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# THE TRANSFERABILITY OF SOFT SKILLS OF WOMEN VETERANS TO CORPORATE AMERICA

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THE TRANSFERABILITY OF SOFT SKILLS OF WOMEN VETERANS  
TO CORPORATE AMERICA

by

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B.S., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 1998  
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A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Department of Workforce Education  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

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for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Workforce Education and Development

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Graduate School  
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March 10, 2017

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

CHANTY BRADLEY CLAY, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, presented on March 10, 2017, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE TRANSFERABILITY OF SOFT SKILLS OF WOMEN VETERANS TO CORPORATE AMERICA

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Keith Waugh

The purpose of this study was to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support their career success by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans. Thorndike and Woodworth's (1901) Identical Elements Theory was used to better understand how women veterans transferred learning in one context (military) to another similar context (corporate America) and their identification, marketability, and utilization of these learned soft skills to the workforce. A narrative analysis was used in this study along with a triangulation method that included semi-structured interviews, review of the participants' resumes, and review of their current job descriptions. Credibility, reliability, and external validity were maintained throughout the study with member checks, peer reviews, and reflexivity. Findings show that women veterans were able to identify soft skills innately associated with the military, and when prompted they articulated other military soft skills. They also viewed their transition experience unfavorably, and believed their collective military experience, education, and skills are not being considered by organizations in their post military career development. The data collected resulted in recommendations for improvements in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and the need for women veterans to maximize the identification, marketability, and utilization of their transferable soft skills in support of their reintegration, and ongoing career development needs.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the brave women who have proudly served in the armed forces, with special recognition for the women in the United States Air Force. Without a doubt, you have served your country and have earned your respect as women and as veterans.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The separation from the military and transition to civilian life can be complex and even challenging for returning veterans. According to Morin (2011), returning to civilian life can pose unique challenges for veterans who encountered an emotionally traumatic experience, suffered a service-related injury, or served in a combat zone. As noted by Hayden, Osborn, Stein-McCormick and Van Hoose (2013), while not all veterans experience challenges with reintegration, women veterans will more likely experience some difficulty with reintegration, thus adding additional layers of complication to their overall post military transition.

In addition, many women veterans learn a plethora of transferable hard and soft skills during their military service; however, often times they are unable to effectively identify, market, and utilize their learned soft skills in support of their transition, reintegration, and post military career development. As noted by Han (2015), most soft skills are not taught in school and are often times learned on the job by trial and error.

Therefore, in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of the transition process that some women veterans experience in their post military career, this chapter is divided into three sections, each providing context as to the women veterans' transition experience. The first section includes a background overview of women in the military and their reintegration as a veteran. Section two describes the transition assistance support afforded to military women and veterans, and the significance of soft skills in the workplace. Lastly, the third section includes identified aspects of the transfer theoretical foundation and its association to the transition process affecting women veterans. All sections will highlight the various aspects of women

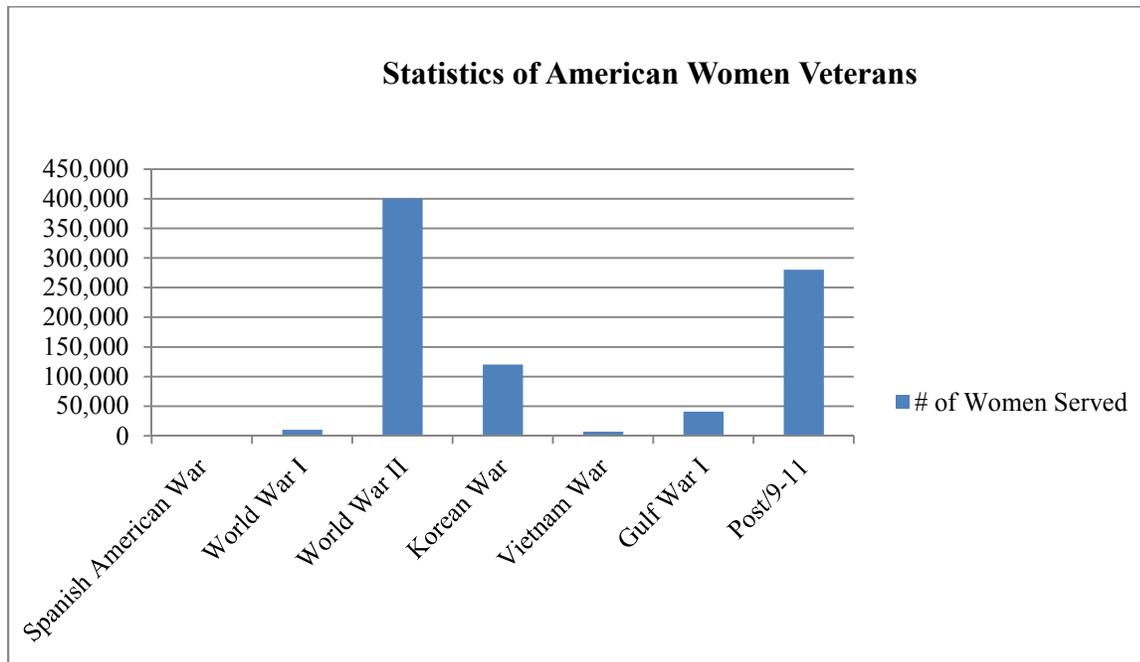
veterans' transitions to their post military careers and how my study intends to contribute to addressing any gaps.

### **Background**

For many years thousands of women have raised their right hand and were sworn to protect and serve their country as a member of the armed forces. In fact, according to the Department of Labor (DOL) (United States Department of Labor, 2015), the history of women volunteering and serving our country dates back to the American Revolution. As outlined by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2007), in *The Women Veterans: Past, Present and Future* report, it was not uncommon for women to act as pseudo military members in battle in support of their husbands, fathers, or brothers. Furthermore, most women served in conventional civilian roles, which included cooks, caregivers, and nurses (Holm, 1982). Unfortunately, their service was not compensated monetarily or with any formal training; most were given rations – food, clothing, and candy – in exchange for their service, and sadly their service has gone unrecognized. In fact, the Disabled American Veterans' (DAV) (DAV, 2014) report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*, also purported that “our nation does not yet adequately recognize and celebrate the contributions of women in the military service, treat them with dignity, and respect or promote their successful transition to civilian life” (p. 2).

The VA's (2011) *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics* report highlighted the increased number of women in service during various military eras and conflicts. Further noted in the aforementioned report, the military service of women remained a “very small minority of the Armed Forces population” (p. 1) until 1973 when legislation “imposed a two

percent cap on women’s participation in the military” (p. 1). However, when those gender caps were lifted, women entered military service at unprecedented rates (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Statistics of American women veterans throughout various military campaigns. Adapted from the “Military service history and VA benefit utilization statistics” by United States Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics American Women Veterans, 2011, p. 7. Copyright 2011 by the *United States Department of Veterans Affairs*.

As outlined by the DAV (2014), women accounted for approximately 20% of new recruits; 14.5% of the 1.4 million were active duty components; and, 850,000 were in a reserve component. Further, according to the above-referenced report, almost 280,000 women have served since Post-9/11 during the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, the report also estimated by 2020, the number of women in the veteran population is expected to “grow steadily from 1.8 million to 2 million” (p. 2) increasing their representation to approximately “11% of the veteran population” (p. 2).

As outlined in the VA's (2012) *Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans* report, women are now the fastest growing group within the veteran community. Furthermore, the VA (2012) reported that the population of women veterans has grown steadily over the last decade due to the increasing number and proportion of women entering and leaving the military. The aforementioned report estimated that in 2010 the median age of women veterans was 48 compared to 68 for men. This supports the expectation that women veterans and their needs are necessary to be addressed given the expected longevity of their integration in society. Outlined in the *Women Veterans in Transition* research project (2007a) conducted by the Business and Professional Women's Foundation (BPWF), women veterans are in need of a combination of both practical and psychological support as they transition from the military to the workforce. Further, they reported that various challenges of returning veterans are unique and could relate to a veteran's socio-cultural background, areas of diversity, and their "lived experience" (p. 42) in the military and should "point to the need for services that address the whole person with tailored interventions" (p. 42).

In fact, the DAV (2014) suggested that a vast majority of "women veteran's deficiencies are not met due to an imbalanced focus on the 80% solution for men veterans who dominate in both numbers and public consciousness" (p. 2). Further, the report highlighted that "women who serve our country in the military are strong and heroic" (p. 2) and unfortunately their contributions go "unrecognized as well as their challenges with readjustment post military" (p. 2).

### **Reintegration**

As outlined by the DOL (2015), understanding the unique reintegration needs of women veterans is more complex due to the lack of available data, and unfortunately most data that

exists related to veterans' needs does not differentiate gender. More importantly, as outlined by the DOL (2015), it is imperative to understand and address the unique reintegration needs of women to ensure they are valued in our society and not victimized. Hayden, Osborn, Stein-McCormick, and Van Hoose (2013) stated that "women veterans tend to have more difficulty with reintegration and with experiences that ultimately can add layers of complexity to their transition process" (p. 42).

Another factor impacting the reintegration of women veterans included in the DOL's *Women Veterans and Employment – Opportunities for Future Research* (2015) report is the issue of self-identification as a veteran, which many believe poses a unique challenge to conducting outreach to better understand their needs. Further, Zottarelli (2015) noted that women may not self-identify their veteran status for various reasons to include not actually fighting in combat, or having any combat exposure. Another reason why some women veterans do not self-identify, according to Zottarelli (2015), is related to the possibility of them encountering some type of traumatic experience, or worst case scenario they had an unsuccessful military career that resulted in a less than honorable discharge. In addition, Zottarelli (2015) also asserted that a significant amount of women veterans consciously choose not to self-identify because of the common misperception by non-veterans who tend to believe that a veteran is normally a male. Indeed, all of these factors may impact a woman veteran's lack of desire to self-identify. However, despite these challenges it is imperative for women veterans to self-identify as noted by Rafique (2016), to "recognize their service and utilize the wealth of resources available" (p. 1) as they reintegrate and transition into their post military career.

In addition, the DOL's (2015) *Women Veterans and Employment – Opportunities for Future Research* report stated the reasons women veterans are not self-identifying their veteran

status relates to confusion in definitions, general norms, and personal experiences. More specifically, the report asserts that women who choose not to self-identify are concerned with the social-psychological phenomenon known as “stereotype threat” (DOL, 2015, p. 2) that may contribute to decreased performance among women. Further, according to this report, a stereotype threat refers to “members of a group being more likely to perform according to a negative stereotype after they are made aware of the stereotype” (DOL, 2015, p. 2). All of these factors could impact a woman veteran’s ability to successfully transition from the military thus affecting her reintegration experience.

### **Transition Assistance**

According to the Business and Professional Women’s Foundation (BPWF) (2010), many women veterans encounter inconsistent or inaccessible transition resources when leaving their military obligations and returning to civilian life. One way to ensure women veterans are capable of assessing and understanding their military-provided skills is through career transition services. Therefore, as noted by the DOL (2002), a military transitioning program called Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was created in 1990 to support the service member’s transition to civilian life.

Further outlined in the DOL (2002) TAP manual, the program was established to provide job search assistance and related services to separating service members during their period of transition into civilian life. Clemons and Milson (2008) wrote that upon a military member’s transition from the service, one of the mandatory and recommended steps is to attend the TAP. In addition, to ensure all military members are afforded the opportunity to receive transition assistance, every separating service member must produce proof that pre-separation counseling had been received. Furthermore, according to Clemons and Milson (2008), the transition

training includes completion of a pre-separation checklist at least 90 days prior to separation and requires the military service member to accept or decline the U.S. military's offer for various transitional services to include career counseling.

As stated, the TAP is afforded to every military member upon separation or retirement; unfortunately, information is not differentiated specifically for women in the military.

According to the Women's Research and Education Institute (2001), there is an apparent need to understand if there are differences in approaches to job-hunting skills training provided to male and women veterans not being addressed in the TAP or other veterans' programs.

Thiruvengadam (2011) also reported that the TAP has not been "revamped" (p. 3B) since it was created nearly two decades ago – a period which saw an increase in the number of women joining the military.

Not surprisingly, many studies and reports have outlined the ineffectiveness and insufficient services of the TAP; and as a result, in 2014 the program underwent an overhaul and was redesigned as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Transition Goals, Plans and Success (GPS) program (Cronk, 2015). Although the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs co-led the redesign effort of the military transition program, Faurer, Rogers-Broderson, and Bailie (2014) stated that many other credible agencies collaborated on this redesign effort to include U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Further outlined by the DOD, the restructured program mandated that all service members discharged or released from active duty having served 180 continuous days on active duty under Title 10, U.S.C. would participate in pre-separation counseling, DVA briefings, and the DOL employment workshop (2014a). Additionally, according to the DOD, the redesigned

Military Transition Program (MTP) represents a collaborative effort to prepare the multitude of veterans continuously seeking employment opportunities after the military as a result of military downsizing and fewer military forces deployed worldwide (2014b).

To date, no studies have been conducted to compare the original and redesigned transitioning programs; however, the need still remains for customized transition and reintegration information specific to women veterans' needs. Henderson (1975) further explained that research regarding women veterans and the transferability and portability of their skills in the post-1973 era is scarce as the roles in the military for women were limited, and data had been neglected and even omitted from past and current military analyses. More recently, according to the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) *America's Women Veterans: Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics* (2011) report, data on women who served in the military was scarce in the decades after WWII. Further, the aforementioned report highlighted the realization that the 1980 decennial census marked the first time ever the women's veteran status was captured in a large national survey. Not surprisingly, the above-mentioned report validated current research that prior to 1980 the census questionnaire only inquired about the military service of men – hence the lack of data regarding women veterans.

The lack of knowledge regarding the needs and status of the women veterans has implications for the workforce. Specifically, data cannot be tracked by the Department of Labor (DOL) regarding the employment or unemployment rate of women veterans as outlined in the its *Women Veterans & Employment Opportunities for Future Research* (2015) report that purports the lack of publicly available data creates issues for understanding women veterans' needs.

There is also a lack of knowledge regarding the benefits afforded to women veterans associated with their transition and employment. According to the DOL (2015), the Government

Accounting Office's (GAO) 1982 report stated many women veterans were unaware that they even had access to VA benefits.

In addition, the VA (2014) found that "57% of women veterans who were eligible for VA benefits did not know that they were eligible" (p. 1). In fact, the VA's (2011) *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics* report attempted to identify actions to ensure all women veterans understood and had equal access to Veterans Administration benefits.

Research from the VA's (2011) in the *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics* report further supports the need of women veterans to understand the benefits afforded to them under the military transition program and the Veterans Administration. It also supports the need of the women veterans to be able to fully assess their career skills, and be able to identify those transferable skills to support a seamless transition to a civilian life and success in a comparable job in corporate life.

### **Soft Skills Transfer**

In today's workplace, soft skills could potentially enhance a person's career progression and ultimately complement one's hard or occupational skills. Mahasneh and Thabet (2015) defined soft skills as the "needed ability and traits that are often used to describe non-technical skills" (p. 2). And, according to Robles (2012), many employers would prefer their new employees possess "strong" (p. 453) soft skills as well as hard skills. Further noted by Nealy (2005), soft skills are critical in today's workplace and in most instances support employees' career success, increase performance and productivity, and more recently many leaders are emphasizing the need for developing their employees' soft skills.

According to Clark College Career Services (2012), transferable skills are defined as "versatile skills and qualities learned and developed over time that can be applied to many

situations” (p. 1). Further outlined by Clark College Career Services (2012), transferable skills can be *soft* or *hard* and are also helpful as veterans navigate through life and transition to the workplace. And, as noted by Han (2015), hard skills can be “learned in school, from books, and are usually a designated level of competency and a direct path as to how to excel” (p. 1). In fact, lacking the ability to self-assess and identify one’s soft and hard skills could potentially have long term financial, physical, and behavioral consequences on the earning power, workplace attitude, and overall success of the women veterans transitioning into the workforce.

Therefore, many women veterans could benefit from marketing and utilizing their soft skills in a post military career. Watson (1983) noted that soft skills are portable and possessing them can enhance the person’s opportunity for career success. Kozlowski and Salas (1997) posited that acquisition of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes are of “little value” (p. 195) if they are not generalized in a job or enhanced over time. Additionally, Arguinis and Kraiger (2009) noted that “knowledge, skills, and abilities are necessary to maintain a competitive advantage” (p. 103) in an ever-changing workforce.

If women veterans lack the ability to transfer the soft skills and knowledge gained in the military to viable employment in a post military career, they are at risk of inadvertently devaluing the training and experience received in the military. As a result, Thorndike and Woodworth’s (1901) Identical Elements Theory, and Perkins and Salomon’s (1988) transfer theories will be used to identify and better understand the transfer process of women veterans transitioning to the workforce.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Given that women veterans learn several soft skills during their military service and transfer those skills to their post military career, Thorndike and Woodworth’s (1901) theory of

identical elements is relevant to this study. According to Thorndike and Woodworth (1901), the Identical Elements Theory suggested that transfer from one task to another would only occur when both tasks shared identical elements. Further, they proposed that the greater the number of shared elements, the greater the amount of transfer. Royer (1978) suggested that Thorndike and Woodworth's theory of identical elements has heavily influenced many of the subsequent considerations of the transfer theory.

Several taxonomies related to the training transfer theory have been identified to include the following:

- *Near transfer* which is the overlap between situations, original and transfer contexts are similar;
- *Far transfer* which has little overlap between situations, original and transfer settings are dissimilar;
- *Positive transfer* simply describes what is learned in one context enhances learning in a different setting; and,
- *Negative transfer* includes what is learned in one context hinders or delays learning in a different setting. (Schunk, 2004, p. 320)

Goel (2009) posited that the training objective is not achieved until learning transfers from one context to another. Cormier and Hagman (1987) stated that the transfer of learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts performance in another context or with other related materials. Therefore, according to Perkins and Salomon (1989a), transfer takes place whenever our existing knowledge, abilities, and skills affect the learning and performance of new tasks. More importantly, as noted by Arguinis and Kraiger (2009), in today's global and

ever-changing economy one's transferable knowledge and skills are necessary to maintain a "competitive advantage" (p. 103).

Ball and Mangum (1989) conducted a study using the data from the National Longitudinal Survey-Youth Cohort (NLSY) that focused on the transfer of skills to civilian employment. In fact, according to Ball and Mangum (1989), this was one of the first studies to look at the transferability of military-provided occupational training for both men and women and their earnings in the post-draft era that began in 1974. Additionally, using the data from the NLSY cohort study, Ball and Mangum (1989) examined the factors of the transfer of military and other types of training, and the effect of skills transfer, veteran status, and post-school training on the annual earnings and hourly wages of volunteer-era veterans. Specifically for women veterans, as outlined by Hirsch and Mehay (1996), the authors found that military training is less likely than various types of civilian training to be transferred to civilian jobs. Although Ball and Mangum (1989) offered preliminary evidence on the earnings of female veterans, further research is clearly warranted.

Clooney, Falk, Segal, and Segal's (2003) research focused on the socioeconomics of women veterans and viewed the human capital theory as a bridging environment from military service to civilian life. Clooney et al. also hypothesized that the bridging environment of the military should improve the socialization experiences not available to those entering the All-Volunteer Force (AVF). The status of minority women veterans was also Clooney et al.'s point of focus as the results were positive in terms of the educational and financial outcomes from this study. Overall, this study highlighted how women veterans achieved advantages as a result of their military service. And, many studies have been conducted by organizations that support women veterans and the unique issues that impact their transition for post military career

success. Therefore, a need for further investigation into the transition of women veterans' post military careers is necessary for ongoing support of women veterans.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although transfer theory has been researched and explored in depth to understand various phenomena, there are missed opportunities to better understand how women veterans identify and transfer their soft skills from the military to viable roles in corporate America. Dochy (1992) wrote that the amount of prior knowledge an individual has is a powerful predictor of new learning. Therefore, women veterans could potentially bring a wealth of existing knowledge from their military training and experience to roles in corporate America. It is even more important for women veterans to be able to identify, market, and negotiate their skills for post military career success. Unfortunately, very few women veterans use much of their prior knowledge and military skills deliberately, spontaneously, and aggressively, resulting in a very low return on investment in terms of transfer (De Jong & Simons, 1990; Dochy, 1992).

As outlined by Shane's (2015), the *Mission Continues on Monday* survey of women veterans transitioning in their post military life, most women veterans do not feel "respected and valued as veterans" (p. 1) and this perception impacts their sense of identity and ability to successfully transition. Given that women veterans are a growing segment of the workforce population, it is important to understand their unique transition needs (BPWF, 2007). Atwood and Camacho (2007) outlined two future research questions related to the needs of women veterans to include the following: (a) how effective are the Department of Veterans Affairs programs for women veterans? and (b) how salient is veteran status for women veterans?

Moreover, Atwood and Camacho (2007) highlighted pertinent sociological questions to be researched for future studies related to women veterans to include these: (a) what does

research on the latest generation of women veterans say about the progress, or lack of progress toward integration of women in the military? (b) how active are women veterans in small-business endeavors in comparison with civilian women cohorts? and (c) are women veterans better able to negotiate or survive in the corporate sectors dominated by males than their nonveteran cohorts? Answering and addressing most, if not all, of the above-mentioned questions would support a cohesive transition support plan for women veterans. More specifically, the last question closely relates to the need to better understand the transferability and integration of their learned skills in their post military career as it would be plausible for women veterans to utilize and even maximize their previous experience; however, future research would determine if this is indeed factual.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Brown (2003) defined employability as the “capability to move self-sufficiently through the labor market” (p. 1). Further noted by Brown (2003), employability for an individual “depends on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes one possesses, the way one’s assets are presented to the employer, and the context within they are worked” (p. 1). Therefore, many women veterans encounter employability issues such as identifying, marketing, and utilizing their military learned soft skills that are not being addressed in the transition process, and are ultimately faced with several issues to include unemployment or underemployment. According to the Business and Professional Women’s Foundation (2007b), standardized transition activities do not take into account the unique transition needs of women veterans. Further, the report highlights that some employers are not adequately engaging with women veterans to better understand the knowledge, skills, and abilities they gained in the military and are not taking full advantage of this growing source of “intellectual capital” (p. 1). It is, therefore, important to

study if and how women veterans are marketing, utilizing, and transferring their military skills in corporate America. Equally important is to understand if there are significant issues associated with the transition process in preparing the women veterans for their post military careers to avoid adding to the increasing unemployment rate and underemployment crisis.

### **Significance of the Study**

Unfortunately, research specifically focused on the transfer of skills for women veterans is extremely limited. More specifically, to date there is no literature designated to women veterans and the identification, marketability, and utilization of their transferable soft skills to corporate America. However, the number of women veterans entering the workforce in the upcoming years is expected to grow dramatically. As noted by the DAV (2014), by 2020 the number of women in the veteran population is expected to “grow steadily from 1.8 million to 2 million” (p. 2) at which time “women will make up 11% of the veteran population” (p. 2). In addition, women veterans also faced many issues while serving their country that could impact their employability to include, but not limited to, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual assault, and more recently combat exposure. Indeed, the lack of career and transition preparation for women veterans can potentially impact their reintegration in the workplace. Therefore, lacking the ability to identify, market, and utilize their military learned soft skills can unfortunately result in underemployment, unemployment, and even homelessness in their post military transition. Lastly, many Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals are ill-prepared to support women veterans’ transition into the workplace, as well as their ongoing post military career development needs. Therefore, it is important to conduct this study to support the effective career preparation, reintegration, and transition of women veterans and the transferability of their soft skills in their post military employment and career process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support their career success by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate.

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions this study aims to answer include the following:

1. How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?
2. How do women veterans identify and market their transferable skills in corporate America?
3. How do women veterans utilize their transferable skills in organizations for career success?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were provisionally defined and will be clarified later as interview results are analyzed.

- *Gulf War I era veteran*: veteran who served anywhere in the world during the period of August 1990 – August 2001 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).
- *Gulf War II era veteran*: veteran who served anywhere in the world during the period of September 2001 – present (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).
- *Hard skills*: can be learned in school, from books, and are usually a designated level of competency and a direct path as to how to excel. Examples of hard skills include

math, physics, accounting, programming, finance, biology, chemistry, and statistics.

Also, the ability coming from one's knowledge, practice, and aptitude to do something well (Han, 2015).

- *Korean War era veteran*: veteran who served anywhere in the world during the period of July 1950 – January 1955 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016)
- *Soft skills*: character traits and interpersonal qualities also known as people skills, and personal attributes that one possesses (Robles, 2012).
- *Transferable skills*: such as social skills, communication, leadership and problem solving skills that can be applied in many different situations (United States Department of State, Bureau of Human Resources, 2006).
- *Underemployment*: the condition in which people in a labor force are employed at less than full-time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- *Vietnam era veteran*: veteran who served anywhere in the world during the period of August 1964 – April 1975 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).
- *World War II era veteran*: veteran who served anywhere in the world during the period of December 1941 – December 1946 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

After serving in the military and gaining valuable skills from training, many women veterans anticipate a successful reintegration into the workforce by transferring their learned skills. As noted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014), the projected number of women leaving the military is expected to increase in the upcoming years. Shane (2015) noted that women veterans make up about 16% of the veterans population, which is the highest in history. Moreover, Brown and Lent (2013) suggested deeper insight into the transitioning needs of veterans is necessary to address the challenges that accompany their career transitions. Moreover, Anderson and Goodman (2014) noted that although each branch of service provides pre-separation counseling and transition services, more often the support offered is limited to job search activities and is for the most part “short-term” (p. 40). Thus, if women veterans lack the ability to market, utilize, and transfer the knowledge gained in the military to viable employment post military career, they are at risk of adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate and inadvertently devaluing the training received in the military.

