information necessary to make informed decisions. The decision-making process was the same [as the military], but the impact, potential consequences, or results of those decisions are different. There is high stress in the decision-making.

V2 stated,

You can never force a civilian job to define you as much as the military established your self-value or worth to America. Find a job where you can give back to society, and you will be satisfied. While I was volunteering to help veterans, it has been more fulfilling than work. Stop wasting time thinking about going back to the military.

V6 reported,

My military experience has been helpful in preparing me to explain the contrast between military and civilian systems to other veterans. It also gave me the ability to be direct without being disrespectful, which veterans appreciate. I felt that earning my Masters in Social Work combined with my military uniquely prepared me to work as a veteran in a Mental Health setting.

During my analysis of the interviews, self-awareness and purpose was very prevalent. The participants were less concerned with financial gain but more focused on the intrinsic values associated with their everyday contributions to society. The need to self-identify with service to the community or the nation was a major factor in accepting their current positions. The tenacity to remain professionally invested in their new civilian job, despite the adjustment periods, were based on the interviewed Gulf-War-era-II veterans determination to continue to contribute to their societies.

V2 stated,

I did not know what I needed until I was in a situation at work that made me identify that I did not know how to find the answer. In the military, there was always a SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for everything. In my new job, I

had to humble myself enough to ask someone what to do. Having to decide to consult with someone was frustrating because I could not be as secure as I wanted to be. I had to admit I did not know what to do. That was frustrating.

V5 stated,

In my experience, the organizational teamwork and team building don't work as well as it did when I was in the military. We trusted our comrades because we knew each other's level of commitment. It was our life. In my new job, people do not trust one another as much. There is this "at-will" law that makes it possible for you to be terminated at any time. How can anyone be dedicated under those circumstances?"

Participants described their high level of commitment was ridiculed by fellow employees. V1 identified, " in the military, you work until the job is done. You understand your mission. In the civilian world, you never finish, but you keep working hoping that you are making progress." Approximately 80% of the interviewed veterans identified that they spent a significant amount of time trying to re-invent their purpose and accepting that they were no longer in the military. V5 remained determined to find a job that had a similar structure to the military so that he could find fellow veterans. In his current position, he has found more than 40% of his co-workers have served in the military and could understand him. V5 identified, "I found other veterans who could give me pointers at finding the reality check that I was missing."

V7 remembered missing his participation in leadership roles by stating,

The military puts everyone in some sort of position of leadership at different times. Some of us were good at it, others, not so much. Being able to utilize each member effectively was a key part of that. So when I found myself in office jobs with that similar feeling of putting all these different personalities together, it was easier to implement myself into the role needed.

The interviewed veterans were all interested in understanding the path to leadership in their new civilian roles. V6 identified that during his interview, "his military service was discussed in the initial interviews and informed that his leadership abilities would be welcomed in the new workplace." Several veterans recalled the importance of clarifying their transferrable skills; subsequently employers found associations for their skills. This reiterates the findings in the literature reviews regarding the need for veterans to understand and communicate their interchangeable talents to employers that may not readily identify how their military experience relates to their civilian employment duties (Badger, & McCuddy, 2014; Clemens & King, 2008; King, 2012; Olsen; Robertson & Brott, 2014). The connection assisted in alleviating career barriers that were misunderstandings or the lack of clarity in terminology variations from the military to civilian employment. In some cases, veterans identified that these seemingly small clarifications lead to dialog and increased communications in the workplace.

Contrary to Becker's (1976) assertions that job specific skills are non-transferrable, even in similar work environments; the outcomes of this research negated his findings. The participant responses indicated Gulf-War-era-II veterans utilized skills learned in the military to adapt and evolve in their new workplace. These veterans

increased their human capital value for the employers by increasing their productivity through occupational knowledge. It was commendable that the veterans recognized their progress of essential civilian professional experience while maneuvering their new workplace. The interviewed veterans identified that this experience positioned them for long-term promotional opportunities. According to V5, “it is easier to prepare for promotional opportunities in the civilian sector. The military required full packets to promote.”

