

2019

# Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform Department of Defense Leader Development Policy

Glenn J. Butler  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Glenn Butler

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform Department of Defense Leader  
Development Policy

by

Glenn Butler

MA, American Military University, 2012

BS, Excelsior College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2019

## Abstract

Although there are several robust leader development programs in the U.S. Army, no standardized access to leader development is provided to all service members at the start of their career. Forty-four percent of the Department of Defense (DoD) active duty personnel are 25 years of age or less. Despite this known experience gap, there is a shortfall in policy that ensures standardized access to leader development during this foundational period. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the United States Army Pacific's Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) to inform DoD policy on leader development. The RLDP-P and its unique participant composition provided the conceptual framework and transformational leadership provided the theoretical framework for this study. Semistructured interviews of 16 RLDP-P participants were used to identify scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. Data were analyzed using inductive coding to identify the study's major themes. This study's central research question addressed the RLDP-P's impact on the participants' professional goals. The findings revealed the program inspired participants to create or refine their professional goals, increased their desire for self-development, and motivated them to develop others. Policy recommendations to the DoD for future leader development programs include diversity of mentor engagements in a small group environment and exposure to professional broadening opportunities. These findings will inform future DoD policy on standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my father who is no longer with us, but never forgotten, our talks about your Army career inspired this research. I wish that you could have seen this, Dad. Mom, you are the heart of our family, and I am grateful for your love and support. Mom and Dad Gonzalez, I am so thankful for your daily prayers and love. To my brilliant siblings, I remain so proud of you and am excited to see what God has in store for each of you. To my son Donovan, I hope that you read this one day and add it to a lifetime of lessons on grit that your mother and I have instilled in you. To my beautiful wife Lisette, words can never fully express my gratitude to you. You read and edited every single word of this dissertation and always lovingly demanded my best. The patience, strength, wisdom, and love that you showed throughout this process are the types of acts that great love stories are based upon. You are my daily reminder of just how much God loves me.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

There are over two million active and reserve personnel serving in the United States armed forces (Department of Defense [DoD], 2017). Many of these individuals immediately step into leadership positions after completion of their initial training. As part of this initial training, the DoD provides each recruit standardized access to the technical and tactical aspect of their job through military operational specialty training. Leader development, however, is largely dependent on the commander of the recruits' first unit to have an effective program in place. This unit-level program and its effectiveness are the responsibility of the unit commander. The Demographics Report for the DoD (2016) noted that over 44% of service members are 25 years of age or less. This young population that makes up nearly half of the force inherently possess very little life experience to draw upon when making leadership decisions.

The necessity for leader development at the start of service members' careers is heightened by the inherent levels of responsibility that many new soldiers immediately face. It is not uncommon for a new officer who has recently graduated from college to be in charge of a platoon with 10-20 personnel. The military and many civilian organizations have this personnel challenge in common for their new leaders. For the military, though, it is of heightened importance due to the possibility that these young leaders will also be sent to a combat zone as part of their first duty assignment. With many of these leaders deploying to combat early in their careers, it is a necessity to provide them a solid leader development foundation. The Assessment of Readjustment

Needs of Military Personnel, Veterans, and Their Families found that 45% of the Army soldiers returning from combat were 29 years of age or younger (National Academy of Sciences, 2013). For service members, this gap in development literally has a life or death aspect to it. These new soldiers have the potential to not only be deployed to a combat zone during their first assignment, but they would also be responsible for the lives of the service members of whom they are in charge.

This study focused on gaining an understanding of what service members who participated in an extensive Army leader development program viewed as essential elements of the program that positively impacted their professional goals. Although there are many types of leader development programs, no standardized access to leader development exists in the Army (Schirmer et al., 2008). Researchers have continued to assess the evolution of leader development in the military, but the lack of standardized access to leader development still remains. Kirchner (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of Army veterans that echoed this variance in leader development experiences. Although the respondents praised their overall development as leaders as a result of their military service, they largely were unable to describe the Army's leader development program (Kirchner, 2018). The rapidly changing nature of the threats our military faces requires the DoD to focus on and provide adaptive leader development across the military branches. Straus et al. (2014) assessed that programs such as the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Adaptive Leader Program are addressing this training requirement, but they reach a limited amount of the force.

This research topic was selected to assist in filling this gap in the literature. Ultimately, it may also inform DoD policy to improve the quality of leader development for all service members in the United States military. I focused this qualitative research on the Army as the researched program, the United States Army Pacific's (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P), is an Army-sponsored program. However, the program's participants are from multiple services, not just the Army. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. The findings of this research are applicable to future DoD policy on leader development and not solely Army policy.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study with relevant literature associated with leader development in the military presented as background. I also present the purpose of the study, research problem, and the central research question. The conceptual framework and the theoretical framework of transformational leadership are explained along with its relation to two common leadership styles in the military: transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership. An in-depth review of the study and its assessed significance conclude the chapter.

## **Background**

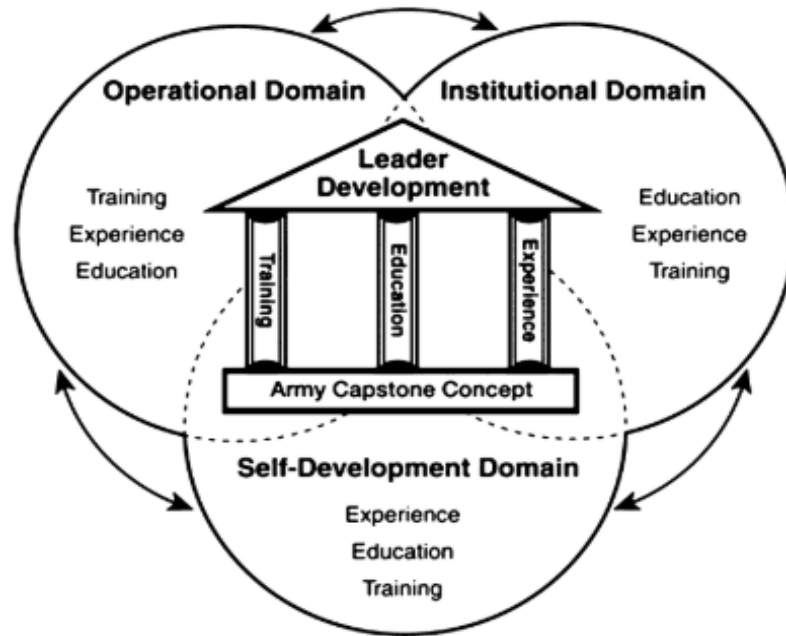
The U.S. Army requires effective leadership at all echelons to accomplish its various missions in defense of the nation. The Army codifies its approach to leader development through published guidance such as the Department of the Army Pamphlet



600-3: Officer Professional Development and Career Management. This guidance serves as a general path for leader development but fails to implement standardized access to development for service members at each organization. This causes a significant inconsistency in the type and quality of leader development that service members receive across the organization (Schirmer et al., 2008). Although researched Army veterans directly linked their leadership ability to their military service, they were largely unable to describe the actual Army leader development program that was in place for their development (Kirchner, 2018). Institutional development through programs such as the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Adaptive Leader Program provide innovative leader development, but that program reaches less than 1% of the force (Straus et al., 2014).

The U.S. Army is a leader-driven organization that depends on a largely decentralized command structure due to its size. As in many civilian organizations, military leaders are given partial autonomy to lead their organization toward the overall mission. That causes an implied requirement to ensure leaders are capable of effectively leading with the given autonomy. According to Development Dimensions International's (2014) research, across the globe organizations spend over \$50 billion annually on leadership development. To address this important requirement, the Army leader development model focuses on three domains of development that are overarching throughout a service member's career. Institutional development, operational development, and self-development compose these domains (Department of the Army, 2017b). Unit-level leader development programs are the first development touchpoint for service members following their initial training. In the foundational years, this

development framework varies in effectiveness for service members because access to leader development is not standardized (Crissman, 2013). The Army leader development model can be viewed in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* The Army leader development model.

### **Problem Statement**

In the Army, service members will potentially deploy to combat during their first duty assignment. Young leaders can quickly find themselves responsible for decisions that impact the lives of the service members they have been placed in charge of. Although there are several robust leader development programs in the Army, none provide standardized access to junior service members. With such a young workforce to which we trust our nation's defense, there is an inherent necessity for leader development

from the start of service members' careers. Despite this known requirement, there is a gap in policy that would ensure leader development is not neglected during the crucial foundational years of nearly half the DoD's service members.

The published guidance on Army leader development places this critical responsibility on unit commanders (Department of the Army, 2017b). Although many young commanders excel in their tactical training programs, they often fail to provide sound, holistic, and comprehensive leader development programs. Schirmer et al. (2008) found that the Army's unit-level leader development activities varied significantly in frequency and quality across the force. Arguably more alarming is the fact that no standardized access to leader development at the unit-level exists for service members (Schirmer et al., 2008). Kirchner's (2018) phenomenological study of Army veterans found that although the military provides extensive leader development opportunities, the research participants were largely unable to describe the Army's leader development program. The current study addressed gaps in existing literature to inform DoD policy on leader development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this interview-driven, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the RLDP-P to inform DoD policy on leader development. Currently, traditional leader development programs for new service members lack standardization of content and implementation in the Army (Schirmer et al., 2008). Study participants shared their experiences from the RLDP-P, and I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the

leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. The identified scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals will inform future DoD policy on leader development. Specifically, the results can be used to inform DoD policy decisions on standardized access to leader development for service members from the start of their careers.

The RLDP-P, targeted to young service members, is unique for the Army. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. The RLDP-P aims to build adaptive leaders across the military branches, and its target participants range from precommissioned college cadets to senior captains. A qualitative study allowed an inductive approach to understanding the individual meanings each assessed participant possessed regarding the RLDP-P and DoD policy on leader development.

### **Research Question**

One research question guided this qualitative research study:

RQ: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals?

I used a phenomenological qualitative study to explore the experiences of participants of the RLDP-P. In this study, I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. The identified emerging themes from

the semistructured interviews will help inform future DoD policy on leader development for service members from the start of their careers.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

In Army and civilian organizations, there is a broad range of leadership techniques. In the Army, the common leadership approaches are consistent with the full range leadership model. Leadership styles range from a passive laissez-faire method, to a transactional approach that is contingent on rewards and punishments, to a transformational approach that motivates and inspires (Bass, Avolio, Berson, & Jung, 2003). Transformational leadership theory provided the framework for this study. Hallmarks of transformational leadership are the ability to inspire trust and loyalty by those who follow the leader and the subsequent placement of individual interests behind those of the group (Clawson, 2012).

The military is dependent on trust between service members and those in positions of authority. Inherent to military service is the potential for life and death decisions. Leadership styles such as transactional leadership, which foster a false sense of loyalty that is dependent on rewards for an action, is not sufficient on its own to garner the level of trust necessitated in combat. Bass's theory of transformational leadership goes beyond a transaction for desired behavior being conducted and inspires the consideration of the organization's interests before that of the individual's interests (Bass, 1990). The tenets of transformational leadership provide a more apt framework for military leader development programs to be rooted in.

Military culture requires a hybrid of leadership styles and the use of transactional methods when appropriate. As in civilian organizations, transactional leadership styles in the military were viewed as effective and essential prior to the introduction of transformational leadership theory (Bass et al., 2003). The progression of leadership theory has led to the evolution of leader development in military organizations. Although relevant studies exist such as the predictive work by Bass et al. (2003) on unit performance, there was limited literature on the necessity to standardize access to leader development from the start of service members' careers. I coded the collected data from the semistructured interviews for emerging themes and viewed them through the lens of transformational leadership. I assessed the emerging themes for congruence with the characteristics of transformational leadership during the data analysis process. As the researcher, I collected the shared experiences of the study participants and identified scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. I describe this framework in detail in Chapter 2.

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was an active duty Army leader development program. The DoD is a large organization that is composed of over two million personnel when including the civilian employees (DoD, 2017). To make the qualitative inquiry manageable, I focused on a program from a single branch of the DoD. The selected program, the RLDP-P, provided access to a participant pool with a unique perspective due to the scope of the program. The RLDP-P, owned and managed by the Army, provided a diverse study population comprising enlisted and officer service

members with varying years of service, both male and female, from diverse career fields, and representative of multiple branches of the military.

The RLDP-P is a highly competitive Army leader development program. The goal of the program is to produce agile and adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. The program targets leaders who are early to mid-career professionals and provides them a robust leadership foundation that is unique in comparison to conventional military courses. The RLDP-P is a three-phase course that takes nearly 1-year to complete. The three phases cover the elements of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) in a comprehensive manner that includes unique engagements with academics, government agencies, and foreign allies. The course also provides senior leaders and academics as mentors to the participants throughout the duration of the program to enhance the engagements and maximize the learning opportunities.

By conceptually framing this research with the RLDP-P, I gained the needed access to a unique and diverse participant pool that has representatives from multiple branches of the DoD. Due to the structure of the military, the DoD has the ability to implement policy across multiple branches. This conceptual framework provided the opportunity to explore the experiences of a variety of service members who participated in the RLDP-P. Study participants provided their experiences from the RLDP-P, and I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. The identified scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the

service members' professional goals will inform future DoD policy on leader development. Specifically, the results will inform DoD policy decisions on standardized access to leader development for service members from the start of their careers.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative method of inquiry for this study. In this interview-driven phenomenological study I explored the experiences of participants of the RLDP-P. Qualitative research provides meaning to the experiences of study participants by seeking to understand the participants' views of a phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A phenomenological study explores and describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology is the study of past experiences according to the perspective of the respective individuals (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989) and the outputs of a phenomenological study present the commonalities of the study participants' shared experiences (Creswell, 2007). I conducted 16 semistructured interviews with participants from the RLDP-P and used a five-question interview guide to fully explore the experiences of the participants. For this phenomenological study, an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the RLDP-P participants was required.

A researcher using a quantitative methodological approach seeks clear and measurable variables to then identify existing relationships from the collected statistical data. Maxwell (2013) explained that in quantitative methodological research, the use of statistical procedures and data measurement is conducted by the researcher. In this study, I used open-ended questions to fully explore the experiences of the study participants.



The use of open-ended questions to answer the research question eliminated consideration for a quantitative or mixed-method research design for this study. This study's design required the exploration of the personal experiences and perspectives of the study participants. Exploring experiences are best achieved using a qualitative research design.

Due to the worldwide assignments of the program's participants, all interviews were conducted via telephone. I collected and then analyzed the data for codes and subsequent themes. I then identified emerging themes for scalable and feasible elements of the program to inform future DoD leader development policy. The emerging themes reflected the experiences of a diverse program population with participants from multiple services, both genders, and representatives from both the officer and enlisted ranks.

Leader development in the military is critical and the continued focus on understanding the allocated efforts to develop leaders supports this. The Army has the Center for Army Leadership as the organization's lead for research on leadership and leader development. The Center for Army Leadership provides the Army its doctrine on leader development and a centralized location for resources to educate and develop military personnel on leadership. One of the means available for a holistic look at a service member's leadership performance is the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback. This provides junior, peer, and supervisor feedback for the service member on their leadership performance for the evaluation period. This tool was a resource to compare participant data to as it is one of the most commonly used leadership evaluation resources

in the Army. As a source document, this provided a common framework for Army leader development performance.

The Center for Army Leadership additionally provides access to the Army Career Tracker. The Army Career Tracker focuses service members on their respective career goals implemented through their Individual Development Plan that is created through the Army Career Tracker. The system additionally connects the service members with their leadership and any selected mentors to whom they have provided access. These feedback and goal orienting mechanisms provided comparative points for emerging themes on leader development activities identified by the study participants.

### **Definitions**

*Department of the Army Pamphlet:* DoD instructional publication that provides written guidance and optional methods of performing missions and functions.

*Full range leadership continuum:* Leadership model developed by Avolio and Bass (2004) expressing the ranges of leadership.

*Institutional development:* Education in the Army that is primarily professional military education or civilian education system, but may include studies within civilian academia. Professional military education and civilian education system are progressive and sequential across a career continuum to ensure that soldiers and Army civilians are successful at each stage of their professional service while continually growing in the competencies and attributes needed for higher levels of service (Department of the Army, 2017b).

*Junior leader:* For the purpose of this study, an Army leader who is a company-grade leader or below. This is comparable to a first line supervisor in civilian organizations.

*Laissez-faire leader:* A leader who provides limited guidance and mostly is absent from the organization (Bass, 1985).

*Leader development:* A deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process of development grounded in the Army values. It grows soldiers and civilians into competent and confident leaders capable of directing teams and organizations to execute decisive action (Department of the Army, 2017a).

*Operational development:* Experience gained through on-the-job training in a variety of challenging assignments and additional duties that prepares officers to lead and train soldiers both in garrison and ultimately in combat. The commander or leader in the unit plays a significant and instrumental role in this area. Commanders and other senior leaders are particularly responsible for mentoring that is vital to the development of junior officers. They introduce the officer to their unit and establish leader development programs (Department of the Army, 2017a).

*Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P):* A unique, three-phase Army leader development program aimed at developing agile and adaptive leaders. The program prepares junior to midgrade enlisted and officer leaders for complex challenges in dynamic environments. The program is sponsored by the USARPAC but trains service members across the DoD who are stationed in the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility.