The Business and Professional Women’s Foundation (BPWF) (2007b) found that women veterans received relatively less support upon return from service compared to male veterans and generally have a difficult time with transition. Many veterans – especially women veterans - could benefit from some type of assistance in identifying the magnitude of resources, programs, and unique factors that directly and indirectly impact their transition (Lin, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support the

career success of women veterans by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate. In order to provide a more in-depth analysis of the research related to transition of women veterans, the literature review is divided into four sections, each covering one aspect of my study. The first section includes an historical overview of the evolution of women in the military. Section two includes information specific to soft skills and the relevant use of these skills in today's work environment. Section three expands on the theoretical foundation of the study as it relates to the transition of military women and veterans. Lastly, the fourth section includes identified factors affecting the employability of women veterans. All sections of the literature review will include identified gaps in existing literature in the specific areas and how my research study intends to contribute to addressing these gaps.

### **Historical Overview**

Women have proudly served in the military throughout all periods of United States history, and to date still contribute to protecting our country (Innes, 2014). According to the VA (2007), it was not uncommon for women to act as pseudo military members in support of their husbands, fathers, or brothers into battle. Unfortunately, as shared by Holm (1982), the women who served received no formal training, no monetary compensation, and were only given rations such as food, clothing, and candy in exchange for their service. Furthermore, the VA (2007) report indicated that most women served in conventional civilian roles. Holm (1982) noted that the roles given to women included cooks, caregivers, and nurses.

Thomas (1978) noted that the institutionalization of the nursing corps during the Spanish-American War essentially established women as a formal part of the military. Unfortunately,

this only gave women marginal status as they continued to encounter discriminatory practices and received no military rank or benefits veterans (Holm, 1982). Although World War I (WWI) was considered a milestone for women in the military, the most significant historical turning point happened during World War II (WWII) when the needs for additional support resulted in approximately 280,000 women serving (Holm, 1982). Further noted by Holm (1982), WWII also marked a significant change for women; they were afforded full military status to include military status, rank, benefits, and monetary compensation.

The VA's (2007) *Women Veterans: Past, Present and Future* report also noted the trend toward greater equality for women in the military began in 1973 with the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), and when occupational roles opened up for women. Holm (1982) highlighted that a need was established to promote women in positions other than nursing roles as women were seen as critical to the military despite retention challenges after the AVF 1973. As outlined by the VA (2014), the integration of women in the military and the degree of militarization have changed intensely over time. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) (2014) also highlighted that the change to full military status did little to increase the number of women serving in the armed forces as they encountered a 2% cap on their enlistment. The aforementioned report noted that in 1973 women joining the military increased when the 2% cap was lifted (DAV, 2014). More importantly, the report also noted that women were then considered veterans after serving in the armed forces.

According to the Szymendera (2016), a veteran refers to a person who "served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from conditions other than dishonorable" (p. 1). Despite the many efforts that have been instituted to make the military a more career-oriented, viable employment option for women, Holm (1982) stated that more

needs to be done to encourage women to remain in the military to take advantage of the training, experience, and opportunities to support a viable post military career.

### **Evolution and Role Changes**

According to Innes (2014), while employability of women veterans and the transferability of their skills post military career is an important issue, it is certainly not the only one effecting their transition. According to the DAV (2014), expanded research is needed to better understand women veterans' unique needs to include focus on the impact of combat exposure and experience, reintegration, employability post military career, and homelessness. Historically, as shared by Kleykamp (2013), roles in the military for women were limited to certain occupations and many viewed this limitation as occupational gender discrimination. Further, underscored by Kleykamp (2013) in the *Unemployment, Earnings, and Enrollment among Post 9/11 Veterans* research brief, although progress was made and certain roles were open to women in the military, there were still a few jobs closed to women. Specifically, the Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women (CHCUW, 2012) stressed that roles in the military had become more diversified and resulted in many women achieving promotions and top ranks. However, Bumiller and Shanker (2013) stated that the 1994 ban on women in combat roles still existed.

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACWS) (2011) highlighted that there are consequences and potential long-term impacts to be addressed as a result of women troops deploying multiple times in combat and in combat environments. In addition, the CHCUW (2012) noted in the *Women in the Military and Women Veterans* report that the “evolving roles of women in the military have introduced new risks to their health” (p. 2) as many are now allowed to serve in combat roles thus exposing them to “physical injury, emotional trauma and disability” (p. 2).

In addition, Kamarck (2016) noted that the GAO was instrumental in highlighting disparities faced by women in combat roles as they were “barred from many combat-related jobs,” (p. 5) resulting in an impact on the expansion of women in the armed services.

Furthermore, Kamarck (2016) noted that the GAO reported the primary rationale for “excluding women from direct ground combat occupations” (p. 6) was due to “lack of public and congressional support, lack of support by servicewomen, and lack of need given that there were an adequate number of men available to fill those positions” (p. 6).

Kamarck (2016) stated that many women in the military “served in combat environments for much of the recent history of the U.S. military” (p. 1). Furthermore, this report stated that “in the past two decades of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, the lines between combat and noncombat roles have become increasingly blurred and as a result DoD’s exclusion policies have been called into question” (p. 1). Wood (2015) shared that research and reports outlining the need to diversify roles in the military directly supported the ban being lifted on women serving in combat roles thus creating additional opportunities for skills development. Wood (2015) also noted, however, that changes would be “gradual” (p. 1) with only designated positions available immediately; and, each “branch of the military would have until 2016 to request exceptions to the new rule” (p. 1). Fortunately, as shared by Wood (2015), the Pentagon announced that same year that “all combat jobs would be open to women” (p. 1), thus leveling the playing field and opening doors for additional skills opportunity.

One identified result of combat exposure is the significant increase in the use of services offered by the VA to women. The VA (2012) proclaimed that women veterans who use their services has “doubled in the past 10 years from 160,000 in 2000 to 337,000 in 2011” (p. 1) as a result of combat experience, and the new roles offered to women. Kukla, Rattray and Salyers

(2015) noted in a recent study that approximately 70% of soldiers returning from “combat” (p. 477) experienced at least one readjustment stressor. Kukla et al. (2015) also stated that work reintegration after leaving the military – particularly after combat exposure – can result in a variety of factors that “influence the way veterans think about themselves, other people, and their ability to succeed” (p. 487), for employment and a post military career.

Therefore, if women veterans do not take advantage of the veteran services offered to them upon separation from the military, as well as lack the ability to self-assess, identify, and transfer the soft skills gained during their military career, they are involuntarily complicating their post military transition. To better understand women veterans’ transition from the military to the workforce, and the transferability of their soft skills, Thorndike and Woodworth’s (1901) Identical Elements Theory was used.

### **Strands of Research**

Unfortunately, research specifically focused on the transfer of soft skills for women veterans is limited. The Department of Labor (DOL, 2015) reported that a specific challenge in understanding issues related to women veterans is impacted by the limited publicly available data related that is not “differentiate by gender” (p. 1). According to the DOL (2015), research that is inclusive of all veterans and not segmented by gender impacts research studies and in most instances results in “insufficient samples to conduct a more differentiated analysis” (p. 1). It is important to outline, according to the DOL (2015), that the oversight of women veterans data in research makes it difficult to “identify veteran trends, gender trends, overlaps of the two, and unexplained phenomena” (p. 1). Therefore, DOL (2015) reported that more recently progress has been made to include both a gender variable and a veteran variable in all future

employment-related research which may reveal valuable trends pertaining to women veterans and the transfer of their skills from the military to a successful post military career.

Several studies have examined how military-provided occupational skills training transfers to post military career success and employment. Specifically, Ball and Mangum (1989) conducted one of the earlier studies that included information on women veterans collected from the National Longitudinal Survey-Youth (NLSY) Cohort. Ball and Mangum (1989) examined the data from the NLSY to better understand how military-provided training affects post military employment in the post-AVF era. However, this research did not include data on women veterans, further adding to the gap of research on the transfer of women veterans and the impact to their reintegration and employability post military career.

### **Soft Skills**

There is a plethora of research related to the transfer theory. However, there are limited studies related to the transfer theory of women veterans. Moreover, there is a lack of data and research related to the transition needs of women veterans in corporate America. Not surprisingly, no research specifically focuses on the transfer of soft skills related to women veterans and the marketing and utilization of those skills in corporate life.

Unfortunately, literature specific to the transferability of soft skills for women veterans is scarce. Nevertheless, there has been ancillary research that examined the portability of skills from career to career and the transfer of soft skills from college to employment but nothing specific to women veterans and the transfer of their soft skills to viable post military employment (Bates, Bell, Cragolini, Crebert, & Patrick 2004; Brown, Hackett & Lent, 1999; Cohen, Duberly & Mallon 2006; Fouad & Swanson, 1999).

Evenson (1999) suggested that many companies, businesses, as well as educational settings have used the term soft skills for an extended period of time. In fact, according to Sheikh (2009) and Smith (2007), interpersonal skills or soft skills are in many cases the most important skills employees possess at all levels in an organization. Robles (2012) also noted that soft skills are a combination of both “interpersonal and personal attributes” (p. 457). More importantly, as noted by Robles (2012), soft skills are “employability skills that are transferable in many jobs” (p. 458).

A review of relevant literature suggests several key transferable soft skills integral to successful employment:

- Professionalism and reliability;
- The ability to cope with uncertainty;
- The ability to plan and think strategically;
- The capability to communicate and interact with others in teams, or through networking;
- Good written and verbal communication skills;
- Creativity and self-confidence; and,
- Good self-management and time-management skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 413).

Further, Barone, McLarty, Sojka, and Tucker (2000), Elias and Purcell (2004), McLarty (1998), and Nabi (2003) complemented the previously identified soft skills by identifying the importance and willingness to learn and accept responsibility as another viable soft skill necessary in the transition process specifically for employment. In fact, many employers are now viewing soft skills equally as important as technical skills. Robles (2012) clearly noted how

business executives consider soft skills a “very important attribute” (p. 453) for employees and future candidates both internal and external to the business for open positions. In addition, Nealy (2005) suggested that many current and future business leaders prefer employees who possess and utilize their hard and soft skills as both are critical in the performance development and performance management process of employees.

According to Klaus (2010), approximately 75% of long-term job success is dependent on people or ‘soft skills’, while only 25% is dependent on technical expertise. Perreault (2004) proclaimed that possessing and demonstrating soft skills can set a candidate apart from other individuals or job seekers who may have similar technical and hard skills. Therefore, women veterans who transition from the military to civilian employment should focus on identifying, marketing, and utilizing both hard and soft skills acquired during their military career to viable post military employment.

Not surprisingly, many women veterans are not capitalizing on the soft skills learned in the military in their post military careers. In fact, a study of 1,022 veterans conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation (2015) reported that 63% of veterans are not using three or more of their skills such as managing the career development of others, decision-making, relationship or stakeholder management, and team building that could be relevant in a corporate work environment. More importantly, Huber (2015) underscored that several valuable skills learned during a veteran’s military service are not being used effectively, and many of these military learned skills are “transferable to the workplace” (p. 1). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support their career success by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability

issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate. Tennant (1999) examined whether soft skills learned in a specific situation can be bridged from one construct to another. Not surprisingly, this position was drawn from Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) who further postulated the following:

[A] recurring observation of the study of transfer in one situation fails to transfer to another... that such failures are an inevitable consequence of the limited power of generality of human knowledge. Just having knowledge that logically implies a solution to a task is not enough. One must learn to apply that knowledge to specific situations. (p. 165)

### **Theoretical Foundations**

This section examines what researchers have identified about the transition theory, Identical Elements Theory, and factors affecting the employability of women veterans. The first section includes information specific to the transition theory as well as the main categories of the theory as it relates to transition. The second section focused on the Identical Elements Theory and its association to the transfer of learning and the transfer of training, and information regarding the near/far and low/high transfer taxonomies. The last section discussed existing literature on factors affecting the employability of women veterans, and identified organizations specifically focused on research related to women veterans and their transition into the workforce.

#### **Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory**

Schlossberg (1981) stated that a transition, "can occur if an event or non-event results in a change of assumptions about oneself or the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Therefore, an initial model regarding life transitions by

Schlossberg (1981) suggested the following characteristics as influential factors in the transition process: (a) the particular transition, (b) pre- and post-transition environments, and (c) the individual experience. Schlossberg's transition theory (2011) considers the need for understanding transitions as anticipated, unanticipated, or a non-event and how individuals cope and adapt to life-altering change.

According to Schlossberg (1981), individuals cope and adapt to transitions differently based on time, resources, and challenges that can be organized into the four main categories of situation, self, supports, and strategies. Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg (2006) purported that transition relates to shifting roles and questioning one's value system. According to Buzzetta, Reppert, and Rose (2014), referencing one's "individual assets and inner strengths" (p. 86) from the transition theory is necessary as it relates to the actual transition event. Hayden et al. (2013) recommended using Schlossberg's 4S transition model as a "resource for assisting veterans in managing their transition concerns" (p. 86) and especially women veterans.

### **Identical Elements Theory**

Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) originally introduced the Identical Elements Theory to explore how individuals would transfer learning in one context to another similar context facilitated through the use of identical elements. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) noted that Thorndike and Woodworth were the first to use transfer tests to examine assumptions about learning with the doctrine of "formal discipline" (p. 51) or practice from learning. Thorndike (1913) posited that the degree of transfer between the initial and later learnings was dependent upon the match or similarities across the two contexts. McLean and Yamnill (2001) proclaimed that according to the Identical Elements Theory, transfer is improved by increasing "the degree of correspondence among the training setting stimuli, responses, and conditions" (p. 201).

Further, Taylor (1997) suggested that Thorndike and Woodworth's theory also implied that transfer of learning depends on how similar the learning and transfer tasks are which are influenced in the process. Mandel and Tracey (2012) outlined that the essence of the Identical Elements Theory can be explained in a way that "the more elements (ex: content and procedure) of one situation are identical to the elements of a second situation, the greater the transfer, and thus the easier learning in the second situation" (p. 44).

Al-Araimi (2011) argued that predictable and stable work environments tend to have different approaches as to how they apply a lens on the Identical Elements Theory. Dudovskiy (2013) noted that the principle of Identical Elements Theory stated that the "level of training transfer depends on the level of similarity between training and performance environments" (p. 1). Dudovskiy (2013) continued and shared that there is a "positive correlation between the similarities of training and performance environments" (p. 1) and the level of training transfer. Further Bransford et al. (2000) posited that "processes of learning and the transfer of learning are central to understanding how people develop important competencies" (p. 51).

As stated, the Identical Elements Theory was originally introduced by Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) as the transfer of practice. Bransford et al. (2000) noted that early research on the transfer of learning was guided by "theories that emphasized the similarity between the condition of learning and the condition of transfer" (p. 51). As noted by Tuijnman (1996), the outcome of transfer related to three approaches to include the following: (a) the similarity of the course and target situation (identical elements hypothesis), (b) significance of general strategies for transfer, and (c) support of transfer by situated cognition (p. 592). Cormier and Hagman (1987) defined the transfer of learning as the "application of skills and knowledge learned in one situation and applied in another" (p. 151). Sharma (2015) further expounded on the definition of

the transfer of learning as the “partial or total application” (p. 1) carryover of a combination of skills, habits, knowledge, and attitudes from one situation to another.

Varron (2012) noted that the transfer of learning is “facilitated in the second situation to the extent that it contains identical elements or factors” (p. 1) which occurred earlier in the learning situation; and, these factors may be in the form of concepts, action, facts, attitudes, or principles. Although research related to transfer of learning and transfer of training has evolved, so has the need to further define these terms to better understand the applicability of the Identical Elements theoretical framework to women veterans’ transfer of soft skills in their post military career.

### **Transfer of Learning**

Subedi (2004) articulated that existing definitions and the conceptual framework on transfer of learning and transfer of training “do not differ fundamentally” (p. 594); however, both terms closely relate to learning and originate from the domain of pedagogic psychology. Additionally, Subedi (2004) suggested that the transfer of learning derives from a “knowledge base and generic competencies” (p. 594), whereas, transfer of training focuses on “specific competencies and the implicit and explicit use of knowledge, skills, and attitudes” in the work place (p. 594).

Dudovskiy (2013) noted that identical elements could include a variety of items to include content, procedures, skills, and or behaviors. Further, Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) proposed that the greater the number of shared elements, the greater the amount of transfer. Royer (1978) suggested that Thorndike and Woodworth's Identical Elements Theory has heavily influenced many of the subsequent considerations of transfer theory.

Goel (2009) stated that the “goal of all training interventions” (p. 1) is the transfer of learning. Sharma (2015) described the meaning of *transfer* as “the effects of past learning upon present acquisition” (p. 1). Baldwin and Ford (1988) suggested that transfer is the effective and continuous application of skills and knowledge gained in a training context and effectively used on the job. Interestingly, Foxon (1993) proclaimed that trying to define transfer in terms of post-training application can be “problematic” (p. 131). Holding (1991) stated that “transfer of training occurs whenever the effects of prior learning influence the performance of a later activity” (p. 93). Kozlowski and Salas (1997) posited that acquisition of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes through training is “of little value” (p. 195) if the new learnings are not generalized to the job and more importantly maintained over a period of time.

Therefore, Broad (1982) suggested that many practitioners will look for “proof of the transfer” (p. 132) in terms of a positive impact or positive occurrence after training. Perkins and Salomon (1992) further claimed that transfer of learning can either enhance (*positive*) or undermine (*negative*) a related performance. Not surprisingly, Perkins and Salomon (1992) further noted that negative transfer is often problematic and the impact normally takes place in the early stages of learning. Luchins and Luchins (1970) also noted that negative transfer can “hurt” performance on a related task and “limit people’s abilities to function efficiently in a new setting” (pp. 51-53). Fortunately, as noted by Perkins and Salomon (1992), learners are able to course-correct for the “effects of negative transfer” (p. 3) by leveraging their gained skills and experience.

Ball and Mangum (1989) noted that a key factor in the economic value of any training experience is the transferability of the training. Not surprisingly this includes military training which is transferable to viable post military employment. Therefore, if women veterans lack the

ability to transfer the soft skills gained in the military to viable employment post military career, they are unconsciously demonstrating what Foxon (1993) referred to as *transfer failure*.

To better understand the four stages of transfer failure, Foxon (1993) listed the following stages to assess *transfer failure*, and noted that transfer failure is more probable in the early stages of the transfer process:

- Transfer intention normally happens at the end of course motivation as the learner applies certain aspects of the learning in the work environment (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Noe, 1986). In addition, transfer failure will most likely occur at this stage according to Foxon (1993) and it can be perpetuated if learners leave the training with low motivation.
- Transfer initiation referred to the attempts to apply some form or aspect of the learning on the job (Laker, 1990). Also noted by Foxon (1993), transfer initiation is imperative to support partial transfer and transfer maintenance.
- Partial transfer assumes that transfer is sporadic and inconsistent and as noted by Foxon (1993), is the “norm” (p. 133) although no specific research to date has addressed this issue.
- Transfer maintenance is referred to by Baldwin and Ford (1988) as the final stage maintaining the application of the learning to the job over a period of time to support performance enhancement. Foxon (1993) further expounded that skills progressed to “unconscious use” (p. 143) and integrated into one’s job behavior are considered positive hence the goal of transfer.

Conversely, transfer can also have a positive outcome and effect. Therefore, Baldwin and Ford (1988) defined positive transfer as the degree to which individuals successfully apply skills learned in one context and enhance learning in a different setting. Sharma (2015) further

defined positive transfer as “learning in one situation facilitating learning in another situation” (p. 2). Bates, Carvalho, Holton and Seyler (1997) collectively agreed that learning is of little value unless it is “transferred in some way to performance” (p. 196). More importantly, Goel (2009) highlighted that when learners become more self-aware and take accountability, as well as ownership of their learnings, they increase the likelihood of transfer.

As stated, several taxonomies related to the training transfer theory have been identified and are applicable to the transfer experience of women veterans to employability in their post military career:

- *Near Transfer* which is the overlap between situations where original and transfer contexts are similar;
- *Far Transfer* which has little overlap between situations; original and transfer settings are dissimilar;
- *Positive Transfer* simply describes what is learned in one context enhances learning in a different setting;
- *Negative Transfer* includes what is learned in one context hinders or delays learning in a different setting;
- *Low Road Transfer* is when well-established skills transfer in almost automatic fashion; and,
- *High Road Transfer* involves abstraction and conscious formulations of connections between contexts (Schunk, 2004, p. 320).

**Near and Far Transfer.** Additionally, Goel (2009) suggested the most notably influential theory to explain the transfer of learning are the *near-transfer* versus *far-transfer* theories. According to Perkins and Saloman (1992), transfer can include “near transfer” (to

closely related contexts and performances) and “far transfer” (to rather different contexts and performances) (p. 2). Perkins and Saloman (1992) posited that “near transfer is much more likely” (p. 4) to occur than far transfer.

In fact, according to previous research, all of the following contribute to successful near transfer as it is more likely to occur based on the following:

- Training content and program reflect the workplace;
- There is greater specificity about where and how training is applied;
- There is a deliberate overlearning of a task;
- The procedure is emphasized; and,
- The application of the training is restricted to areas in which the trainee was prepared (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Clark & Voogel, 1985; Noe, 1986).

Therefore, as McLean and Yamnill (2001) purported, the Identical Elements Theory influences the “acquisition of near transfer” (p. 202). Juxtaposing near transfer, McLean and Yamnill (2001) noted that far transfer can be “abstracted and connected” (p. 202) to new problems. Moreover, Laker (1990) suggested that far transfer is more conducive for management development or for creative problem solving. McLean and Yamnill (2001) also stated that individuals are more likely to apply new skills and behaviors when faced with “new challenges and unfamiliar problems” (p. 202).

**High and Low Road Transfer.** Developed by Perkins and Salomon (1988), *low road* and *high road* transfer are also recognized in the transfer process. Low road transfer refers to developing knowledge and skills to a high level of automaticity. Further, low road transfer requires a “great deal of practice in varying settings” (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p. 3). In contrast, high road transfer involves the cognitive understanding and “purposeful, conscious

analysis, mindfulness, and application of strategies” (p. 3) that can be applied across multiple disciplines. Further, Perkins and Salomon (1988) noted that in high road transfer, there is an “intentional mindful abstraction” of an idea then the “conscious, intentional application” (p. 3) of the idea when faced by a problem or issue.

**Factors Influencing the Transfer of Learning.** Baldwin and Ford (1988) suggested three factors that directly impact the transfer process to include training inputs, training outputs, and conditions of transfer. Grossman and Salas (2011) proposed that training inputs both directly and indirectly influence conditions of transfer through their “impact on training outputs” (p. 105). Furthermore, Grossman and Salas (2011) advocated that training inputs are crucial for the “learning, retention, generalization and maintenance” (p. 105) of targeted skills. Burke and Hutchins (2007) posited that trainee characteristics are powerful in the transfer of training. Further, Burke and Hutchins (2007) suggested that an individual’s cognitive ability is a strong predictor of transfer outcomes.

Bandura (1982) proclaimed that self-efficacy has also been associated with the transfer of training and is defined as the judgment an individual makes about his or her ability to perform a given task. Grossman and Salas’s (2011) research suggests that self-efficacy “partially contributes to transfer through its influence on motivation” (p. 109). Grossman and Salas (2011) further aligned the association of self-efficacy with positive and negative transfer. More specifically, Judge and Robbins (2009) noted that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to “exert more effort” (p. 109) to meet the challenge. Conversely, a study conducted by Kendall and Vancouver (2006) highlighted that self-efficacy negatively related to motivation and performance when examined at the individual level. Despite these two opposing positions,

Grossman and Salas (2011) suggested existing research continues to align the significance of self-efficacy with positive transfer.

Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) posited that the transfer climate can inhibit or facilitate the use of learned skills. Belcourt and Saks (2006) proclaimed that individuals who perceive a positive transfer climate are more likely to apply learned competencies on the job. Grossman and Salas (2011) defined characteristics of positive transfer climate to include cues to prompt individuals to use new skills, consequences for the correct use of skills, social support, incentives, and feedback. Further, according to Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992), previous research and scientific literature available on transfer of training with focus on organizational support is limited. Grossman and Salas (2011) stated that “support is one of the most salient aspects of the work environment” (p. 113) related to transfer. Further noted by Grossman and Salas (2011), lack of management support is a “significant barrier” (p. 113) to the transfer of training. In fact, many studies have been instrumental in emphasizing the importance of leader involvement in the transfer outcomes (Belcourt & Saks, 2006; Bushe & Gilpin-Jackson, 2007).