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented findings from the semistructured interviews conducted with 11 Gulf-War-era-II veterans in the Los Angeles area to understand the perceived impact of the transition from military combat exposure to civilian employment. The data collected from the interviews were instrumental in answering the research questions. The participants shared their experiences and perceptions related to their transition from combat exposure in the military to civilian employment. The answers to the research questions uncovered that GWII veterans continued to adjust personally and professionally in their new careers, military attributes such as time management and reliability were utilized, cognitive information processing was applicable in daily decision-making skills, and GWII veterans identified an awareness of their human capital significance in the workplace through occupational knowledge and training.

According to Moustakas (1994), the qualitative phenomenological-research paradigm is optimal to investigate the subjective knowledge of the individuals that have lived experiences in the explored phenomenon. My role of the researcher utilized the

guidance of Walden IRB policies to ensure that each semi-structured interviews and the data collected did not present greater than minimal risk to the participants (Walden, 2010). All of the participants were willing to share their experience and were interested in the social impact that research has had on veteran policy. The majority of the participants were interested in how the findings were interpreted and provided me additional research ideas for the future.

My analysis of the collected data illustrated that there are individual choices that established the successful trajectory of the veterans' transition. While addressing the research questions, the findings indicated all participants appeared to tap into some innate abilities to adapt and overcome to fit into their new roles that centered on self-awareness and self-knowledge. The participating veterans exhibited the cognizance of their value as a civilian employee and how they increased their employability with education and increased credentialing. The results of the interviews consequently revealed the veterans maximizing various veteran community resources, the application of cognitive information processing skills utilized to adapt, and clarifies that all participants identified that local veteran resources are essential to assist in the veteran transition.

In Chapter 5, I continue to address the research questions, the limitations of the study, interpretation of the findings, the implications for social change that the research uncovered, and the recommendations for action that can be taken to increase the awareness of career conversion factors and the opportunities for future research

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine perceptions and about the transition from military to civilian employment of 11 Gulf-War-era-II veterans in the Los Angeles area. I employed the cognitive information processing theory and the human capital theory to investigate the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans in Los Angeles that transitioned into civilian employment after combat exposure. The goal was to understand the lived experiences of the veterans perceptions in the following areas: (a) military; (b) personal adjustments; and (c) work environment decision-making skills used during their transition. These areas aided in ensuring that the research questions were adequately addressed. I used purposeful sampling and collected data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and video calls. The modified version of the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen Method and hand coding methods provided the structure to analyze the resulting data (Moustakas, 1994).

Five themes emerged that solidified the transitional experiences of the veterans interviewed. The themes were: (a) the presence of self-validating values, (b) love of country and social responsibility, (c) the value in veteran networking and social support, (d) continued self-improvement, and (e) self-awareness to adapt to the decision-making skills required in the civilian employment environments. The themes uncovered allowed me to answer the research questions. The collective knowledge of the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veteran's transition into civilian employment is crucial for developing effective strategies for veterans to retain long-term civilian employment.



### **Interpretation of Findings**

The major conclusions of the study validated the use of CIP as a continuous self-discovery during the transition from military to civilian life. The interviewed veterans all had a proclivity to utilize the CIP approach throughout successful adjustments, even if the Gulf-War-era-II veterans were not familiar with the CIP theory. My interpretation of the findings related to the use of professional and personal development in decision-making skills confirm the use of cognitive information processing and human capital theory as a motives or strategies to establish employment stability.

The CIP approach provided a concept-based pyramid of information processing domains that focused on self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, career decision-making skills, and executive processing to aid in the transition to civilian employment (Sampson et al., 2002; Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011). All of the veterans reported the necessity to increase their understanding of their self-knowledge, company's policies, and avenues of career advancement. It was critical for the interviewed veterans to contribute to the company's overall performance and becoming an integral asset of the company. Veteran statements revealed the importance of self-worth and identity as a pre-requisite for the dedication required to remain employed in their civilian positions.