*Self-development:* Activities that stretch the individual beyond the demands of on-the-job or institutional training. Self-development, consisting of individual study, research, professional reading, practice, and self-assessment, is accomplished via numerous means (studying, observing, and experiencing), and is consistent with a service member's personal self-development action plan and professional goals (Department of the Army, 2017a).

*Service member:* A member of the United States military.

*Transactional leader:* A leader who assigns activities and tasks to followers and motivates individuals by punishment and reward. There is a noticeable chain of command and mostly downward communication (Burns, 1978).

*Transformational leader:* A leader who motivates employees in a way that transcends self-interests for the greater good of the organization (Bass, 1985).

*Unit:* The organization to which the service member is assigned. The Army has several echelons that units fall within such as a battery, which consists of a few hundred soldiers, or a brigade, which consists of multiple units and several thousand soldiers.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I specifically focused on the participants of an Army leader development program, but I assumed the results from this study would be transferable across the DoD to inform DoD policy on unit-level leader development programs. The RLDP-P is comprised of a diverse group of participants from multiple branches of the DoD. I assumed that I would be able to find enough eligible participants who were willing to provide their honest first-hand experiences to improve leader development

policy in the DoD. I assumed that each of the study participants were ambitious professionals who would be interested in improving leader development in the military due to their participation in the RLDP-P.

Due to the anonymized answers of the participants remaining confidential and the absence of any reward contingent on participation, I assumed the participants had no reason to provide false information. I assumed that as active duty service members, all study participants would have been exposed to some form of DoD leader development prior to their participation in the RLDP-P and would have a baseline to compare their program experience to. Lastly, I assumed the results of this study would be beneficial outside of the DoD as well and could inform civilian organizations' approach to leader development. Globally, organizations spend over \$50 billion on leadership development annually according to Development Dimensions International (2014). The necessity to provide effective leader development exists in both the public and private sector.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this research ranged from the founding work on transformational leadership by Burns in 1978 through current research on leader development in both civilian and military organizations. In research, a delimitation narrows the scope of a respective study through boundaries placed on the research. The delimitation for this research narrowed the broader focus on transformational leadership's role in leader development to the perspective of study participants from the Army's RLDP-P. The primary delimitation of the study was that the target population was solely participants of the RLDP-P. The following key search terms were used to review existing research:

Transformational leadership, full range leadership, leader development programs, military leader development, laissez-faire leadership, and transactional leadership. Additionally, source documents of the RLDP-P were used for comparison to the respondent's interviews for additional context.

I developed a five-question interview guide that additionally consisted of five follow-up questions in the event the primary questions received insufficient data. The interview guide assisted in the semistructured collection of data from the study participants. Using the interview guide, I explored the experiences of the study participants to identify scalable and feasible elements of the leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. Additionally, this research will inform future DoD policy on leader development. The results of this study are potentially applicable and transferrable to each military branch and some civilian organizations to inform their respective leader development policies.

### **Limitations**

The two eligibility requirements for the research participants were that they had to (a) be an active duty service member, and (b) have participated in the Army's RLDP-P. These purposeful sampling requirements ensured the participants were able to provide valid information on the research topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Access to participants was a limitation of the study. Study participants were all active duty service members assigned to varying duty stations around the world. During my role as the researcher, I was stationed abroad as an active duty service member. This limited my in-person access

to many of the service members in the participant pool and required the use of telephone for the interviews and e-mail communication for participant recruitment.

Sample size was also a limitation as there were only 3 years' worth of participants in this program. The size of the program cohorts varied. Over the 3 years, there were between 20 and 40 in each cohort spread out over three phases for a 1-year period. There were just over 100 total service members who were in the available participant pool for this study. To mitigate this limitation, I contacted all eligible participants from the RLDP-P for participation in the research.

My role as an inexperienced researcher was also a limitation as the interview-driven qualitative methodological design is vulnerable to researcher bias. Bias in qualitative research threatens the research validity (Maxwell, 2013). My limited experience in facilitating interviews was mitigated by strict adherence to the semistructured interview design to ensure I avoided projecting my own impressions and focused strictly on exploring the experiences of the study participants. To strengthen my interview capabilities, I used the interview techniques presented by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Patton (2015).

### **Significance of the Study**

When counting the 742,000 civilian personnel and 826,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists, the DoD is the largest employer in the United States, totaling over 2.8 million people (DoD, 2017). The findings of this research could strengthen the DoD and its military branches from their foundations and improve the quality of service members for generations to come. The findings of this study have potential policy implications for

the DoD as they can inform the policy and research gaps in standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers. As previously noted, research has shown that there is no standardized approach to leader development in the Army at the unit-level (Schirmer et al., 2008). The leader development experience and opportunities of each service member varies due to this. Though the study participants were from the Army, the data will be pertinent for each of the U.S. military departments.

The current study has the potential for what Yob and Brewer (n.d.) referred to as the ripple effect. Yob and Brewer (n.d.) explained that change can start with one person, and the effects of their actions can then spread to others to generate desired social change. Similarly, the results of this study will potentially indirectly impact those in the service members' sphere of influence such as their close friends and family. Through improving the DoD leader development policies, the personal and professional gains from leader development now becomes shared with those in a service member's reference group. In addition, many service members join the civilian workforce at completion of their careers and these associated leader development improvements will benefit the civilian organizations they transition to. Harrell and Berglass (2012) found in their research on businesses' perspectives on hiring veterans that many actively sought to hire veterans and referenced their leadership ability as a key factor. Most importantly, Army leaders in combat make decisions that have life or death implications for their followers. The improved decision-making capability from leader development can translate to a reduction in service members lost.



## **Summary**

Chapter 1 provided the background for this study and clearly outlined the research problem. Although the Army does emphasize leader development, I presented the existing gap in DoD policy and research for standardized access to unit-level leader development programs. Additionally, I presented the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study and the primary definitions associated with this research. I also presented the limitations, assumptions, and significance of this study in this chapter. The presented facts show the potential for social change from which our service members and, indirectly, their reference groups can benefit through this research. In Chapter 2, I present an in-depth literature review of the relevant studies and literature surrounding transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### **Introduction**

Military leaders must be adaptive and prepared to lead soldiers in a complex environment (Department of the Army, 2015) because military leaders from the start of their careers can be required to make decisions that have life or death implications. Currently, traditional leader development programs for new service members lack standardization of content and implementation in the Army (Schirmer et al., 2008). Although explored experiences of Army veterans revealed that the Army's use of observed and experienced leadership opportunities was perceived as an effective leader development tool, many veterans did not understand the Army's formal leader development components (Kirchner, 2018). This can largely be attributed to the widely varying implementation and access to leader development at the unit-level.

The purpose of this interview-driven, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the United States Army Pacific's (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) to inform DoD policy on leader development. Study participants shared their experiences from the RLDP-P, and I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals. The shared leader development experiences from the participant pool were viewed through the leadership continuum model (Avolio & Bass, 2004) that describes leadership on a scale from completely passive (*laissez-faire* leadership) to inspirational means of motivation (transformational leadership). The

leadership continuum model is relevant to this research as it encompasses the three approaches to leadership commonly displayed in the military. Varying factors such as leadership positions held and lessons learned from previous leadership are some of the factors that influence the type of leadership styles displayed by leaders in the military.

In this chapter, I provide an explanation of the literature search strategies applied. This will focus primarily on transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) but will also provide an overview of the full range leadership continuum (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The full range leadership continuum review will include laissez-faire leadership and transactional leadership in relation to transformational leadership. This perspective is necessary to provide context for the three leadership styles most commonly encountered in the military and experienced by the study participants during their military careers. The dominant leadership style displayed during the RLDP-P is identified as an output from the shared experiences of the research participants. Lastly, I present these three leadership theories in direct relation to Army application in training to identify existing gaps in research.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

In this literature review I conducted an in-depth search of leadership theory with a focus on transformational leadership. I additionally conducted a detailed search of transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership theories. The search ranged from founding works on transformational leadership theory to current studies published through 2019. The literature search was exhaustive and included materials ranging from peer-reviewed articles on organizational leadership to military studies that provide a

multinational perspective on the full range leadership continuum. Although there is a wealth of academic material on leader development published, there is very little that focuses on the necessity for standardized access to leader development. When considering this void for studies relating to the Army specifically, this gap in literature becomes even greater.

I reviewed the progression of transformational leadership theory by its origins from its seminal theorists in order to provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Next, I assessed the peer-reviewed works that represented significant contributions to the development of the theory from its origins to its current applications in leader development theory. The sources of information provided in this literature review include theoretical texts, scholarly studies, dissertations, professional military literature, and DoD websites.

The databases searched included Military & Government Collection, Business Source Complete, Political Science Complete, and PsycINFO. Additionally, I used military databases that required DoD common access card access such as the Center for Army Lessons Learned archives. This provided access to military research and professional articles maintained on DoD websites. The dates for the literature search ranged from 1943 to 2019. The following terms were the primary search parameters, but I did not limit the literature search to them. The following key search terms were primarily used to explore the databases: *military leader development*, *military entry training*, *laissez-faire leadership*, *transactional leadership*, and *transformational*

*leadership*. The searches, using variations of the terms, offered 265 articles with 65 articles producing material relevant to the study.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Transformational leadership theory provided the theoretical foundation for this research. When researching published work on leadership theories, Judge and Piccolo (2004) found transformational leadership to be the most researched leadership theories in recent decades. While expounding upon the formative and foundational work of Burns (1978), Bass (1985) described transformational leadership as a method of influencing followers by the incorporation of motivational and inspirational practices.

Transformational leaders possess the ability to move those who follow them beyond their own singular concerns of self-interest and inspire them to consider the needs of the organization. They achieve this through idealized influence, providing a source of inspiration for those they lead, and through intellectual stimulation.

Transformational leaders are capable of raising the mindset of individuals to shift an individualistic approach to one that nests with organizational goals and values (Bass, 1999). Research on military officers' integration of character into leadership functions echoed this noting that holistic leader development necessitates the use of transformational leadership (Sosik, Arenas, Chun, & Ziya, 2018). In the military, it is imperative that service members trust and believe in their leadership. Military leaders train their service members to conduct their jobs for combat operations in which they will likely be placed in harm's way. Alvinus, Johansson, and Larsson (2017) noted the importance of organizational commitment for service members due to the inherent risk

associated with combat operations. This level of commitment cannot be sustained through a transactional leadership approach alone and necessitates the inclusion of a transformational leadership approach. This is the primary consideration for transformational leadership theory providing the framework for this study.

Leaders who view their followers individually and provide individualized guidance rather than generic direction for their entire team demonstrate associated behaviors of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders have the ability to not only identify individual needs of those they lead, but they see those elements as an opportunity to motivate through fulfillment of those needs (Burns, 1978). Williams (1994) echoed this, noting that transformational leaders display behaviors such as altruism and motivate those they lead with these same values. In addition to effectively and clearly promoting the goals and mission of the organization, a transformational leader will also acknowledge the successes of those he leads and display role modeling behaviors. These behaviors have been linked to higher performance, including in political leadership (Burns, 1978).

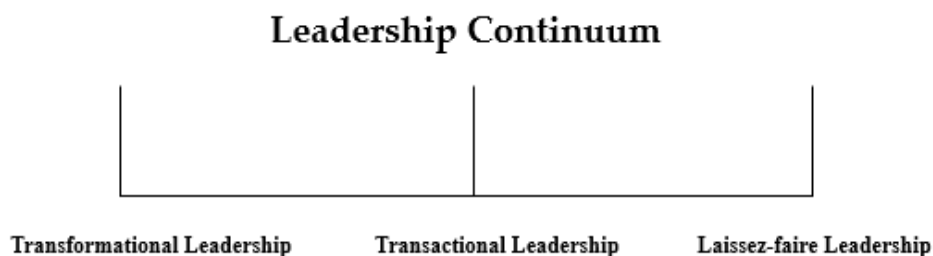
The foundation of transformational leadership was developed originally by Burns (1978) who introduced the concept as transforming leadership in his award-winning work *Leadership*. Burns largely spoke in terms of political context in his initial work, but his concept of transformational leadership has broad application in today's world. Studies and practical application of transformational theory can be found in industries that depend on leaders generating profits through sales as well as in military contexts. Transformational leadership truly covers the entire spectrum.

When looking at transformational leadership theory, Bass (1985) identified four components of transformational leadership that are known as the four I's of leadership:

1. Individualized consideration: Leaders pay attention to each individual's need for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor. Followers are developed to successively higher levels of potential. New learning opportunities are created along with a supportive climate in which to grow. Individual differences in terms of needs and desires are recognized.
2. Idealized influence: These leaders are admired, respected, and trusted. Followers identify with and want to emulate their leaders. Among the things the leader does to earn credit with followers is to consider followers' needs over the leader's own needs. The leader shares risks with followers and is consistent in conduct with underlying ethics, principles, and values.
3. Intellectual stimulation: Leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. There is no ridicule or public criticism of individual members' mistakes. New ideas and creative solutions to problems are solicited from followers, who are included in the process of addressing problems and finding solutions.
4. Inspirational motivation: Leaders behave in ways that motivate those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Individual and team spirit is aroused. Enthusiasm and optimism are displayed. The

leader encourages followers to envision attractive future states, which they can ultimately envision for themselves.

Transformational leadership cannot be discussed in a holistic manner without providing comparative context through the full range leadership continuum model. In addition to transformational leadership, transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership exist on Bass' (1985) full range leadership continuum.



*Figure 2.* Leadership continuum.

The full range leadership continuum describes leadership styles that are distinct, but leaders have the ability to demonstrate more than one style. This selection of leadership style can be situation and personality dependent. Although a leader might prefer to interact with the followers in a transformational manner, in a time sensitive scenario, a transactional leadership approach might be the appropriate method to achieve the desired result. With transformational leadership composing one of the polar limits of the continuum, transactional leadership is placed in the middle.

Burns (1978) developed transactional leadership theory in addition to transformational leadership theory while assessing political leadership. Much like its name suggests, transactional leadership is a contingent relationship between the leader



and follower that is more aptly characterized as management than leadership. Where transformational leadership seeks to motivate through inspiration, transactional leadership depends on rewards and punishments. The clear establishment of goals and the structure in place regarding the work environment is a strength of transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). Where Burns' (1978) work largely separated the two leadership theories, Bass' (1985) expansion on this work noted that in the best leaders a dual demonstration of the two leadership styles is displayed as appropriate. Avolio (1999) echoed this argument and noted that the foundation or base of transformational leadership dynamics are the transactions from transactional leadership.

A problem associated with transactional leadership is that success is dependent on task accomplishment and does not provide leadership focus on the development of their subordinates (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2007). The inspirational engagement that links employee self-interests with that of the organization does not exist in a transactional dynamic. Transactional leadership is an exchange-based relationship between the leader and the subordinates (Kane & Tremble, 2000). The supervised individual is not acting from inspiration but is performing for a reward or to avoid a punishment. This has led to transactional engagement by leaders and followers to be considered task-related, whereas transformational leadership contrasts with its inspirational motivation and individualized consideration (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996).

This dynamic becomes even further complex when considering the necessity for a leader to be able to control the rewards and punishments that are the core of the transactional leadership approach. A transactional leader is inevitably setup for failure

when that leader is unable to provide the outlined rewards that was promised to the followers. If an employee's only motivation was an increase in pay or a promotion, but the leader is unable to actually provide those items when they are earned, then the leader will lose the trust and the effort of that employee. Avolio and Bass (2004) explained that a transactional leader's failure to meet the self-interests of employees will limit even minimal achievement of desired outcomes.

Transactional leadership has two subcategories that necessitate discussion for its place in the evolving leadership theory. Passive management-by-exception and active management-by-exception (Avolio & Bass, 2004). These two differentiators for transactional leadership provide fidelity based on the level of interaction displayed by the leader with the followers (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2015). On the active side, the leader bases their interaction on when it is necessitated due to circumstances such as providing initial standards for a task and then conducting follow-up interactions in the event that employees fail to meet a goal. Leadership using an active management-by-exception approach will monitor employee activity for any deviation from the standard or associated errors, and then implement the punishment to correct the action (Bass, 1985). This is coercive in nature and supports the task-oriented dynamic of transactional leadership. Passive management-by-exception takes an approach of avoidance. The leader does not have consistent engagement or overwatch of employees. In a passive approach, the leader limits engagement with employees to the point of an actual problem arising that forces their engagement. This approach to leadership is considered more management than it is actual leadership (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007).

There are several factors that have led to the increased usage of transformational leadership and the reduction in effectiveness of a solely transactional leadership approach. A generational shift in perspective is one of those factors identified. Bass (1999) explained that a shift in how parents raise their children to view authority has played a role in the transition from transactional to transformational leadership in many industries. Bass noted that in the 1950s, in the United States, it was much more common for parents to teach their children to respect authority and to not question those in positions of authority. This respect for authority that was instilled in children translated to the interaction with organizations that employed them as adults. With a shift in culture regarding the propensity to teach children to question authority when necessary, Bass (1999) argued convincingly that skepticism has replaced the unquestioning loyalty to an organization that existed in the 1950s.