Many researchers have questioned Thorndike and Woodworth’s Identical Elements Theory as more studies focused on the evolution of the transfer of learning and other transfer theories emerged (Foxon, 1993). Subedi (2004) declared that the amount of “research on strategies to facilitate transfer” (p. 591) of employee training is still limited. Bransford et al. (2000) highlighted that the emphasis on identical elements of tasks “excluded several key factors such as learner characteristics, whether relevant principles were extrapolated, problem solving, creativity, or motivation” (p. 53) and more emphasis on “drill and practice” (p. 53).

### **Factors Affecting the Employability of Women**

Given the anticipated large number of women veterans currently in the workforce and those expected to enter the workforce in the near future, there are risks to their employability if they are unable to translate their military skills (Chicas, Maiden, Oh, Wilcox & Young, 2012; DOL, 2015). Not surprisingly, women veterans face similar challenges as non-veteran women with employability in the workplace; some highlighted challenges include pay equity, promotion, and personal and professional development. While this list is not all inclusive, these identified issues create a multitude of reasons to better understand the success of women veterans' post military career to avoid aggravating the current environment of non-veteran women.

The underpinnings of this research are indirectly aligned with the feminism theory (Bartowski & Kolmar, 2005), as both the military and corporate America can be interpreted by many as male-dominated environments. This theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality for women veterans. According to Bartowski and Kolmar (2005), the feminism theory examines women's social roles, experience, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology, sociology, communication, education, and philosophy. Although progress has been in terms of equality, Thomas (2015) noted a recently conducted comprehensive *Woman in the Workplace* study which highlighted the need for continuous progress in the area of equality in the workplace.

Specifically, the *Women in the Workplace* 2015 study focused on the state of women in corporate America based on input from 118 companies and approximately 30,000 employees. The study confirmed that women are still “underrepresented at every level in the corporate pipeline” (Thomas, 2015, p. 1). Thomas (2015) further noted that the study suggested that both the “structure and culture of work” are impacting women in the workplace as they are still

experiencing an “uneven playing field, a workplace skewed in favor of men” (p. 1), and are twice as likely to think their gender will make it harder for advancement. Therefore, it is important to explore if skills learned in one environment (military) support the career success of women veterans in another environment (corporate America) with the hope of mitigating some of the aforementioned challenges faced by woman veterans.

Specifically for women veterans, Dolsen (2015) summarized their experience by proclaiming that a “one-size fits all solution” (p. 9) to transition issues ignores the “diversity of the military community and unique challenges” (p. 9) women veterans face both *during* and *after* serving their country. Outlined by Huber (2015) in the article *Unlocking the Value of Veterans in the Workplace*, although many companies have good intentions when designing recruitment strategies for veterans, gaps still exist. More specifically, the gap includes knowledge of the various unique challenges, as well as strategies to handle these challenges that sets veterans apart from their civilian co-workers. Of course, these challenges can unintentionally impact veterans’ employability as well as their longevity with the company.

Chicas, Oh, Maiden, Wilcox, and Young (2012) recognized that several organizations have created policies and programs to “bolster the labor market’s capacity to employ” veterans (p. 2). Chicas et al. (2012) proclaimed that these organizations are “serving as critical pieces of the larger movement to ensure veterans are securing employment and effectively transitioning to civilian life” (p. 2). Armstrong and Haynie (2012) outlined in the *Veterans Employment Survey* that many mid-to-senior level managers, of which many were veterans, highlighted several positive outcomes to support the employability of veterans. Specifically, the survey was administered to 77 participants from 37 different industries and was disaggregated to examine the differences of veterans and non-veterans (Armstrong & Haynie, 2012).

According to the aforementioned survey, results overall were positive; however, “responses were slightly more positive among participants with prior military service” (Chicas et al., 2012, p. 3). Not surprisingly, Chicas et al. (2012) posited that approximately 85% of respondents thought veterans are “disciplined, make good leaders, work well in teams, show organizational commitment, and bring cross-cultural experiences to the workplace” (p. 3). Additionally, Chicas et al. (2012) highlighted that 80% of the respondents agreed that veterans “take on high levels of responsibilities” (p. 3) and are “advanced at team building skills” (p. 3). Further, Chicas et al. noted that 83% of respondents felt it was “valuable to expose their workplace to individuals with military experience” (p. 3). Overall, as eloquently noted by Chicas et al. (2012), “securing employment is one of the first steps veterans can take to successfully transition to civilian life” (p. 3) and ensuring frameworks are in place to support women veterans career transition and employability success are imperative.

### **Employability**

Gazier (2006) defined employability as “an individual’s ability to find and keep a stable job in a given economic and institutional context” (p. 11). Many women veterans as noted by Reidel (2007), received quality training during their military career; however, some lack the ability to understand, self-assess, and translate those skills thus potentially having an impact on their employability and post military career. In addition, women make up about 15% of the military with approximately 200,000 women in the enlisted or officer ranks (Wood, 2015). In an *nbcnews.com* report, Reidel (2007) reported that while military training programs have produced some of the best women leaders in our country, 76% of women veterans felt unable to effectively translate their military skills to civilian terms.

Further, the BPWF's (2007) *Women Veterans in Transition* survey found that women veterans received relatively less support upon return from service and generally experienced a more difficult transition. Further, Zoroya (2012) reported that nearly 22% of women veterans – or an estimated 50,000 women – who served during both Iraq and Afghanistan wars were unemployed as of December 2011. Certainly, the reintegration of women veterans into the civilian workforce can be a challenge; and, it is especially heightened given today's economic challenges.

According to the VA's (2011) *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics* report, one of the most prominent issues facing the women veterans is the high unemployment rate. Thiruvengadam (2011) highlighted the alarmingly high unemployment rate of women veterans at 13.5%, which is approximately 3% above nonveteran women. Thiruvengadam (2011) also reported that women veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were more likely to be unemployed, and unfortunately were more likely to be underemployed, resulting in financial implications as well as their reintegration. The DAV (2014) reported that approximately 280,000 women served in the Iraq and Afghanistan war. Further noted, many women veterans who returned from deployment encountered combat exposure and faced a significant difficulty which may have had an impact on their mental, psychological, and social health. Of course, these issues may require additional transition support for women veterans' reintegration specifically with acquiring viable employment post military career. Further noted in the above-mentioned report, there is a "misperception" (p. 2) that problems women veterans experienced while at war will disappear when "there are no more boots on the ground" (DAV, 2014, p. 2). Zoroya (2012) further articulated concerns for the high unemployment rate of women veterans

despite an overall decline in unemployment as well as an increase in federal programs to help veterans.

Although research suggests that the unemployment rate for women veterans was at one point acute, more recently there appears to be some improvement. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2016), indications of some reprieve from the progressively high unemployment rate of women veterans was on the horizon. Outlined by the BLS (2016), the unemployment rate for women veterans was 6.4% in 2015 indicating an improvement from the prior year's 8.5%. The unemployment rate data was collected from the 2015 *Current Population Survey*, which the BLS (2016) defined as a "monthly survey of about 60,000 eligible households that obtains information on employment and unemployment among the nation's civilian non-institutional population age 16 and over" (p. 8).

Progress toward employability of women veterans appears to be moving in the right direction. However, opportunities still remain to equip women veterans with the necessary skills to identify and negotiate their transferable skills so that prior military training and experience is viewed as a return on investment. The Business Professional Women's Foundation (2007) found that many women veterans are ill-equipped at articulating their military skills in addition to civilian employers lack the ability to understand their skills. Therefore, Zoroya (2012) posited that the issue of high unemployment among women veterans is especially unfortunate as many of them possess military experience that translates to the workforce. Innes (2014) stated that women veterans will more likely "face problems finding work after leaving the military" (p. 1) if they are not highlighting their "transferable skills" (p. 1).

In addition, Zoroya (2012) wrote that many women veterans experience unemployment as they tend to gravitate toward work in areas now experiencing severe cutbacks such as the

education and public sector. However, many women veterans possess transferable skills that are not limited to the education and public sector. In fact, many women veterans are applying their learned skills in many other industries in corporate America. Zoroya (2012) further noted the identification and the “lack of marketable civilian skills” (p. 1) as potential culprits in the unemployment issue of women veterans. Consequently, women veterans can ensure they possess the talent to identify their transferable skills with transition support or training.

As outlined in the VA’s *Women Veterans: Past, Present, and Future* (2007) report, the number of women in the military ultimately affects the population of women veterans in the civilian workforce. More specifically, the BPWF (2007) reported that in 1980 there were 1.1 million women veterans; by 2008, there were 1.8 million, and an estimated 1.9 million women veterans is expected by 2020 – approximately 10% of the veteran population. Innes (2014) reported that currently women “account for 20% of the new recruits,” (p. 2) which highlights the emerging trend toward an increase in the future of women veteran population seeking employment. Moreover, the BPWF (2007) reported that more than 150,000 women will be transitioning out of the military over the next few years; and, most will be seeking jobs that capitalize on their transferable skills and talents learned in the military.

### **Homelessness**

Another implication of ineffective career transition impacting women veterans includes homelessness. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD, 2012) *Annual Homeless Assessment Report* highlighted the commonly held notion that military experience provides women service members with job training, education, benefits, as well as the maturity needed for a productive life in their post military career. This notion, albeit a positive perspective, has conflicted with the increase and presence of women veterans in the homeless

community. Fortunately, according to HUD (2012), between 2011 and 2012, the number of sheltered female veterans has declined by 22.4 % (3,095 fewer women), which is reflective of continuous improvement to identify and support homeless women veterans in finding homes. Perl (2015) further noted in the *Congressional Research Service Veterans Homelessness* report that the critical issue of women veteran homelessness received the much deserved attention, and is now approximately 8% of the homeless women population. In order to continue to reduce the homelessness issues women veterans' face, it is important for women separating from military service to receive sufficient support in all aspects of their transition needs.

### **Organizations Focused on Women Veterans**

Several organizations have identified and researched the needs of women veterans and their transition to a successful post military career. In fact, high profile organizations that focused solely on supporting the needs of the women veterans to better understand the benefits and transition impacts include the BPWF (2007) and the Women's Research Education and Institute (WREI, 2012). In fact, these two organizations have conducted multiple studies, written numerous briefs, and have been instrumental in policy changes, increased services, and additional resources for women veterans.

#### **Business Professional Women's Foundation**

The Business and Professional Women's Foundation was established in 1956 and was the first foundation dedicated to conducting research and providing information solely about working women (BPWF, 2012). The BPWF have been in the forefront of diversity and inclusion by partnering with employers to create successful workplaces that embrace and practice diversity, equity, and work-life balance to support the career success of women (BPWF, 2012). As included on the BPWF website, this organization has conducted multiple studies on women

veterans and non-veteran women to include the *Women Veterans in Transition (WVIT) Research* project. According to BPWF (2012), the goal of the WVIT research initiative is to provide information and resources about women veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workplace by highlighting the unique needs of women veterans.

### **Women's Research Education and Institute**

According to the Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI, 2001), which was founded in 1977, its mission is to identify issues affecting women in their roles in the family, workplace, and public arena, and to inform and help shape the public policy debate on these issues. WREI is committed to equality for working women to include military women and women veterans. Since 1989, WREI has monitored the status of women in the U.S. armed forces, produces a biennial report, and holds biennial conferences to examine the roles and responsibilities of women in all uniformed professions, including firefighting, policing, and peacekeeping (WREI, 2001).

One of WREI's major initiative's the *Women in the Military* project was established in 1990 to provide information and policy analysis on issues important to military women and women veterans to government policy makers, scholars, the media, and the general public (WREI, 2001). The BPWF (2012) and WREI (2001) have been instrumental in changing the lives of many women veterans and non-veteran women. Both of these organizations have conducted major research that played an important role in the transition and employability of women veterans.

### **Transition Assistance**

As stated, there are limited studies focused on the preparation of the women veterans as it relates to their transition and the transfer of their soft skills to corporate America. The Women's

Research and Education Institute (2001) reported that there was a need to better understand the differences in approaches to job-hunting skills training provided to men and women veterans not being addressed in the TAP or other veterans' programs. Further outlined by WREI (2001), future research would need to take into consideration the unique needs of women veterans and their transition requirements with regard to employability. Therefore, Clemons and Milson (2008) wrote it is necessary that the TAP support the service member by providing explicit training to help the military member understand how to translate the portability and marketability of one's military training and experience to civilian roles. Research focused on the employability of women veterans, and their ability to identify, market, and utilize their transferable skills in a post military career will need to become a priority (Clemons & Milson, 2008).

The percentage of women in the military has increased over the decades resulting in advanced opportunities, roles, and transferable skillsets. Moreover, Anderson and Goodman (2014) noted that although each branch of service provides pre-separation counseling and transition services, more often the support offered is limited to job search activities and are for the most part "short-term" (p. 40). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (2014), women are becoming the fastest growing segment of the workforce population, and there is a need to understand and ensure they are fully prepared to transition those skills post military career. Buzzetta et al. (2014) suggested that women veterans are in need of, and deserve effective assistance with career their transition. Another common difficulty with women veterans' transition is their inability to identify and market the skills they acquired through their military experience. According to Felder (2008), possessing the ability to articulate "one's

military skills to an employer” can be somewhat overwhelming, and requires additional preparation and support (p. 86).

In the Center for Talent Innovation (2015) survey of a 1,022 veterans, approximately 29% felt “overqualified for their current position” (p. 1), and many of their transferable military skills that “translate into the workplace setting are being left on the table” (p. 1) therefore impacting their transition and post military career success. Cleymans and Conlon (2014) stated that transition assistance has been a “long-standing practice” (p. 154) for military members; however, recent statutory changes mandated participation by all service members. Thiruvengadam (2011) also reported that the TAP has not been “revamped” (p. 3b) since it was created nearly two decades ago – a period which saw an increase in the number of women joining the military.

As shared, many studies and reports have highlighted the ineffectiveness and insufficient services of TAP. As a result, in 2014 the program underwent an overhaul and was redesigned as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Transition Goals Plans and Success (GPS) program (DoD, 2014b). In fact, the redesigned program and enhancements resulted in a name change from the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to a broader name that is inclusive of the revised changes (Cleymans & Conlon, 2014). The new transition program, now known as Transition GPS, “requires service members to produce evidence of meeting specific requirements that are aligned with their stated post-service goals” (Cleymans & Conlon, 2014, p. 154).

Faurer, Rogers-Broderson, and Bailie (2014) stated that the DoD and the VA co-led the redesign effort of the MTP and collaborated with other credible agencies the program’s redesign effort to include DOL, United States Small Business Administration, United States Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. As outlined by the DOD (2014b),

the restructured program mandated that all service members discharged or released from active duty having served 180 continuous days on active duty under Title 10, U.S.C. would participate in pre-separation counseling, VA briefings, and the DOL employment workshop. Further, the DOD (2014b) stated that the redesigned MTP represents an effort to prepare the thousands of veterans still seeking employment opportunities after the military as a result of military downsizing and fewer military forces deployed worldwide.

### **Summary**

Lastly, research related to the historical contributions of women in the military and their transition experience as veterans has increased dramatically over the last several years. Unfortunately, minimal progress and research has been made to better understand the unique challenges women veterans face when transitioning from the armed services. As noted, Thorndike and Woodworth's (1901) Identical Elements Theory was used and it was determined that there are opportunities to better understand how women veterans are able to transfer learned skills from one context (the military) to a similar context (corporate America) for career success. As noted by the Council on Veterans Employment (2015) report, women veterans are "younger, more educated" (p. 3)... and, are "more likely to be in the civilian labor force" (p. 3) compared to their male veteran counterparts. Therefore, the DAV's (2014) *Women Veterans: A Long Journey Home* report recommended researchers, policymakers, and Congress monitor and enhance the services offered to women veterans specific to their healthcare needs, transition, and employment.

To date there are very few theoretically-founded research based studies on women veterans' transfer of soft skills to post military careers. Further, research should be conducted to better understand the differences and implications between hard skills and soft skills transfer

specifically for women veterans. Ball and Mangum (1989) recommended further research to investigate the consequence of military transferability of skills for veterans; however, an expanded perspective to explore the experiences of women veterans and the transferability and portability of their soft skills post military career is critical for future employability and transition into corporate America.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The purpose of this study was to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support their career success by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate.

The central research questions this study aims to answer include the following:

1. How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?
2. How do women veterans identify and market their transferable skills in corporate America?
3. How do women veterans utilize their transferable skills in organizations for career success?

Thorndike and Woodworth's (1901) identical element and the transfer theories were used as frameworks to examine how women veterans transfer their military learned soft skills to the workforce in their post military career. Therefore, in order to better understand the methodology most appropriate for this study, this section is divided into eight sections: (a) research design, (b) pilot study, (c) data collection, (d) research population and participants' work environment, (e) data analysis, (f) validity, reliability, and ethics (g) impact on theoretical leanings, and (h) personal bias statement.

First, the structure of the research design section includes the rationale for choosing a qualitative design as the most suitable for fulfilling the purpose of this study. The next section describes the pilot study conducted with women veterans that informed and supported the

method for this study. This is followed by data collection method and processes used in the study. Next, the research population section includes a description of the sample population, the rationale for selecting this group to conduct this study, and the participants' work environment. The data analysis section is included with focus on the processes used in the study. A section specific to ensuring validity, reliability, and ethics was also included, as well as an area with specific focus on the impact of theoretical leanings for this study. Lastly, a section was dedicated to the researcher's personal bias statement.

### **Research Design**

According to Baldeo, Brassolotto, and Raphael (2013), the epistemological concept is correspondingly dependent upon "critically evaluating or transcending previous ways of thinking" (p. 1) in order to gain a greater understanding of the world we live in. Further, Merriam (2009) identified four epistemological perspectives of qualitative research: (a) positivist (post-positivist), (b) interpretive (constructive), (c) critical, and (d) postmodern (post-structural). Of the aforementioned perspectives, the epistemology most beneficial in this research is the interpretive and social constructivist. Creswell (2007) explained that in a constructivist paradigm, individuals "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 9). Further Creswell (2007) posited, "... meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views"...and, these "subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically..." (pp. 20-21). Thus, as a researcher operating in a constructivist or interpretive model, interest was in understanding how individuals made sense of their experiences, what meaning they attributed to their experiences, and how they constructed their worlds (Merriam, 2009), especially women veterans and their transition process into the world of work.

As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) further posited that qualitative research consists of a “set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible” and these “practices transform the world” (p. 1). According to Preissle (2006), qualitative research is “vague, broad and inclusive enough” ( p. 13) to support understanding the experiences of the world. Therefore, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) concluded that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings while attempting to interpret and make sense of the phenomena” (p. 1). Philosophically speaking, most people will interpret things through their own lens and experiences; therefore, it was natural to utilize a qualitative approach in this research.

There are basic characteristics of qualitative inquiry that support this method as the most suitable for fulfilling the purpose of this study. As outlined by Merriam (2009), qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding, not just of how people make sense of the world but also of “delineating the process of meaning-making and describing how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). The focus is to “...gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (Wyse, 2011, p.1). In addition, it also provides insight into the problem or helps to develop ideas for future research and increases the possibility of discovering and exposing the influences, actions, beliefs, and perceptions of participants (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 1990). Further, Wyse (2011) stated that quantitative research is mainly used to quantify the problem by generating numerical data to be transformed into useable statistics. In contrast, as stated by Merriam (2009), the overall purpose of qualitative research is to “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23).

Therefore, qualitative studies are normally inductive in approach (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). As stated by Van Maanen (1979), qualitative research is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 13). As suggested by Sandeloswki (2004), an important contribution of qualitative research is that it “complicates and thereby unfreezes the idea of evidence, foregrounds the politics in definitions of evidence, and precludes a priori prejudices against certain types of evidence” (p. 1382).

In addition, Lewis and Ritchie (2013) posited that qualitative research involves close contact between the “researcher and the people being studied” (p. 4) whereby the researcher is the primary instrument. Furthermore, Maxwell (2005) noted that a qualitative researcher is used as a means of data collection and analysis. As noted by Storr and Xu (2012), in order to become an effective qualitative researcher one would need to deliberately apply a whole new way of thinking about what “constitutes as evidence” (p. 1).

However, there are advantages and disadvantages with the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection. One major advantage is that the researcher is present at the data collection phase and is able to adapt to unforeseen issues as they unfold. Further, by being part of the data collection process, the researcher can enhance the process by being able to identify and react to non-verbal cues and responses through the observation of the participant or data source (Merriam, 2009).

Alternately, there are indeed disadvantages to qualitative research. Specifically, the subjectivities and biases of the researcher could have an impact during the data collection process as well as the interpretation of the data. Finally, qualitative research is rich in

description. It is through the description that the researcher builds the context of the study and the perception of the participants. The findings, therefore, are in the form of themes around the perceptions of participants regarding the phenomenon being studied, which in this case would be the transition experience from the military and the transfer of learned soft skills for women veterans.

Creswell (2007) identified five perspectives in qualitative research to include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, and case study. Given that my theoretical framework is the Identical Elements Theory and the transfer of training of women veterans, the narrative analysis was used to explore the transition experiences of women veterans, and the transfer of their soft skills from the military to corporate America. According to Chase (2011), narrative inquiry “revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who lived them” (p. 421). As indicated by Merriam (2009), “first-person accounts of experience form the narrative or text” (p. 202) of a qualitative research approach. That being stated, narrative inquiry was the most logical and effective research approach for this study because it allowed the women veterans to share their transition experience, and to narrate their own stories.

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) noted some of the more common characteristics of narrative approaches to include the researcher focusing on the individual stories of one or a few participants, the practical use of the participant’s stories, the ability to allow flexibility in how the participant’s stories and meanings may impact or change the inquiry, and focus on articulating through written communication the complex and multilayered meanings in literary form. And, Best and Kahn (2006) highlighted the effective use of narratives and stated that a narrative analysis is “used to study people’s individual life stories” (p. 269). Therefore, a

qualitative study facilitated a rich description of the participants' perspectives and the narratives around their transition process, which enabled me to construct the context of the study and analyze the findings more in-depth.

### **Pilot Study**

Given the desire to better understand the transition experience and plight of women veterans in the transfer of soft skills from the military to corporate America, the opportunity arose to conduct a pilot study as a requirement of an Advanced Qualitative Methods class. The study conducted in spring 2012 aimed at finding answers to the following research questions:

1. How do women veterans identify their transferable skills in corporate life?
2. How effective was the Transition Assistance Program in the transition from the military to the workforce?
3. How do women veterans negotiate their transferable skills for post military career success?

The main goals of conducting this pilot study were the following: (a) check the suitability of the research design; (b) test and identify any deficiencies in the methodology; (c) test the proposed interview protocol; (d) learn to collect, analyze, and report qualitative data; and, (e) prepare or rehearse as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis for future research.

Further, a financial services company in the Midwest was selected because of the company's robust goal to hire 20,000 veterans by 2020, ultimately increasing the representation of the current 7,500 male and female self-identified veterans dramatically in the next several

years. In fact, the self-identification status was determined as each veteran opted to disclose their prior military status; thereby, both male and female veterans made their status known.

The participants (n = 5) in the study were prior active duty military and were no longer serving in a reserve or guard capacity. They included prior enlisted and officer ranks with no time limit as to when the women veteran served in the armed forces. The participants were diverse and inclusive of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, with various military careers, as well as various current job titles and roles within the financial services company.

The women veterans all had different experiences from various military locations both domestic and international. In addition, they all were full-time employees and all had varying levels of experience as either an individual contributor or leader. The study provided an invaluable opportunity to frame future dissertation research more effectively. From this process, valuable lessons were learned regarding the interview protocol, scheduling, the sample selection, and the opportunity for improvement as a researcher.

A total of 11 interview questions were included on the pilot study interview protocol, all related to the three research questions. The guidelines set by the American Psychological Association (2010) manual were followed in this research. Further, as outlined on Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC, 2016) website, the Human Subjects Committee (HSC) is “responsible for reviewing all human-subjects research projects, regardless of discipline or funding source, conducted by individuals affiliated with SIUC, including students” (p. 1). Additionally, the Southern Illinois University Carbondale (2012) website stated that approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) must be obtained prior to the involvement of subjects, including in pilot studies. Therefore, contact was initiated with the participants after approval

and clearance was received by the IRB in the spring of 2012. Upon receipt of IRB approval, a consent form was sent to the participants prior to the interview, and reiterated that any information shared would be confidential, and their participation was voluntary.

As each interview began, it was also necessary to interject that the role of the researcher as a human resources professional at the same company required the reporting of company policy violations, risks, and any potential life threatening information shared during the interview will need to be reported. All of the participants articulated their understanding of the process, and the interview process proceeded without delay.

An immediate learning during the interview process was the discovery that the participants were unclear as to what transferable skills - *soft skills* and *hard skills* – the researcher was referring to, and therefore it caused confusion for the participants. In fact, the need to define and differentiate between the two skills was highlighted during the first interview in which the participant consistently asked for clarification and appeared confused. As a result, a decision was made to define both hard and soft skills as a part of the remaining interviews. Therefore, *hard skills* were defined to the participants as technical skills learned in the military that relate to the job and/or function you were in while on active duty such as mechanical work, shooting a gun, and administrative work. And, *soft skills* were defined as skills or competencies learned in the military that are not technical and are intangible such as communication skills, listening skills, and being respectful. Once clarification was made, the remaining participants all appeared to understand the difference between these two skills and provided clear responses throughout the interview process.