The population of veterans interviewed included a broad range of industries that can decrease the knowledge gap to understand the lived experiences of successfully transitioned veterans. There were similarities of essential educational accomplishments, decision-making attributes, self-awareness, and information processing for every job that the participants worked. Ulrich and Lake (1991) noted that the uniqueness if an

employee's skills and capabilities are critical requirements for gaining a competitive advantage in the workplace. None of the interviewed participants accepted management roles within the first year of new civilian employment. The understanding of the human capital needs of the employers and the value employers placed on the hired veterans' management attributes did not immediately translate in the workplace. During the interviews, the participants were proud of their leadership skills and were initially under the impression that they would find employment that allowed them to manage others. Based on the data collected from the research, management roles were unfulfilled during the early years of employment.

The information obtained in this research can be enlightening to other veterans, community partners, and practitioners that are assisting veterans during their employment transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). The interviews revealed that veterans required time to acclimate to their new work environment and understand the culture before assuming a management and leadership role. As with several focus groups in Los Angeles, many veterans did not fully understand how much the military changed them. Veterans expressed superiority about the civilian counterparts in values, work ethics, and life experiences but felt inexperienced regarding career and professional development in the civilian world (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014).

The themes related to the decision-making skills, such as continued self-improvement and self-awareness to adapt to the decision-making skills required in the civilian employment environments focused on the knowledge domains of self-knowledge and occupational knowledge. The veterans interviewed focused on communication, self-

analysis, and understanding their options before making decisions in the workplace. All of the participants placed great emphasis on the importance of enhancing their personal and professional development in their new civilian employment because they were adapting to an unfamiliar environment.

Based on the outcome of the interviews, there was a common focus of continuous assessment, self-awareness, and re-aligning goals by the veterans during the transition. The majority of the veterans identified that although they conducted various types of analysis, they cannot imagine any other way to be committed to resolutions in their new career. Occupational knowledge was essential for every participant. Occupational knowledge is one's unique structural representation of work and understanding the occupational terms, education, and training requirements of the duties required to fulfill the job responsibilities (Sampson et al., 2004; Strong et al., 2015).

Human capital is a measure of the economic value of an employee's skillset leveraged to increase productivity. The outcomes of the interviews identified that military veterans viewed their company's acquisition of military veterans as beneficial for the company's organizational goals of increasing cultural diversity, adaptability, and leadership abilities. The themes related to veteran networking and support groups assisted in understanding human capital value assets. The employee's productivity was enhanced by the attainment of occupation specific education and certifications. For an employer, it is the collective wealth of knowledge, talents, training, skills, judgment, and accumulated experiences for a population (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961). The findings of this study confirmed that the interviewed veterans understood that their future earning

potential improved by the acquisition of skills, occupational knowledge, and education (Becker, 1975). These findings coincide with the research conducted for this study. The veterans expressed a high level of pressure to live up to these verbalized expectations of their civilian employers. Similarly, all participants identified that their work ethics, determination, and propensity to ascertain leadership or management roles in their civilian employment originated from their military service.

The theme of self-validating value related to income differences for the veteran participants. Income differences after the military transition was a re-occurring discussion during the interviews. There were inconsistent findings related to income during the literature review. For five of the participants, their military experience and education did not provide a significant increase in income within the early years of their transitions. It became evident that pay and salary increases occurred after the first year of the military to civilian employment transition. For six other participants, they were able to see the financial incentives related to the education and military experience immediately. The cost of living allocations and incentives for the Los Angeles area built into the interviewees' income created monetary incentives increased their earning baselines over the poverty level, despite the change in cultures.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were three notable limitations during this study: (a) data was obtained from a closed population of veterans, (b) the study participants were localized in the Los Angeles area, and (c) the data was obtained at one period of time. Participants acquired by snowball sampling included referrals and associates in the military community that

were familiar with veterans who met the study's criteria (Patton, 1990). Although this outcome validated information obtained in the literature review reflecting the military community as close-knit and heavily dependent on the military networking, it also created limitations for this study.