This evolution extended to the needs of the workforce. Employers needed leaders who were adaptive to dynamic environments. An adaptive leader works with those he leads to address the organization's complex problems in a creative manner. An adaptive leader additionally seeks to develop their followers to handle a wide variety of leadership responsibilities (Bennis, Spreitzer, & Cummings, 2001). This addresses the intellectual stimulation that is indicative of transformational leadership but is absent in the contingent relationship of transactional leaders and their followers (Bass et al., 2003).

The other end of the continuum is laissez-faire leadership. This leadership style contrasts entirely with transformational leadership with its hands-off approach. Laissez-faire leadership is considered absent leadership (Yukl, 2010; Judge & Piccolo, 2004),

takes a nonintervention approach, and removes much of the interaction between leader and follower that is resident in transactional and transformational leadership (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2015). This hands-off approach largely removes the feedback and development aspect of the interaction with those who are led (Yukl, 2010). As a result of this, laissez-faire leadership tends to be the least effective.

This approach is dependent on employees being self-sustaining in order to solve problems as the leader is not engaged to provide guidance or support through decision making. This lack of engagement of a laissez-faire leader logically translates to a negative impact on both results for the leader and the performance of the followers. In addition to increased stress, role conflict, and reduced job dissatisfaction are characteristic of laissez-faire leadership environments. This can partially be attributed to the absence of both feedback and rewards in this leadership style (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2015). Comparatively, a close correlation between follower consideration and transformational leadership provided positive predictors of employee satisfaction (Piccolo et al., 2012).

The comparison of the full range leadership continuum theories shows that at times elements overlap each other as situations and personalities adjust. Transactional leadership provides a structure that favors routine taskings. For daily operations that are considered routine tasks, a leader will most likely employ a transactional approach and receive favorable results. When a dynamic aspect of an environment influences an organization and its decision making, that is when transformational leadership provides a more effective option. The polar opposite of this logic is the hands-off approach found in

laissez-faire scenarios and the reduction in performance by both the leader and the follower. Table 1 compares the characteristics of the leadership theories in the full range leadership model.

Table 1

*Comparisons of Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Theories*

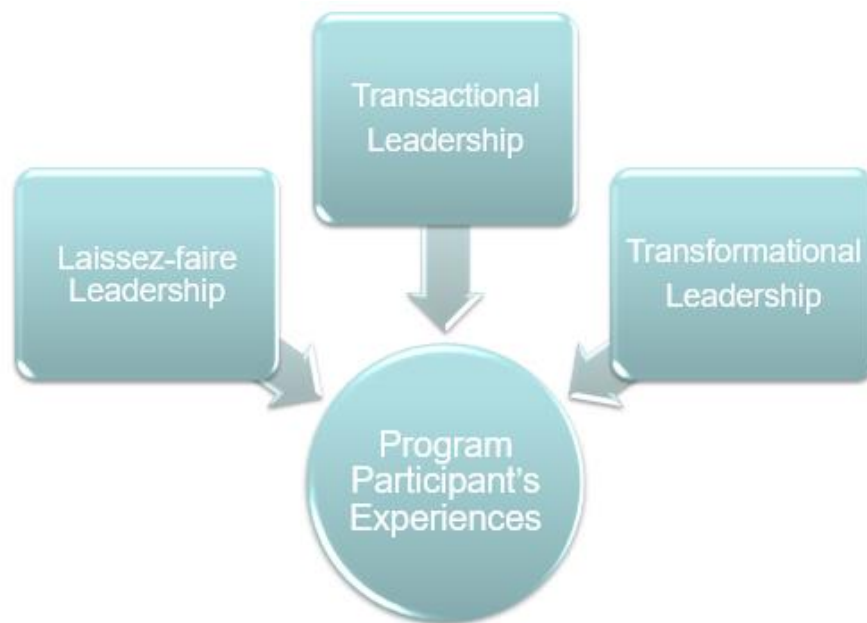
Transformational leadership	Transactional leadership	Laissez-faire leadership
Idealized influence	Contingent reward	Laissez-faire
Inspirational motivation	Constructive transactions	Minimal engagement
Intellectual stimulation	Passive and active management by exception	Hands-off leadership
Individualized consideration		

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework I selected for this phenomenological study was an active duty Army leader development program. The research was conducted in an Army garrison/ noncombat deployment work environment. Although transformational leadership theory provided the theoretical lens for this study, the remaining two elements of the full range leadership model (transactional and laissez-faire leadership) were relevant as the three theories compose the most common leadership styles applied in the military. The DoD is a large organization that is composed of over two million personnel when including the civilian employees (DoD, 2017). The Army composes 36% of the entire DoD and is the largest branch of the military (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018).

To make this qualitative inquiry manageable, a program from a single branch of the DoD was the focus.

The selected Army managed program is the RLDP-P. The Army was selected, because even though there are representatives from other branches of the DoD that participate in the RLDP-P, the program is owned by the Army. Additionally, the preponderance of attendees to the program are Army soldiers. The program provided access to a variety of service members with varying rank, ages, time in service, gender, and duty-station experience. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. Figure 3 depicts the conceptual framework for this study.



*Figure 3.* Conceptual framework.

The RLDP-P is a highly competitive Army leader development program. The program targets leaders who are early to mid-career professionals and provides them a robust leadership foundation that is unique in comparison to conventional military courses. The RLDP-P is a three-phase course that takes nearly 1 year to complete. The three phases cover the elements of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) in a comprehensive manner that includes unique engagements with academics, government agencies, and foreign allies. The course also provides senior leaders and academics as mentors to the participants throughout the duration of the program to enhance the engagements and maximize the learning opportunities.

Phase I provides the participants an immersive experience in strategic and critical thinking with a focus on the Indo-Pacific Theater of Operations for the DoD. For nearly two weeks, the participants are engaged by a variety of subject matter experts such as strategic level military leaders in the Indo-Pacific and academics from think tanks that specialized in the Indo-Pacific Theater of Operations. Phase II provides the participants an in-depth and in-person perspective from the National level of power. The participants are flown to locations such as Washington D.C. to engage with leaders from organizations such as the State Department, the United Nations, and military leaders at the Pentagon. The capstone of the RLDP-P is Phase III where participants travel to countries of strategic significance to the United States' interests in the Indo-Pacific region such as Japan, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. During this phase, participants engage partner nation leaders in each aspect of the elements of national power such as port authority

officials in Sri Lanka to discuss the global economic impacts of increased trade flowing through Sri Lankan ports.

In each of these phases, the military senior leader and civilian subject matter expert mentors add a depth to each learning engagement that could only be gleaned from the years of experience that each ascertained over the course of their respective careers. Unique elements of the program such as the focus on mentor engagement are aspects of the RLDP-P that made it a feasible selection for the conceptual framework.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

For this study, I conducted a review of the relevant research conducted in relation to the full range of leadership model. Much of the relevant literature focused on transformational leadership as well as transactional leadership in a variation of frameworks and study populations and provided insight into the variation of research methodologies used to form existing literature. The seminal theorist for transformational leadership is James M. Burns. Burns (1978) used a qualitative research design to assess political leaders largely through historical documents and biographies. Burns analyzed the source documents surrounding the selected political leaders and then identified common themes between the political leaders as part of the coding process.

From the identified common themes Burns (1978) was able to assess the differences between the political leaders according to the data. This also informed his understanding and the formation of the transformational leadership theory. In addition to transformational leadership theory, qualitative inquiry through inductive reasoning supported Burns' formation of transactional leadership theory as well. With both



leadership theories being new, Burns' selection of qualitative inquiry for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon was an effective method of inquiry. As the emerging themes were identified for the selected political leaders, the two distinct theories emerged and have both been remained foundational for leadership theory. It is necessary to highlight the lens in which Burns' viewed these two leadership styles. Burns (1978) focused on the exchange between leaders and followers as the differentiator between transactional and transformational leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Where transformational leaders provide their subordinates a deeper purpose that nests with their needs as well as that of the organization, transactional leaders providing a contrasting interaction focused simply on an exchange between the leader and subordinate (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987).

Bass' (1985) work on organizational management took the seminal work on transformational leadership conducted by Burns (1978) and moved the theory forward by creating the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ assesses the full range of leadership and measures the type and frequency that the assessed leader uses. Bass' (1985) MLQ was pivotal in expressing that there is not a singular method of leadership style being leveraged, but that each effective leader's respective profile contains both transactional and transformational factors. Waldman, Bass, and Yammarino (1990) referred to this as augmentation, as the elements of transformational leadership are used to increase the results of transactional leadership. Where Burns' (1978) seminal work was qualitative, Bass (1985) conducted a quantitative research design in forming the MLQ. Bass assigned numerical values to the eight question MLQ

and derived his measurements on the usage of transformational and transactional leadership from the corresponding data.

Additionally, Bass (1985) differentiated his stance from Burns (1978) on the perspective of transformational and transactional leadership being on opposite ends of a leadership continuum. Bass argued that there is an inherent linkage between the two leadership theories. Bass (1985) explained that the best leaders will have a combination of the leadership approaches as appropriate. A comparison of the two leadership styles provide a positive correlation (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). Howell and Avolio (1993) argued that transformational and transactional leadership play a complimentary role for effective leaders. Baskarada, Cromarty, and Watson (2016) echoed this perspective of balanced leadership and demonstrated a coexistence of the two leadership styles versus a polarization of them. In their inductive analysis of senior officials from the Australian Defence Force, a clear usage of both leadership styles was observed and the ability to balance their usage as necessary.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) remains one of the most significant enhancements of Burns' (1978) theories. Studies have been conducted to confirm the validity and the reliability of the MLQ. One of these studies was conducted by Lowe et al. (1996), a meta-analysis that consisted of 75 research studies composed of various source documents such as journals and technical reports. The MLQ is used heavily by researchers for civilian organizations and has been tested in military contexts as well. Relevant studies that focused specifically on standardized access to leader development in the military were limited, but those that were available provided useful

data. In their meta-analysis of nearly 40 studies leveraging the MLQ (Avolio et al., 1999), Lowe et al. (1996) analyzed transformational and transactional leadership into five dimensions. Their research found that the two transactional leadership dimensions produced overall validities of .41 for the contingent reward dimension and .05 for the management by exception dimension. Comparatively the remaining three analyzed transformational leadership dimensions produced an overall validity range of .71 for charisma to .60 for intellectual stimulation. Lowe et al. (1996) found that leaders in public sector organizations produced a notably higher validity, but that this variance showed minimal fluctuation with increased leadership levels within the respective public organizations.

Bass et al. (2003) used the MLQ to predict Army unit performances based on their usage of transformational and transactional leadership. The researchers assessed each participant before they conducted a large military training exercise and from the results of their MLQ, the researchers sought to predict how the teams would perform. The target audience was entry-level leadership so this provided relevant data as the majority of studies focused on service members who were at least a Captain or above and often times, post-command. These factors speak to the time in service that the participants already have. The MLQ proved to be reliable in predicting both positive and negative performances based on the type of leadership displayed. This includes differentiating between the effects of passive and active transactional leadership styles (Bass et al., 2003). Figure 4 depicts the full range of leadership model.

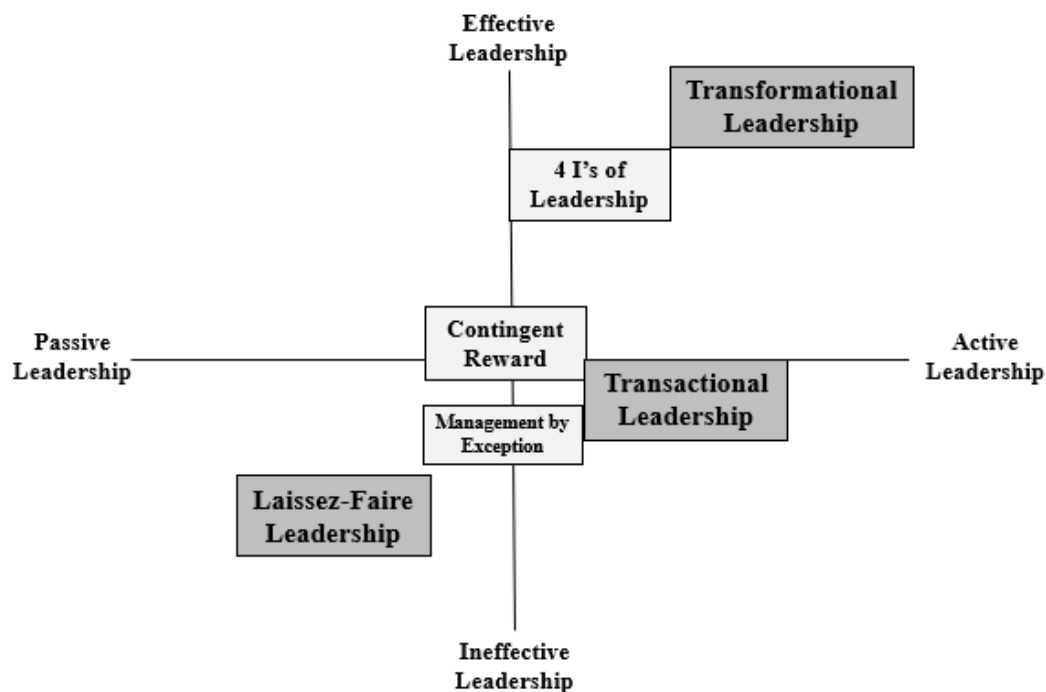


Figure 4. Full range of leadership model.

### Leadership Theory and the Military

Research has found that the Army's unit-level leader development varies significantly in frequency and quality across the force (Schirmer et al., 2008). The nonprofit Research and Development Arroyo Center research team conducted a 450 Army officer mixed-method study on the Army's unit-level leader development programs. The researchers used the conceptual framework of a garrison environment and collected data from their participants primarily during their attendance at military academic institutions such as the National Defense University and the Army War College. Many had combat experience and enough operational experience to have been a unit commander also known as post-command officers.

A mixture of interviews and questionnaires were used for the data collection. Several significant outputs resulted from the research. Besides the operational experience gained from positions held, role models and personal interaction were found as valuable leader development tools to the participants. Research found that the unit commander played a significant role in the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the participants' leader development experience (Schirmer et al., 2008). This coincides with Army doctrine that outlines leader development programs as the responsibility of the unit commander (Department of the Army, 2017b). Overall, the most significant output of the study is the fact that no standardized access to leader development at the unit level exists for service members (Schirmer et al., 2008). This gap for standardized access to leader development at the unit-level remains a cause for continued research to inform DoD policy on leader development.

In the United States military, 82% of the active duty service members are enlisted personnel (DoD, 2016). This is a significant point to keep in mind for military studies. The existing literature on leader development heavily focuses on the perspective of officers although they make up less than 20% of the overall force. Kirchner (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of Army lower enlisted veterans that echoed Schirmer et al.'s (2008) findings on the variance in leader development experiences. The researcher explored the leader development experiences of the veterans from their time in service through participant provided leader autobiographies and in-person interviews.

The purposeful sample included ten veterans with 5 years or less time in service. Although the respondents praised their overall development as leaders as a result of their

military service, they largely were unable to describe the Army's leader development program (Kirchner, 2018). The narratives from the participants showed widely varying leader development experiences at their respective units and it can be seen that this contributed to the participants' inability to describe with any detail the fundamental framework of the Army's leader development program. The narratives also demonstrated a perceived strength in leadership ability following their military service that they attributed to their time in service despite lack of understanding for the formal leader development process (Kirchner, 2018). The RLDP-P is comprised of both enlisted and officer service members so I explored the perspective and experiences of both sides in the current study.

The military has a traditionally transactional approach to leadership largely due to its dependence on standard operating procedures (SOP). These SOPs allow a large organization like the Army to function with the accomplishment of routine activities without them becoming more of a resource drain than necessary. O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) refer to this as a mechanistic management system and explain that they suit a stable environment. This is where the value of transactional leadership truly resides in the military. There are sustaining functions that must occur that do not require much creativity or problem solving in order to accomplish them. These tasks require structure and guidance to be provided by a leader and then a follow-up to ensure that these standard tasks are being completed to standard.

This dynamic between leaders in the Army and the soldiers for the completion of standard tasks is textbook transactional leadership. It is argued among scholars that

different leadership styles can be necessitated by varied circumstances (Yukl, 2012). This argument is relevant in military context. As junior leaders are trained, it is important to develop them to understand that different scenarios necessitate different leadership approaches. The dynamic challenges an Army leader will face in complex combat and training environments will differ from the largely standard activities required covered by SOPs. It is at this point that an understanding of transformational leadership is required.

The Australian Defence Force recognized the necessity to use varying leadership styles as appropriate. Baskarada et al. (2016) explained that their qualitative research of senior officials from the Australian Defence Force led to a consensus in diverse usage and belief in a balance of transactional and transformational leadership styles. The researchers referred to it as ambidexterity of leadership. Brandt, Laitinen, and Laitinen (2016) explained that internal and external factors impact the respective leadership style chosen by leaders. Baskarada et al. (2016) conducted semistructured interviews with 11 senior leaders, each with decades of experience, and explored their approach to promoting ambidexterity of leadership in their organizations and its ties to transformational and transactional leadership. The research demonstrated the value in balancing the type of leadership leveraged and coincides with Bass' (1985) findings on balancing leadership.