The data analysis included a review of the transcribed interview notes and the participants' resumes. As the data analysis began, the realization of the importance to design

quality inquiry questions was discovered. As shared, a total of 11 interview questions were included on the interview protocol all relating to my three research questions. Merriam (2009) also suggested that “*categories*” (p. 181) are conceptual elements that cover many individual examples. Therefore, the process of category construction began with coding or “making notations next to bits of data” (p. 178) that were viewed as relevant to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The data was analyzed by conceptual coding and by making a list of the topics and categories together for meaning. After grouping together topics and categories, several themes began to emerge, and three major themes were identified: (a) military experience prepares you for life and the workforce, (b) self-promote or use military training skills in current role, and (c) lack of career transition support from the military.

These three major themes all related to my research questions. In fact, the first theme revealed how many of the participants shared how their military experience prepared them for life roles, in addition to their roles in corporate America. The other two themes were not as much of a surprise as there was already research related to issues women veterans experienced in their transition or reintegration into the workforce regarding skills transfer all related to the subpar transition assistance program.

As it relates to the documents review, an analysis of the participants’ resumes was conducted to determine if they were effectively identifying and marketing their military skills and experience. Unfortunately, three of the five participants only listed their date of service, military job title, and branch of service on their resume. None of these three participants’ resumes included any data related to their soft or hard skills shared during the interview process. One could assume that the lack of data related to their military experience was based on the

amount of time these women veterans had been separated from the military, as they had been out of the military since 1979, 1991, and 1996 respectively.

Of the five participants' resumes, one participant expounded on her military experience throughout her resume, and highlighted several of the same skills during the interview process. Interestingly, her resume included the different military roles she held while on active duty, and she consistently included both the hard and soft skills gained during her service. In contrast to the three women veterans who had separated in the 1990's, this participant may have been able to elaborate on her military experience since she had separated in 2002. One would rationally assume her more recent separation date supported recognizing and promoting her military hard and soft transferable skills.

Lastly, one participant's resume only listed her date of service, military job title, and branch of service; however, this participant included several key competencies highlighted during the interview process in the *Summary of Skills* section on her resume to include detail oriented, hard worker, problem solver, team player, and takes on extra projects. Aside from that, her resume only included the jobs she had held since leaving the military; however, she did clearly discuss her soft skills consistently in the interview process.

Overall, three of the five participants' resumes failed to highlight their military experience, or the soft skills they learned while on active duty. One would assume that many military roles, job functions, and specific duties performed by military service members are not necessarily transferable to common civilian occupations; however, Clemons and Milson (2008) highlighted that it is imperative that the TAP support the service member by providing explicit training to help the military member understand how to translate the portability and marketability of their military training and experience to civilian roles.

Unfortunately, most of the participants did not highlight or market their military experience in their resumes, and this supported the research related to the need to overhaul the TAP program and make it more effective in helping veterans – especially women veterans – be able to highlight their military learned transferable skills. One would also assume from this study that women veterans are somewhat successful in corporate America as they are all currently employed; however, more research needs to be conducted to further verify and validate these findings. Additionally, this pilot study is a mark in the right direction as many women veterans will be reintegrating into the workplace in the near future, and will possess a plethora of skills and talents that are easily transferable if they are able to identify and articulate those skills in corporate America.

In addition to the need for the woman veteran to be able to identify her transferable skills, organizations could benefit from understanding how to support women veterans in their transition for ongoing support of their financial, emotional, and personal needs. Indeed, the benefits to understanding the impact of the transfer of women veterans' socio-demographic factors can be advantageous to women veterans and non-veteran women.

In retrospect, participants who had separated from the military more recently should have been selected to ensure they were able to recall their military experience, training, and more importantly their transition experience. Further, an analysis of their job title and job description would have also complemented this pilot study by analyzing if their current role or job descriptions included any preferred or desired soft skills similar to the information shared during the interview process, and the information on their resumes. Therefore, the interview, resume review, and an analysis of the participants' job description would have been three relevant sources of data and would have established triangulation. Lastly, a deeper analysis of their

employability and transferability from the military to corporate America would have also complemented this process.

### **Data Collection**

Merriam (2009) suggested that “time, money, location, and availability of site respondents” (p. 79) is essential to convenience sampling, and as a result this type of data collection was the most effective for this study. Further, the choice of participants should directly reflect the focus and purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the participants of the study included women veterans who self-identified as veterans and were currently employed at the same financial organization in the Midwest. Although the same organization was used in the current research, the participants in this study were different from the participants in the aforementioned pilot study.

Specifically for the purpose of the study, the participants were self-identified women veterans affiliated with the Veterans Team Member Network (VTMN), which is an affinity group at the organization aimed at increasing awareness and support for veterans which members include both veterans and non-veterans. There were approximately twenty eight self-identified women veterans on the (VTMN) list; however, 5 of the women veterans had previously participated in the pilot study conducted in 2012, and as a result were excluded from the list. This process left approximately twenty three potential participants for this study.

Therefore, an email was sent to the twenty three potential participants offering the opportunity to volunteer for this study. As a result, a total of thirteen respondents replied willing to participate in this study. The participants were a diverse group of women veterans who served in one of the various branches of service in the armed forces, in the capacity of active duty, guard, or reserves, and participated in the transition assistance program. The participants

were leaders and individual contributors in their role and currently employed at the financial services organization (see Figure 2).

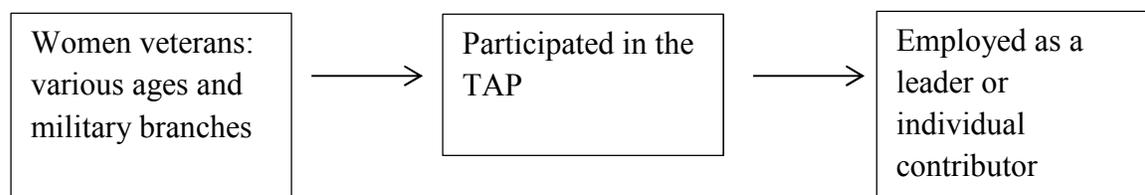


Figure 2. Convenience sampling of current study participants.

### Types of Interviews

Merriam (2009) identified three basic types of interviews based on structure: (a) highly structured or standardized, (b) semi-structured, and (c) unstructured or informal. The semi-structured interview was the most appropriate method for my study to understand the perceptions of women veterans and their transition experience. In addition, a semi-structured interview process supported a simplistic pattern of interviewing and it afforded me the opportunity to be agile and nimble in the moment (Maxwell, 2005). My interview protocol consisted of the following three sections of questions (see Appendix A for the complete interview protocol):

- Section 1: Role of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in the career preparation and transition process (Relates to Research Question 1)
- Section 2: Role of women veterans in identifying and marketing their military soft skills (Relates to Research Questions 2)
- Section 3: Role of women veterans in utilizing their soft skills in organizations (Relates to Research Question 3)

As suggested by Patton (2002), each of the three sections of questions included the six basic types of interview questions collected from my participants such as *background* or *demographic* questions which seek to understand the particular background, current situation, or demographic

details about the participant. Another type of question included *knowledge* questions which focus on what the person knew or did not know about a situation or process. Another suggested question included *experience* and *behavior* questions which seek to understand the type of activities a person does. The next type of question included *opinion* and *value* questions which seek to understand the respondent's opinions or beliefs about a situation, process, or experience. Next, included were *feelings* questions which focused on how the participant feels or felt about a situation, condition, experience, or process. And lastly, *sensory* questions were used which included specific data about what the participant saw or heard and what the participant did or did not see or hear in a particular situation, process, or experience.

### **Interview Process**

According to Merriam (2009), one of the most effective tools in social science research is interviewing as a systemic activity. Further, in all forms of qualitative research, a large majority of the time an interview is the most effective tool used to collect data (Merriam, 2009). An interview, according to deMarrais (2004) is “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55).

As outlined by Maxwell (2005), interviewing is often a very effective method of understanding someone's perspective; other methods such as reviewing job descriptions and analyzing resumes can enable one to draw inferences unavailable exclusively with interviewing. Patton (2002) explained that often times the decision to interview people is simply because we “cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions” (pp. 340-41).

As noted by Edwards and Holland (2013), a qualitative interview includes the interactional exchange of dialogue between two or more participants, in face-to-face or other contexts... and is also a “thematic, topic-centered, biographical, or narrative approach where the

researcher has topics, themes, or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure”... and also has a “perspective regarding knowledge as situated and contextual, requiring the researcher to ensure that relevant contexts are brought into focus” (p. 3) so that situated knowledge can be produced.

That being stated, interviews were conducted with 13 study participants the week of November 14 - 18, 2016, and each lasted approximately 35 to 40 minutes. All of the interviews were scheduled during the work week, and during the team member’s normal office hours. Luckily all 13 of the interviews were conducted face to face; however, Participant B’s and Participant H’s interviews were technologically-aided via Skype. Both Skype interviews were conducted during normal work hours; however, they were scheduled later in the afternoon when the stock market closed to avoid interruption to participants’ responsibilities. No interviews were conducted after office hours.

Given that all of the participants were employed at an identified financial services company, the consent form (see Appendix B) was attached to a company email address, which established the nature and purpose of the study and further explained how and why they were identified as potential participants. The email (see Appendix C) outlined the interview process, included a statement regarding the process being voluntary, and informed them of the confidentiality involved and that their identify would be protected in the process. Those who were willing to participate in the study were asked to complete the consent form and return it via email to the provided email address. The researcher’s contact information was also included, as well as the contact information of the dissertation chair in the event the participants had clarifying questions. Participants were also asked to provide a copy of their resume via email

prior to the scheduled interview, or to bring a copy to the interview, and each of the participant's job description was downloaded from the company's internal system.

### **Documenting Process**

A digital recorder was used to record the interviews, and a microphone was attached to each participant to ensure their responses were clearly captured. Each completed interview was transferred on to a hard drive to ensure no data was lost, and an online folder was created to store all completed interviews to be downloaded at the discretion of the researcher. The recorded interviews were downloaded by APBS services, and also transcribed by the same contractor. A confidentiality statement was included in the contract with APBS. And, saved copies of the transcripts are in an online file on the researcher's hard drive.

The participants were organized alphabetically (ex: Participant A, Participant B, etc.) according to the sequence of those who were interviewed. In addition, a confidential spreadsheet was created that included a list of participants' actual names, the date and time of the scheduled interview, and their contact email, and phone numbers. All of these actions afforded an opportunity to organize the data effectively, and enabled retrieving the information expeditiously and with ease. Therefore, the 13 women veteran participants who were interviewed are highlighted below (see Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Representation of Participants*

Participant	Branch	Years	Military Job	Year Joined Company	Current Role
Participant A	USAF	1986-1996	Inventory Management Manager	2006	Product Management Manager 2

Table 1 (Continued)

Participant B	USN	1990-1993	Mineman	2007	Associate Financial Advisor
Participant C	USAF	2006-2012	Cryptologic Linguist	2016	Business Initiatives Consultant 2
Participant D	USN	1982-1986	Avionics Electrician	2010	Operations Risk Consultant 2
Participant E	USAF	1987-1991	Medical Services Technician	2006	Project Analyst
Participant F	Army	1989-1992	Personnel Manager	2010	Sales Advisory Consultant
Participant G	Army	1989-1995	Administrative Specialist	2011	Product Manager
Participant H	Army	1984-1994	Personnel Management	1999	Sr. Client Associate
Participant I	USAF	2004-2008	Security Police	2013	Operations Risk Consultant 2
Participant J	USAF	2003-2012	Financial Management Specialist	2012	Operations Risk Consultant 3
Participant K	Army	2004-2013	Logistics Ammunition Specialist	2010	Security Services Specialist 4
Participant L	Army	1989-2000	Transportation Officer	1996	Desktop Engineer
Participant M	USAF	1979-2002	Personnel Management Manager	2008	Executive Assistant

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### Participants' Work Environment

As stated, all of the participants were employed at a financial services organization in the Midwest. Specifically, the finance industry recruits for both leadership and individual contributor positions; therefore, the participants were in both individual contributor and leader roles. Many of the positions in the financial services industry – specifically for this financial

organization – include both required and preferred skills for their positions. And, more recently this financial organization has included military experience as a desired preference or skill in many of its job descriptions.

Many job postings include statements that are aligned with the culture of the organization along with the specific education, skills, and experience to include *soft* or leadership traits such as self-efficacy, critical thinking, influential, and effective communication skills. As noted on the above-referenced Midwest financial services website, the current population includes an approximate 57% of the current employee base as women. Further, the organization has a robust goal to hire 20,000 veterans by 2020 ultimately increasing the representation of the current 7,500 current self-identified veterans dramatically in the next several years. In fact, these factors enabled me to explore how the infrastructure of this organization supports the career development and career progression of women veterans while applying the Identical Elements Theory.

More importantly, the ability to function in a diverse and inclusive environment is essential in today's work environment as outlined by this organization. In fact, one of the organization's goals is to leverage its team members' differences to anticipate and meet the needs of their diverse customer population. In addition, the organization also embraces the innovation and creativity that comes from diverse perspectives of team members. And, the representation of current team member populations at this organization includes various leadership and individual contributor roles, percent of women, and minorities by category (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Diverse Representation of Team Members*

Roles	% Women	% Minority
Board of directors	44%	31%
Officers and managers	50%	30%
Professionals	43%	22%
Technicians	34%	34%
Sales workers	31%	23%
Administrative support	67%	50%
Operations	39%	34%
Service workers	35%	65%
Total	57%	40%

Note. Minority category includes team members who self-identify in a race or ethnicity other than White or Caucasian.

### **Data Analysis**

Atkinson and Coffey (1996) indicated that “we should never collect data without substantial analysis going on” (p. 2). Creswell (2007) further identified five additional perspectives in qualitative research to include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, and case study. Merriam (2009) included critical research as the sixth approach. As stated, the theoretical framework used to support this study is the Identical Elements Theory and the transfer of training; therefore, the narrative analysis was used to explore the transition experiences of women veterans and the transfer of their skills from the military to corporate America. The analysis of data, therefore, involved understanding the

perceptions of women veterans with specific focus on their transition, how they articulated those experiences, and existing programs impacting the employment of women veterans post military career.

As stated, the narrative analysis approach was used to identify the themes that emerged from the research. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously per the following suggestions noted by Biklen and Bogdan (2007) regarding qualitative research methodology to include the following:

- Showed discipline to avoid a plethora of data to diffuse.
- Remained conscious about the type of study you want to accomplish; determined how much detail or information was needed to accomplish the goal of the study.
- Developed analytics questions.
- Planned data collection sessions accordingly; used lessons learned from previous pilot study.
- Wrote memos about self-learnings.
- Reviewed literature on the topic based on the themes that emerge in the analysis.
- Considered using metaphors, analogies, and concepts.
- Focused on visualizing the learning about the phenomenon (pp. 171-172).

Merriam (2009) called answers to themes or categories as findings. According to Maxwell (2005), the initial step in qualitative analysis is *reading* the interview transcripts or documents. Therefore, the process of data analysis began by segmenting data collected from the interviews, individual resumes, and individual job descriptions and placing the information in folders for each participant. The participants were assigned pseudonyms beginning with the first letter of the alphabet (ex: Participant A) and continuing this labeling process for all of the

interviewees for data tracking. After reading all 13 transcripts several times, the data was broken down into small units as recommended by Dey (1993) and then analyzed for “recurring themes and patterns” (p. 44) that emerged. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), a unit “must meet two criteria”: (1) it should be “heuristic” or reveal relevant information to the study, and (2) the unit should be the “smallest piece of information that is able to stand alone and be interpretable” (p. 203).

Merriam (2009) defined the themes and patterns that emerge from the data as categories and data analysis as the process of “category construction” (p. 178). Further, Merriam (2009) also suggested that “*categories*” (p. 181) are conceptual elements that cover many individual examples. Merriam (2009) suggested category construction during data analysis should include the following criteria:

- *Responsive* to the purpose of the research which in essence should answer your research question(s).
- *Exhaustive* and able to place relevant data from the study in a category or subcategory.
- *Mutually exclusive* with a specific unit of data able to be fit into only one category.
- *Sensitive* to what is in the actual data affording an ‘outsider’ the ability to read and gain sense of the categories.
- *Conceptually congruent* with the same level of abstraction characterized by all categories.

Therefore, the process of category construction began with coding or “making notations next to bits of data” (p. 178) that were viewed as relevant to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, each transcript included notes relevant to the study. The data

analysis process continued with assigning codes to segments of data that were identified and directly aligned to the research questions. After reading all 13 participants' transcripts several times, codes were assigned and grouped based on similarities and parallels. Corbin and Strauss (2007) referred to this process of grouping codes as axial coding and others called it analytical coding. As communicated by Richards (2005), analytical coding goes beyond description and is based on and involves interpretation and reflection of meaning. Next step included following the process of coding and category construction with each set of data. The same processes of coding were consistently done with deliberate focus on ensuring the identified codes in the previous transcripts were also present in the next.

The next stage in the data analysis process as outlined by Merriam (2009) was to compare the lists of codes that were generated across all 13 transcripts. This list supported the identification of patterns that emerged across the data. And, these patterns became the themes that encompassed similar units of data across all the transcripts. Themes and categories were organized into individual files as they were "congruent with the orientation of the study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 184). As noted by Mays, Pope, and Zeibland (2000), identifying all the "key issues, concepts, and themes" (p. 116) which the data can be examined and referenced is "carried out by drawing on a priori issues and questions derived from the objectives of the study" (p. 116).

In addition to semi-structured interviews, participants were also asked to provide a copy of their resume for this study in an effort to analyze the women veterans' ability to market their military learned soft skills. In addition, participants' job descriptions were downloaded and reviewed to further analyze the women veterans' utilization of their military soft skills in their corporate America role.

Therefore, after a thorough review and analysis of the participants' transcripts, an analysis of the participants' resumes and their job descriptions was conducted to determine if the soft skills shared during the semi-structured interview process as being marketed for post military employment, are actually being marketed on the participants resumes. In addition, an analysis of the participants' job descriptions was also conducted to determine if the soft skills they shared during the interview process as being utilized in their current role were actually outlined on their job description.

All 13 participants complied and provided their resume; and, in fact all of the participants listed their military service dates and branch, job title, and branch of service on their resumes. Although the participants shared a variety of soft skills marketed in their quest for a post military career during the interview process, only a few of them marketed those same skills on their resumes. In some instances, a few participants did not include any soft skills on their resumes. Unfortunately, there were some inconsistencies as it relates to the soft skills the participants articulated during the interview process as skills they marketed for post military employment, and the soft skills outlined and marketed on the participants' resumes.

Furthermore, the current job description of each participant was downloaded, reviewed, and analyzed to assess the consistency between what the participants articulated during the interview process as soft skills currently being utilized in their role, and the soft skills outlined on their job description. The review process included an analysis of the roles and responsibilities section, the required qualifications, and the desired qualifications of each job description for all 13 participants. Similar to the analysis and outcome of the resume review, the job description analysis also showed inconsistencies with the soft skills the participants articulated during the interview process, and the soft skills they are currently utilizing in their corporate American role.

In addition, consciously attempting to set aside any biases and pre-determined notions were done to avoid obstructing the view of the participant's experience. Lastly, themes were analyzed and aligned with the theoretical framework, and the research questions (Huberman & Miles, 1984).

### **Ensuring Validity, Credibility, Reliability, and Ethics**

Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that all research must have "truth value", "applicability", "consistency", and "neutrality" (p. 15) in order to be considered worthwhile. Merriam (2009) referred to validity and reliability of any research study involving applying an ethical manner while conducting the investigation (p. 209). Further, Merriam (2009) wrote it is necessary that researchers "exude confidence in the conduct of the investigation" (p. 210). More importantly, Merriam (2009) stated that the approach or orientation depends on "the study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, interpreted and the way in which the findings are presented" (p. 210). However, the concepts of reliability and validity are operationalized differently in quantitative and qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research, concepts such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are substituted with credibility, transferability, and dependability.

### **Ensuring Credibility**

Internal validity in any research is basically about one's interpretation or meaning of reality (Merriam, 2009). In addressing credibility, Shenton (2004) suggested interviewers attempt to "demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny" (p. 1) is actually being offered. Therefore, Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative research and internal validity be substituted with credibility which ensures that the findings are "credible given the data presented" (p. 213).

However, methodological experts have identified and suggested strategies such as triangulation, member checks, and an appropriate level of engagement, reflexivity, peer review, and maximum variation that the qualitative researcher can follow to ensure that the interpretation of participants' perceptions was credible (Merriam, 2009). As indicated by Brewer and Hunter (1989) and Guba (1978), triangulation or multiple methods used together "compensates for individual limitations and exploits respective benefits" (p. 65) as well as improves the credibility of a research study .

Denzin (1978) identified four types of triangulation such as multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, and multiple theories. To ensure the credibility of this study, the multiple sources of data and multiple theories were used in the process. As suggested by Patton (2002), triangulation was used in this study to include semi-structured interviews, resume review, and job description review. Secondly, even though the Identical Elements Theory and transfer training theories formed the fundamental framework of this study, the multiple theories approach was used to check if the perception of participants could be better understood and interpreted with the help of other related theories.

**Member checks.** In order to ensure additional credibility of this study, member checks were conducted with Participant A and Participant K to avoid what Merriam (2009) stated as the "possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say or do" (p. 217), as well as to identify the researcher's own biases and potential misunderstandings. Therefore, a meeting invite was sent to Participant A along with the transcribed interview notes with the request for her to review the notes for accuracy, to ensure her overall transition experience was captured appropriately, and to be prepared to discuss them at the upcoming meeting. The meeting was very successful with Participant A, and she agreed that the information captured on the

transcribed notes, and my interpretation of her experience was correct and no action was needed to change the results. Interestingly, Participant A also expressed that since the interview process, she had deliberately focused on the updating of her resume, and reflecting on ways to market her soft skills.

The second member check was conducted with Participant K. Exact to the previous member check, the researcher owned the logistics and scheduled the meeting. However, Participant K requested a copy of the transcribed notes be brought to the meeting due to her limited ability to print a copy in her work environment. Therefore, a review of the notes in advance was not available; however, when the researcher and participant met, the transcribed notes were reviewed and discussed thoroughly. Overall, this process was equally as effective given that the researcher and participant were able to review and discuss each section of the transcribed notes collectively, and as a result no additional changes or edits were needed and the information was validated. Given that this participant shared very sensitive information in the interview process related to her transition experience, the researcher was cognizant not to revisit those specific issues, and to focus on her overall transition experience to ensure it was captured correctly. The meeting was very successful with Participant K, and she agreed that the information captured on the transcribed notes, and my interpretation of her experience was correct and no action was needed to change the results. Similar to Participant A, this participant also shared that since the interview process, she had been actively thinking of ways to market and utilize her soft skills more effectively in her corporate America role, and she continuously expressed appreciation for being a part of the study.

Next, to ensure credibility, reflexivity, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, the human instrument” (p. 183) was

used in the study. This involved identifying, articulating, and clarifying the researcher's subjectivities, biases, assumptions, and dispositions regarding the process of transition from the military to corporate America given the researcher's status as a veteran working in the corporate sector.

Reflexivity, according to Maxwell (2005), enabled the researcher to understand and demonstrate how preconceived assumptions and personal values could have influenced the process and findings of the study. In an effort to reflect critically as a researcher, memos and field notes were written as a strategy of reflection. Further, to ensure critical reflection, the researcher remained conscientious of the real-world issues women veterans may have faced in the military as the population in the study and the theoretical bias. Further, a review of the lessons learned, and a review of the relevant notes from the pilot study were applied to include defining soft skills, and the need to probe for clarity appropriately during the interview process.

In addition, Patton (1990) suggested the strategy of "having two or more persons independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare their findings" (p. 560). Therefore, the process of peer review was done to include the engagement of the researcher's doctoral chair and members on the committee to solicit their feedback, insight, and seasoned perspective by scanning some of the data to determine the effectiveness of the process, and whether or not the findings are credible and are based on the data (Merriam, 2009). This supported data credibility in the overall process.

### **Reliability**

Merriam (2009) suggested that the next significant question to consider in research is the extent of replication. This study created an opportunity to determine if the findings are able to be replicated or repeated. However, a principal of qualitative research is not to "isolate the laws of

human behavior” (p. 221) but to understand, describe, and interpret the perspectives of participants (Merriam, 2009).

Therefore, Joppe (2000) considered *replicability* or *repeatability* as a desired outcome of reliability, and specifically stated:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability... if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. (p. 1)

The criteria to emphasize, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the consistency of findings of the data collected. Most importantly, a qualitative researcher should not set out to ensure that his or her study allows for the same results to be replicated or repeated by fellow researchers, but, rather to ensure that the fellow researchers consider the results to be relatively “consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Therefore, to confirm reliability in qualitative research it is important to ensure the study is dependable and replicable.