The findings applied to a population of Los Angeles area Gulf-War-era-II veterans, but they may not be generalizable to other veterans in other cities or states. As a result, future studies could expand the sample population across states to achieve a broader understanding of Gulf-War-era-II veteran's employment transition to stable employment after combat exposure. Finally, the last limitation was the point in time the interviews were conducted. It is reasonable to imagine that the participants may have had diverse perspectives during their initial start of their new civilian job while faced with the highest number of personal and professional decision-making dilemmas. At the time of the interviews, the participants were able to identify several triumphs related to their career transition that assisted them in retaining employment.

### **Recommendations**

There are several recommendations for continued research based on the findings from this study. It might be insightful to research the earning differences in civilian employment after military service. Income was a significant factor in transitioning and accepting jobs for the interviewed veterans. The turning point for the veterans interviewed was the substantial increases in income received after the first year. The outcome of this research did not provide consistent findings with the literature review and similar reports throughout California cities. Veterans accepted work that paid less than

their military pay to attain employment. The inconsistencies reported related to income differences warrant additional research to understand what factors influence wages after the military.

The U.S. Department of Labor (2014) reported that veterans received lower wages than their nonmilitary peers, in the same positions. The findings of this research confirmed that many veterans attain stable employment income that is higher than their earnings in the military (Mani, 2013). Some participants identified pay in the military at \$60,000 and their salary in civilian employment at \$80,000 in the first 3 years. Some of the increases included cost of living allowances for Los Angeles.

In similar California areas, Orange County and San Francisco, the interviews reflected veteran difficulties associated with communication, wage differentials, and decision-making adjustments to civilian employment. Difficulties reported suggested that veterans accepted work that paid less than the military and complications adjusting to financial management. The research data during the literature review was consistent with the wages differences reported during the interviews. Information obtained in the literature review indicated, in Orange County, 61% of Gulf-War-era-II veterans identified adjustment problems in employment and identified that when hired, their earnings were below the poverty level. In San Francisco, 71% reported difficulties in their transition and 83% who worked full-time reported annual salary below \$60,000 a year. The median income for San Francisco is \$77,734 annually (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015; Castro & Kintzle, 2017). The interviews conducted indicated that some veterans accepted work that paid less than their military pay to attain employment. Employers can benefit from

understanding that the recruitment efforts can benefit from competitive pay, benefits, and professional development paths for employers to increase retention and promote diversity.

The findings of this research suggested that an investment in collecting county and state data to inform factual decision-making can assist in properly allocating resources based on the needs of the local veteran population. Community assessments allow for prioritizing resources to address the unique and most pressing needs of their veteran populations (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). It may be insightful to understand how veteran hiring and the veteran employment experience can enhance veteran networking groups. Investing in community-based resources and employment community collaborates would aid in understanding the needs of the local veteran population. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor do not directly support the strategic decision-making at local levels. The data relevant to communities are lost in large-scale studies that generalize trends and inadequately identify service providers depreciate the confidence that veterans have regarding the relevancy of the information (Blumke, 2011; Chica et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2015). Additional measures could include optimizing funding strategies, reframing relevant program development services, and the development of policies to customize service to vulnerable subsets of veterans (Castro & Kintzle, 2017).

Counseling and awareness of the decision-making during career transitions can illuminate tools such as the cognitive information processing approach as a resource to overcome development issues. The accessibility of veteran mentors repeatedly surfaced

during the interviews. As transitioning veterans developed into civilian employees, there was a high concentration on the need to maintain veteran networks and remain in communication with fellow veterans of all branches for guidance and support (Collins et al., 2014). Further, increasing awareness of veteran networking in the work place and in the veteran community is important to maintain successful employment retention and provide support throughout the transition for the veteran community.