Trottier, Van Wart, and Wang (2008) found in their research on transformational leadership in the federal government that both transactional and transformational leadership were perceived by study participants as important. This ambidexterity of

leadership also translated to the delegation of responsibilities as well. In order to allow them to focus on the level of decisions appropriate for their strategic positions, they had to effectively delegate standard actions to their deputies and assistants. This action freed them up from transactional aspects and allowed them to operate more so in a transformational realm Baskarada et al. (2016). This approach to leadership shows foresight and speaks to the individual and organizational learning these leaders have gained in a strategic context (Baskarada, Shrimpton, & Ng, 2016).

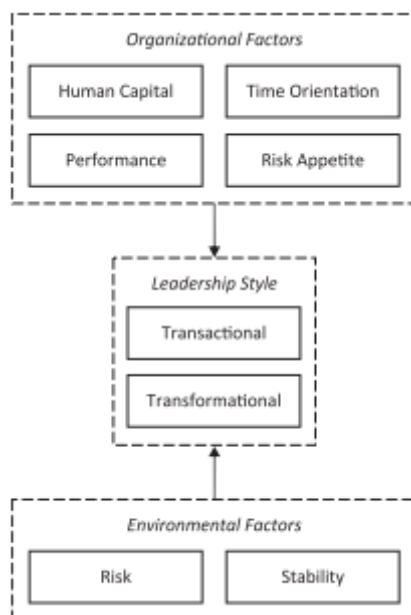
Leader development and the ability to conduct it is a skill that is developed. Steinberg and Leaman (1990) conducted a task analysis to ensure the tasks and skills that were being taught in military leader development programs coincided with the requirements that the service member's future military positions would require of them. 200 service members from the enlisted and officer ranks were selected for interviews to collect the data that the analysis instrument was developed from. Once the instrument was created, over 5,000 officers and nearly 6,000 noncommissioned officers (NCOs) were interviewed across the DoD.

The scope of Steinberg and Leaman's (1990) study was broad and included additional tasks beyond leader development, but the leadership outputs were relevant literature to the current study. The study produced 560 different tasks that fell within four broad categories: (a) train, teach, and develop, (b) motivate, (c) resource, and (d) provide direction. There are elements of each that touch on leader development in the military. Although an analysis of job tasks is beneficial in identifying what is being done in positions by service members, Fallesen, Keller-Glaze, and Curnow (2011)



demonstrated that it lacks the fidelity of what should be done in these respective positions. Overall, there were nine performance factors identified by the task analysis as required for officers and ten performance factors identified as required for NCO and five of those resulting factors were identified to be common for officers and NCOs.

One aspect of the military that is universal is the assessing and mitigation of risk. Although the loss of revenue and market share are the primary considerations for many organizations, the Army weighs risk largely in terms of lives. Personnel is the most important resource the military has. Technology and advanced weaponry do not do anything for a military force that does not have the personnel that can effectively leverage those resources. Risk mitigation must be factored into the balance of leadership styles when considering the context of military action. The relationship of these factors can be seen in Figure 5. Combat and their respective training environments are complex and dynamic. Since one of the risks that the Army weighs is human capital, a conservative transactional leadership approach is considered by leaders even if the preferred method is transformational. This is also true when considering the delegation of authority in the military. The structure and rigor provided by transactional leadership is a method of risk mitigation and safety (Baskarada et al., 2016).



*Figure 5.* Adapted from “Balancing Transactional and Transformational Leadership,” by Baskarada et al., 2016.

Although the U.S. Army is larger than the Australian Defence Force, these principles of necessitating balance of leadership hold true. Army doctrine highlights that a leader development program should create agile and competent leaders, while increasing expertise (Department of the Army, 2015). To achieve this, the leader development program must be holistic. The military must be intentional with what it provides through its leader development programs because the touchpoints are limited. Much of the development for military leaders is acquired through operational knowledge that is gained through experience and self-development. Larsson et al. (2006) conducted a multinational study of leader development for junior officers. The study consisted of five participant nations and 50 total officers. The participant pool for this grounded

theory study was selected based on their wide variety of experience (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Larsson et al. (2006) used semistructured interviews for their data collection in this inductive study with prepared follow-up questions to explore the leadership experiences of the participants. This same approach to data collection was used in the current study because it effectively provided participants the opportunity to share the full breadth of their experiences.

Larsson et al. (2006) found similar findings to Schirmer et al. (2008) and Kirchner (2018) regarding the varied leader development experience of the participants. With only ten of the study participants being from the United States military, this demonstrated that the lack of standardization for unit-level leader development is experienced by the four other participant nations as well. Another significant output of the study is that the professional reference group of the participants which is composed of their subordinates, peers, and seniors, play the central role in the participant's leader development and not necessarily a formal program (Larsson et al., 2006). Again, the variance in experience of leader development programs by unit makes this problematic as at one organization the experience can be minimal while another organization can provide a robust program depending on the unit commander. The core of the study participant's leader development experiences was also supplemented with personal resources which coincides with the Army's self-development pillar in the leader development model (Department of the Army, 2017a). The foundation for leadership skills such as understanding how and when to balance leadership styles is something, that for many, is

not intuitive. This needs to be honed from the start of service members' careers through standardized leader development.

With multiple pillars composing the Army's leader development model, solely assessing leader development programs without using studies on self-development and institutional development for comparison would provide an incomplete picture. The collective of these approaches to military leader development are needed to provide substantial comparison points for the RLDP-P shared experiences provided by the study participants. Larsson et al. (2006) demonstrated the complexity of military leader development through their multinational research showing that these challenges transcended national borders. The effective leveraging of institutional development and self-development is a necessity for leader development. These functions are complimented by the lessons learned by service members at their organization through job performance and leader development programs.

### **Summary**

The literature demonstrates that although transactional leadership is not ideal for many leadership situations, it has relevant usage in an organization like the military which is heavily dependent on routine tasks being accomplished. Transactional leadership removes the need for autonomy in these situations and allows standard operating procedures to be the guiding force for military operations in those situations. However, transformational leadership theory addresses the complex leadership dynamics that are required to lead outside of routine operations. Assessing military leadership styles provides a look at each element of the full range leadership model from the hands-

off approach of laissez-faire leadership to the inspirational leadership provided through transformational leadership (Bass et al., 2003). Key studies on the impacts of transformational leadership on military unit performances demonstrated the utility of transformational leadership for military organizations (Bass et al, 2003; Larsson et al., 2006). However, the gap exists in policy that ensures standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers (Schirmer et al., 2008).

Researchers have continued to assess the evolution of leader development in the military, but the lack of standardized access to leader development still remains. The findings of the current study will assist in filling the gap in literature and will inform future DoD policy on leader development.

In Chapter 2, I provided an in-depth literature review of the relevant studies and literature surrounding transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. I also provided a review of the seminal works on transformational leadership theory for the theoretical framework and the literature related to key characteristics of this study. Additionally, I presented the full range leadership model with literature and significant studies for context, as well as the key studies that support this research. In Chapter 3, I present a detailed description of the research methods used and the rationale for this study. Additionally, I provide a detailed examination of the role of the researcher, the methodology, and any issues of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

### **Introduction**

Many service members find themselves acclimating to their new lives in the military while they are simultaneously learning their roles as leaders. It is not uncommon for a new officer who has recently graduated from college to be in charge of a platoon with 10-20 soldiers. The necessity for leader development at the start of service members' careers is heightened by the inherent levels of responsibility that many new leaders immediately face. The military and many civilian organizations have this personnel challenge in common. For the military, though, it is of heightened importance due to the possibility that these young leaders will also be sent to a combat zone as part of their first duty assignment. These leaders must be adaptive and prepared to lead soldiers in a complex environment (Department of the Army, 2015). This means in the most literal sense that service members from the start of their careers can be required to make decisions that have life or death implications.

The purpose of this interview-driven, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the United States Army Pacific's (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) to inform DoD policy on leader development. In this study, I sought to understand the elements of the program that positively impacted the professional goals of the participants. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. Study participants shared their

experiences from the RLDP-P, and I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the leader development program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals.

In the following chapter, I present and document the techniques and methodology used to conduct this qualitative research study. Additionally, I present the study's purpose, research design, rationale, and the role of the researcher. The chapter concludes with the research methodology used for this study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

One research question guided this qualitative study: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? In this interview-driven phenomenological study I explored the participants' personal experiences with the RLDP-P and their experience with DoD leader development programs prior to their RLDP-P participation for comparative context. In order to collect those experiences, I conducted 16 semistructured interviews. I used an interview guide comprising five-questions with prepared follow-up questions to ensure the participants' experiences were fully captured. The guide also ensured I took an objective and nonbiased approach to collect data from the study participants. This interview guide was the primary data collection tool. I conducted the interviews and created the interview guide as part of my role as the researcher. I made primary and backup audio recordings of all interviews to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. All 16 participants consented to the use of audio recording devices for their interview.

The semistructured nature of the interviews provided the flexible construct required for exploratory research (Reynolds, 2007). The inductive nature of qualitative research provides a focus on the details of the participant's experiences in order to discover the themes and patterns resident in the collected data (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is an academic means of acquiring understanding of a group or individual's perspective on a problem through inductive inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Klenke (2008) argued that phenomenological studies focus on perceptions, past experiences, emotions, and the respective thoughts of study participants and the manner that the participants make sense of them. The importance of the shared experiences of the study participants was the primary reason for selecting a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies are suited to present the commonalities of experiences with a phenomenon by study participants (Creswell, 2007) and provide researchers the ability to study past experiences as perceived by the individuals (Valle et al., 1989).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher for this study was to explore and understand the DoD leader development experiences of the study participants. In this study, I sought to understand the impact of the participants' shared leader development experiences on their professional goals. I explored the leader development experiences that the study participants received during the RLDP-P and DoD leader development experiences prior to their RLDP-P participation. I asked the study participants to specifically focus on their first duty assignment's leader development program. This provided context to the experiences and perspectives shared by the participants regarding their time in the RLDP-



P and a comparative view to traditional DoD leader development experiences. This study was approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Army Research Institute, and the Army Human Research Protections Office. I conducted the study in accordance with all Walden IRB guidance (approval number 08-31-18-0415738). I provided all participants an overview of the study with the invitation as well as the consent forms. The voluntary nature of the study was emphasized in both the invitation and consent forms. A \$5 gift card was provided to each participant to thank them for their time, but there was no reward given in exchange for participation.

I am an active duty service member and a graduate of the RLDP-P, but I did not have a relationship with any of the study participants. I am a targeting officer in the Army who currently serves at the 8th Army Headquarters in Korea. I have served as a military leader on both the enlisted and officer side of the Army at nearly every echelon from the tactical to the operational level over the course of my career. My experience as an active duty service member and graduate of the RLDP-P provided me an in-depth perspective that was used in creation of the conceptual framework for this study.

Although I shared professional commonalities with the study participants, the variances in things such as our time in service as well as duty positions and locations, gave each of us very different military service experiences from which to draw. These professional variances, including working in different organizations around the world, also mitigated any ethical concerns about perceived professional impacts for participation or declining to participate in this study. I conducted all interviews in a formal manner consistent with

customs and courtesies of military organizations. This was a means of staying objective and avoiding bias in my data collection efforts.

Maintaining confidentiality was a very important aspect of my role as a researcher. To ensure confidentiality, all collected data were anonymized, and I assigned each participant a participant number rather than using their name. Additionally, I maintained positive control of all collected research on a secure external computer storage drive that is password protected. I am the only individual with access to the password. The detailed breakdown of all physical and electronic security measures taken in this study are covered in the data collection section of this chapter. Lastly, each interview was conducted individually and in private to ensure the participants had full privacy while they shared their experiences. The identity of the participants will remain confidential. Table 2 depicts the basic study interview details.

Table 2

*Study Interview Details*

Participant code	Interview medium	Date of interview
P1	Telephone	1-Dec-18
P2	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P3	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P4	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P5	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P6	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P7	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P8	Telephone	2-Dec-18
P9	Telephone	3-Dec-18
P10	Telephone	3-Dec-18
P11	Telephone	4-Dec-18
P12	Telephone	5-Dec-18
P13	Telephone	5-Dec-18
P14	Telephone	5-Dec-18
P15	Telephone	8-Dec-18
P16	Telephone	8-Dec-18

## Methodology

### Participant Selection

The target study population for this interview-driven phenomenological study was active duty service members who participated in the Army's RLDP-P. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. This program provided a diverse study population comprising enlisted and officer service members with varying years of service, both male and female, from diverse career fields, and representative of multiple

branches of the military. With the broad range of leader development experiences due to the varied assignment history, the experiences from this participant pool provided relevant data.

This participant pool not only possessed a broad range of leader development program experiences, but they additionally shared a unique leader development experience through the RLDP-P. The program had only been in existence for 3 years, so the purposeful sampling goal of 10-12 participants out of a possible 104 eligible service members was selected. The limited time the program had been in existence factored in to the selected sample size and anticipated information saturation point. Sixteen volunteers returned their consent forms, so all 16 participants were included in the study. Due to the dynamic nature of the participant pool's military schedules, I accepted all 16 study volunteers in the event that there were cancellations for any reason such as military deployments. Information saturation was achieved by the 16th participant.

The literature demonstrates that purposeful sampling is an effective approach for qualitative studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). By using purposeful sampling, I recruited study participants with valid and relevant data to be explored during the research process. Additionally, the 16 research participants equated to 15% of the eligible RLDP-P participants being interviewed. I reached out to all 104 eligible participants of the program with a formal invitation to participate in the research study via e-mail with the assistance of the RLDP-P program managers. Due to the worldwide distribution of the program participants, e-mail was the only feasible means of inviting all study participants. The program's distribution list was provided by the RLDP-P program

managers and this assisted in verifying the volunteers met the study eligibility requirements. The two eligibility requirements for the research participants were that they had to (a) be an active duty service member, and (b) have participated in the Army's RLDP-P. These purposeful sampling requirements were important as they ensured the participants were able to provide valid information on the research topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

### **Data Collection**

As part of my role as the researcher, I created a five-question interview guide for this study (Appendix A). The five-question interview guide additionally contained follow-up questions to ensure the participant's experiences were fully captured. With the uniqueness of the RLDP-P's structure, creating an interview guide provided me the flexibility to fully explore the dynamic characteristics of the program. In creation of the interview guide, I avoided the use of jargon and ensured all questions were clear and did not lead the study participants to a particular response (Tracy, 2013). The interview guide provided me a semistructured means of answering the central research question: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? All five questions produced answers that collectively will inform future DoD policy decisions on standardized access to leader development.

To gather the experiences of the participants and identify emerging themes to inform DoD policy on standardizing access to leader development, I asked the following questions:

1. Did your first unit have a leader development program that shaped your professional goals?
  - If yes, will you share some of the memorable aspects of that leader development program?
  - If no, will you share how you feel that impacted your growth as a new leader in the military in terms of your professional goals?
2. Will you describe for me any memorable leader development activities that you found beneficial from the RLDP-P?
  - Are there any other leader development activities you would like to highlight from the RLDP-P?
3. Will you describe for me any memorable aspects of the mentor and instructor engagements during the RLDP-P?
  - Is there anything else regarding the mentor and instructor engagements that you would like to share?
4. Will you describe for me any memorable impacts of the partner nation engagements that you experienced as part of the RLDP-P?
  - Is there anything else regarding the partner nation engagements that you would like to share?
5. Based on your participation in the RLDP-P will you share any impact the program had on your professional goals?
  - Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experience in the RLDP-P?

To assist with validity, input from military leaders and civilian mentors familiar with my research topic were leveraged to provide their feedback on the interview guide based on their leader development experiences. The interview guide was shaped with the input from the military leaders and civilian mentors. This provided me an outside perspective on the primary data collection tool for the study. For additional context, I reviewed Army policy on leader development along with foundational program documents for the RLDP-P. I conducted the interviews in accordance with the Walden IRB guidance. No data was collected until the study received Walden IRB approval. All participants provided their consent via the signed consent forms or written consent via e-mail prior to being scheduled for an interview.

As a means of ensuring confidentiality for the study participants, each participant was assigned a number that their corresponding data were referenced by for this study. This alleviated the need to use the names of the study participants in any of the study material. To additionally ensure confidentiality, I interviewed each participant individually via telephonic interview from my private residence. This was to ensure that the participants' responses were not overheard. I conducted all interviews between December 1, 2018 and December 8, 2018. The 16 interviews lasted an average of approximately 40 minutes. This included a review of the consent forms and the interview protocol with the study participants. The protocol discussion included a reminder that participation was 100% voluntary and of the measures that would be taking place to ensure confidentiality. It was also reiterated to each participant that their shared experiences would be collected, transcribed, anonymized, and coded for analysis. Lastly,

each participant was reminded that in order to protect their identity, their interview data would be associated with an assigned participant number rather than a name.

Only one interview was conducted per study participant and each interview was conducted one-on-one. Two separate recording devices were used to ensure all parts of each interview were captured. I made primary and backup audio recordings of all interviews to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. All participants consented to the recording of their interview. I conducted all e-mail communication through password protected e-mail accounts to ensure confidentiality. I used a virtual private network on an encrypted internet connection for all electronic communication with the study participants. This ensured that any communication to study participants were impossible to be viewed by a third party without direct access to the participants' personal e-mail accounts. Positive control of all collected data was maintained on a password protected external computer storage drive. I am the only individual with access to the password. The data were additionally protected by physical security measures. I secured the electronic devices in my private residence that requires keys for two separate locks to gain entrance. The residence was also protected by a home security system. The stored data for the study will remain secured and maintained for 5 years as required by the Walden IRB.