Merriam (2009) identified four strategies to ensure consistency or dependability of a study such as triangulation, peer review, researcher’s position, and audit trail (p. 222). The first three have already been discussed in detail in the previous section; therefore, the last item to be discussed is audit trail. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail is used to enhance the dependability of a qualitative study and a process by which a researcher documents in detail the findings. According to Merriam (2009), it is a process which allows fellow researchers or the audience of a study to understand how the researcher (a) collected the data, (b) arrived at categories or themes, (c) interpreted the themes, and (d) culled findings from the data. Therefore, in order to document the entire process from data collection to developing results, it is

recommended that the researcher maintain a very detailed log of the process. As suggested by Merriam (2009), a personal log of reflections were kept, as well as documented memos, additional questions from the participants, thought provoking ideas, and more importantly, any subjectivities that may have impacted the results.

### **External Validity and Transferability**

External validity of a study, according to Merriam (2009), refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other situations. Erickson (1986) argued that qualitative studies can shift from the common to the specific. Therefore, according to Golafshani (2003), the focus of a qualitative researcher is to support the transferability of the arrived findings to “real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (p. 600). One of the most common strategies, according to Merriam (2009), is to enhance the transferability of a qualitative study by providing a “rich or thick description” (p. 227). Therefore, a detailed description of the participants, the setting of the study, and the manner in which the researcher arrived at the findings were kept in a log. Direct quotes from the participants were used, and any memos to support providing a clear idea of the process that led to the results.

### **Ethics**

As stated by Merriam (2009), qualitative case studies are limited by the “sensitivity and integrity” (p. 52) of the researcher. Therefore, a qualitative researcher is more likely to encounter ethical dilemmas regarding collection and analysis of data and dissemination of findings (Merriam, 2009). To counter this and ensure an ethical approach was utilized, the guidelines set by the American Psychological Association (2010) manual were closely followed. Further, as outlined on Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC, 2016) website, the SIUC Human Subjects Committee (HSC) is responsible for reviewing all human-subjects research

projects, regardless of discipline or funding source, conducted by individuals affiliated with SIUC, including students. Additionally, the Southern Illinois University Carbondale (2016) website stated that approval from the IRB must be obtained prior to the involvement of subjects. Contact was initiated with the participants after approval was received and cleared by the IRB on November 8, 2016 (see Appendix D). Upon receipt of IRB approval, a consent form was sent to all of the identified interviewees prior to the interview (see Appendix B).

As stated by Stake (2005), qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. And, given the sensitive issues some women veterans may have faced during their time in the military such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual assault, and discrimination, the researcher remained conscious of these identifiable physical and unidentifiable emotional risks to the participants in this study. The researcher remained aware of how interviewing could be an invasion into the private spaces of participants according to Stake (2005). The participants were placed in a situation where they had to reflect upon situations they experienced during their military career, and may not have wanted to recall or reflect upon.

Although the interview process could be beneficial to participants, their willingness to allow the researcher into their world of opinions, military experiences, and feelings helped the interviewer's intellectual curiosity more than the participants as she may have to relive an unpleasant experience in the process. In essence, interacting with these participants afforded access to valuable information that could inadvertently facilitate a set-back because of the potential *real* issues faced by women veterans. Therefore, it was important to apply integrity and empathy, and remain cognizant of being ethically bound to respect the relationship as much as possible (Lincoln, 1995).

Most importantly, as a woman veteran and human resources professional, it was necessary to be conscious of the perceived unequal power that existed in the interview process. As the interviewer, possessing the power to ask questions, especially if the questions appeared invasive and somewhat sensitive to their military experience, can inadvertently place the participants in a position to feel as if they are required to answer the question. Observing the participants' reactions to the interview questions was very important. And, although technically the participants had the right to decline answering some questions, none of them did so.

### **Impact on Theoretical Leanings**

Of course, as a researcher, one's beliefs, concerns, and theoretical leanings could have had an impact on the understanding and interpretation of the perceptions of women veterans with regard to their ability to transfer their learned military soft skills to a successful career post military. With the strong theoretical leaning toward the Identical Elements Theory, the researcher was conscious of embarking on the research with an intellectual curiosity to understand if women veterans perceived their military training and experience as beneficial to their post military career in corporate America, and if the transition assistance program supported their career preparation.

Secondly, informed by the transfer theory, the belief that women veterans who do not fully comprehend the impacts – to include financial implications – of identifying, marketing, and utilizing their learned military skills are placing themselves at a disadvantage. To concur with previous research studying the transfer and employability of women veterans, there is a need to modify programs and design processes that support the unique needs of women veterans. According to Brown and Hesketh (2004), the process of exclusion plays out in recruitment practices and the culture of corporate organizations. Therefore, the recruitment of women

veterans in many organizations is perpetuated by the culture of the organization and its ability to proactively recruit, retain, and develop women veterans, and their integration into an environment that recognizes their talents, skills, and ability.

In today's economy there are other viable obstacles that inhibit the employment of women veterans. As shared, several dynamics – to include sexual assault, combat, and war – can affect the psychological stability of women veterans resulting in many long-term issues such as PTSD. Therefore, the self-efficacy of the individual is also shaped by their background. Nevertheless, more recently many government agencies have taken actions to recognize the unique needs of women veterans. It is important to be cognizant of the current implications many women veterans face such as being underemployed or unemployed, and not having the adequate services available to them as a veterans.

#### **Personal Bias Statement**

As stated by Merriam (2009), qualitative case studies are limited by the “sensitivity and integrity” (p. 52) of the researcher. As a woman veteran and corporate human resources leader at a major financial institution, and a researcher, my goal of this research is to promote the success of women veterans' transition into corporate America. Given the researcher's transition experience from the military, appropriate steps were taken to increase internal validity and credibility of the process, as member checks were conducted with two of the participants to ensure the interpretation of the emerging data was accurate. There is a strong belief by the researcher that women veterans possess extremely valuable skills and experience, and many organizations and non-veterans – to include other women – are not adequately recognizing and acknowledging those skills.

Women veterans, according to the researcher, are sometimes placed at a disadvantage because of the unequal perception associated with a *skilled veteran* being a male. And, rarely are women veterans who have served - in many cases - alongside her fellow brother in arms considered a *skilled veteran*. And, many women who separate from the military without being fully prepared to maximize her talents may encounter implications such as underemployment and unemployment.

Further, the professional experience of a woman veteran and human resources leader in corporate America afforded the researcher the privilege of experiencing firsthand the need to design transition support unique to women. Further, interactions with women veterans in the workplace have demonstrated that often times many women veterans do not effectively articulate, identify, market, or expose their military experience because of the misperception that their experience is not valued in corporate America. As a researcher interested in studying women veterans, it is believed that the transition from the military to corporate America had not been fully explored because many women veterans feel *invisible* in the workplace, as the two environments are different; yet, the women veterans' skills can still be applied in a new setting. With minimal support from the transition assistance program, and the lack of recognition from many organizations, it is believed that many women veterans are in roles unequal to their skills and many of their military learned talents being underutilized – especially their leadership skills.

The experience and limited observations of the researcher have shown that women veterans who are able to effectively identify and market their military experience fair well during their post military career in corporate America. However, it is believed that the support needed from the transition assistance program is not geared toward the unique needs of women veterans, thus placing them at a disadvantage in terms of being able to identify, translate, and negotiate

their collective military experience to support a successful reintegration into the work world. Therefore, a concern relates to the differences with which women veterans are prepared for a post military career, how they enter the workforce, and how they are not afforded equal opportunity for career success as compared to their male veteran counterparts. The transfer theory supports the idea of being able to identify and rely on previously learned skills in one environment (military) and then transfer and apply those skills in a similar situation (workplace).

The firm belief is that the soft skills and experiences of women veterans gained from their military service are not being fully utilized in their post military career; however, their experience and transition process could possibly differ from the researcher's ineffective transition from the military. Admittedly, a mental block could have developed or guided the conversation with an inadvertent *hidden* agenda of listening for a phrase or expression to support this perception. The researcher was very much aware of the need to be careful and conscientious not to influence or put ideas into the mindset of participants, especially dealing with the potential unique situations of women veterans. For that reason, the researcher waited for the participant's experience and perceptions to naturally unfold and was prepared to accept and interpret them as shared.

Lastly, the researcher was cognizant that a conversation exploring the participant's military experience may conjure up deep-seated issues. Fortunately, no uncomfortable situations arose with the participants, and no one shared any unpleasant or negative military experiences. Luckily, the researcher's status as a woman veteran, a display of pure empathy, and demonstrating active listening supported a positive exchange in the interview process. And, more importantly, an end result of sharing valuable information to be used in future research in support of women veterans in their transitions from the military.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support the career success of women veterans by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate.

The central research questions this study aimed to answer include the following:

1. How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?
2. How do women veterans identify and market their transferable soft skills in corporate America?
3. How do women veterans utilize their transferable soft skills in organizations for career success?

As stated by Merriam (2009), “without an ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming” (p. 171). Therefore, a triangulation method was applied in this study and the research findings of this chapter are based on the following data sources: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) participants’ resumes, and (c) participants’ current job description.

Additionally, the product of this data analysis resulted in a descriptive presentation of the themes that emerged and is presented in two sections: (a) participants’ profiles and (b) themes and sub-themes. An interpretation of each section is conducted to identify themes and to answer the research questions.

### Participants' Profiles

During the in-depth interviews, study participants described their transition experience from the military to corporate America. The participants also identified and discussed the soft skills learned, marketed, and utilized from their military service, as well as the perceptions of organizational support of women veterans in their post military career.

The participants in this study were comprised of 13 women veterans currently employed full-time at a Midwest financial company. Their statuses varied by veteran status being either enlisted or officer; branch of service to include U.S. Army (Army), U.S. Air Force (USAF), and U.S. Navy (USN); years of service; and, lastly by their military job titles. As it relates to the participants' current employment status, they varied by job titles, job levels such as manager or individual contributor roles, and they worked in different departments within the same line of business. The above information was collected during the semi-structured interviews with the participants, and from field notes, participants' resumes, as well as a review of their job descriptions (see Table 3). Following the table, information for each participant will be presented.

Table 3

#### *Representation of Survey Participants*

Participant	Branch	Years	Military Job	Year joined Company	Current Role
Participant A	USAF	1986-1996	Inventory Management Manager	2006	Product Management Manager 2
Participant B	USN	1990-1993	Mineman	2007	Associate Financial Advisor

Table 3 (Continued)

Participant C	USAF	2006-2012	Cryptologic Linguist	2016	Business Initiatives Consultant 2
Participant D	USN	1982-1986	Avionics Electrician	2010	Operations Risk Consultant 2
Participant E	USAF	1987-1991	Medical Services Technician	2006	Project Analyst
Participant F	Army	1989-1992	Personnel Manager	2010	Sales Advisory Consultant
Participant G	Army	1989-1995	Administrative Specialist	2011	Product Manager
Participant H	Army	1984-1994	Personnel Management	1999	Sr. Client Associate
Participant I	USAF	2004-2008	Security Police	2013	Operations Risk Consultant 2
Participant J	USAF	2003-2012	Financial Management Specialist	2012	Operations Risk Consultant 3
Participant K	Army	2004-2013	Logistics Ammunition Specialist	2010	Security Services Specialist 4
Participant L	Army	1989-2000	Transportation Officer	1996	Desktop Engineer
Participant M	USAF	1979-2002	Personnel Management Manager	2008	Executive Assistant

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### Participant A

Participant A joined the U.S. Air Force in 1986 as an Inventory Management Manager. She was an officer and managed a supply division of approximately 60 military and civilian employees. Her primary area of responsibility was in logistics, and her military duties included managing supply assets, monitoring and reporting performance data, and monitoring contractual statements of work. She served approximately 10 years in the military and separated in 1996. She joined her current organization in 2006, and is a Marketing Program Manager 2, which is a

senior level individual contributor role. Although she held numerous leadership roles in the military, she proactively shared that she has not held a leader role since separating from the military. Her current responsibilities include documenting, tracking, and reporting on team goals aligned with business strategic initiatives. She is also responsible for leveraging appropriate communication vehicles and resources, to help different groups promote their financial services and products.

### **Participant B**

Participant B joined the U.S. Navy in 1990 as an enlisted sailor and worked as a Mineman. Her primary duties included testing, assembling, and maintaining underwater explosive devices (mines). She also assisted in the detection and neutralization of underwater mines. She joined the military with an Associate's degree and is from a family of Navy veterans to include her father and brother. She also shared that her son also joined the Navy as a part of their family tradition. She is a Gulf War veteran and decided to separate from the Navy when she was pregnant. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 1993. She has worked at several organizations prior to joining her current organization in 2007 and is presently an Associate Financial Advisor. Her responsibilities include coordinating and managing all of the administration for three financial advisors. She is also responsible for managing and maintaining the client review program and facilitating questions related to account issues, taxes, estates, and trust accounts, as well as taking stock market trade orders.

### **Participant C**

Participant C joined the U.S. Air Force in 2006 as an enlisted airman and worked as a Cryptologic Linguist. Her primary duties included translating Arabic for intelligence reports, authorizing reports for senior decision-makers, developing a network information file on target

networks, acting as a liaison with the Intelligence Community members, and briefing results to interested policymakers. Prior to joining the military, she was a teacher and also worked as a paralegal. She served approximately six years in the military and separated in 2012. She recently joined her current organization in early 2016 and is a Business Initiative Consultant 2. Her current responsibilities include strategizing, planning, and executing a variety of programs and services with focus on change management, process improvement, and program redesign. She is also responsible for developing metrics and ensuring plans and programs adhere to policies and regulations.

### **Participant D**

Participant D joined the U.S. Navy in 1982 as an enlisted sailor and worked as an Avionics Electronic Technician. Her primary duties included troubleshooting and repairing digital equipment, fiber optics, infrared detection, radar systems, electricity generation systems, laser electronics, navigation systems, communications equipment, pressure indication systems, electric transformers, and circuits, and employing test equipment and procedures. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 1986. She joined her current organization in early 2010 and is an Operational Risk Consultant 2. Her current responsibilities include monitoring a risk-based program to identify and mitigate operational risk as a result of inadequate internal processes, people, systems, or external events. In addition, she is responsible for consulting and supporting projects and initiatives, as well as coordinating the production of operational risk reports for senior management.

### **Participant E**

Participant E joined the U.S. Air Force in 1987 as an enlisted airman and worked as a Medical Services Technician in the neo-natal hospital unit. She is a Desert Storm veteran and

her primary duties included providing and utilizing the nursing process to provide care for patients, monitoring and recording physiological measurements, orienting parents of new patients to the hospital environment, and admitting, discharging, and transferring patients as directed. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 1991. She was unemployed several months after separating from the military and was able to find stable employment in 1993. She worked at several organizations before she joined her current organization in early 2006 and is presently a Project Analyst. Her responsibilities include developing, maintaining, and recording all consulting service agreements, conducting annual review of contractual agreements, and ensuring compliance with Financial Advisors.

### **Participant F**

Participant F joined the U.S. Army in 1989 as an enlisted soldier and worked as a Personnel Management Specialist. Her primary duties included preparing reports, evaluating personnel qualifications for special assignments, and processing requests for transfer or reassignment. She was also responsible for processing centralized and decentralized promotions and reduction actions, processing classification/reclassification actions, and preparing orders. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 1992. She has worked in the financial services industry since 1997 and joined her current organization in early 2010 and is a Sales Advisory Consultant. Her current responsibilities include coaching and supporting field team members on proprietary systems, resolving client complaints, and acting as a liaison between field team members and other internal home office teams.

### **Participant G**

Participant G joined the US Army in 1989 as an enlisted soldier and worked as an Administrative Assistant. She is a Desert Storm veteran and was on the travel team during the

war, working with spouses and military families preparing them for the soldier's duty. Some of her primary duties included maintaining administrative and financial records for unit, preparing military awards for battalion, maintaining the Maneuver Control System for unit field logistics, and preparing formal responses to Congressional Inquiries. She was also a certified Humvee driver for the Adjutant General and also completed the U.S. Armed Forces Postal Academy while active duty. She served approximately five years in the military and separated in 1994. She joined the organization in early 1995 and has held several jobs at the company with her current role as a Product Management Manager. Her current responsibilities include managing a team that coordinates marketing and communication efforts, interacting and creating strong partnerships, developing internal and client facing marketing materials, and marketing project plans.

### **Participant H**

Participant H joined the U.S. Army in 1984 as an enlisted soldier and worked as a Personnel Manager. She was a part of a travel team in support of Operation Desert Storm and her primary duties included preparing reports, processing requests for transfer or reassignment, and talking to spouses regarding military families support needs. She was also responsible for processing classification/reclassification actions and preparing orders. She served approximately 10 years in the military and separated in 1994. She joined the organization in early 1999, has held several jobs at the company, and is currently a Senior Registered Client Associate. Her current responsibilities include analyzing client financial information to determine available investment objectives, answering client questions concerning financial plans and strategies, preparing and interpreting client information, such as investment performance reports, opening client accounts, and disbursing funds to creditors as required.

**Participant I**

Participant I joined the U.S. Air Force in 2004 as an enlisted airman and worked as a Security Police. She served three tours of duty in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her primary duties included scheduling all mandatory appointments for approximately 200 service members to maintain deployment readiness, guard launch facilities, security installations and personnel, and protect high-valued assets during transport. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 2008. After separating from the military she worked at the Veteran's Affairs office in the student work-study program while completing her degree. She joined the organization in early 2013 and is currently an Operational Risk Consultant 2. Her current responsibilities include leading business initiatives to support the recruitment and transition of financial advisors, creating and maintaining reports, monitoring the day-to-day and pre-hire processes to ensure compliance with firm policy, and educating team members on risk related topics.

**Participant J**

Participant J joined the U.S. Air Force in 2003 as an enlisted airman and worked as a Financial Management Specialist. Her primary duties included oversight reviews and audits, recording incoming payments, processing vendor payments, and ensuring all incoming military pay documents were reviewed for accuracy and compliance with statutory and regulatory authority prior to payment. She served approximately four years in the military and separated in 2007. She attended school upon separation from the military and is a Certified Public Accountant. She joined her current organization in early 2012 and is currently an Operational Risk Consultant Level 3. Her responsibilities include validating corrective action plans for respective findings to ensure appropriate remediation of identified regulatory and operational

risks, providing consulting services and support to business partners, and coordinating and developing various reports for Senior Leadership which include information pertaining to the status of issues within their respective areas.

### **Participant K**

Participant K joined the U.S. Army in 2004 as an enlisted soldier and served both active duty and reserve components. She served two years active duty and separated when she was eight months pregnant. After separating from the Army, she was unemployed and eventually became homeless and lived in a shelter for approximately nine months. After a year of her initial separation, she joined the Army Reserves and served one and a half years before transitioning to the National Guard. She worked as a Logistics and Ammunition Specialist; her primary duties included receiving, storing, and issuing conventional ammunition, guided missiles, large rockets, explosives, and other ammunition and explosive related items. She was also responsible for performing maintenance modification, destruction and demilitarization on ammunition and explosive components, operating computer hardware and software/utilities manual records in order to perform stock control, and accounting procedures, and performing ammunition supply stock control and accounting duties using both automated and manual procedures. She served approximately 10 years in the military and separated in 2013.

She is currently a Securities Service Specialist 4 who joined the organization in early 2010. Her present responsibilities include providing phone, computer, and in person support to all associates within the front and back office, providing department training sessions, monitoring and ensuring all procedures are met within the section and assisting with special department projects, and resolving escalated questions and problems. She is also responsible for

authorizing withdrawal of cash and securities, processing delivery of all types of securities between brokers, and analyzing and reviewing activity with anti-money laundering compliance.

### **Participant L**

Participant L joined the U.S. Army National Guard in 1989 in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program while attending college. Upon graduation from college, she joined the Army Reserves, received her commission as an officer in 1991, and worked as a Transportation Officer. She maintained Secret and Top Secret security clearances and her primary duties included managing, supervising, and evaluating a 10-person administrative team, scheduling monthly training meetings, organizing and supervising unit drill meetings, and procuring training aides and equipment. She was also responsible for designing the standard operating procedures for managing a reserve unit to include training, maintenance management, logistics, finance, personnel management, mobilization, and physical security. She served approximately 11 years in the military and separated in 2000. While in the Army Reserves, she joined the organization in 1996 and has held several jobs in the organization and is currently a Desktop Engineer. Her present responsibilities include packaging, deploying, and supporting all available software for 35,000 desktops, managing software implementation projects, creating software implementation roadmaps, and managing vendor relationships.

### **Participant M**

Participant M joined the U.S. Air Force in 1979 as an enlisted airman and worked as a Personnel Manager. Her primary duties included managing the base customer service center by providing counseling and maintaining records for over 5,000 active duty personnel and approximately 25,000 local area retirees. She also traveled extensively to deactivate squadrons and assist personnel with relocation support, directed the classification and retraining programs,

and counseled individuals on career progression, financial responsibilities, and personal issues. She served approximately 23 years in the military and retired in 2002. Upon her separation, she has held several executive administrative jobs before joining her current organization in 2008 and is currently in the same job title. Her responsibilities include composing correspondence, producing reports, and assisting with department budget preparations. She is also responsible for collecting and analyzing monthly expenditures, purchasing supplies, handling account reconciliations, and controlling records management.

Overall, the participants were able to describe their transition experience from the military to corporate America. In addition, they all were able to identify and discuss the soft skills learned from their military service, as well as their perceptions of organizational support of women veterans in their post military career.

### **Themes and Sub-Themes**

Interviewees contributed nearly equally the same amount of information during the interview process, and their collective experiences are included in the narrative analysis of this study. Not surprisingly, their military experience and post military career experience differed; therefore, all participants' views are represented in this study. An analysis of the 13 participants' interviews, resumes, and current job descriptions resulted in data saturation particularly with the participants' description of their overall transition experience, and their ability to identify and market military learned soft skills.

The similarities and differences in the participants' responses to the interview questions resulted in the identification of four major themes through data reduction: (a) mediocre career preparation, (b) identification and marketing of soft skills (c) utilization of soft skills, and (d) organizational barriers utilizing military experience. In most cases, the data acquired through

triangulation analysis from the interview transcripts, resumes, and job descriptions are described where they appear to fit more logically within these themes (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Data Analysis Outcomes*

Themes	Subthemes
Mediocre career preparation	Basic resume, job search, and interview skills training; Low and no expectations of the TAP; Reliance on self or other resources; Unfavorable perception of the transition experience
Identification and marketing of soft skills	Identified soft skills from military; Soft skills marketed for post military employment; Increased awareness of diversity and inclusion
Utilization of soft skills	Soft skills utilized post military; Impact of confidence and courage in their current role
Organizational barriers utilizing military experience	Negative experience using skills; Minimal knowledge or value of military service; Unequal post military career opportunities; Lack of recognition

**Theme 1: (RQ 1) Mediocre Career Preparation**

When asked how well the TAP (Transition Assistance Program) prepared them for employment in their post military career, some participants expressed disdain and basically had an overall unfavorable perception of the TAP. Many shared that the information provided in the

TAP was obsolete and even rudimentary, and resulted in them having to rely on their own resources and job hunting skills learned prior to joining the military to find viable employment after the military. In addition, some participants stated that they leveraged their education, personal network systems, as well as their self-developed confidence in the quest for a post military career. Therefore, this theme is discussed with three sub-themes: (a) basic resume, job search, and interview skills training; (b) low and no expectations of the TAP; and (c) unfavorable perceptions of the transition experience.

**Basic resume, job search, and interview skills training.** Several participants shared that the TAP lacked substance and only provided minimal skills training in preparing for a post military career. Several stated that the information was very simple and dated, and the overall support was subpar. Participant G articulated how the minimal career preparation support from the TAP impacted her ability to find employment and said:

They helped us build a resume, but that was about it...It was very hard for me to find a job because no one classified me as having any skills and so it took me 6 months...

luckily A.G. Edwards took a chance on me and so I entered the industry as a secretary.

Participant C shared her experience with the TAP as it relates to the resume writing and resource support, and essentially had to rely on others to help build her resume. She said:

I cannot remember anything standing out... it was that insignificant... I worked with my peers and even I remember reaching out to a Captain asking him to review my resume and I think that is what helped me... I did not get anything from TAP.

Participant A shared that because she was not sure what to expect from the TAP, she appreciated the help they offered to build a resume; however, in retrospect she now sees and understands how the support and preparation could have been improved and said:

I did not know what to expect... I mean at the time, I was pretty happy with that because, of course, I had not had to build a resume prior to going into the military, so that was all kind of new to me... in retrospect, I can see other ways it could have been better.

Participant M also shared that the support she received for job searching skills and creating a resume was rudimentary and obsolete. She elaborated and said:

We were all given the task of writing our resume and we turned them in and got very little feedback. I critiqued this pretty heavily when we were done... I really don't want to keep being negative to them because they all had a job to do as well, but I think they were a little out of touch with what it took in today's world to go out and find a job because we were still talking about looking through the newspapers. There was a little bit online stuff... you are all about job search websites and there should have been someone based in the personnel office there talking to us about U.S.A. jobs, websites, let's do a mock resume online for government positions. They did not do any of that. So their own best resources that they had were not even a part of their TAP program.

In addition, Participant M also highlighted the subpar experience she had with the TAP to prepare for interviewing in her post military career and said:

I was just throw-up sick getting ready for these interviews and TAP did run us through some mock interviews, but once I went to a real interview, I really did not feel like it was really the best preparation.