Gender-specific transition difficulties would be a beneficial area of focus for future research endeavors. It was interesting to identify that gender based issues surfaced throughout the interviews. Four of the 11 participants of this research were women and provided additional input regarding their transition. The male participants identified that they had to place more dedication in their ability to communicate with females and refrain from using profanity. The men interviewed also indicated that the civilian employment culture catered to emotions and feelings more than the military. This knowledge demonstrated an awareness of cultural differences but also provided an insight to the various areas of adjustments that veterans make to integrate into the civilian workforce culture.

The contributions to the body of knowledge regarding female veterans have increased due to the presence of female veterans' service in combat roles. Research reflected the presence of gender differences created career problems (Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015; GAO, 2011). The outcomes of the four female veterans interviewed indicated that gender differences existed in both the military and civilian employment concerning income and promotions. The female participants



stated that the stigma surrounding their military service caused more problems for them professionally than their gender. Future research can benefit from studies that identify gender comparisons of the veteran transition into employment and wage differences.

### **Social Change Implications**

My research holds a positive social impact implication because it can increase professional development skills of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who can increase employment stability in the civilian workplaces and inform potential employers in identifying the human capital of Gulf-War-era-II veterans. The findings from this research identified that every veteran participant evolved professionally during an exploratory period between locating, securing their civilian jobs, and continued to adapt to retain civilian employment. The combat veteran paradox indicates that the change individuals experience during the combat exposure and transitions into civilian life are normal, and not indicative of a mental health disorder (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). Several researchers identified various economic adjustments, career problems, and identity problems regarding the transition from military combat to civilian employment (Department of Labor, 2015; Phillips et al., 2007).

Researchers proposed solutions to mitigate employment issues for Gulf-War-era-II veterans who included increasing education and increased awareness for the employers and the veterans (Collins et al., 2014). An increase of resources allocations, veteran mentoring or networking, and self-awareness categorizing can provide support for transitioning veterans and lead to identifying decision-making methods in work and personal development. The applications of cognitive information processing can become

a joint effort for all involved to eliminate unemployment rates that are higher than civilian rates. Career services researchers and policy developers have demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive information processing in career assessment, career counseling, employment problem-solving, and career selection in the civilian sector (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008).

The applications of cognitive information processing have been effective in job placement and this research reflects that CIP skills were utilized after job acquisition and throughout daily career problem solving. It could be beneficial for future research to identify community resources utilized or underutilized during the GW era II transitions. In the interviews completed, there were no discussions related to resources sought or used during their transitions. The sustainment of employment for veterans appears to come with challenges that can be resolved with the application of CIP skills. The literature review identified issues related to disabilities and gender as barriers during re-integration. None of the interviewed participants discussed either of these matters as factors related to their transition.

### **Conclusions**

This dissertation focused on the experiences and perceptions of Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned from combat to civilian employment in Los Angeles. The unemployment rate has decreased with the implementation of employment resources, initiatives, and investments over the past 10 years. This research uncovered the ongoing decision-making process of military veterans who convert into civilian employees requires continuous self-awareness, development, and strategies to maintain long-term

employment. There were five themes that emerged from the data represented the transitional experiences of the participant veterans': (a) presence of self-validating values, (b) love of country and social responsibility, (c) importance of veteran networking and social support, (d) continued self-improvement, and (e) self-awareness to adapt to decision-making skills required in civilian employment.

Military veterans enter the civilian workforce with a wealth of knowledge and strategic attributes that allows them to be valued as performers and produce economic value (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958). Human capital investments allow companies to professionally develop employees after hiring them. The interviewed veterans appeared focused on development and advancement early in their civilian careers. The human capital theory reflected the importance of human time investments as a valuable contribution to employer's productivity. Combat veterans are educated when they arrive to the workforce or are in schooling during the transition.