Each of the study participants shared their relevant leader development experiences based on the semistructured interview questions. If an answer was unclear, I asked the study's participants to provide clarification or to expound on their answer. In gathering this open-ended data, assumptions regarding the shared experiences were



avoided by asking general questions and any necessary follow-up questions, and then the final analysis was developed from the collected raw data (Creswell, 2009). This also speaks to the inherent requirement a qualitative researcher must meet in order to ensure reliability. Conducting qualitative inquiry requires that the researcher conducting data collection is trained and capable to effectively use the required data collection procedures (Sullivan, Rassel, Berner, & Taliaferro, 2017). Each study participant also had the opportunity to review their coded answers following transcription and provide any updates or revisions. This allowed me to avoid any bias through assumption and ensure the data reflected exactly what the respondent intended during the interview process. Richards (2014) explained that in qualitative research, bias can be minimized and accuracy ensured by receiving participant feedback and verification of answers.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

The data analysis for this study followed a logical progression to ensure no steps were missed or that conclusions were made before the completion of the actual analysis. Once the interviews were completed, I listened to and transcribed the audio recordings. I reviewed my hand-written notes in addition to the audio recordings to provide any additional context such as inflection in a participant's voice. Following each interview with the study participants, the audio tapes were reviewed and the highest quality recording was identified for use in transcription. I then uploaded the highest quality audio file to the secure online transcription site, Sonix, for transcription. That raw data was collected and then organized for the detailed analysis. I used both manual coding and ATLAS.ti (version 8) qualitative data analysis software for coding and the

identification of trends and emerging themes. The detailed analysis included the identification of all meaningful themes, descriptions, and their respective characteristics (Maxwell, 2013). When used correctly, qualitative data analysis software is a significant tool for researchers and current trends show increased usage of multifaceted software that allows a variety of data types to be analyzed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Once identified, I analyzed the major themes against the theoretical lens of the full range leadership model (Bass, 1985). This allowed me to identify the associated leadership theories that aligned with the study participants' leader development program experiences in the military. An example of this was when participants expressed limited or no engagement with instructors and mentors during leader development programs. Those characteristics showed alignment with laissez-faire leadership by those leaders (Bass, 1985). The data analysis was ongoing to fully identify patterns that emerged during the collection process (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Information saturation was reached once additional emerging themes from the coded data ceased to be produced.

The five interview questions, along with their associated follow-up questions, were all oriented at collectively answering the single research question for this study. The first question provided context for the type of DoD leader development experiences the participants had prior to participation in the RLDP-P. All four subsequent questions built a holistic picture of the participants' perception of the program and its impact on their professional goals. Additionally, questions two through five were written to identify scalable and feasible aspects of the program that would inform future DoD policy on

leader development. The emerging themes were looked at holistically to then identify the major findings for the study.

Although the RLDP-P is an Army program, it is comprised of service members from multiple military branches. This factor assisted in achieving transferability as the results would then be relevant to not only Army service members, but the DoD enterprise as a whole. This also includes the civilian federal employees whom are an invaluable portion of the DoD workforce. I conducted audits of the collected data throughout the study to ensure dependability of the research.

The detailed analysis consisted of a trustworthiness assessment. Patton (2015) explained the value in avoiding unnecessary challenges associated with objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative research by focusing on trustworthiness. This difference in focus lends itself to an understood position of neutrality. Several methods of assessing the trustworthiness of the study findings are recommended for qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). One method used to determine that the findings of the study were accurate was the member checking method. I provided the coded data to the participants for their respective interview to review the themes that emerged. This gave the participants the opportunity to discuss the detailed analysis of their interview in terms of emerging themes and provide their feedback or make corrections if necessary. Only two participants provided additional feedback following their interview and their additions were included in the raw data and referenced as e-mail contributions. Additionally, peer debriefing was used for trustworthiness and as a means of increasing accuracy by adding additional perspectives to the interpretation of data. The peer debriefing with selected

military and civilian leaders additionally served as a means of providing reflexivity for this study.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I presented the research design and methodology used for this research study. Additionally, I included a detailed overview of the study to describe the role of the researcher as well as the data-gathering methodology. In the methodology section, I reviewed the participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study results. Lastly, I presented the methods of assessing the accuracy of the research results in detail and I presented the reasons that the research design and methodology were selected. In Chapter 4, I present the detailed data analysis and key findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results of the Study

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this interview-driven phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the United States Army Pacific's (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) to inform DoD policy on leader development. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of the 16 semistructured interviews conducted with the research participants. One research question guided this study: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? I created an interview guide consisting of five primary interview questions and prepared follow-up questions to collect the data for this study.

This chapter provides details of the research setting, participant recruitment, and demographics of the study. I also present specifics of the study data collection method, the resulting codes, and emerging themes from the data analysis in this chapter. Also, I provide evidence of trustworthiness for the study in context of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To conclude the chapter, I present details of the study results as well as a summary of the findings in relation to the study's central research question.

### **Research Setting**

Each of the study participants and I were active duty service members at the time of this study. The personal and organizational conditions that could impact the study were directly related to the active duty status of the study participants and myself. Due to

the worldwide assignments of all study participants, I conducted the 16 semistructured interviews via telephonic interview over Skype. The distribution list for the RLDP-P participants was provided by the program's leadership team. I then e-mailed the research invitation and consent forms to all program participants who were active duty service members.

The military is a rank-based organization, so a request for information can be misconstrued as a directive if not appropriately communicated. To address this, all communication for the research was sent from my university e-mail account and not a military e-mail account. At the start of the research invitation it was specified and emphasized that the research was in no way connected to my role as a military officer. It was also specified that the research was in no way directed by the DoD and that participation was 100% voluntary. I took these mitigation measures so that the participant pool did not feel obligated to participate due to my role as a military officer or their role as an active duty service member.

I did not work with or have any direct authority over any of the research participant pool. Additionally, all potential participants were informed that all collected data would be anonymized and would remain confidential. I did this to address any participant concerns that their participation in the study would have any impact on their careers. The full details of the data collection process are presented later in this chapter.

### **Demographics**

The two eligibility requirements for the research participants were that they had to (a) be an active duty service member, and (b) have participated in the Army's RLDP-P.

These purposeful sampling requirements ensured the participants were able to provide valid information on the research topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Once the program leadership provided the RLDP-P participant distribution list to me, I immediately analyzed the list to identify the active duty service members. There were 104 eligible service members who were invited to participate in the study. Of the 104 eligible, 16 participants responded with their consent and scheduled an interview. This number reflected 15.38% of all eligible participants.

The composition of the study participants was broken out into rank classification rather than the specific rank grade to further protect the confidentiality of the study participants. Of the 16 participants, 11 were officers (68.75%), two were warrant officers (12.5%), and three were NCOs (18.75%). Although enlisted service members compose 82.3% of the DoD active duty manning (DoD, 2016), this type of robust leader development is commonly associated with officer leader development programs. The reduced representation of enlisted personnel is not unusual for this type of course. Warrant officers are subject matter experts and compose less than 3% of the Army so their lower representation was not atypical for the Army.

Additionally, the average years of service for the 16 study participants was 10.09 years. Comparatively, the average years of service in the military for officers is 11 years and 6.7 years for enlisted personnel (Pew Research Center, 2011). The last relevant demographic statistic was the gender of the study participants. Eleven of the study participants were male (68.75%) and five study participants were female (31.25%). Although there is a statistical disparity between gender representation for the study, in

context of the DoD, the female representation was higher than the norm. According to the 2016 DoD Demographics Report, women only compose 15.9% of the active duty manning. To protect the identity of each study participant, a number was assigned to each participant from P1 to P16. Table 3 depicts the demographics of the individual study participants.

Table 3

*Study Demographics*

Participants	Gender	Years of service	Rank classification
P 1	Male	16	Officer
P 2	Male	18	NCO (Enlisted)
P 3	Male	7	NCO (Enlisted)
P 4	Male	11	Warrant Officer
P 5	Male	13	Warrant Officer
P 6	Male	18	NCO (Enlisted)
P 7	Male	3	Officer
P 8	Female	14	Officer
P 9	Male	1.5	Officer
P 10	Male	15	Officer
P 11	Male	15	Officer
P 12	Female	4	Officer
P 13	Female	10	Officer
P 14	Female	3.5	Officer
P 15	Male	9	Officer
P 16	Female	3.5	Officer

### **Data Collection**

For this qualitative study, I explored the experiences of active duty service members who participated in the Army's RLDP-P. I conducted sixteen semistructured telephonic interviews via Skype from my private residence in Korea in order to collect



the data. All data collection procedures were followed as described in Chapter 3 and in accordance with the IRB approved study proposal. There were no deviations from the proposed study that required an additional IRB review. The only difference in the data collection process from the approved study proposal was the increased number of study participants. The initial goal for the proposed research participation was 10-12 participants. Due to the dynamic nature of the participant pool's military schedules, I accepted all 16 study volunteers in the event that there were cancellations for any reason, such as military deployments.

Following the receipt of all necessary DoD approval to conduct the research, the program leadership provided the RLDP-P participant distribution list. After removing any Department of the Army civilian participants and those service members no longer active duty, 104 participants remained. The study's invitation and accompanying consent forms were e-mailed to all 104 eligible study participants on November 29, 2018. As each participant responded and provided their consent to participate, they were scheduled for their interview based on their availability, and the times were deconflicted by time zone. From December 1, 2018, through December 8, 2018, I conducted all 16 interviews.

I conducted the semistructured interviews with an interview guide. This interview guide was the primary data collection tool and all questions were created and asked by myself as part of my role as the researcher. The 16 interviews lasted an average of approximately 40 minutes. This included a review of the consent forms and the interview protocol with the study participants. Only one interview was conducted per study participant and each interview was conducted one-on-one. Two separate recording

devices were used to ensure all parts of each interview were captured. A recording application on my iPad was the primary recording device and a recording application on my iPhone was the alternate recording device.

All data collected were protected in accordance with the approved study proposal and included both physical and electronic storage security measures. Positive control of all collected data was maintained on a password protected external computer storage drive. I am the only individual with access to the password. Also, I used a virtual private network for all online interaction with study participants and their data. The data were additionally protected by physical security measures. I secured the electronic devices in my private residence that requires keys for two separate locks to gain entrance. The residence was also protected by a home security system. The stored data for the study will remain secured and maintained for 5 years as required by the Walden IRB.

The highest quality audio recording from the two devices was used to make the interview transcripts. I sent all study participants the transcribed data and relevant quotes from their respective interviews to review for accuracy. Clarifying or additional answers were sent via e-mail by two of the study participants, and I added those answers to the raw data for analysis. I conducted all e-mail communication through password protected e-mail accounts to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, I used a virtual private network on an encrypted internet connection for all e-mail communication with the study participants. This ensured that any communication to study participants was impossible to be viewed by a third party without direct access to the participants' personal e-mail accounts. There were no unusual circumstances that occurred during the data collection

process. There was no apprehension detected from the study participants, which correlated with the prompt volunteer response to the study invitation. Several of the study participants showed concern that they were providing too much information, and I reassured them that if they had 10 experiences to share for each question that I would collect data on all ten experiences. This appeared to alleviate any concern shown by the participants at the time of their interview.

### **Data Analysis**

After completion of all interviews, I analyzed the collected raw data to identify all meaningful themes and descriptions and their respective characteristics (see Maxwell, 2013). To identify and move inductively from coded units to emerging themes, I used both manual coding and ATLAS.ti (version 8) qualitative data analysis software. Each study participant's raw data were associated with their assigned participant number, which ranged from P1 to P16. Following each interview with the RLDP-P study participants, I reviewed the primary and backup audio recordings to identify the copy with the highest quality for transcription purposes.

Once I identified the best recordings, I uploaded the audio files to the secure online transcription software service, Sonix. I reviewed each transcript in conjunction with the audio recording of the interview to make any necessary corrections to the transcript and ensure its accuracy. I repeated this process for all 16 interview transcripts. This also allowed me to fully immerse myself in the raw data provided by each study participant. The manual review of each transcript and the repeated analysis of each audio

recording as part of the transcription process provided a logical start point for the manual coding of the raw data.

I used open coding for the coding process. I used a spreadsheet and a word document to capture the results and to organize the manual coding data. The spreadsheet captured, by respective participant, both the code and the interview question(s) that the code presented. From there, I identified the frequency of the code across the study participants and calculated for thematic identification. The word document was used to capture all quotes for each respective code and subsequent theme for all 16 study participants. As patterns emerged from these data analysis tools, I was then able to group the codes into subthemes that composed the major themes of the study. These two documents were my primary manual coding tools, as they evolved with the data analysis and assisted in the full identification of patterns that emerged from the collection process (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Information saturation was reached once the emerging themes from the coded data ceased to be produced.

Following the manual transcription, the raw data were imported into ATLAS.ti (version 8) qualitative data analysis software. When used correctly, qualitative data analysis software is a significant tool for researchers and current trends show increased usage of multifaceted software that allows a variety of data types to be analyzed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). ATLAS.ti allowed me to take the raw data and manipulate it in different forms to view the material from multiple perspectives. The software outputs such as a word cloud or detailed word count confirmed in multiple formats the results of my manual coding. The software also helped me visualize the codes and the themes with

which they aligned. Table 4 provides a description of the major themes identified from the participant data.

Table 4

*Description of Major Themes*

Subthemes	Themes	Frequency of theme	Description of theme
No development, Focus solely on current position	No formal leader development	14/16 participants (87.5%)	Absence of formal leader development at the start of the service member's career that shaped their professional goals
Exposure to senior leaders, Informal leader development, Diversity of mentor engagements, Diversity of cohort	Investment in soldier development	16/16 participants (100%)	The perceived investment of time, energy, experience, or resources toward the development of service members
Exposure to opportunities, Goals, Broaden perspective, Build relationships	Goal development	12/16 participants (75%)	The creation and/or the refinement of professional goals
Self-awareness, Develop others, Academic rigor, How to think	Self-development	12/16 participants (75%)	The participant's desire to develop themselves professionally

Using the qualitative data analysis software, I was able to attach all necessary quotes to their respective code(s) and easily reference the data by using the detailed code view. From there, all of the subthemes were grouped under their respective themes. Table 5 depicts the thematic structure.

Table 5

*Thematic Structure*

Themes	Subthemes	Codes (in vivo)	*P=Participant
No formal leader development	1) No development 2) Focus solely on current position	1) Nobody really sat me down or even talked to me on a personal level for my own development. Even bigger picture in terms of the Army. Nobody spoke to me about what our mission was, what my unit does, and how it fit into the bigger picture (P12). 2) What we did have was more common soldier task or battle drill focused sergeant's time training. That is the development that I had. There was nothing oriented toward higher level development (P8).	
Investment in soldier development	1) Exposure to senior leaders 2) Informal leader development 3) Diversity of mentor engagements 4) Diversity of cohort	1) By having someone that has lived the strategic side (of leadership) it exposed us to a whole new side of the Army (P7). 2) My informal engagements were by chance during commutes or by proximity as we walked to different locations. The mentors really took those opportunities to open our thoughts on experiences and give you information that you did not even know to ask for (P14). 3) Every mentor brought a different way to learn to the table (P6). 4) For me as a young leader, just seeing the different experiences across the cohort was so beneficial (P12).	
Goal development	1) Exposure to opportunities 2) Goals 3) Broaden perspective 4) Build relationships	1) The program it exposed me to broadening opportunities that I was unaware of as a junior leader (P16). 2) Attending the program helped me refine my professional goals more clearly (P11). 3) It was so eye-opening to finally get that full understanding or a better understanding of what we are doing in the Pacific and how we impact others (P12). 4) Completing the program, I gained a relationship with the mentors, fellow students, and a greater appreciation for our partner nations and the jobs that we all have to do (P9).	
Self-development	1) Self-awareness 2) Develop others 3) Academic rigor 4) How to think	1) It helps a leader become really self-aware of how they see themselves, how others see them, and how they can change their perspective and understand how they interact with people to better connect and influence individuals around them (P11). 2) This is another thing that I can place in my toolkit as far as another aspect to energize my fellow NCOs in terms of leader development (P6). 3) We very rarely get tested in that format and this type of academic setting where you are expected to not just regurgitate information or you don't have hours to work on some sort of brief that you have a strong understanding of and background on... Developmentally it was extremely challenging and very high reward (P16). 4) It provided me with more of a strategic level way of looking at things. It is more about the perspective that I gained than any information directly (9).	

The use of the qualitative data analysis software provided me the ability to quickly navigate large amounts of data while the manual coding provided me an in-depth familiarization with the data. Lastly, I analyzed the identified themes against the theoretical lens of the full range leadership model (Bass, 1985) to identify characteristics of leadership theories the study participants have been experiencing as part of their leader development experiences in the military. This is presented in the study results section of this chapter.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The strategies to ensure trustworthiness that are outlined in Chapter 3 were adhered to during this study. Achieving trustworthiness was viewed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, also referred to as internal validity, speaks toward the research design, instrumentation, and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To strengthen the credibility of this study, I was deliberate and precise with the purposeful sampling to ensure only eligible participants were identified and selected. This also ensured that all participants would be able to provide relevant data to the study. The RLDP-P program leadership provided the participant distribution list which was another method of validating the study participants. Following the data collection, I provided the transcribed data to each participant via e-mail as part of the study's member check. Lastly, strict adherence was maintained to ensure confidentiality for the study participants.