Participant H also felt the TAP was not helpful in preparing her for a post military career and said, "I really do not think it helped a lot because everything that I pretty much did was on my own. So, I cannot really say that I received a lot of help to prepare me for transition". When

asked to further clarify as to what would have made the career preparation process better, Participant H shared,

More direction as to ... I do not know ... I know there is a lot of separation between military and civilian, but maybe if there had been I guess more guidance as to what direction that I should take or avenues maybe. So, I do not feel like I received a lot of support as far as recommendations or suggestions on how and where I should go.

**Low and no expectations of the TAP.** Many participants shared that they had *low* and, in some instances, *no expectations* of the TAP. In addition, they also had preconceived ideas about the TAP based on information shared by past participants of the program. Participant H stated, “I initially did not have high expectations of TAP... once I got out and actually started to pursue employment I then realized that it would have been great to have additional assistance.”

Participant M shared how she witnessed her spouse, who is also a veteran, go through the TAP and as a result did not have high expectations of the program. She was even more disappointed when she attended the program and said.

I have to say that I was really disappointed in the TAP program, as I went through it. My husband had retired about two years ahead of me, so I kind of watched him go through the whole job search and kind of knew better what to expect. I just remember thinking this cannot possibly be correct. It can't be. So, I was really, really kind of disappointed in the whole TAP program.

Participant C also expressed her low expectations of TAP, and when asked how well she thought the program prepared her for post military employment she stated, “pretty low... they had TAP review and a TAP class, but I think really what did it for me was connecting with my peers that have done it before me”... she also had anticipated not receiving a lot from the

program and shared, “my expectation was getting a check next to that box so that I could out process... I knew that I was not going to get much... my expectations were already pretty low walking into it...”

When asked if she had any expectations of the TAP, Participant D said, “not really. Because I did not really know what to expect, but I just knew that I needed to find a job.” In addition, when asked about expectations of the TAP, Participant A also stated that “I did not really.”

Interestingly, Participant I shared that she had predefined plans after the military, and upon attending TAP she had preconceived ideas as to what she wanted to learn from the program. She specifically stated,

I think for me what I really wanted to get out of it was more understanding of the benefits I would be entitled to after separation just because I knew I had planned to finish my degree... so I think that was another piece that I probably really paid attention to. I attended everything. I just honed in on the things that I know I needed in my next phase.

**Reliance on self or other resources.** As a result of some study participants having low and, in some instances no expectations of the TAP, many expressed the need to rely on their own resources and support systems in preparation for their post military career transition. Participant E openly stated she had to take it upon herself to find employment, and that the TAP should have included focus on career planning or even help with steering in the right direction upon separation and said,

I really think if they had some kind of job search, you know, or part-time internships they could help you with... if they would steer you in the right direction or help you do things if you are interested in a different field, I am sure they have things, you know, support

they could get... because I was in the medical field, they never really offered up anything for, you know... you really have to take it upon yourself to even do that. They really do not go out of their way to encourage, “Hey you’re in the medical field. Do you want to go take classes at the community college in the medical field?” or, if you are doing something... or do you want to do something. It does not seem like they encourage that.

Specifically, Participant C stated that her perception of the career preparation she received from the TAP was “pretty low”, and as a result she had to rely totally on her network and experience for her post military career. Participant C stated she leveraged her ability to connect with others and a support system to find post military employment and said,

I made it my second job to connect with people who have done it [TAP] before me or was in the process of doing it and pretty much mimic their steps and, as a result, I was pretty successful in getting several job offers.

Participant F shared that although she did not “get anything” from the TAP, she had prior work experience before joining the Army and utilized those skills to find a job after leaving the military. “I worked in junior high and in senior high school before I joined the Army. So going to work after is just what you do.” After clarifying if she received any resume writing or career planning in her transition support she stated, “I had already gone through that in high school... and this admin thing that I did for the military is my path, so I became an admin.”

Participant B shared that upon reflection of her TAP experience, she could not recall learning anything of value from the program and went on to share how she resorted to her experience prior to joining the Navy for employment and shared, “I really didn’t remember there being much available” as it relates to program support. She further stated that she had to rely on her previous work experience and the degree she earned prior to joining the Navy to find a job

and said, “I already had been in the workforce a year before I went in. So, I just kind of built on that”... She went on to explain how she also leveraged her degree to find a job and said:

I had an associate’s degree in office management so when I left the military I literally started the next day working in a legal office and I do not even remember having support... it was more of just transition out... I do not remember there being anything really of note, really of importance to me... it was more just an exit.

Participant K was not afforded the opportunity for transition support as a result of an impromptu separation because of her pregnancy and had to rely on other sources for employment and said,

I did not get the luxury of any transition support... I did receive a contracting job with the Veteran’s Curation project and they actually helped with my transition... they helped me build my resume... and they helped me with interviewing.

Participant K went on to share her experience related to transition support and said,

I was thinking that when I got back from overseas that I was going to get all of these job offers, help with the resume, and where to go next. Like some people actually had jobs to return back to, but for a majority of us from like my unit did not have that opportunity. I stumbled across the job and it landed me there. It was not something that they actually came into my unit and discussed. It was something I actually ran across... and when I say, if I did not have that, I would have probably been lost, because I was unemployed, I could not find a job, nobody wanted to hire me.

Unfortunately, the lack of transition support may have resulted in real life implications for Participant K; she, like many other women veterans, encountered homelessness upon her separation from the Army and sadly shared,

I was actually homeless. I left active duty because I was pregnant and then I was eight or nine months and then I went to a civilian and then went with the Guard, but I did not have a vehicle, I was homeless, did not have a job. It was just nothing. So I just had to get back into okay, now I gotta figure out how, what do I do next? Like where do I go next? Because I am so used to having that employment with the military knowing that you have a paycheck coming around, you get up in the morning, not having any of that, I was just lost.

Additionally, Participant H did not feel the TAP met her expectations and provided her the necessary skills to find a job after the Army and had to rely on her own skills to find a job and said, “I really do not think it helped a lot because everything that I pretty much did was on my own... so, I cannot say that I received a lot of help to prepare me for transition.”

**Unfavorable perception of the transition experience.** Not surprisingly, many of the participants summarized their transition experience from the military to the world of work as unfavorable. Most of the participants described their experience negatively and were harsh in their definition of the overall transition process. When asked to describe her transition experience, Participant K stated,

It was very dark. I was that person who was standing in the middle of the aisle and screaming for help and having no way to go and just hoping that something might fall into your lap and then, when that little piece happens to fall into your lap, you hold onto it and then hope something else comes into your life. It was very uneventful... eventually I came across the Veteran’s Curation Project which actually helped me, but it was uneventful. If nationwide there was a transitional period to allow veterans to get back

into that, and getting back into themselves, would have been a little bit more eventful, but mine was dark – it was dark.

Multiple participants provided negative insights into their individual transition experience. A summation of their general transition experience highlights the dissatisfaction, as well as the poor quality of post military career preparation support they received after serving their country. Participant I was very clear to share her lack of excitement about, as well as the ineffectiveness of the TAP and said,

I felt like the program that I attended was very much a check the box, this is a requirement that we have to get them to complete prior to going out in the workforce. I mean I think they covered all the bases, but it was very just dry, dull, boring, just sitting in there for, I think, we were in there for four or five days for the full day and just getting the material. I kind of just ... I was there. I attended, but I did not get much out of it.

The transition experience was “bumpy” according to Participant E, who further shared,

I mean I have kind of had a jiggy jag road getting anyway just because I had to get out and go to school for a whole different career. So my personal career was a little bumpy all by itself, but then the military part of it probably did not really help me until I, probably after I started working here because it really just never came into a question.

Participant D also shared an unfavorable description of her transition experience and said,

I guess, since I really did not know what I was going to be doing once I got out, anyway, I just knew I was going to be looking for a job and, so, I guess, I really did not, there was not anything really for me. So, I really did not get anything from the military as a transition. I would say it was uneventful.

Participant G described her transition experience as “unsupported” and went on to share, “the transition assistance was pretty much non-existent.” In addition, Participant B defined her transition experience as “overwhelming” and went on to say,

Even being in for a little while, it was stressful and it was scary because it is... the military, for all of its goofiness and faults, is secure and it is safe and it is a known. I have to pay for my bills... I have to look for a job. I have to, you know, take care of myself and it is a huge life change.

Participant H also defined her transition experience as “lacking,” and she further expounded, I mean as far as support... because of the skills that I learned and discipline and at various things, it kind of made me not so much give up. So I have to say, even though I feel as though I did not have the support that I should have received or maybe thought that I should have received during the transition, because of the type of person I am, I do not back down from a challenge. So I looked at that as that was a challenge. Yes, maybe I should have received it, but I did not so, you know, let me do what I got to do...

Participant C also described her transition experience unfavorably and said,

I cannot remember anything really standing out. They had a panel ... yeah, and I do not even really remember the panel... I cannot even really tell you what I remember too much about that program. It was that insignificant.

One participant described problems with her transition that may not have been related to the TAP program. That is, Participant A also defined her transition experience as “probably not very efficient.” She went on to share that upon reflection of her transition, the inefficiency was not “necessarily because of the TAP program or because of what I learned in the military, but

just because of that hiatus of a couple of years between” as it refers to the time she took off before searching for employment after the military.

However, not all of the participants had unfavorable views of their overall transition experience. Interestingly, a few participants described their transition experience as “seamless”; however, it was due to having a defined plan after the military, as well as support from family and friends. More specifically, Participant I shared her experience and said,

I think, for me, it was fairly seamless and I think that is pretty much because I had a defined plan, like I knew I wanted to go to school and study accounting and finance and I did that.

Participant F also described her experience as “seamless” and also credited her family and friends for the support she received when she transitioned out of the Army and said,

I am going to say seamless first. Secondly, it is humongous to have family and friends who still do this and who still embrace you, who still love you and are listening to the same story for a week, a month, a year, however many times you need to get that out of your system and still there is no judgment, resentment, you know, fear.

## **Theme 2: (RQ 2) Identification and Marketing of Soft Skills**

When asked specifically about the soft skills learned in their military service, all 13 participants were able to identify a variety of soft skills from their individual experiences. Not surprisingly, the more commonly known military soft skills such as *discipline* and *respect* were immediately shared by many participants; however, other more transferable soft skills were also discussed in the process. In addition, the participants were also capable of sharing their military learned soft skills marketed in their transition for employment. Therefore, this theme is

discussed with three sub-themes: (a) soft skills identified from military, (b) soft skills marketed for employment, and (c) increased awareness of diversity and inclusion.

**Soft skills identified from military service.** When asked to identify soft skills learned in the military, not surprisingly many participants highlighted *discipline* as a soft skill identified, marketed, or and currently being utilized in their post military role. However, when prompted to identify other soft skills learned in the military, participants shared other commonly known soft skills such as *respect* and *teamwork* that innately relate to the military service.

When further prompted to reflect on their military experience, several participants were able to highlight a variety of soft skills learned from their military experience to include *detail-oriented, flexibility, change-management, problem-solving, patience, effective listening skills, and influential skills*. The aforesaid skills are not all inclusive; however, they were commonly shared by participants as skills they have either identified or marketed in their post military career.

Participant I communicated her ability to function in different environments and atmospheres as soft skills learned during her time in the military and said, “something that I always shine a light on is that I feel like I can function in many different atmospheres and environments and I definitely try to highlight that as skills of mine.” When asked specifically about the soft skills identified as a result of her military service, Participant K boldly said:

I have to say definitely communication. I found myself being able to teach classes, present presentations, having clear outlines, and actually communicating with anybody and listening to them. Before I was in the military, I was so sheltered. I did not have a whole lot of friends. I did not know how to talk to people. Well, in the military, you are forced to basically do that. You are forced to say, okay, now this is going to be... and

this is who you have got to deal with. You need to figure out how to talk to this person and then, after speaking to multiple people, I am like okay this is what I suggest on how you present your class and all that good stuff. It was just so much helpful.

Participant M identified communication skills as the soft skill she directly related to her military experience and said, “I think I developed good speaking skills and listening skills”.

Participant H identified detail oriented and good customer service as two specific soft skills learned from the military. When asked why she specifically chose those particular soft skills she stated, “because I do believe that those are good in a business environment”.

Several participants attributed their military service with helping to develop their *teamwork, team building, and team oriented* skills, and thus marketed those skills upon their transition. Participant M articulated how her military experience helped to develop her sense of teamwork and said,

When you are in the military you are really taught team. I don't feel that as much here.

For instance, when I was a supervisor, you know, you are a supervisor in the military 24/7... you don't have that whole sense of community and team here.

Participant C also shared her strong belief in teamwork and said, “Team building is a big one... understanding that working together brings that greater goal and brings that bigger, greater outcome”. Participant D also noted that her military career included a lot of teamwork while problem solving and working through issues and said, “A lot of teamwork because a lot of the time I kind of would start at the bottom and say, okay, this is wrong and then we go to here and here and here”.

Lastly, Participant J highlighted how her military service helped to develop her sense of teamwork and said,

I do think the military teaches you to do that.... We could not even be a minute late in the service and, if we were, then our entire squadron would be affected. It was not just me. I was affecting everybody else.... It also ensured that we were part of a team and that your actions can affect other people.

**Soft skills marketed for post military employment.** In addition to identifying learned soft skills, participants were also able to share the soft skills they marketed for employment. When asked to share the soft skills marketed after transitioning from the military, the participants recalled a variety of skills developed during their post military career employment process and marketed in their transition to include *multi-tasking, decision-making, leadership, team building, organizational skills, broad perspective, and critical thinker.*

Participant G explained how she marketed the work ethic and a positivity she gained while serving her country during interviews for post military employment and said,

Work ethic was part of that, but I am also very positive and approach things optimistically and so I was able to bring kind of an excitement for a career into my interviews. They knew that I was looking for something that would help me, not only continue with my education, but to where working together I would benefit the company at the end of that. So progressive learning throughout everything that I was doing.

Participant J shared how intense and unique her military finance role was, and further explained how she marketed both critical thinking and decision making upon her transition from the military and said,

It involved things that you are just not going to find in the outside world and so being able to think through those situations and critical thinking through was a challenge... you are not presented the same things in the real world.

Although several participants held supervisory or leadership roles in the military, very few shared they marketed either in their post military career. However, Participant A highlighted that she marketed both leadership and management skills in her post military career and said,

Leadership... I definitely would say that... I guess more interpersonal skills too, management and leadership skills, both I learned there [military] and I probably could say that I marketed the management skills. I definitely included those in my resume.

Participant C highlighted collaboration and her ability to think “outside the box” as soft skills for employment after the military and said,

Collaboration and thinking outside the box. I think that is what sold me at Deloitte. Deloitte was trying to recruit so many people and it was really hard to get into that company and I think really what sold me was that I was, you know, I kept continually saying thinking outside the box, but also I networked. I met the right person and talked to the right person that did whatever he could to get me in that firm.

Participant D shared how she marketed her ability to learn quickly and her problem solving skills for post military employment and said,

I guess speaking, talking with whoever the interviewer is or whoever trying to sell myself, I guess, and say what I can do and I will try anything and I can learn very quickly which, you know, and problem solver.

When asked to further clarify who she chose those skills to market for employment after the military she said,

[They] are my strengths because I am a people person. I know I want to help out because that is what I do in this job now. I take whatever, whoever calls I get are mine. I will

take the problem whatever you have. So I try to solve everything and help them out, just like to be helpful.

Participant M shared how she maximized the marketing of her years of military service, maturity, flexibility, and communication skills for post military employment and said,

I was active duty for 23 years, I can get here at 8 in the morning and I will be here until 5 in the afternoon and I will be here for you that whole time, and what you need me to do, I will do it... I have flexibility... and, communication. I think just the maturity, I think is probably a big, not that you can really market that, but it was appealing. I think. I wasn't a young 20-something or even 30-something then, marketing that. You know, I don't know, it didn't mean a lot to me, but I think it meant a lot them. They [companies] just want a mature person.

**Increased awareness of diversity and inclusion.** Many of the study participants credited their military service with broadening their sense of diversity and inclusiveness. Several of the participants either identified diversity and inclusion as a skills learned in the military, or marketed in their post career employment. Many of them expressed gratitude and appreciation for being able to interact, engage, and be exposed to different cultures, people, experiences, and thoughts. Several stated that they are able to respect other cultures, ethnicities, and differences, understand different cultures, and ultimately have become more tolerant as a result of serving their country.

Participant F identified diversity and inclusion as skills learned in the military and stated that her military experience exposed her to different cultures, races, and locations which she marketed and utilizes on a daily basis in her corporate role. She said,

Growing up in East St. Louis, you are surrounded by 99.9% African-American people.

The military does not see your color, at least while I was going through the military. So, you learn that even though you have your own way of living, other people from different cultures, different races, and different locations who look like you who do not think like you bring a lot to your thinking process so you can be more sensitive to other people, you know, more tolerant of other people.

Participant G also accredited her military experience with developing a greater sense of respect for others and increasing her respect for diversity. When asked specifically about her diversity and inclusion experience in the military she shared,

Respect for others and a respect for diversity. I mean it truly was my first experience with a wide cross of individuals from different disciplines, different socioeconomic backgrounds. It broadens your mind. It truly does. So, it also made me appreciative of those differences. So, I think it was educational in that aspect as well because then I was more curious. So, it stoked my curiosity to learn about the different things that people brought to our organization.

Participant I also shared how her military experience was instrumental in increasing her exposure to diversity, and it increased her ability to communicate and interact with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. When asked to further expand on this particular identified soft skill she shared,

For sure I would say how to communicate with people outside of my race. Prior to going into the military, you know I went in pretty much right out of high school, a year or so out of high school. My group of friends looked, talked, and acted just like me and, when I went into the military I think that purview completely changed things... I did not have

that pool that I had from my high school. So, I think the military definitely taught me that I can relate to these people on an interpersonal level and we do have a lot of commonalities that I did not think were there before. So, I mean I always say that is the biggest thing that I got from the military that, you know, it is not so different.

Participant B also shared how her military experience afforded an opportunity to understand, as well as embrace diversity and inclusiveness and said,

I think it was dealing with so many different people from so many different places and really being able to interact with them like a family. I have really picked up on that and it was funny because people were so sensitive because they knew I am Christian or whatever, but they were respectful, they were courteous, they were pleasant, they were funny, and they were inclusive.

As stated, all of the study participants were able to identify a variety of soft skills associated with, and learned during their military service, in addition to those marketed for post military employment. Interestingly, the participants' identification of diversity and inclusion as soft skills learned in the military are very similar to the data shared by the participants in the previous pilot study who credits the military with increasing their diversity and inclusion lens at work and in life. Indeed, the participants in this study, and the participants in the pilot study, both attributed their military experience with having a life changing impact on their increased awareness of inclusiveness in the workplace.

### **Theme 3: (RQ 3) Utilization of Soft Skills**

Participants were able to share a variety of soft skills learned during their military service currently being utilized in their corporate roles. Collectively, many participants articulated using a selection of common soft skills in their current role in the workplace to include *communication*,

*analytical skills, knowledge sharing, leadership, problem-solving, tolerance, and respect for others.* Therefore, this theme is discussed with two sub-themes: (a) soft skills utilized in post military career, and (b) impact of confidence and courage in their current role.

**Soft skills utilized in post military career.** More specifically, Participant H highlighted communication and the ability to adapt to change as soft skills currently being utilized in her role and said, “well I use all of those on a day-to-day basis. Of course, I have really good people communication skills and being able to adapt to change and meeting deadlines and details are very important”.

Participant M described developing her ability to communicate and manage in the military and being able to utilize those skills in her current role and stated,

I am constantly in, I don't know what you would call it, but I call it kind of managing down. So, I can give direction to [my leaders] directs and their directs kind of easily. I mean, it's not difficult for me, I don't feel intimidated... If I need something, then I developed the skill to be able to go to them and tell them, you know, this is what we need. Here's when I need it. Can I help you with that in any way, but I need to get this information. So, I would say that, communication is a big thing. You know you go through all of the leadership schools, senior academies, you go through all of that and develop good communication skills... So, that really helped me develop good listening skills because every person who came through that door needed my help with something. So, it was important to listen to them first to hear what it was they needed from me. Then, figure out how we could get that taken care of. So, that has served me well.

Participant B also shared how she is currently utilizing several of the soft skills learned in the military in her role and said,

The biggest one... it is funny because even now I can say I am still growing up. I am still learning a lot. ... compassion and it is tolerance and it is confidence and it is discipline. It is knowing that what I am doing is for the best and I am doing it in the best interest of the people that I am impacting and that is the way I felt when I was in the Navy and that is the way I felt when I am out of it...

When asked about the military soft skills currently being utilized in her role, Participant I accredited her military experience with shaping her ability to share knowledge and embrace teamwork and said,

I definitely think the analytics, being able to analyze a situation, and understanding the full picture... I think just having the military background and then coming into a work environment you just have a different lens automatically... I definitely think I am very inclusive. Like, in my group, I am always the person to say, 'Hey we are doing this. We are doing that?' So, I think, in the military where it can be very detrimental for one person to have all the knowledge, I am definitely a knowledge sharer. I am not the type of person where if I know something, you cannot know that because I do not want you to be better than me. I definitely feel like I see that a lot in corporate America where people just want to hang on to everything that they know.

Participant G highlighted leadership and mentoring as skills currently being utilized in her role and said, "... leadership, most definitely, and mentorship at this point and so I am very happy to pass that on because I have had because I have had the benefit of that throughout my career". Participant D also utilizes the non-judgmental skills she learned in the military in her current role and said,

I do not judge anyone, like, you know, how you first meet someone, even in a new role and sometimes you just get the wrong impression or you give them the wrong impression. I just try to step back and kind of understand whatever the situation is...

Participant L also credits the military with developing her leadership, communication, and ability to interact at all levels as skills being utilized in her role and said,

They [military] teach you a lot of leadership training, lots of leadership training. I actually started a leadership program here. I do believe that my military career has helped me to be a more polished, I guess, person in the corporate environment, just because I do understand leadership and I understand chain of command and I understand and feel comfortable talking to somebody who is the head of the company.

**Impact of confidence and courage in their current role.** Interestingly, several participants identified *confidence* or *courage* as a soft skill learned and utilized in their current role as a result of their military service. Specifically, many participants credited the military for helping to build their confidence and having an impact on them professionally in their post military career, and personally in life.

Participant L went on to share how her military service impacted her confidence in the workplace and stated, "I just felt that I became very confident in the military. It really forces you to come out of your little box and do things that you may be afraid to do or whatever". She went on to share how other women veterans tend to appear more confident than non-women veterans and said,

As I get older, I feel like that more and more. Especially when I encounter other women.

I mean, sometimes when I encounter women from the military I do feel that they have

more confidence about what they can do than maybe a female who has not been in the military.

Moreover, Participant C credited her military service with increasing her confidence in finding employment, and connecting with people in her current job and said, "... the military helped my confidence a 100%. It helped my confidence in getting a job and also helped my confidence in connecting with people". Participant F also shared how her military service was instrumental in increasing her confidence when interacting and communicating with leaders and others in higher positions in the organization and said, "I was able to interact with so many different people, but my experience was also broader in terms of able to communicate at different levels, a level of confidence that I currently feel".

Participant D also highlighted confidence as a skill gained in the military and how it has impacted her ability to interact in male-dominated environments and said,

A lot of confidence... well because I think there was only 2 or 3 other women that were in my area... it was mostly a male... so we had to triple prove ourselves. You know. That we could handle the workload, handle the problem, whatever came up that we could fix whatever. Give us a shot. We will try to fix it. So, it gave me a lot of confidence to know. I guess just maybe interact more with males... I learned how to interact with males maybe and, well, I guess any military... So they could think of you as a fellow worker. Because we all had a job to do, so, fellow worker I guess.

In contrast, a few participants felt that their military experience negatively impacted their confidence. Interestingly, Participant J shared that her military experience bruised her confidence and actually deflated it and said,

I have been trying to portray more confidence and have been working on speaking my mind and that has been really important to me because I always felt for many years even after the service that I could not do that and I needed to just be a yes man kind of, I think, and I realized that it is not always the most productive approach to take.

Participant J went on to share that after serving in the military, she continues to work on increasing her courage when interacting and communicating in the workplace, and shared she is developing, “courage to still speak your mind and even though you know you are going to be challenged... it could be squashed”.

Participant E also shared that her military experience impacted her self-confidence. When asked to clarify if she felt that the impact was positive, she stated, “No, I do not think so. I think it actually went the other way”. When asked to further explain she went on to say,

I think your communication skills are very limited if you are at the bottom rung [in the military]. If I would have been an officer or something where you have a little bit more of a voice, but I was enlisted, so, really you just do your job and keep your nose clean. You are not going to be allowed to say or do much of anything outside of your normal job duties in that, you know.... the higher up you get you have a little more privilege in that area, but I did my four years and got out.