The results of the study indicated that the participants felt that their military experience warranted higher pay in their new positions. In some cases, this suggests that the participants do not consider the trajectory of their earnings as their employers in relation to human capital (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1958). Veterans identified how their employer advised them of their starting wage and could expect raises in the future. This translates to the employers being aware of the veterans increasing value after measurable time tables and reflected an awareness of long-term value. Time investments also benefited employees with increased opportunities for advancements and higher earning potentials (Welch, 1975).

The retention of Gulf-War-era-II veterans and the long-term acquisition of management and leadership roles were the next steps in professional development for those interviewed. Although the majority of the veterans interviewed acknowledged that they arrive at new employment with the capacity to learn, they could not manage or lead in an environment where they were still learning. Cognitive information processing has become an essential tool in adjusting and adapting to new civilian employment for transitioning veterans (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011; Sampson et al., 2002).

All of the interviewed employees identified goals to increase their imprints in their new organizations. The veterans oscillated between their determination to understand their work environment and their capacity to attain management roles. Based on their military experience, veterans interviewed were most comfortable being in management and leadership and were all focused on understanding the process to achieve those roles. Their confidence in the accomplishing stability in civilian employment increased with the longevity of their positions and exposure to their new work environment.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

**EMPLOYED VETERANS: NEEDED FOR TRANSITION RESEARCH STUDY*****Statement of Problem***

- As of 2015, there are 2 million veterans in California (551, 825 Gulf-War-era-II veterans)
- The unemployment rate for veterans is 8.8% men and 9.6% women in California.
- The number of veterans will increase by 35,000 or more in the next couple of years as the US Military structure changes as the forces are drawn down in the Middle East.

***Purpose of the Study***

- To understand the lived experiences of Gulf-War-era-II combat veterans, of all branches of the military, during their transitions from military to civilian employment.

***Why Should I Complete this Study?***

- You can help identify employment challenges for transitioning veterans.
- You can help empower veterans to develop the necessary tools to overcome employment challenges and maintain long-term employment after combat.

***Other Important Information***

- Individual Interviews
- 30 minutes time frame; One possible follow-up via email or phone (15 minutes or less)
- Confidential Participation
- Digitally Audio Recorded for review by Denita Oyeka for data analysis. Thereafter they will be kept in a locked secure location and discarded.
- Selection criteria will ensure the focus of the study participants with at least one year in civilian employment, between the ages of 24-34, and reside in the Los Angeles Area after an honorable discharge.
- You can decide whether or not to participate at any time.

**Contact Information*****Denita Oyeka******US Army, Iraq Combat Veteran******Walden University Doctoral Candidate, 2017*****NOTE:**

**This Study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Review Board, Walden University and solely used for dissertation research as a Walden Doctoral Candidate.**

## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

California Veterans Collaborative

April 10, 2016

Dear Denita Oyeka,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Gulf-War-era-II Veterans: Civilian Employment Integration with the California Veterans Collaborative. As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit veterans at our meetings, record data collection, conduct member checking, and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing facility access and Veterans Counseling Professionals during the interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

President

## Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

### Military Experience

1. Why did you join the military?
2. When and where did complete your combat service?
3. Do you feel that your military service contributed to your success in life?

### Personal Experiences in Civilian Employment

4. What motivated you to return to work after military service?
5. Were there wage differences in comparison to your military pay at separation and you new employment?
6. What were you looking for in a career when you started your new occupation?

### Work Environment Experiences

7. In what way does the organizational structure relate to teamwork and/or team building at your company compare to the military?
8. Do you feel that you understand the organizational goals of the company?
9. How did you feel that your military experience impacts your professional aptitude to make decisions in your civilian job?
10. Have you ever thought about quitting your job or what would make you quit?

### Self Knowledge and Occupational Knowledge

11. Tell me about your work situation since you returned from combat service. Based on your education and experience, did you feel that you were capable of fulfilling the position? Why or why not?
12. Are there any differences in the decision-making skills in the military compared to your civilian job?