**Transferability**

Transferability of a study ensures applicability to larger contexts outside of the study focus while still maintaining the integrity of the study-specific data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although the RLDP-P is an Army program, it consists of service members from multiple military branches. This factor will assist in achieving transferability as the results will be relevant to not only Army service members, but the DoD enterprise as a whole. This also includes the civilian federal employees whom are an invaluable portion of the DoD workforce. I provided a detailed account of the research methodology, including usage of the data collection instrumentation, to ensure researchers are able to repeat the procedures for any future studies. This also assisted in proving the dependability of the study.

**Dependability**

Dependability of a study is viewed in terms of stability of the study data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To aid in the stability of this study, a detailed methodological description of the data collection and data analysis processes was maintained and documented. Additionally, I conducted an audit of the collected data to ensure dependability of the research. As the study data increased during the data collection process, I conducted regular audits to ensure continued accuracy of the data. This also ensured mistakes in data analysis were not made and allowed to compound throughout the process.

**Confirmability**

The detailed data analysis consisted of a trustworthiness assessment as well. Patton (2015) explained the value in avoiding unnecessary challenges associated with

objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative research by focusing on trustworthiness. Any inherent biases were challenged through the use of external perspectives. This was gained through the use of the member checking method to review my findings. Separate from letting the participants review the transcripts from their interviews, I shared the emerging themes from their interview with them and collected their feedback via e-mail. I additionally used peer debriefings with military and civilian leaders for confirmability as a means of increasing accuracy by adding additional perspectives to the interpretation of the findings.

### **Study Results**

The purpose of this interview-driven phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the Army's RLDP-P. The RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. Study participants provided their experiences from the RLDP-P and I explored those shared experiences to identify scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals.

This study was guided by one central research question: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? The identified scalable and feasible elements of the program that positively impacted the service members' professional goals will inform future DoD policy on leader development. Specifically, the results will inform DoD policy decisions on standardized access to

leader development for service members from the start of their careers. I conducted sixteen semistructured interviews to collect the data for this study. To answer the central research question, I developed an interview guide consisting of five-questions and prepared follow-up questions. A synopsis answer is provided for each that reflects the participant trends for that specific question. A more detailed answer by theme, consisting of participant quotes, is presented later in this chapter. The interview questions follow:

1. Did your first unit have a leader development program that shaped your professional goals?
  - a) Out of 16 participants, 14 (87.5%) did not have a leader development program that shaped their professional goals at their first assignment. Additionally, 7 out of 16 participants (43.75%) spoke of their first unit solely focusing on their development at that specific job with no additional focus on their career as a whole.
    - If yes, will you share some of the memorable aspects of that leader development program?
    - If no, will you share how you feel that impacted your growth as a new leader in the military in terms of your professional goals?
2. Will you describe for me any memorable leader development activities that you found beneficial from the RLDP-P?
  - a) Two trends arose from this question: the cultural immersion leader development experiences and the series of self-awareness trainings. All 16 participants referenced at least one of these activities. The cultural

immersion engagements were a part of the participant's Phase III where they traveled to various partner nations for civil, political, and military engagements. The self-awareness trainings were in-depth and encompassed multiple lessons throughout the program such as critical thinking, personality assessments, red teaming (develops ability to see plans and operations from external perspective), and avoiding group think.

- Are there any other leader development activities you would like to highlight from the RLDP-P?
3. Will you describe for me any memorable aspects of the mentor and instructor engagements during the RLDP-P?
    - a) In response to this question, 8 out of 16 participants (50%) described the exposure to senior leaders in a small group environment to be impactful, and 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) found the diversity of mentor engagements to be effective. Additionally, 8 out of 16 participants (50%) expressed in this question that the informal leader development engagements by the mentors during the program were impactful.
      - Is there anything else regarding the mentor and instructor engagements that you would like to share?
  4. Will you describe for me any memorable impacts of the partner nation engagements that you experienced as part of the RLDP-P?
    - a) This question provided some redundancy as many participants had already referenced cultural immersion as an impactful leader development activity

in question two. The additional pertinent trend that emerged from this question's responses is that 14 out of 16 participants (87.5%) expressed that their perspective was broadened as a result of the partner nation engagements.

- Is there anything else regarding the partner nation engagements that you would like to share?
5. Based on your participation in the RLDP-P will you share any impact the program had on your professional goals?
- a) This question provided the primary data for the study's central research question. Out of 16 participants, 10 (62.5%) shared that the program made them create or refine their professional goals. For many of the participants, this included academic goals as well. Out of 16 participants, 10 (62.5%) shared that the program increased their desire for self-development. The self-development remarks included leadership aspects such as self-awareness and critical thinking. Out of 16 participants, 7 (43.75%) expressed a desire to improve their ability to develop others as a result of the program. These are presented with participant quotes during the thematic analysis.
- Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experience in the RLDP-P?

There were four major themes that emerged from the data analysis: (a) no formal leader development, (b) investment in soldier development, (c) goal development, and (d)

self-development. Each of the four themes were found in at least 75% of the participants' shared experiences. Table 6 depicts the major themes as aligned with the individual participant's responses. The percentages reflect the presentation of the respective themes in all five interview questions collectively.

Table 6

*Participant Data Aligned to the Major Themes*

Themes	Participants (P)																Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
No formal leader development	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	X	x	87.5%
Investment in soldier development	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	100%
Goal development			x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	75%
Self-development	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x			x	X	x	75%

The following is an in-depth review of each major theme. Each theme is accompanied by direct quotes from the collected participant data.

**Theme 1: No Formal Leader Development**

Out of the 16 study participants, 14 (87.5%) shared the experience of receiving no formal leader development that shaped their professional goals during their foundational years of military service. The participants spoke of being very young when they joined the military and having to figure things out for themselves in the absence of formal

development. Nearly half of the participants (43.75%) noted that the development they did receive from their first organization was focused solely on developing them for their first job with no additional focus on professional goals. For some of the participants, the experience was over 12 years since their first assignment, but all participants were able to recall that point of their career and provided relevant data. The following are excerpts from the participants' interviews.

Participant 1: For my first unit, I was only with them for a month and a half and then we went straight to Iraq. So, I missed all of the unit's rotations at the Training Centers. Initially when I got on board there was no type of leadership development going on because they finished a 9-month deployment to Kosovo, came right back, did 60 days in the box (training), and then went straight to Iraq. When I got with them there was nothing I saw or was privy to for any type of actual leader development. It probably wasn't until, through a certain portion of the deployment, when I eventually became a platoon leader in one of the companies. It was more of an informal leader development along the lines of an after-action review.

Participant 3: There were ongoing one-off type things that focused on a particular aspect of leadership development or a particular thing for everyone to improve on, but there was no larger or coherent program that tied everything together.

Participant 6: Coming from an enlisted perspective, the focus on leader development was minimal at our degree since younger enlisted members are not

always thought of as leaders and we tend to just focus on their soldier development.

Participant 8: The leader development helped shape the officership piece of it.

The conversations about what I wanted my career to look like or looking toward the future was never had until I was a Captain.

Participant 12: Now, looking back, it is so crucial. I do not understand why more people are not standing up to be mentors or to be helpful to young up and coming soldiers. I understand a lot of it is just work, people get busy with the day-to-day things that need to be done so they forget about the importance of mentorship. I am blessed that I had the opportunity to have good people come into my life, but if I didn't it would have made my Army career so much harder.

Participant 13: They did not have a formal program, but they fostered a development environment where they supported soldiers to go to military and civilian schools, they would bring in speakers or have the officers come together to speak about career progression. It was focused toward a specific branch so it did not apply to me often times, but because they fostered leader development from an early stage in my career, I carried that on with me.

Participant 15: Unless you are prior service, you really do not know what to expect or what you are really getting into...Your perspective has not been shaped yet. You are going in there wide eyed and trying to take it all in, learn the system, and form your own perspective on how you think this machine (the military)



operates. You really do not have the experience yet to look outside your 50-meter target. That comes with time and experience.

## **Theme 2: Investment in Soldier Development**

Out of 16 study participants, all 16 (100%) expressed their leader development experiences in terms of a perceived investment by the military in them as a soldier. This perception was also maintained when looking at a perceived failure by the military to invest in their development as well. In addition to this theme being present in all 16 participants' data, 8 of the 16 participants (50%) expressed their views of leader development as an investment in as many as three separate questions during the interview. I found that many of the study participants translated the investment by the military in their professional development as an effective incentive to continue their military service. This point is important as it denotes a potential correlation between investment in soldier development and retention depending on the service member's perception of the investment or lack thereof. The participants viewed investments in terms of time, energy, resources, and sharing experience with them for their development. The following are excerpts from the participants' interviews.

Participant 1: If I have to turn to and depend on that corporal or specialist, and expect them to perform and act in a certain way, I need to give them something more than just a PowerPoint slide to look at or an online video or training to go through once a year (to develop them).

Participant 3: When our senior mentor came up to me and spoke to me about my career based on observing me during the course, he asked me if I had considered

going to Officer Candidate School (OCS). To me, having a mentor observing the class and making career suggestions like that was impactful. I have considered it before, but hearing that from him brought that into a whole new perspective for me. Now it is something I am definitely considering a lot more following the program . . . The program made a big difference for me in terms of my decision of wanting to stay in the military for a career.

Participant 5: I think that not having a leadership development program impacts how the Army sells itself to service members as a career. The majority of the people around me, including myself, were planning on getting out of the military after our initial contracts. Most of my peers from that time did get out of the military. Not providing a defined leadership development program it just doesn't do a good job of convincing people to stay in the military and helping them form career goals...I think that when a new person to the military sees a lack of investment toward developing the individual, it makes you question why you would make this your primary focus in terms of a career path.

Participant 8: We had a diverse group of mentors that were with us for the program. Our senior mentor was a retired general and was the most impactful for me. He was able to give us his perspective as a former Army officer, but he was also able to throw in those nuggets of life lessons. He absolutely took the time if we were traveling on the bus or if we were sitting in restaurants eating, he would sit with individual leaders and speak to them about their career concerns and how

he could better shape or provide perspective for what we were looking to do in the military. It was definitely valuable.

Participant 10: The impact that this program had on me is everything. From hierarchy not being linear anymore and leaders like myself should be exposed to many situations to enhance our cultural awareness. I really loved this course because it invested in the soldier...the individual. That individual is the most important asset of the U.S. Army. It magnifies the importance of strategic leadership, cultural immersion, and I think it is all about relationships.

Participant 12: I think it definitely places young soldiers at disadvantage if people do not come in and help them and explain things to them. It is probably one of the main reasons young soldiers/officers get out of the military. They do not see their potential or value because others do not reach out to them and help them see it through leader development.

Participant 13: Sitting in class for the first time with the command team, you could see that the command team cared. To have the command team speak about the importance of the program with the passion that they did, it really stood out for us as something that we wanted to be a part of.

Participant 14: Looking back on it, my commander's influence was really big. I didn't realize that him taking that time for leader development and him investing in us it really did pay off. He was giving us insights and looking out for our best interests and not leaving us to figure everything out for ourselves. I think the lack of formal development from higher made me feel a little bit like a robot or just a

task executer. You lose sight of the bigger picture a lot easier if there is not a reinforcement of what everything is geared toward in terms of the big picture.

Participant 16: I was able to continue to engage with our mentor following the program and that was really important for me. To have someone as a resource to speak to about career development as I was kind of at a standstill. I did not know when exactly would be a good time to leave my assignment at the time, what kind of job I should look for next, or building my primary military education and subsequent positions within my 5-year plan. To be able to reach out to the mentor following the program was invaluable.

### **Theme 3: Goal Development**

Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) shared that the program caused them to create or refine their professional goals. For many of the participants, this included academic goals as well. Participants received graduate degree credits with a partner university so several participants referenced the pursuit of their graduate degree as a result of the program. Exposure to professional opportunities such as academic programs or jobs that are considered broadening positions factored in to the goal development and refinement of the study participants. A trend that emerged as a subtheme to this major theme was the perspective that building relationships, such as mentor and peer relationships, played a role in their professional goal development. The following are excerpts from the participants' interviews.

Participant 3: I am still not entirely sure about my future in the Army, but this program has made me much more excited about the opportunity to stay in the

Army. For the first time I have started to think more than 1-year ahead at a time. The program has introduced me to the option of being a Foreign Area Officer (FAO) through the cultural engagements with our partner nations...In addition to the development of my strategic thinking capability, the introduction to options such as the FAO made me a whole lot more excited about a future in the Army. I can definitely say that this program has increased my interest to stay in the Army.

Participant 7: It could have very easily made me lose faith in the Army or sight of the bigger picture. As new leaders, if we take things only year by year then we can very easily go until the end of our first contract and then up and transition out of the military. By the RLDP-P focusing on the future and building us as operational leaders, I can see myself past that first contract and as a Major or Lieutenant Colonel down the line and making those strategic level decisions and building relationships. What that program (first duty station's program) failed to do was look past the tactical level and failed to make us excited about our future in the Army.

Participant 9: Going into the program, I intended to do my initial contract and then just figure it out from there. The program gave me the opportunity to interact with and ask questions of mentors and fellow leaders in various stages of their career about my own development. This refined my perspective and I now have clear goals all the way through to my key development assignments.

Participant 10: The goal was for the cohort to think strategically and have a vision of how decisions are made at the higher echelons. I think they nailed the program

objectives when it comes to thinking strategically and having a vision of how things could be in the future and how much of an impact the individual has. That left an impression on me...In a 2-month period it is hard to completely shape who I am, but I can set and refine goals that allow me to be an adaptive and agile leader that thrives in ambiguity and chaos.

Participant 11: Attending the program helped me refine my professional goals more clearly. Now I have a very clear path of goals and objectives that I want to achieve and I have a plethora of tools, experience, and exposure on how I need to get to my goals and objectives. I think that if I never had been exposed to any leader development in my civilian, college, and military careers that I would have been completely blown away and my exposure to the program would have completely changed my outlook, goals, and perspectives in the military.

Participant 13: After finishing my key development time, my goal is to head to D.C. or Leavenworth and work leader development for the Army. That is what I want to do and that is where my passion is at.

Participant 14: Made me do a 180 on my professional goals. Before the program, I was more on the side of the fence of getting out after my contract and seeing what else I could do in life. This program totally turned me around and showed me the bigger picture. The “Why” of why we do everything. I viewed the actions of my unit differently and more strategically impactful. It made me really excited and want to be more involved, work harder, and to be a better member of the team. It made me want to develop good mentor and mentee relationships,

whether I find good mentors or someone chooses me as a mentor. Reinvesting in people, it is pretty unique to the military and it really made me want to pursue a career which is completely opposite to what I was planning.

#### **Theme 4: Self-Development**

Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) shared that the program caused them to focus on their self-development. This was an interesting theme to emerge as the Army's leader development model encompasses self-development as one of its three domains. The other two domains of the leader development model, the operational and the institutional domain, are largely automatic forms of development for service members. They encompass institutional training as well as experience-based training gained from an individual doing their job. Self-development is the one domain that service members have full control over though as it is on the individual to spend their personal time and energy for additional development such as completing civilian certifications and degrees. Within the scope of self-development, the participants discussed desires for development ranging from their approach to developing others to the way they think as a leader. The following are excerpts from the participants' interviews.

Participant 1: I tried to look internally at my professional development to figure out if I am doing the right things to develop the people in my organization...I have always felt that if I can understand things at their level and make them feel appreciated and make them know that they are an important part of this machine, that they will be able to perform at an even higher level.

Participant 2: One of the things we do now is take a critical look at our operations and see if we can do things a better way to create efficiencies. Since the program, I actively apply red teaming and avoid group think to create solutions in my organization.

Participant 4: Because the program has teamed up with a University to provide credit hours toward our graduate studies, I am continuing to further my education in International Relations...continuing to move down the path of the three pillars of leader development.

Participant 6: In regards to leader development for NCOs, the change has been transformational in terms of the expectations of what an NCO should be and what they can achieve. Even going back to the lifelong learning aspect of it...the change has been quite substantial regarding the attitude toward NCO professional development.

Participant 7: The overall theme was to question your biases. That is a great thing for new and old leaders as well as people of all ages. No matter who we are and how we were raised, we are inherently obtaining biases. By acknowledging those biases, questioning them, and starting to see the world from a different perspective we become more adaptive leaders and at the same time more open to ways outside of how we have always done things.

Participant 9: Meeting the people that I met in the program, I was able to identify qualities that I aspire to professionally be it communication skills, intelligence, or how to conduct myself as a professional officer . . . It all influenced me in a way



to get where I am currently and to make the decisions that I have professionally today.

Participant 11: This was a great opportunity and I hate that it came so late in my career. I think it would have been very beneficial if I received this early in my career...Ideally what I would like to see across the Army is a lot of the aspects taught in the program to be incorporated in all primary military education courses. I think that would be extremely beneficial...It is hit and miss on any other programs in the Army that are geared and focused on comprehensive professional development centered on self-awareness, interactions, and provides perspective on the national elements of power. This program takes all of those concentrations and gives it to you in a condensed timeframe to set you up to continue to touch back on and refine those over your military career. If you had something like that, whether it be a week or something at career course or candidate school, to be exposed to these foundational concepts and where to find these things, it would provide a framework for your own self-development professionally throughout your career.