Participant C shared that the greatest challenge she faces when utilizing her military soft skills in the organization relate to being perceived as “overly responsible”, and believe it has resulted in a negative reputation with her leaders. She went on to share that, “I feel like I have gotten this really from the military. I am just over responsible”. She further stated that the outcome or result of being overly responsible has resulted in a perception of trying to be perfect or getting everything right and said

When I did the strength finders, responsibility was listed as number one. I am so concerned with doing the right thing all of the time and sometimes I find myself, even yesterday, specifically, and this is one of my personal development areas, is I can tend to be very apologetic, if that makes sense. Just feeling like, oh my gosh, maybe I did something wrong and, even though I have a boss who is just phenomenal, I still am a little bit fearful of authority and I think a lot of that comes from that fear of discipline all the time in the military and that is a challenge even now that still resonates where I am at now. Just that fear of doing something wrong.

Participant C shared that utilizing her responsibility skills can make her appear as being overly responsible, and unfortunately this has bruised her self-confidence and shared, I feel like you almost bug your boss. One of the things I did a lot when I first started this position like I told my boss every time I would go for like to lunch... had to leave early today when it was only like fifteen minutes and she is like looking at me. It takes away confidence, I feel like. The perception of being confident.... like, if I am apologizing, I am already thinking that I have done something wrong and it makes me look little, I think, and confidence is one of those things that I feel like it is so important especially as a woman to be able to resonate and to keep our heads up high and not be quick to say, hey we have done something wrong.

#### **Theme 4: Organizational Barriers Utilizing Military Experience**

Although the study participants were able to highlight the military learned soft skills being currently utilized in their role, many expressed challenges associated with being able to fully maximize the use of their military learned skills in organizations in corporate America. Specifically, some of the participants articulated a negative experience when utilizing their

military skills. As stated, many of the participants credited the military with their increased self-confidence, courage, and leadership skills. Unfortunately, the participants noted that using certain soft skills as a woman veteran in an organization presented issues and challenges, as the use of these skills are viewed indifferently by some. Therefore, this theme is discussed with four sub-themes: (a) negative experiences using skills, (b) minimal knowledge and value of women veterans' military service, (c) unequal career opportunities in post military career roles, and (d) lack of recognition.

**Negative experiences using skills.** Participant A openly shared how she encountered very negative experiences when utilizing the discipline and leadership skills she learned during her military service in her current role and said,

Well, I think, in more male dominated businesses, the perception is that you are... How do I put this nicely? That you are aggressive and bossy and that you try to take charge a lot. Well, in my position, when I was in the military, you are expected to lead, you are expected to delegate, you are expected to get things organized, and you do not ask what everybody thinks about getting it done. You get it done. You did not have to get consensus to lead in the military. Where in the business world, that is the expectation is that you know you lead by consensus and that is certainly not the experience in 10 years in the military. You lead by example and you lead by what you know to be best.

Demonstrating too much confidence as a woman veteran to avoid the perception of being arrogant or appearing as a "show-off" was a concern stated by Participant D. She shared that when utilizing some soft skills you do not want to give the "wrong impression." And further stated, "because I know I want to be confident, but you do not want to be over confident."

Participant K also shared thoughts related to the challenges she faced in the

workplace to include the perception of appearing too “rough around the edges” when utilizing her military skills and said,

It was a whole change around... I was a little bit rough around the edges when you are expected to be, as a woman, a little bit soft around the edges. I had to soften it up a little bit too where I am not like standing at parade rest every five seconds.

Participant I articulated the challenges women veterans face when utilizing their military soft skills to avoid negative perceptions and shared,

I think women veterans have the tendency to be type casted as very, you know, hard and rigid and, when you are being too assertive, you come off the ‘B’ word. So, I think that is definitely a challenge. I think just across the board when, and maybe not necessarily related to women, but just across the board, when you try to you know make a connection to your military experience, it can be sometimes seen as a negative thing, like someone who has not moved on and they are still living in the past and well this was the military and this is corporate America and, you know, a lot of people do not see the similarities because obviously we know many people do not have the military experience.

**Minimal knowledge and value of women veterans’ military service.** Several participants shared concerns related to the utilization of their military service and skills, and those skills not being understood, recognized, or valued in the workplace. Participant B highlighted how she and other women veterans face issues when applying their military skills and experience due to the lack of knowledge about the military, or the perception associated with the value of their military experience and shared,

We do still have a lot of challenges because we do carry over different tools and skills from the military into the civilian world that may not be quite received and I do not know

why... because I know that every time I have applied for anything, I had it on my resume... sometimes it may be kind of overlooked or maybe the person who is doing the interview does not quite understand.

Participant F also shared a concern related to working with individuals who may not understand her military experience and even though she includes military experience on her resume, she does not disclose her veteran status in the workplace and shared, “only on my resume do I say that I am a veteran. That is the only place I say it”. When asked to further clarify if she were ashamed or embarrassed sharing her military service, she explained more in-depth and said,

No. I am very proud of it... If there was another team member who had probably been in the military and there is not, not on my team and not on my previous team either, I would talk about it more probably, but, when I came back from Desert Storm, I feel like no one could relate to my experience. Because going into the Army is challenging... if you have never had to think outside yourself and become a team... completely and totally... you have to rely on other people for your life.

Participant K also shared how she consciously thinks about how to communicate and interact in organizations with non-veterans, and has now developed more empathy and said, “how I present myself, how I start a conversation or even speak to somebody who is not into the military service was my biggest thing... I can now put myself into their shoes and them into my shoes” as it relates to not understanding the military experience.

Participant L also shared her concern with her military experience not being valued and said, “even with military background, it seems that people don’t care so much”.

Participant L highlighted the perceived discriminatory practices she faces as a women veteran in a leadership role as compared to other male veterans to include her spouse who is also a military veteran and said,

It feels like over the years when I have said, hey, on the civilian side of the house, hey I have this military background, and they are like, yeah, we don't care. My husband, however, could say he was in the military and everybody was like, wow, let's make him a manager, you know.

Participant C also expressed a concern with speaking up as a woman veteran and feeling as if she has to prove herself as compared to male veterans when utilizing her military learned soft skills such as interacting with leaders and shared,

I mean other than me trying to have more confidence and courage to speak up, yeah. I have talked to a lot of male counterparts, veterans, and they do not have the same challenges. They never were worried about speaking up to their leaders especially when they went into the civilian life, but that is the one thing I think I could point out the most over anything else.

Unfortunately, some expressed concerns with feeling invisible in terms of their military skills, experience, and overall presence as a women veteran. As a result, some of the women veterans shared that they consciously do not share their veteran status, and in some instances they stated that they do not view themselves as veterans.

Participant F articulated that she could not fully comprehend being a veteran and shared why she did not classify herself as a veteran and said,

I am like well, you know, I was just doing my job.... you cannot wrap your mind around the veteran part. Because when I think veteran, I think of my granddad that fought in

World War II. You know that is what I think a veteran is. I do not think of myself that way. I just thought that, when I came back, I needed to kind of like get into a new normal and then begin my life...

As a result of not feeling as if her military service is valued in society and the workplace, Participant B articulated that she is proud of her military service, but does not feel society views it as impactful or important and stated,

Like if I told you that I was in the military, it is, oh you were in the military. That is very cool. Move on. And it is not impactful enough. It is not important enough on my resume to stand out and slap you in the face and say you need to hire this person because they served our country. It is an interesting side bar, nothing more. I say that knowing that I am so proud of the service and I do not hesitate to tell people, I was in the Navy, my son is in the Navy, my husband was in the Navy, and my dad was retired Navy. I am damn proud of that, but it is not that important to the rest of the world.

Participant E also shared concerns as it relates to discriminatory practices and feeling as if her status as a veteran is often times overlooked and stated,

It is hard for women to speak up and be heard without being considered some negative word... I think most of the time they see you as a woman. They do not see you even as a veteran. So, you know, you get overlooked. My ex-husband was a veteran and most of the time people assumed that because my son says, 'oh yeah we have a veteran in our family', they assume it is the dad. They do not ever even ask, 'well what about your Mom was she a veteran too?' You know, so it is just completely overlooked... but they, our society, just assume it is the man. And so, I think, in general, women veterans are overlooked... So, the equality of it is still not there.

Participant H also shared her concern with society not understanding, as well as viewing the skills of women veterans as valuable and said, “because they are not quite fully conscious of what we bring to the table”.

**Unequal career opportunities in post military career roles.** Many participants expressed a concern with not feeling as if the utilization of their soft skills, along with their military service, experience, and education are being collectively factored into their post military career development and growth. Unfortunately, several of the participants believed they were hired and placed in lower level jobs versus a role comparable to their collective military skills, education, and experience.

Interestingly, many participants viewed this oversight as impactful to their overall career development and growth, and felt overlooked and even out of place when comparing their total experience with that of their current co-workers and peers. Participant I explicitly shared her discontent with her current job level and the use of her military soft skills as it compares to her peers and stated,

I spent four years in the military... I do not want to use the words – waste of time. But, it is not viewed as experience. So, when you see your peers in your age group, and they are here and they may have spent their four years in college. Okay, and you spend four years serving your country, but then you went and finished college so, technically you both are even... like the peers that I kind of gauge myself against, the ones who are my same age, it is like they are holding positions higher than me when I know it is not because of their work product because, if I am going to say myself, I will. I think I turn out an excellent work product and I have been told so by everyone I work for so I know it is not that. I

am engaged at work, I have good work product, and I have the educational background.

So why am I not at another level?

In comparison to her spouse who is also a veteran, Participant L also shared concerns with the use of her military learned soft skills and the minimal number of promotions, or lack thereof, she has experienced in the organization, as well as her current title said,

It seems like it has been a little easier for him to move up the chain, I guess you would say. I can't say that I haven't moved up the chain, but like if you look, like I feel successful when you look financially. I've moved up. But I really and truly have only gotten one promotion in my 16 years here. In the military you kind of get promotions. I have actually talked to my boss about why my job title hasn't changed and things like that. Like I said he trusts me and gives me things to make me feel important to make me feel like I am a leader. He tells me that I am a senior person on the team, but I told him, I want a senior title... I am a senior level person and I would like to see that title, you know. And, I don't know if that is a woman thing, a man thing; that's just my perception is that it feels like sometimes that men veterans can move quicker than women.

**Lack of recognition.** Some study participants expressed a variety of concerns related to the recognition, or the lack thereof, organizations provide women veterans' military service, and the utilization of their military learned soft skills in their post military career. Participant H stated that managers in organizations should be held accountable with increasing their knowledge of, and their ability to recognize women veterans' skills, and further elaborated by stating, "I think maybe individual managers do not recognize and give enough attention to our skills". When asked to further explain why she felt this way, Participant H shared, "I just think, again, it is because they are not quite fully conscious of what we bring to the table".

Participant F respectfully believes organizations should recognize the talent and skills of women veterans more often and said, “recognize women veterans and their talent other than just Veterans Day”. Additionally, Participant E also expressed a desire for women veterans to be recognized more in the workplace and shared, “you know, it would be nice to have some individual recognition for women veterans”.

Participant J also shared concern regarding the lack of recognition of women as it relates to their career development and growth and said,

Just recognize their valued experience especially if they are in a related career field. In a way, I kind of understand if you worked in service in billeting and then you choose to be an accountant later on. I do not know if that is a one for one ratio, but, in my personal experience, I am a one for one ratio. So I do not know why I, I guess, would get hired in at the lower levels instead of and then you would have somebody who had much less experience than me getting hired at the same level.

As previously stated, many of the participant’s self-confidence, courage, and leadership skills were increased as a result of their military experience; unfortunately, the perception that women veterans’ military service is viewed indifferently by managers, recruiters, and key stakeholders in corporate America ultimately impacts their ability to identify, market, and utilized their military soft skills in order to nurture a successful post military career. Therefore, all of the study participants were able to share a variety of soft skills identified from their military service, those marketed for post military employment, and the skills currently being utilized in their role in corporate America (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Participants' Soft Skills as Shared During the Semi-Structured Interview Process*

Participant	Perception of Identified skills	Perception of Marketed skills	Perception of Utilized skills
Participant A	discipline integrity sense of service camaraderie	organizational leadership discipline management	discipline leadership
Participant B	interact with different people tolerant	discipline self-respect self-confidence	confidence compassion discipline respect
Participant C	team building networking confidence communication leadership	collaboration think outside the box team building	think outside of box problem solving
Participant D	confidence teamwork decision making analytical problem solving	non-judgmental quick learner interact with people problem solving teamwork	communication interact with all levels problem solving
Participant E	team playing dealing with hierarchy	responsible accountable	dealing with authority use voice know when to engage
Participant F	listen to understand embrace diversity inclusiveness patience	patience communication	patience communication empathy positive attitude change management
Participant G	respect for others respect for diversity work ethic respect chain of command	work ethic positive attitude optimistic excitement about job	leadership mentorship inclusiveness mission focused

Table 5 (Continued)

Participant H	interact with all levels attention to details discipline leadership	detail oriented customer service adaptability change management	communication change management meet deadlines detail oriented
Participant I	communication diversity and inclusiveness interpersonal skills	discipline function in different environments	critical thinking decision making analytical big picture perspective inclusiveness knowledge sharing
Participant J	handling authority speak up/use voice courage	discipline reliable team oriented	discipline speak mind
Participant K	communication multi-tasking team oriented self-motivated confidence courage	team oriented multi-tasking discipline adjust communication self-motivated	team oriented multi-tasking discipline communication
Participant L	leadership detail oriented confidence discipline sees big picture	leadership communication discipline confidence	gets things done leadership
Participant M	teamwork camaraderie good listening skills clear communicator manage down	listening skills discipline communication	flexibility teamwork manage down

**Resume and Job Description Review.** A review and analysis of each of the participant's resumes and job descriptions was conducted to determine if they were actually identifying, marketing, and utilizing the soft skills communicated during the semi-structured

interview process to those being marketed with the participant's resume, and the soft skills being utilized in their current role in corporate America.

**Resume review.** The goal of the resume review was to compare the soft skills communicated during the interview process to the soft skills actually being marketed on the participants' resumes. All 13 participants complied and provided a resume; and, in fact all of the participants listed their military service on their resumes. Although the participants shared a variety of soft skills marketed in their quest for a post military career during the interview process, only a few of them actually marketed those same skills on their resumes. In addition, some participants did not include any soft skills on their resumes. Unfortunately, as it relates to the comparison of soft skills articulated during the interview process, and the soft skills outlined and marketed on the participants' resumes, there were some inconsistencies.

Specifically, Participants C, F, and M did not include any soft skills on their resumes; however, they were able to clearly articulate the soft skills marketed for a post military career during the interview process. And, only four participants were consistent in the soft skills communicated during the interview and the soft skills included on their resumes. Participant D included a total of nine soft skills on her resume with only *problem-solving* as the one consistent soft skill shared during the interview and the resume review. Participant H had a total of seven soft skills outlined on her resume with *customer service* as the one consistent soft skill shared during the interview process. Additionally, Participant L had a total of four soft skills highlighted on her resume with *leadership* as the only soft skill consistent between the resume and the interview. Participant K represented the most consistency when comparing the soft skills shared during the interview process and the soft skills highlighted in the resume review to include *team oriented*, *self-motivated*, and *multi-tasking*.

***Job description review.*** The current job description of each participant was downloaded, reviewed, and analyzed to assess the consistency between what the participants articulated during the interview process as soft skills currently being utilized in their role, and the soft skills outlined on their job description. All of the participants, with the exception of Participant C, are currently working in a role that includes at least one or more soft skills communicated during the interview process, as well as highlighted on their resume. Furthermore, Participant C was one of the three participants who did not list any soft skills on their resume.

The majority of the participants to include Participants C, D, E, F, G, I, L, and M articulated at least one or more soft skills during the interview process that correlated to the soft skills outlined on their current job description, identified during the interview process, and included on their resume. Other participants were instrumental in identifying, marketing, and using soft skills consistently.

Specifically, Participant B was able to highlight several soft skills directly aligned with what she shared on her resume, during the interview, and in her current role, such as (a) interpersonal skills, (b) flexibility, (c) motivation, (d) team player, (e) organizational skills, and (f) communication skills. In addition, Participant H also was consistent with the soft skills she communicated during the interview process, highlighted on her resume, and outlined in her job description for the role she is supporting, to include (a) customer service, (b) multi-tasking, (c) communication skills, and (d) detail-oriented. Further, Participant J was the most consistent in the identification, marketing, and utilization soft skills highlighted during the interview process, resume review, and those outlined in her current job description, such as (a) bonds with management, (b) team oriented, (c) detail-oriented, (d) strong analytical skills, (e) communication, and (d) manage multiple initiatives.

Lastly, Participant K also demonstrated consistency in the identification, marketing, and utilization of soft skills during the interview process, resume review, and the job description review. She was instrumental in highlighting team oriented, self-motivated, organizational skills, self-managed, and multi-tasking as learned soft skills utilized in her post military career.

Overall, a review and analysis of each of the participant's resumes and job descriptions highlighted several inconsistencies between what the participants articulated as soft skills being identified, marketed, and utilized into their corporate role, and the skills they are actually marketing and utilizing as a result of their respective resume and job description (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Actual Marketed and Utilized Soft Skills*

Participant	Marketed Soft Skills (Resumes)	Utilized Soft Skills (Job Descriptions)
Participant A	communication collaboration relationship building partnership	coordination leadership management
Participant B	interpersonal skills confidence flexible reliable networking motivating team player energetic driven organizational skills work ethic results-oriented people-oriented dependable communicator	motivated team player communicator strong interpersonal skills organizational skills flexible

Table 6 (Continued)

Participant C	none listed	leadership prioritize work
Participant D	motivated multi-tasking problem solving creative self-starter team player time management analytical problem solving	problem solving interpersonal skills detail-oriented accurate interact with all levels solid communication skills
Participant E	problem solving efficient detail-oriented hard working team player	manage deadlines responsible detail-oriented
Participant F	none listed	interpersonal skills communication skills partnering collaboration
Participant G	problem solving solution-focused independent negotiation conflict management decision-making	management accurate partnering
Participant H	customer service analytical multi-tasking relationship management team building communication interpersonal skills	client/customer service detail-oriented accurate organizational skills multi-tasking communication

Table 6 (Continued)

Participant I	leadership skills	interpersonal skills communication analytical detail-oriented accurate interact with all levels
Participant J	problem-solving relationship building bond (management/peers) prioritization works independently detail-oriented analytical critical thinking communication organizational multi-tasking	interpersonal skills communication analytical detail-oriented accurate interact with all levels
Participant K	team-oriented adaptable self-motivated organizational self-managed multi-tasking	navigation interpersonal communication organizational multi-tasking prioritization work independently proactive innovative creative sound judgment problem-solving
Participant L	leadership analytical works independently team oriented	interpersonal leadership communication problem solving
Participant M	none listed	interact with all levels customer service management

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### **Summary**

Not surprisingly, all of the participants were able to identify the soft skills that innately relate to their military service. In addition, all of the participants were able to share the soft skills learned in the military, and all provided a resume for review; however, there were inconsistencies with the soft skills shared during the interview process, the soft skills they included on their resumes, and the soft skills included on their job descriptions.

The participants also discussed concerns related to the perceived lack of organizational support and their perception of unfair treatment as it relates to their post military career development and opportunities. Moreover, they also felt as if their military service and skills were not valued in the organization, and that there was a lack of recognition of their collective military experience, education, and skills. Lastly, the majority of the participants expressed overall disdain, as well as dissatisfaction with the career preparation received in their transition experience, resulting in many of them having to rely on their self-developed skills or other resources for their transition.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the transfer of soft skills of women veterans to their post military career in corporate America in order to support their career success by helping them market and utilize their soft skills and experience in their post military career, and to better understand the employability issues of women veterans to avoid adding to an alarmingly high unemployment rate. This research was conducted with a triangulation method through semi-structured interviews, a review of the participants' resumes, and a review of the participants' current job descriptions. This chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses the findings of the overall study. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the theoretical and practical implications of this study, as well as the participants' transition experience from the military to corporate America. Finally, this chapter concludes with suggestions for organizational practice and future research.

#### Discussion

Three central research questions framed this study to include the following:

1. How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?
2. How do women veterans identify and market their transferable skills in corporate America?
3. How do women veterans utilize their transferable skills in organizations for career success?

The research questions were answered and resulted in four themes that emerged from the semi-structured interview data, resume review, and job description analysis as reported in Chapter 4.

**Research Question 1. How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?**

The research related to the TAP (Transition Assistance Program) clearly outlined that transition assistance is afforded to every military member upon separation or retirement from the military, and is designed for veterans without any specific focus on the unique needs of women veterans. However, as outlined by Hayden et al. (2013), while not all veterans experience challenges with reintegration, women veterans tend to have more difficulty with reintegration, therefore impacting their overall transition experience. Unfortunately, many women veterans who experience reintegration challenges face unemployment issues, and in some instances underemployment. Interestingly, many participants in this study expressed concern with the current job level, and felt their overall post military career development and progress was subpar based on the limited career preparation support they received in their transition from the military, and their reintegration into the workforce.

The participants in this study expressed overall disdain as it relates to the transition assistance received, or lack thereof, from the TAP in preparation for employment in their post military career. The participants in this study, as outlined in Chapter 4, described the different measures they encountered for employment after separating or retiring from the military as a result of the ineffectiveness of the TAP. Many participants articulated that they had *low* or, in some instances, *no expectations* of the TAP. As a result, they relied on their own resources, such as job hunting skills learned prior to joining the military from education or personal network systems, as well as the confidence developed from their time in the military in the quest for a post military career. As stated, a few of the participants clearly recognized the need for an alternate support system for their transition, and relied on their network base and interpersonal

confidence. The participants' abilities to rely on their own resources and skills for a post military career, as a result of the ineffectiveness of the TAP, directly support this research in that the participants were able to utilize their learned soft skills such as responsibility, accountability, communication, and self-confidence to obtain post military employment.

According to Felder (2008), possessing the ability to articulate one's "military skills to an employer" (p. 86) can be somewhat overwhelming and requires additional preparation and support. Indeed, this suggests that the women veterans in this study could have benefited from additional and more effective transition support. Their obvious need is directly aligned with the research by the Women's Research and Education Institute (2001) report, that was instrumental in underscoring the apparent need to better understand if there are differences in approaches to job-hunting skills training provided to men and women veterans that are not being addressed in the TAP or other veterans' programs. Thiruvengadam (2011) also reported that the TAP had not been "revamped" (p. 3b) since it was created nearly two decades ago – a period which saw an increase in the number of women joining the military. In addition, the participants in this study also had preconceived ideas about the TAP based on information shared by past participants of the program which may have created anticipatory expectations, and facilitated a need for the participants to seek other avenues of transition support.

Not surprisingly, many studies and reports were instrumental in outlining the ineffectiveness and insufficient services of TAP resulting in the program being revamped in 2014. The program underwent an overhaul and was redesigned as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS) program (Cronk, 2015). Furthermore, according to the DOL (United States Department of Labor) the redesigned MTP (Military Transition Program) represents a collaborative effort to prepare the multitude of

veterans continuously seeking employment opportunities after the military with the anticipated downsizing, and fewer military forces deployed worldwide (DoD, 2014a).

Unfortunately, none of the participants in the study were afforded an opportunity to experience the revised transition GPS program and as such were only able to reference their transition experience prior to 2014. Overall, the participants summarized their transition experience from the military to the world of work as unfavorable; therefore, most of the participants described their career preparation and transition experience negatively. And, those who described the transition assistance as quasi-effective, had predefined expectations of the program, and deliberately focused on specific areas of the TAP to meet their individual transition needs such as benefits.

**Research Question 2. How do women veterans identify and market their transferable soft skills in corporate America?**

During the interview process, all of the participants were able to identify a variety of soft skills learned from their individual military experience, and the soft skills marketed in their post military employment process. Admittedly, many of the participants had to self-reflect and think specifically about their military experience to identify the learned soft skills. It was apparent during the interview process that they had not connected the alignment of identifying, marketing, and utilizing their military learned soft skills in their post military career as most of their career preparation, especially from the TAP, focused on hard or occupational skills identification in their career transfer.

Although the participants shared a variety of soft skills marketed in their quest for post military employment during the interview process, only a few of them are actually marketing those same skills on their resumes. In fact, 10 out of the 13 participants successfully highlighted

at least one or more soft skills on their resumes. And in some instances, a few participants did not include any soft skills on their resumes; however, they clearly shared marketed soft skills during the interview process. Therefore, as it relates to the soft skills the participants articulated during the interview process as skills they marketed for post military employment, and the soft skills actually being marketed on the participants' resumes, there were some inconsistencies. Interestingly, the soft skills discussed by the participants during the interviews tended to vary when comparing the interview notes and the resumes. This may be due to many of the participants functioning in different careers or roles from the military, or their ability to self-reflect when encouraged and probed to do so during the interview process.

Not surprisingly, many of the participants identified the more commonly known military soft skills such as *discipline* and *respect*; however, when probed to reflect deeper upon their military experience, all were able to share a variety of soft skills identified from their military service, and those marketed for post military employment. Therefore, it would behoove women veterans to continue in the self-reflection and assessment of their military experience, and be prepared to identify the transferable hard and soft skills learned during their military service, which if marketed and utilized appropriately, could enhance their opportunity for employability and continuous career success.