13. What essential information did you need in your new work environment that prepared you to make informed decisions?

Closing Question

14. Are there any questions or topics that you think are important to your transition?

## Appendix D: Screening Questionnaire

Military Service History

Are you a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, or Operation New Dawn?

What was your branch of service?

How old are you?

Employment

Are you currently employed (full-time) in a civilian job for more than one year?

How long have you been employed in your civilian job?

## Appendix E: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of transitioned Gulf-War-era-II veterans who have integrated into civilian employment. The researcher is inviting Post 911 Veterans who have been in stable civilian employment for more than 1 year, are between the ages of 24-34 years, and live in Los Angeles to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Denita Oyeka, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of the Gulf-War-era-II population during their transition from the military and into civilian employment for more than one year.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in an audio recorded interview for a time-frame of 30-minutes or less.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be available for a possible one-time follow-up questions via email or phone that would last no longer than 15 minutes.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. You are **not** being recruited via the Federal government nor through any governmental state of California and you no one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may withdraw at any time.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as revisiting an upsetting adjustment period, flashbacks, or difficult discussions. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being. Veteran counselors will be available to assist you in addressing any potential difficult discussions that cause you to reflect on your combat experience. This study is not focused on the combat experience, but it is reasonable to assume that the topic may arise while discussing cultural diversity regarding the military and civilian employment.

The potential benefit from this study is to assist Gulf-War-era-II veterans in adapting to civilian employment cultures, developing communication skills, and career development goals for long-term employment in the civilian workplace.

**Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 (phone) or Via Text to 838255**



**Potential Follow Up Contact Information:**

Please be advised that there may be one fact checking follow-up call or email after the initial interview. This follow-up call will last no more than 15 minutes.

**Payment:**

This study does not provide any monetary benefit from your participation.

**Privacy:**

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. Data will be kept secure in a multi-level locked safe in a guarded secure location. Data will be kept for a period of at least 7 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-11-17-0064672 and it expires on July 10, 2018.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**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 with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_



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## Appendix F: Interview Question Matrix

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RQ1: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities experienced by Gulf-War-era-II veterans who transitioned into civilian employment?	RQ2: What skills are necessary to navigate the transition from military combat exposure to civilian employment?	RQ3: What are the decision-making experiences of Gulf-War-era-II veterans contribute to the resolution of career problems during their transition into civilian employment roles?
1-.3. Military Facts (Investment/ Assessment/ Development-HCT) (Valuing/ Synthesis-CIP)	X	X	
4. What motivated you to return to work after military service? (Self Regulation/Analysis- Knowing CIP)			X
5. Were there wage differences in comparison to your military pay at separation and your new employment? (Experience and Education vs. Social Input and Earnings-HCT)	X		
6. What were you looking for in a career when you started your new occupation?	X		
7. In what way does the organizational structure relate to	X	X	

teamwork or team building at your company in comparison to the military?			
8. Do you feel that you understand the organizational goals of the company/agency?		X	
9. How did you feel your military experience and education affects your professional aptitude to make decisions in your civilian job? (Organizational Integration-HCT)	X		
10. Have you ever thought about quitting your job or what would make you quit? (Social Efficacy-HCT)  (Valuing/ Communication: Reflection and Evaluation- CIP)			X
11. Based on your education and experience, did you feel that you were capable of fulfilling the position? Why or why not? (Acquiring New Knowledge-HCT) (Communication/ Analysis-CIP)		X	X
12. Are there any differences in the decision-making skills in the military compared to your civilian job? (Acquiring New Knowledge-HCT) (Communication/ Analysis-CIP)	X		X

13. What essential information did you need in your new work environment that prepared you to make informed decisions? (Investment/ Assessment/ Development-HCT)		X	X
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## Appendix G: The National Institute of Health (NIH) Certificate of Completion