Participant 15: It is not only what you get from the program, but the seed that the program implants in you to acquire more knowledge that makes it dangerous...If anything, because it is only a few weeks of academics, it kind of implants in you the desire to research more and to keep learning. Because you are not going to learn everything in that short period of time. It is on that individual to keep learning more and more and to push themselves and strive to become more of a

professional. I think that is the essence of the program. To implant that seed early so that years later we can draw from our experiences and we will be able to look back and ultimately make better decisions.

There was one participant that provided data that I viewed as discrepant when compared to the other 15 participants' data. The discrepancy was in relation to the effectiveness of the mentor engagements as part of the RLDP-P. Participant 5 highlighted a personal need for rapport to be established between himself and any individual he considers a mentor so the lack of rapport building before the program was a barrier for him. The following is an excerpt from the participant's exact response.

Participant 5: I did not really like the mentor engagement. Maybe it is just me, from my perspective, I did not really get too involved with them and did not find much value in it in my opinion. I found more value when we were interacting with our bilateral partners...That has kind of been my experience throughout my entire career really. To this day, I do not have someone in the Army that I can say that is my mentor. I do not have an individual that I can call up and say I need mentorship on this or that. And that might be my fault for not reaching out and asking someone to be my mentor.

Participant 5: When it (mentorship) comes naturally versus forced, that is how you build long-term relationships. Five years from now, that young leader is able to reach back based on the established relationship because they actually engaged with each other and built up that rapport.

Participant 5's shared experiences depicted an overall positive experience in the program, but the data provided regarding the mentor engagements was discrepant from the study data. To factor this discrepant piece of data into the holistic analysis, I viewed the demographics of the study participants. I believe that this piece of data can largely be explained with the context of the increased years of service that the participant has. Participant 5 currently has over 13 years of service and has the ability to retire at 20 years of service. That means that 65% of the participant's required years of service for retirement has been achieved without a mentor. I believe the absence of a mentor for such an extended period of time, while still achieving career success, impacted the participant's view of mentor engagements. There were no other discrepant cases to report.

The RLDP-P is a robust leader development program that is unique within the DoD. It is not feasible to provide the entirety of the program to all service members. However, the program has the ability to provide the DoD valuable information on how to improve future DoD leader development policy. The detailed data analysis of the participants' shared leader development experiences in the RLDP-P provided four subthemes that addressed the identification of scalable and feasible aspects of the program to inform future DoD policy on leader development. The four subthemes are provided with direct quotes from participant interviews for context as well as the pertinent statistical data.

**Subtheme 1: Diversity of Mentor Engagements**

After completion of the data analysis, diversity of mentor engagements was identified as a subtheme of the investment in soldier development theme. Out of 16 participants, 14 (87.5%) expressed that the diversity of mentor engagements was impactful for their RLDP-P experience. The following is an excerpt from the participants' exact response.

Participant 7: I would go as far to say that the integration of mentors is completely necessary . . . There is something about having a bunch of young leaders being taught that you have been thinking tactically and short term your entire life and we now want you to broaden your horizons, question your biases, and think strategically. Unless there is that person that has done it and has seen the successful side of strategic thinking, it is probably not going to be hammered home with us young leaders. Having a mentor that has seen the strategic side of the Army, can use practical examples from his experience to bring the lessons home, I believe was completely vital for the program to truly develop us as strategic thinkers.

Participant 10: The military in general can be viewed as a very rigid system. This thought process works for contemporary and future leaders . . . This thought process allows us to think progressively and think forward on how to solve problems, how to change culture, what is necessary and what is not necessary . . . while still respecting and enhancing the traditions of the military culture . . . The opportunity to be exposed to diverse instructors and mentors and the ability to

think broadly will benefit the individual and the force as a whole. Everyone wants to know why they are doing something and this helps answer the why.

Participant 11: I think we received a very diverse amount of mentor engagement. Our senior mentor for the overall program was a retired general and he gave a lot of insight and perspective from the general officer level on a daily basis. Rarely, unless you are a general's aide or working on an Army level staff or higher, do you get those formal and informal engagements with general officers. I think that was an extremely valuable addition, whether that was intentional or not, to the program.

Participant 13: It was great to know that there was such a passion outside for retirees to come back to our current force and be mentors.

### **Subtheme 2: Diversity of Cohort Members**

After completion of the data analysis, diversity of cohort members was identified as a subtheme of the investment in soldier development theme. Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) expressed that the diversity of cohort members was impactful for their RLDP-P experience. The following is an excerpt from the participants' exact response.

Participant 3: We had a Singaporean officer in our cohort and just getting a different perspective was beneficial . . . Getting the Singaporean perspective on maintaining relationships with different countries, such as the United States and China. They want to have a positive relationship with both and there is a balancing act that they have to do to maintain a positive relationship with two

countries with opposing views. I think getting that input from a completely different perspective was a really beneficial experience.

Participant 9: The people that were there all contributed to the quality of the discussion and helped me get as much as possible from the experience. That is what really made the program for me. The diverse group of people that were selected to attend the class and the mentors that guided the class. It all fit together to help influence the experience of the participants. The demographic was very important in terms of the diversity of experience. Without that diversity it would have been a completely different experience for me.

Participant 13: It was seeing Mid-Career Leaders "Think Tanks" from across our force come together in one classroom to discuss operational and strategic operations in the Indo-Asia Pacific. There is not a single program in any branch of service that offers this invaluable opportunity for the future of our force.

Knowing that we have the Soldiers/Airmen/Marines/Sailors that have this capacity now, it only assures success for operations in Indo-Asia Pacific region in the future. Bottom line we need more programs like this that incorporate these ranks together, not separate (this response was sent via e-mail following the interview and is verbatim).

### **Subtheme 3: Exposure to Senior Leaders**

After completion of the data analysis, exposure to senior leaders was identified as a subtheme of the investment in soldier development theme. Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) expressed that the exposure to senior leaders in a small group environment was

impactful for their RLDP-P experience. The following is an excerpt from the participants' exact response.

Participant 4: After every presentation or engagement, he would provide his personal take on things based on his experience. It was not as if he was talking to some low-level or mid-grade leaders, he approached each exchange as if he was having a one-on-one exchange with a senior leader such as himself . . . There was no dumbing down of any concepts. I am speaking to you as I would with any other general officer. I appreciated that immensely.

Participant 6: The amount of influential senior leaders that we were exposed to was astronomical. It was the type of exposure in a small group setting that Fortune 500 companies pay to experience.

Participant 8: Going back to Phase II of the program and our participation in the Land Forces Pacific (LANPAC) seminars and panel discussions, it was definitely beneficial to sit in that environment and brief senior leaders and to give our perspective (and receive feedback) on the bigger picture in terms of strategic impact of operations in the Indo-Pacific.

Participant 15: One of the greatest opportunities when talking about leader development (from the program), was the exposure and one-on-one time in a small group setting we had with general officers and senior leaders of the joint apparatus.

**Subtheme 4: Exposure to Opportunities**

After completion of the data analysis, exposure to opportunities was identified as a subtheme of the investment in soldier development theme. Out of 16 participants, 10 (62.5%) expressed that the exposure to professional broadening opportunities was an important part of their RLDP-P experience. The following is an excerpt from the participants' exact response.

Participant 12: We were able to go to the United States Capitol, the State Department, and the Pentagon. The first thing it made me think was that all of this is possible. That I could go and work at these organizations. It made it attainable instead of something far away. Going there and meeting people, seeing these organizations, and walking around made me realize that I could be working there. I have all the capabilities to be working for my country in all these different types of agencies in so many different areas that we generally don't think about. We know they are there, but you don't really think about them. Being there was just so eye opening.

Participant 13: There is funding out there and if units knew this, there would be more leader development programs to help develop soldiers and heighten their long-term interest in the Army . . . I believe that by providing these types of leader development opportunities to soldiers early in their careers, we will see soldiers respond by being all in, 110%.



Participant 15: This program is one of those things that opened up a bunch of doors for me. I would not be in the position that I am in if it were not for the program.

Participant 16: The program opened up a lot of different potential career paths down the road. It exposed me to broadening opportunities that I was unaware of as a junior leader . . . I enjoyed the academic rigor of the program and it exposed me to unique opportunities with an academic background that the military values. Opportunities such as the Harvard strategist program, graduate studies in policy and government and these are programs that the Army is going to want you to use for jobs in the future and something that they really are going to value. These are things that I did not know with the jobs I had held to this point.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided a detailed review of the research methodology for this qualitative study. The 16 semistructured interviews provided rich and contextual data from the study participants' leader development experiences in the military. Two periods from the participants' careers were focused on (a) their initial assignment in the military, and (b) their time participating in the RLDP-P. These two focal points provided me a collective of shared experiences that were viewed from different perspectives.

Additionally, the focus on the participants' leader development experiences at their initial assignment provided me context to their foundational leader development experiences in the military.

Manual coding and ATLAS.ti (version 8) qualitative data analysis software both were used to move from codes to the inductive identification of the study's major themes. I included the detailed data analysis used to answer the study's research question: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? The following results answered the central research question:

- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) shared that the program made them create or refine their professional goals. This was inclusive of academic goals.
- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) shared that the program increased their desire for self-development. Self-development encompassed leadership aspects such as self-awareness and critical thinking.
- 7 out of 16 participants (43.75%) expressed a desire to improve their ability to develop others.

Four major themes emerged from the 16 semistructured interviews:

- No formal leader development.
- Investment in soldier development.
- Goal development.
- Self-development.

Lastly, I presented four subthemes that identified scalable and feasible aspects of the RLDP-P that can inform future DoD policy on leader development. Those four subthemes follow:

- The use of a diverse group of mentors in a small group environment.
- Provide diversity of cohort members.

- Exposure to senior leaders as part of the program.
- Exposure to professional broadening opportunities.

In Chapter 5, I present my interpretation of the study's findings, recommendations, the implications for social change, and opportunities for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 documents the integration, synthesis, and evaluation of the interview and literature findings as they relate to the study research question. I present the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for continued research. Lastly, I provide potential implications for positive social change as a result of this research.

The purpose of this interview-driven phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the United States Army Pacific's (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) to inform DoD policy on leader development. In this study, I sought to understand how participants of the RLDP-P described the impact of the program on their professional goals.

Transformational leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004), in the context of the full range leadership model, provided the theoretical lens through which I viewed the leadership experiences of the study participants. The conceptual framework for the study was an active duty Army leader development program. The RLDP-P was the selected program based on the conceptual framework.

The military excels at leader development and invests time and resources into developing its leaders, but there is still room for improvement. Although there are many types of leader development programs, no standardized access to leader development exists in the Army (Schirmer et al., 2008). Kirchner (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of Army veterans that echoed this variance in leader development experiences. As an Active Duty service member with 15 years of

experience and an alumnus of the RLDP-P, I was aware of the program's unique approach to leader development. The program is composed of leaders from across the DoD with a unique shared leader development experience that can inform future DoD policy on standardized access to leader development. As part of this study, I sought to identify scalable and feasible aspects of the program that can be replicated for future DoD leader development programs. Four subthemes emerged as feasible and scalable aspects of the program that can inform future DoD policy on leader development:

- The use of a diverse group of mentors in a small group environment.
- Exposure to senior leaders as part of the program.
- The presentation of professional broadening opportunities.
- Professional diversity of cohort members.

There was one central research question that guided this study: How do participants of the RLDP-P describe the program's impact on their professional goals? I found the following answers to the central research question:

- Out of 16 participants, 10 (62.5%) shared that the program made them create or refine their professional goals. This was inclusive of academic goals.
- Out of 16 participants, 10 (62.5%) shared that the program increased their desire for self-development. Self-development encompassed leadership aspects such as self-awareness and critical thinking.
- Out of 16 participants, 7 (43.75%) expressed a desire to improve their ability to develop others.

Lastly, there were four major themes that emerged from the 16 semistructured interviews conducted in this study:

- No formal leader development.
- Investment in soldier development.
- Goal development.
- Self-development.

I discuss the interpretation of the findings for these four major themes in detail in the following section.

### **Interpretation of Research Findings**

With a foundation in the related literature, I conducted this interview-driven phenomenological study to explore the experiences of service members who participated in the USARPAC RLDP-P to inform DoD policy on leader development. Although there has been extensive research conducted on leader development, the peer-reviewed literature search in Chapter 2 detailed the existing gap in both DoD policy and the need for research on standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers. This can largely be attributed to the widely varying implementation and access to leader development at the unit-level. The findings of this study will inform DoD policy on standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers and contribute to the discipline's literature.

#### **Theme 1: No Formal Leader Development**

The first major theme of the study was that the study participants did not receive formal leader development at their first military assignment. Of the 16 participants, 14 of

them did not receive formal leader development during their foundational years of service. That equates to 87.5% of the study participants failing to receive intentional development at the start of their careers. This was consistent with the literature reviewed for this study. Schirmer et al. (2008) found that no standardized access to leader development exists in the Army. Larsson et al. (2006) demonstrated that this challenge is not limited to the United States. Their multinational study of service members found a lack of formal leader development in the shared experiences of their study participants, which was congruent with the findings of the current study.

Although Kirchner (2018) demonstrated that veterans perceived a positive correlation to their leadership abilities learned during their military service, the study participants largely did not understand the Army's formal leader development components. The disparity of formal leader development as a foundational element of service members' careers largely explains the lack of consistency in not only implementation but comprehension of the Army leader development model outlined by the Department of the Army (2017b). The significant variances, in both frequency and quality, in foundational leader development activities shared by participants in the current study are consistent with findings at the unit-level across the Army (Schirmer et al., 2008).

It is important to emphasize that just as in a civilian organization, the priority for new service members is to learn their new job. The lack of formal leader development is delineated from the extensive field-specific training that most service members receive at their first assignment. As presented in Chapter 2, the operational domain of leader

development provides leaders the opportunity to develop new service members in their jobs through training and experiences inherent to their new positions (Department of the Army, 2017b). The current study's findings were consistent with this as study participants described development in their military specialty despite the absence of formal leader development.

The findings of this research study showed that organizations generally provided the participants with development that was focused solely on that particular job but did not seek to develop them for the long-term. Over 43% of the study participants experienced this limited approach to development at the start of their career. I viewed this data as the respective organizations focusing on one aspect of career development, the present position, rather than layering their approach to development. A layered approach would allow the service member to receive the critical job development for their new career and still orient the service member toward a future in the military. This could be achieved by leveraging existing tools such as monthly and quarterly counseling and making focused, career-oriented goal development and refinement an inherent part of the process. The literature supports this and presents developmental counseling as the single most important tool for developing leaders at every echelon of the organization (Department of the Army, 2014).

When analyzed in context of the full range leadership model (Avolio & Bass, 2004) the lack of formal leader development can be viewed as laissez-faire leadership or transactional leadership. The key metric was how passive or active the leadership was with additional development efforts. These two differentiators for transactional



leadership provided fidelity based on the level of interaction displayed by the leader with the followers (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2015). Participants with experiences at their first organization that provided them no type of leader development expressed alignment with laissez-faire leadership characteristics (Yukl, 2010; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This is not to say that there was not informal leader development occurring at these organizations. The organizations that provided the current study's participants development solely on the present job and failed to provide any formal leader development were more in line with passive or active transactional leadership. As presented in the literature review, transactional leadership is necessary in an organization like the military and has the same goal of transformational leadership (Caillier, 2014).

### **Theme 2: Investment in Soldier Development**

Investment in soldier development was one of two themes described by 16 out of 16 participants (100%), and it presented across three of the five interview questions. This signaled to me the importance of the perceived investment in development by service members. I stress the importance of the term *perceived investment*. As presented in the literature review, Bass' (1985) research showed that perceived investment can be achieved through individualized consideration displayed by leaders. Addressing each individual's need for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor is a means of achieving this (Bass, 1985), and it is a characteristic of transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The current study demonstrated congruence with this as the participants expressed perceived investment in terms of a leader's shared time, experience, and energy.

Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) described informal leader development as impactful, and it is a subtheme of investment in soldier development for this study. These findings demonstrate that a formal leader development program is not the only means of achieving a perceived investment in soldier development. The participants correlated leader development efforts as an investment in them and correspondingly saw a lack of leader development as an absence of investment in them. Several participants expressed that the military's investment in their leader development translated to their increased desire to make the military a career. These shared transformational leadership experiences from the current study coincide with findings that a deeper purpose that nests with subordinate needs can be provided by leaders (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Comparatively, participant rhetoric describing a perceived lack of investment in their development generally corresponded with a short-term perspective of the military as a career and thinking in terms of one contract of service. This was consistent with Avolio and Bass' (2004) findings that transactional leadership's failure to meet the self-interests of employees resulted in minimal achievement of desired outcomes. This finding is important as it denoted a potential correlation between the investment in soldier development and retention for future military service depending on the service member's perception of the investment or lack thereof.

When analyzed in context of the full range leadership model (Avolio & Bass, 2004), the study participants' shared experiences for this theme fell in alignment with both laissez-faire leadership and transformational leadership characteristics. When describing a perceived lack of investment in soldier development, the data presented in

alignment with laissez-faire leadership characteristics. Laissez-faire leadership is considered absent leadership (Yukl, 2010; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). When the current study's participants shared experiences for a perceived investment in leader development, including informal development, the data demonstrated alignment with transformational leadership characteristics. The participants described elements such as excitement to serve and motivation to develop themselves and others. Transformational leaders have the ability to not only identify individual needs of those they lead, but they see those elements as an opportunity to motivate through fulfillment of those needs (Burns, 1978). These characteristics of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) were in direct alignment with participant descriptions of investment in soldier development.

### **Theme 3: Goal Development**

Goal development or refinement was described by 12 out of 16 participants (75%) in the study, and it presented in at least two of the questions for 7 of those 12 participants (58.3%). Bass (1999) found that transformational leaders are capable of raising the mindset of individuals to shift an individualistic approach to one that nests with organizational goals and values. The current study echoed this finding as the study participants expressed goal development in alignment with transformational leadership characteristics (Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 2004). The subthemes of exposure to opportunities and broadened perspectives impacted how participants described goal development or refinement as a result of the RLDP-P. This was congruent with Bass' (1985) findings that characteristics of transformational leadership such as intellectual stimulation are effective development tools for leaders. From the data, I found that by

the program making a deliberate effort to expose the participants to developmental opportunities and broaden the participants' perspectives, it translated to independent goal development and refinement. Actual drafting of goals or refinement of goals is not a part of the formal structure of the program, but this study's findings show that it was a clear output of the program for 75% of the participants. A deliberate integration of this development tool might translate to an increased output of goal development for future leader development program participants.

When analyzed in context of the full range leadership model (Avolio & Bass, 2004) the study participants' shared experiences for this theme fell in alignment with transformational leadership characteristics (Burns, 1978). The participants described several of the characteristics of transformational leadership when describing goal development such as inspirational motivation and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Additionally, without specifying it, several participants shared goals that would carry them beyond the 10-year mark of service into their key development positions. This point of service tends to be a decision point for many service members as it is still early enough to take any gained identity capital and transition to another career outside the military. After the 10-year mark, many service members see themselves as too close to retirement to leave the military before reaching 20 years. For the participants still in their first few years of service, like Participant 9, this is a significant data point that also shows potential correlation to retention.

**Theme 4: Self-Development**

Out of 16 participants, 12 (75%) shared that the program caused them to focus on their self-development. Self-development as described by the study participants encompassed leadership aspects such as self-awareness and critical thinking. This finding was aligned with existing literature as the Army's leader development model presented self-development as one of its three domains (Department of the Army, 2017b). Additionally, Larsson et al.'s (2011) research demonstrated that the core of leader development experiences for junior officers was supplemented with personal resources. The transformational leadership characteristics of the current study's theme of self-development shows congruence with the literature regarding self-development's role in holistic development (Sosik et al., 2018).

As Kirchner's (2018) research found by exploring the experiences of Army veterans, although the Army's use of observed and experienced leadership opportunities was perceived as an effective leader development tool, few of the study participants understood the Army's formal leader development components. The findings of the current study demonstrated that this disconnect is partially due to the disparity of formal leader development experiences that emphasize self-development during the foundational years of the participants' careers. As presented in the literature review, the Army provides detailed doctrine on leader development. The Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 7-0 (2018) indicated that commanders should be providing the same intensity in their leader development as they do in training their units. This includes supporting self-development programs (Department of the Army, 2012). The findings of

the current study showed a disparity between the Army's intended implementation of unit-level leader development and actual implementation.

When analyzed in context of the full range leadership model (Avolio & Bass, 2004) the study participants' shared experiences for this theme fell in alignment with transformational leadership characteristics. Bass (1985) described transformational leadership as a method of influencing followers by the incorporation of motivational and inspirational practices. The study participants expressed the theme of self-development in terms of transformational leadership characteristics such as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). The program participants described a sense of motivation to develop themselves and others as a result of their experiences in the program. This is congruent with Steinberg and Leaman's (1990) findings that grouped necessary leadership tasks under four broad categories which included the category train, teach, and, develop. For context, 7 out of 16 participants (43.75%) expressed a desire to improve their ability to develop others as a result of the program. This means that the study participants have the potential to leave the program and actively seek to develop those in their respective reference groups.

Self-development is the domain from the Army leader development model that has the most upside potential for leader development. Operational development is dependent on opportunities for development to present themselves to the service member through their daily duties in garrison or combat. Institutional development is limited to particular developmental points in service members' careers and each service member generally receives the same development as everyone else in their career field. Self-

development however, is diverse, flexible, and can be conducted on a daily basis for the duration of a service member's career.

The compound effect of self-development has similar principles to that of compounding interest in economics. The focused, consistent, and incremental efforts of self-development compound on each other over time and lead to the achievement of an individual's personal and professional goals. By instilling the importance of self-development in the foundational years of service members' careers, the DoD would maximize its leader development efforts. From the start of service member's careers, the DoD can integrate the self-development domain into existing tools such as developmental counseling (Department of the Army, 2014). This shifts the self-development domain from a largely conceptual usage and provides the service member and their leadership a clear and measurable framework for the service member's self-development.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Sample size was the most significant limitation to this study. Although, I surpassed my proposed study participation of 10-12 RLDP-P participants, the 16 study participants are a small fraction of the total active duty service members in the DoD. An additional limitation is that all 16 participants of the study were from the Army. Although the RLDP-P is an Army sponsored program, it is comprised of participants from across the military branches. Further research would benefit expansion of the participant pool and the inclusion of RLDP-P alumni from the other military branches.

## **Recommendations**

As previously discussed, the 16 participants of this study were all from one branch of the DoD, the Army. Although there are many similarities in leader development across the force, each branch has its own culture and policy considerations. As a result of this, the findings might not represent the leader development experiences of service members in different branches. To assist with transferability, further research should include participants from each military branch. Also, the DoD is a large organization that is composed of over two million personnel when including the civilian employees (DoD, 2017). Further scholarly inquiry would benefit from an increased sample size and the use of quantitative methodology to provide triangulation of findings. Department of Army civilians are an integral part of the DoD and are also part of the unique composition of the RLDP-P. Future research could benefit from adding their leader development experiences. Lastly, a potential correlation between what the study participants perceived as an investment in their leader development and military service retention presented in the study findings. Further research is needed to explore this relationship.

## **Implications for Positive Social Change**

When counting the 742,000 civilian personnel and 826,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists, the DoD is the largest employer in the United States, totaling over 2.8 million people (DoD, 2017). The findings of this research could strengthen the DoD and its military branches from their foundations and improve the quality of service members for generations to come. The findings of this study have potential policy implications for



the DoD as it can inform the policy and research gaps in standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers. Most importantly, leaders in combat make decisions that have life or death implications for their followers. The improved decision-making capability from leader development can translate to a reduction in service members lost. Four subthemes emerged from the participants' shared experiences that identified scalable and feasible aspects of the RLDP-P. These four subthemes comprise four of my five policy recommendations for future DoD leader development programs:

- Use a diverse group of mentors in a small group environment.
- Expose program participants to senior leaders as part of the program.
- Expose participants to professional broadening opportunities.
- Comprise the program with diverse participants from different military specialties, ranks, and branches of service.

The final policy recommendation emerged from one of the major themes of the study and that is goal development and refinement. I recommend that this fundamental tool to focus an individual's developmental efforts be integrated into leader development programs from the start of service members' careers. In addition to focusing the self-development efforts of the service members, it will provide a standardized tool for all leaders to use as they work to develop their subordinates. Leaders can seek to use the written goals of service members as a living document that is refined with each counseling. It will help the leaders provide service members tailored feedback to help

them achieve their individual goals while achieving the organization's goals as well by nesting the two as applicable.

Each of these five policy recommendations require minimal resources or funding allocation. The study findings show that in a leader development program, these components positively impact the professional goals of service members. The identified scalable and feasible aspects of this program require the commitment of time, energy, and necessitate a priority to be placed on leader development for all service members at the start of their careers. These policy recommendations can be done in conjunction with the critical skill developments that enables our service members to maintain their high level of readiness in defense of the nation. Layering leader development efforts enhances that ability.

### **Conclusion**

Through this interview-driven phenomenological study, I explored the leader development experiences of active duty service members who participated in a very unique leader development program. The USARPAC RLDP-P is one of the few DoD leader development programs that services multiple branches, targets leaders early in their careers, and is specifically designed to produce adaptive leaders who think in a critical and strategic manner. The RLDP-P study participants provided rich and in-depth data from a variety of military leaders with varying ranks, ages, time in service, gender, and military service experiences. Due to the scope and magnitude of this robust leader development experience, it is not practical to provide all service members access to this

program. However, it is practical to learn from the RLDP-P by identifying scalable and feasible aspects of the program to inform future DoD leader development policy.

Many service members find themselves acclimating to their new lives in the military while they are simultaneously learning their roles as leaders. In the military, young leaders are given the immense responsibility of training other service members to potentially lead them into combat. It is not uncommon for a new officer who has recently graduated from college to be in charge of a platoon with 10-20 soldiers. The necessity for leader development at the start of service members' careers is heightened by the inherent levels of responsibility that many new leaders immediately face.

The military and many civilian organizations have this necessity for leader development in common. For the military, though, it is of heightened importance due to the possibility that these young leaders will also be sent to a combat zone as part of their first duty assignment. These leaders must be adaptive and prepared to lead soldiers in a complex environment (Department of the Army, 2015). This means in the most literal sense that service members from the start of their careers can be required to make decisions that have life or death implications. Being intentional about providing standardized access to leader development from the start of service members' careers better equips these young leaders to defend our nation. The investment in their development could also help them broaden their perspective and potentially map out their career in service to their nation.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

To gather the experiences of the participants and identify emerging themes to inform DoD policy on standardizing access to leader development I will ask the following questions:

1. Did your first unit have a leader development program that shaped your professional goals?
  - If yes, will you share some of the memorable aspects of that leader development program?
  - If no, will you share how you feel that impacted your growth as a new leader in the military in terms of your professional goals?
2. Will you describe for me any memorable leader development activities that you found beneficial from the RLDP-P?
  - Are there any other leader development activities you would like to highlight from the RLDP-P?
3. Will you describe for me any memorable aspects of the mentor and instructor engagements during the RLDP-P?
  - Is there anything else regarding the mentor and instructor engagements that you would like to share?
4. Will you describe for me any memorable impacts of the partner nation engagements that you experienced as part of the RLDP-P?
  - Is there anything else regarding the partner nation engagements that you would like to share?

5. Based on your participation in the RLDP-P will you share any impact the program had on your professional goals?
- Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experience in the RLDP-P?



## Appendix B: Army Research Institute Letter of Exemption

**From:** USARMY HQDA ARI (US)

**Sent:** Friday, August 24, 2018 9:22 AM

**To:** Butler, Glenn Joseph

**Subject:** FW: [Non-DoD Source] Glenn Butler Doctoral Study Proposal Informal Review

Good morning CW3 Butler,

Thank you for providing information about your study. I've determined your data collection to be exempt from survey licensure given your study contains no sensitive questions and targets fewer than 99 participants (none of whom belong to a vulnerable population). If you would like to inform potential respondents or IRB about this exemption, you may note the following:

The Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences deemed the interview project, Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform DoD Leader Development Policy, exempt from Army survey licensure on 08/24/2018.

Please ensure you follow up with an Army IRB or Army Human Subjects Protections Office to determine whether your study requires human subjects review. Should you have additional questions about the human subjects research protections review, I encourage you to consult AHRPO.

Best wishes in your data collection.

V/R,

Nicole Thompson, PhD  
Research Psychologist  
U.S. Army Research Institute

## Appendix C: Army Human Research Protections Office Approval



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
 OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL  
 7700 ARLINGTON BOULEVARD  
 FALLS CHURCH, VA 22042

REPLY TO  
 ATTENTION OF

DASG-HRPO

9 November 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR Mr. Glenn Butler, 8<sup>th</sup> Army Fire Support Element, Camp Humphreys, Korea, email: gbutler808@gmail.com

SUBJECT: Research Protections Administrative Review (RPAR) for Protocol "Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform Department of Defense Leader Development Policy," PI: Glenn Butler

### 1. Review Outcomes

The Army Research Protections Office (AHRPO) RPAR of the above referenced protocol is complete, and AHRPO concurs with the Walden University Institutional Review Board's approval of the protocol. RPAR review is required to ensure that Department of Defense (DOD) supported research involving human subjects is compliant with DOD requirements in DOD Instruction (DODI) 3216.02. DoD-supported research involving human subjects is defined as research involving human subjects for which the Department of Defense is providing at least some of the resources, including but not limited to funding, facilities, equipment, personnel (investigators or other personnel performing tasks identified in the research protocol), access to or information about DoD personnel for recruitment, or identifiable data or specimens from living individuals. It includes both DoD-conducted research involving human subjects (intramural research) and research conducted by a non-DoD institution. DOD is supporting the above referenced activity by providing access to DoD personnel for recruitment via email.

### 2. Requirements

**Substantive Changes to the Protocol:** The AHRPO must review and accept the IRB's determination when substantive modifications are made to this research protocol and any modifications that could potentially increase risk to subjects, before the changes are implemented to ensure compliance with the DODI 3216.02. Substantive modifications include a change in principal investigator, change or addition of an institution, elimination or alteration of the consent process, change to the study population that has regulatory implications (e.g., adding children, adding active duty population, etc.), significant change in study design (i.e., would prompt additional scientific review), or a change that could increase risks to subjects.

**Continuing Review:** The AHRPO must ensure an appropriate IRB continuing review occurred within the required timeframe. Submit communication from the IRB regarding any continuation approval or lapse in IRB approval.

**Study Closure:** The AHRPO should be informed of the date and reason for study closure (i.e., study completed, insufficient enrollment to sustain the research, etc.). The AHRPO must

DASG-HRPO

SUBJECT: Research Protections Administrative Review (RPAR) for Protocol "Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform Department of Defense Leader Development Policy," PI: Glenn Butler

receive the final study report submitted to the IRB, including a copy of any acknowledgement documentation and any supporting documents, as soon as all documents become available.

**Notification:** The investigator should immediately notify the AHRPO of the occurrence of any of the following:

- When the IRB used to review and approve the research changes to a different IRB;
- The knowledge of any pending, on-going or completed compliance inspection/visit by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or other government agency concerning this research; the issuance of inspection reports, FDA Form 483, warning letters, or actions taken by any regulatory agencies including legal or medical actions;
- Suspension or termination of this research study by the IRB, the institution, the sponsor, or any regulatory agency;
- Substantiated unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this research study; and
- Substantiated serious or continuing noncompliance related to this research study.

### 3. Other Considerations

If your activity will collect or elicit individuals' attitudes, opinions, behavior and related demographic, social, and economic data, then the activity may be subject to review and approval in accordance with DOD Instruction (DODI) 1100.13, DOD Surveys, and/or DODI 8910.01, Information Collection and Reporting. You may find more information about the Army Survey Approval process at the following: <https://ari.altess.army.mil/default.aspx> and <https://ari.altess.army.mil/pdf/InstructionsforArmySurveyReviewandApprovalforWeb.pdf>. Such approval is separate and distinct from AHRPO review and approval. AHRPO acknowledges that the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences deemed this project exempt from Army survey licensure on 08/24/2018.

### 4. Caution

Do not construe this AHRPO memorandum as IRB approval, DOD Institutional approval, or other DOD support agreement. This review confirms only that the above reference project is deemed by AHRPO to be compliant with the requirements identified in the DODI 3216.02.

DASG-HRPO

SUBJECT: Research Protections Administrative Review (RPAR) for Protocol "Exploring Leader Development Experiences to Inform Department of Defense Leader Development Policy," PI: Glenn Butler

**5. Point of Contact**

The AHRPO Point of Contact for any questions regarding this memorandum is Martha Alvarado at 703-681-5702 or martha.s.alvarado.civ@mail.mil.

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Martha Alvarado, MPH, CIP  
Research Ethics and Compliance Officer  
Army Human Research Protections Office

Appendix D: USARPAC Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific Letter of  
Cooperation

**Letter of Cooperation**  
**Between the United States Army Pacific Regional Leader Development Program Pacific**  
**& CW3 Glenn Butler for Dissertation with Walden University**

20 AUG 2018

This letter provides confirmation that the United States Army Pacific (USARPAC) Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific (RLDP-P) cadre will provide an e-mail distribution list for all current and past program participants. The e-mail distribution list will be used to provide a research invitation to each participant. CW3 Glenn Butler will be the sole researcher contacting the participants as part of his doctoral study. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of 10-12 program participants in order to inform Department of Defense policy on the most effective measures for regional leader development programs. No personally identifiable information (PII) will be stored or published as part of this study and all participant data will be anonymized and remain confidential. The two eligibility requirements for the study follow:

- 1) Participant must be an active duty service member.
- 2) Participant must have participated in the Regional Leader Development Program-Pacific.

No research invitations or data collection will be conducted before the researcher receives Army Institutional Review Board and the Walden University Institutional Review Board approval.



JONATHAN E. HOWERTON  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7

## Appendix E: National Institutes of Health Certificate