Further, as noted by Robles (2012), soft skills are “employability skills that are transferable in many jobs” (p. 458). Given that the participants included both individual contributors and leaders, Sheikh (2009) and Smith (2007) suggested that interpersonal skills or soft skills, in many cases, are the most important skills employees possess at all levels in an organization. The soft skills shared collectively by the participants through the interviews and on their resumes are commonly aligned to the research conducted by Andrews and Higson

(2008), which highlighted key transferable soft skills integral to successful employment: (a) professionalism and reliability, (b) the ability to cope with uncertainty, (c) the ability to plan and think strategically, (d) the capability to communicate and interact with others in teams, or through networking, (e) good written and verbal communication skills, (f) creativity and self-confidence, and (g) good self-management and time-management skills (p. 143). In fact, many participants accredited the military with helping to develop, enhance, and utilize several of the aforementioned soft skills in their post military career and personal life to include self-confidence, reliability, communication skills, interaction with all levels, team building, self-management, and time management skills.

As previously noted in several research studies, many employers now view soft skills as equally important as technical or occupational skills. In fact, Robles (2012) highlighted how business executives consider soft skills a “very important attribute” (p. 453) for employees and future candidates – both internal and external to the business – for open positions. According to Klaus (2010), approximately 75% of long-term job success is dependent on people or soft skills, while only 25% is dependent on technical expertise. And, the current TAP tends to focus mainly on the transfer and identification of occupational skills, but fails to encourage a broader look at both the hard and soft skills learned during one’s military career. As noted by Perreault (2004), possessing and demonstrating soft skills can set a candidate apart from other individuals or job seekers who may have similar technical and hard skills. Therefore, women veterans who transition from the military to civilian employment may be more effective by focusing on identifying and marketing both hard and soft skills acquired in their post military career progression and development.

Lastly, as noted by Innes (2014), women veterans will more likely “face problems finding work after leaving the military” (p. 1) if they are not highlighting their transferable skills. Luckily, the participants in this study were able to identify and market the soft skills learned while serving our country. Unfortunately, they are not actually capitalizing, to a certain degree, on the soft skills learned in the military in their post military careers in the representation of them on their resumes, and in their current role. They should focus on maximizing the marketing and utilization of their learned soft skills by ensuring their resumes and individual development discussions with their managers are reflecting those learned skills.

**Research Question 3. How do women veterans utilize their transferable soft skills in organizations for career success?**

During the interview process, all of the participants were able to articulate a variety of soft skills learned from their individual military experience currently being utilized in their corporate America role. As shared, an analysis entailed a review of what the participants articulated during the interview process as soft skills currently being utilized in their role, and those soft skills outlined on their job description were inconsistent. The review process included an analysis of the roles and responsibilities section, the required qualifications, and the desired qualifications of each job description for all of the 13 participants.

Nealy (2005) suggested that many current and future business leaders prefer employees who possess and utilize hard and soft skills, as both are critical in the performance development and performance management process of employees. The participants in this study were able to identify the soft skills learned while serving our country they are utilizing in corporate America. Interestingly, in addition to a plethora of soft skills shared by the participants, several identified *confidence* or *courage* as a soft skill learned and utilized in their current role as a result of their

military service. Specifically, many participants credit the military for helping to build their confidence and having an impact on them professionally in their post military career, and personally in life.

Overall, the concern relates to the perception versus reality in terms of what women veterans perceive as skills being utilized in their current role as shared during the interview and those that are actually being used in their role. Therefore, opportunities exist for women veterans to capitalize on the actual utilization of their soft skills in their current role. They should focus on maximizing the utilization of their learned soft skills by looking for opportunities to transfer those skills as a part of their post military career development and progression, and by highlighting them during individual development discussions with their managers and other organizational key stakeholders.

### **Outcomes in the Utilization of Military Experience in Organizations**

Unfortunately, several women veterans expressed a variety of challenges they faced when utilizing their military learned soft skills in organizations. Many participants shared that they encountered issues when they utilized their military soft skills such as leadership, communication, and decision making in the workplace. Some attributed the negative experiences to the lack of knowledge about the military, negative perceptions about military and veterans, as well as a lack of understanding as it relates to women in the military. This is supported by Davis and Minnis (2017), in that the public's general lack of knowledge and misunderstanding about the military experience impacts the integration of veterans' military experience, skills, and capabilities transfer into the workplace.

The inability of managers and other key stakeholders, and their lack of military cultural competence, resulted in a few participants expressing their reluctance to share their veteran

status; therefore, potentially impacting their post military career progression and development. As noted by the DOL (2015), one of many factors impacting the reintegration of women veterans is the issue of self-identification as a veteran, which many believe poses a unique challenge to conducting outreach to better understand the needs of women veterans. Interestingly, a few participants stated their reluctance to share their veteran status was due to not viewing themselves as a *true* veteran.

Interestingly, the reluctance to share one's veteran status directly supports Zottarelli's (2015) research in the *Women Veteran Screening Guide* that asserted a significant amount of women veterans consciously choose not to self-identify because of the common misperception of non-veterans who tend to believe that a veteran is normally a male. The aforementioned misperception was also discussed by other participants who highlighted the challenges and perceived discriminatory practices faced as women veterans in leadership roles, as compared to male veterans in the same or similar type leadership roles. In spite of these challenges, it is important for women veterans to self-identify, as noted by Rafique (2016), to "recognize their service and utilize the wealth of resources available" (p. 1) as they reintegrate and transition into their post military career.

Many participants expressed the need for organizations to increase and improve the support they provide women veterans in their post military career development and growth. The participants were able to share a variety of recommendations as it relates to their experience to include increased career opportunities, recognition of their skills, and military experience. Unfortunately, many participants expressed a concern with organizations – particularly managers - not viewing their military service, skills, experience, and education collectively in their career progression and development.

Many participants voiced concern with being hired at the lower level or in entry level positions. This resulted in a few participants stating concerns with feeling as if their skills are under-utilized, which to some translates to being underemployed. Interestingly, this supports Thiruvengadam's (2011) report that women veterans were more likely to be unemployed and, unfortunately, more likely to be underemployed resulting in financial implications, as well as their successful reintegration. As such, many participants viewed placement in jobs at the lower level or entry level as adversely impactful to their overall career development and growth as they felt overlooked, and even out of place, when comparing their experience and performance with their peers.

As it relates to recognition, the participants expressed a variety of concerns related to the lack of recognition as it relates to their military service, skills, and or overall contributions in their post military career. Many believed that managers in organizations lack the ability to recognize women veterans mainly because they do not fully comprehend the contributions women veterans bring to the table in organizations. This further supports the need for military cultural competence training and education for key decision makers in organizations to better understand the contributions, support, and value of women veterans.

### **Theoretical Implications**

For this study, Thorndike and Woodworth's (1901) Identical Elements Theory was used to explore how women veterans would transfer learning in one context (military) to another similar context (corporate America). Thorndike (1913) posited that the degree of transfer between the initial and later learnings was dependent upon the match or similarities across the two contexts. Although all of the participants in this study were in jobs that differed from their military career, each of them were able to identify the transferable soft skills learned in the

military and used in their current role, therefore supporting the Identical Elements Theory. Further, Taylor (1997) suggested that Thorndike and Woodworth's theory also implied that transfer of learning depends on how similar the learning and transfer tasks are influenced in the process. Hence the opportunity to encourage women veterans to market and utilize their military learned transferable soft skills on a frequent basis in corporate America could increase the likelihood of their post military career progression.

Ball and Mangum (1987) noted that a key factor in the economic value of any training experience – especially military provided training – is the transferability of the training to viable employment post military career. Therefore, if women veterans continue to identify, market, and utilize learned military soft skills to viable employment in their post military career, they are unconsciously demonstrating the successful transfer of skills and the Identical Elements Theory that highlights the transfer of learning from the military to corporate America.

### **Practical Implications**

As stated, a large majority of the participants viewed their overall transition experience unfavorably. Many felt the career preparation from the TAP was mediocre at best, and they had to rely on other resources to support their transition and reintegration. In addition, many participants in this study expressed a concern related to the lack of military cultural competence and knowledge of their military experience, skills, and education, and felt these factors were not being collectively considered in their post military career development and progression. Indeed, these combined oversights can result in several implications to include the following: (a) potential negative branding of an organization as not supporting veterans, (b) an increase in turnover of women veterans, and (c) low productivity from women veterans ultimately creating a highly disengaged population of team members.

## **Negative Branding**

Many organizations have recruitment strategies aimed at increasing the representation of veterans who essentially become employees. In fact, the organization employing the participants in this study reported a strategic goal to recruit 20,000 veterans by 2020. Given the potential impact employees can have on an organization's brand, it is important to ensure women veterans are treated and developed appropriately to avoid any type of negative branding on an organization. As noted by Harris and Ogbonna (2000), employees are instrumental to an organization's brand management as they are instrumental in the positive connectivity with the market and its competitive advantage. Therefore, the negative branding of an organization could impact the future recruitment of recently separated and retired women veterans as most of these groups tend to look for military-friendly employers for post military employment. More recently, Dill (2014) outlined the Top 100 Military Friendly employers in a *Forbes.com* article highlighting the various companies and industries that are going "beyond the veteran-focused discounts" (p. 1) and are looking for long-term ways to support veterans by "recruiting and hiring these individuals for jobs that utilize the leadership qualities, technical skills, and field experience they earned throughout their military service" (p. 2). Unfortunately, if women veterans develop a perception that an organization is unwilling to educate its managers, recruiters, and other key career decision makers about the value women veterans bring to an organization, they are at risk of not being able to retain women veterans and their talents, thus resulting in this group voluntarily resigning or turnover.

## **Turnover**

Another implication of this study relates to turnover of women veterans who believe their combined military experience, skills, and education are not being fully understood or considered

in their individual career development. As noted by Erez, Holton, Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (2001) an employee's job knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as their "personal values, career goals, and plans for the future" (p. 9) must fit within the organizational culture to increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover. Furthermore, Erez et al. (2001) defined *fit* as "an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization" (p. 9).

Unfortunately, some participants expressed concern with working alongside inexperienced, junior co-workers, or peers and not being in the right job level or job fit; this resulted in an imbalance, that is, their dissatisfaction with their current career progression. This perceived imbalance represents a real possibility of voluntary turnover if experienced women veterans do not feel valued, and feel as if they are being treated unfairly. This places an organization at risk of not being able to retain disciplined, experienced talent and could impact costs. Of course, many organizations invest a plethora of resources to include money and time in their talent acquisition programs. The goal of trying to retain high-potential talent is a key objective in most organizations; therefore, women veterans should feel valued, and they should also be afforded equal opportunity to be placed in roles equivalent to their skills and ability, promoted appropriately, recognized for their contributions, and supported with a clear career plan and path for success.

### **Disengaged Employees**

Lastly, organizations also face the possibility of inadvertently creating highly disengaged women veteran employees by placing them in lower level or entry level jobs and not recognizing their collective talent and skills for the appropriate level role. As noted by Pech (2009), large percentages of employees are disengaged in today's workplace with some researcher estimating that "80 percent in some organizations" (p. 27). More importantly, as outlined by Pech (2009),

these “demotivated employees come to work; fulfill some semblance of their job requirements; and then go home” (p. 27). Therefore, if women veteran employees do not feel adequately utilized, the outcome or their output may not be at the expected level and may result in what many companies consider as *low productivity*. It is imperative that women veterans in corporate America feel as if the transferable soft skills learned in the military, identified and marketed for a post military career opportunity, and utilized for ongoing career success are collectively factored into their individual development. By doing so, it ensures that women veterans’ talents and experience are recognized, and that they feel empowered and engaged in their post military career growth, ultimately benefiting the organization.

### **Conclusions**

The data collected through triangulation from the interviews, review of the participants’ resumes, and the review of their current job description in this study generated several topics for discussion: (a) women veterans possess the ability to identify, market, and utilize their military learned soft in their post military career; (b) improvements are needed in the overall transition program to include specific focus on the career preparation and reintegration of women veteran; (c) inclusion of women veterans’ military skills, education, and experience in their individual development; (d) maximize the utilization and marketability of their military soft skills on their resumes and in their current roles; and, (e) increase the military cultural competence of managers, HRD, and other key stakeholders.

All of the participants in this study were able to identify the soft skills they learned after serving their country. They discussed and shared the soft skills they marketed for a post military career, and were able to highlight the soft skills they are currently using in their corporate America role. Interestingly, during the interview process the participants had to be prompted for

deep reflection of the soft skills learned in their military role and during their military service. Once they began to self-assess and reflect, the realization and discovery of how their military experience helped to develop a plethora of transferable soft skills for their ongoing post military career development, they appeared excited. Many of the participants shared how they had not thought about the other soft skills they learned in the military as they tend to focus on the more commonly known military skills such as respect, discipline, and integrity.

In addition to identifying soft skills, it was also discovered that success in the post military career of women veterans in corporate America could be improved by addressing and making necessary changes to the transition program. Improvements should begin by equipping women veterans with specific, updated tools and resources required for ongoing post military career development and growth. Therefore, the TAP should support the transition experience of women veterans by making it holistic to include recognizing their transferable hard and soft skills from their military service. The procedures used in this research study would be a viable process to achieve that end. In addition, the transition experience should include support in how to effectively market those skills, and suggest ways to apply those skills effectively to increase the likelihood of a viable post military career,

Furthermore, post military career preparation should include the appropriate level of consulting, coaching, and support in the development of resumes to appropriately articulate their soft skills. When interviewed, all of the participants were able to articulate the soft skills they learned in the military, the ones they marketed for a post military career, and those skills currently being utilized in their corporate America role. Unfortunately, they are not maximizing the marketability of their military soft skills on their resumes as some of the participants did not even list any soft skills, and the some of the participants listed very few soft skills. Moreover,

some of the participants shared that they only mention their military service on their resume, and that they have not discussed - and in some instances do not discuss it - during interviews. In addition, many of the participants were able to communicate during the interview the soft skills they are utilizing in their current role, but also shared that they do not proactively discuss their soft skills during individual development discussions with leaders and other key stakeholders. Indeed, the accountability to communicate and demonstrate one's military learned soft skills is owned by the woman veteran; however, the appropriate level of consulting, coaching, and support should be provided by the TAP, and the organization's managers, and key stakeholders to ensure a win-win outcome in the success of women veterans.

Lastly, several participants expressed their concern related to the recognition of their collective military skills, experience, and education not being factored in their career progression and development. Some participants expressed concern with their current job level and felt as if they had to start over in their career. Some participants expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with having to prove their work value and skills again after a successful military career. This deficiency creates an opportunity for Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals responsible for the human capital growth of an organization to redesign their talent management and talent development program to include information specific to women veterans' military skills, education, and experience in their individual development.

Some examples include incorporating veteran experience as a topic of discussion in talent calibration sessions to highlight the woman veteran's talent and experience with other leaders, indicate veteran status on the woman veteran's Individual Development Plan (IDP especially for those who are considered high potential employees, and encourage the woman veteran to share the military experience, as well as her skills, during manager development sessions. Changes to

ensure both the woman veteran and her leader is aware of the soft skills that are transferable to her corporate America role is advantageous to both parties.

### **Recommendations for Organizational Practice**

Many participants in this study defined their career preparation and transition experience as subpar. In addition, many expressed concerns with feeling underemployed or devalued in their organizations. Specifically, they expressed concerns related to their military experience, skills, and education not being collectively factored into their post military career development and progression. Not surprisingly, this oversight can be remedied by employing changes to organizational practices, policies, and programs aimed at women veterans to include the following: (a) modifying new hire onboarding programs for women veterans, (b) educating key hiring decision makers such as recruiters and managers, and (c) revising talent development processes.

### **New Hire Orientation**

As stated, several participants expressed discontentment with the career preparation they received from the military and this suggests a greater need to support women veterans upon their transition into corporate America. One recommendation would be a modification to an organization's new hire program to include a dedicated section specific to the orientation of women veterans. As noted by Sorenson (2016) in a recent survey to employers regarding the hiring of veterans, approximately 70% of the respondents provided "no special support to veterans during onboarding" (p. 3). Therefore, to increase the likelihood of a successful transition for newly hired women veterans into corporate America, the new hire program should include currently employed women veterans as sponsors or mentors.

The overarching goals of a dedicated onboarding section for newly hired women veterans could include volunteer women veteran sponsors or mentors to share the best practices they employed upon their transition, to create a safe space for newly hired women veterans to express their thoughts and concerns, and to help women veterans assimilate into the new organizational *civilian* culture. Incorporating these changes into an onboarding strategy could potentially improve retention of women veterans, increase their development skills as they could possibly volunteer as a sponsor or mentor in the future, and ultimately create a group of highly engaged women veteran employees. As stated, participation as a veteran sponsor or mentor would be voluntary; however, to influence or encourage participation as a sponsor or mentor the woman veteran could use the opportunity as a part of her individual career development process.

### **Education and Training**

Participants also expressed a concern with key decision makers such as recruiters, managers, and human resource personnel not fully understanding the military or their military experience. A significant reason to encourage these individuals to expand their knowledge is the realization that some women veterans do not disclose their veteran status. In fact, several participants noted that they opted to not share their military service with their managers, leaders, and peers because they do not see the value in doing so. As noted by Davis and Minnis (2017), one way to increase the knowledge of the military to support the recruitment, development, and retention of women veterans is to engage and offer “military cultural competency” (p. 10) training in organizations. Of course, this military cultural competency training should not only focus on understanding the military, but should also encompass deliberate focus on learning more about the transferable skills – specifically the soft skills – of women veterans.

Sorenson (2016) highlighted a recent survey conducted with managers from various companies to assess their knowledge of the military as it relates to hiring veterans. In the aforementioned survey, respondents were asked to rank their knowledge of the military with 10 denoting '*extremely familiar*' and 1 denoting '*not familiar at all*', and unfortunately only a small percent of respondents – approximately 20% - ranked their knowledge of the military at eight or higher highlighting the apparent need for additional training and education to managers, recruiters, and other key hiring and talent development professionals on the contributions of the military (Sorenson, 2016). Consequently, organizations should consider additional training and education for recruiters and managers to bridge this gap and to increase the viability of women veterans viewing an organization as military friendly and well-equipped to support their ongoing career development. The training could be facilitated by current women veterans or by organizations focused on the success of women veterans.

As shared, many organizations create recruitment strategies aimed at increasing the representation of women veterans. Therefore, ensuring that recruiters, managers, human resource professionals, and relevant key stakeholders in organizations increase their understanding of the military experience is vital to women veterans' success, and ultimately would benefit both the organization and women veterans. One would hope that this change would improve an organization's brand reputation as being 'military friendly', and theoretically increase the probability of women veterans sharing their positive recruitment experience with other potential women veteran candidates directly impacting an organization's veteran hiring goals.

## **Talent Development**

Another recommendation includes a review of the organization's practices related to its talent development program. Many organizations encourage the use of an individual development plan (IDP) as a viable tool in the growth of its team members to help in performance improvement, skills development, and career progression. Therefore, a modification to the IDP to include an optional section entitled *veteran experience* could be done to help identify and highlight both hard and soft military learned skills. The section can also support managers in helping them better understand the skills, experience, and training women veterans received during their military service, and the modified IDP could be used during performance coaching and development discussions to support the ongoing career goals of women veterans in their post military career.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study attempted to highlight the transition experience of women veterans, and the career preparation provided by the TAP, in support of their post military employment. Furthermore, this study also focused on women veteran's ability to identify, market, and utilize the soft skills learned during their military career, and transferred in their corporate America role. The qualitative method used for this study offered a detailed examination of 13 women veterans' experience with the TAP in preparation for their post military career, and a deeper analysis of their military learned soft skills with a review of their resumes and current job description.

Although this study represents a start for developing a deeper understanding of the impact of the TAP for women veteran and their post military career in corporate America, as well as an understanding of their learned transferable soft skills, more research is necessary.

First, a future study with women veterans who are not in corporate America may help to understand if the transition support provided to women veterans is geared toward transition into other industries. Conducting the study using participants in the same organization presented some limitations; therefore, replicating the study in different industries may be more beneficial to better understand the broader transition experience of women veterans. One suggested industry that employs a large population of women veterans includes the federal government. As outlined by the Partnership for Public Service (2014), veterans in the federal workforce have increased significantly from 2008 to 2012. Therefore, women veterans who transitioned from the military to the federal workforce may require less cultural assimilation as most federal agencies tend to have an organizational culture similar to the military essentially requiring less transition preparation for women veterans. However, the need to identify, market, and utilize one's soft skills regardless of the industry is necessary to avoid women veterans facing the real possibility of underemployment, and even unemployment upon separation from the military.

Second, it would be advantageous for organizations designated to support women veterans to advocate for additional modifications to the TAP and encourage more of a deliberate focus on programs specifically aimed at addressing the unique reintegration needs of women veterans. Many women veterans in this study described their transition experience negatively, and some had preconceived ideas about the program. Given that the program was recently revamped as of 2014, it may be beneficial to conduct a future study with women veterans who completed the program in 2014 and beyond with the purpose of determining if the program changes have resulted in different perceptions by women veterans, and if there is more focus on marketing both soft and hard skills for a post military career.

Third, replicating this study to explore the transition experience of male veterans in corporate America could potentially address some of the perceptions shared by few participants related to the instant credibility of male veterans in organizations. The purpose of this study could be to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of the women veterans' transition experience to better understand if there are underlying gender-related issues associated with the career preparation support provided by the transition program, and if the preparation is designed more for the male veteran transition experience.

Fourth, research should be conducted with managers, recruiters, and human resource professionals in organizations for the purpose of better understanding their military cultural competence to include their level of knowledge of, and their perceptions about the military. Many participants shared concerns with their managers and other organizational key stakeholders not understanding their military training, education, and skills. In addition, many believed managers were not collectively considering these factors into their overall coaching and development thus impacting their individual development and career progression.

Finally, additional research should be done with recruiters in an organization for the purpose of understanding their knowledge and perception of the military experience in order to support a fair exchange process during the interview process with women veterans. As stated, many of the study participants shared that they only include their military service on their resumes, as most recruiters or managers who conduct the interview do not expound or seek more clarity about their military experience. It would be advantageous for recruiters, and those making key hiring decisions in organizations, to better understand the importance of the woman veteran's military experience to include discussing both her hard and soft military learned skills

to ensure placement in the appropriate job and job level that is comparable to her overall education, skills, and experience.

This research aimed to increase the awareness of women veterans' career preparation experience for their post military career, and to better understand their ability to effectively articulate, identify, and demonstrate the transferable soft skills learned while serving their country. One would hope that the data collected from this study will be used to advance changes to the transition assistance offered to women veterans specifically in support of their post military career preparation, their reintegration needs, and to increase awareness in support of women veterans in their ongoing career development and progression.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

#### Research Questions

- How do women veterans describe the transition assistance program in preparation for post military employment?
- How do women veterans identify and market their transferable skills in corporate America?
- How do women veterans utilize their transferable skills in organizations for career success?

#### Interview Briefing

- Hello.
- Let me begin by thanking you for your Service!
- And, thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I am really interested in understanding your experiences as a woman veteran and your transition experience in preparation of your post military career. I am positive our conversation will enrich my research on women veterans' transition experience.
- Please feel free to ask me clarification questions during our conversation or let me know if you would like to take a break...
- As I had informed you earlier, this conversation is being recorded for transcription purposes...and all the details of the conversation will be kept confidential.
- Please know that I would be more than willing to share my research findings with you, if you are interested.
- Did you bring your resume?

- Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

**Interview Questions:** Please tell me about yourself:

- What is your full name?
- What is your current job title?
- What year did you join the company?

Let's talk now about your military experience?

- What year did you join the military?
- What branch of service did you join?
- What was your job title in the military?
- What were your primary duties?

**Section A: Transition process:**

- Reflecting on your experience entering the workforce after the military, how well do you think the transition assistance program prepared you for employment?
- What do you think would have improved your transition experience?
- What were your expectations of the transition assistant process from the military?
- In hindsight, is there anything you wish you had received from your transition assistance experience to support your transfer out of the military?

**Section B: Skills identification**

- How would you define or describe *soft* skills?
- After hearing my definition of soft skills, is there anything you would add to your definition of soft skills?
- What *soft* skills do you believe you gained specifically from your military experience?
- What soft skills did you market for employment after your transition from the military?

- What made you select those specific soft skills to market?
- What soft skills are you currently utilizing in your current job?
- Are there any soft skills you are NOT utilizing in your current job that you believe could support your career growth?

### **Section C: Support of women veterans in organizations**

- What kind of challenges do you believe women veterans face when applying their military soft skills in organizations?
- How well do think organizations support women veterans' career growth?
- What do you think organizations could do to improve and support women veterans in their post military career growth?

### **Concluding questions**

- If you were to summarize your experience transitioning from the military into the world of work as a women veteran, how would you describe it?
- Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand how women veterans transition from the military to corporate America?

### **Concluding remarks**

Again, thank you for your service and specifically for being willing to share your story and experiences with me...I absolutely enjoyed our conversation...I have learned from this conversation, and I am sure this invaluable data will add significantly to my research... thank you again for your time, your co-operation, and more importantly your service!

## APPENDIX B

**Consent Form**

## Consent to Participate in Research

I (participant), agree to participate in this research project conducted by Chanty R. Clay, PhD Candidate, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

I understand the purpose of this study is to understand the transfer of soft skills, specifically those interpersonal qualities also known as people skills or non-occupational ‘hard’ skills, of women veterans from the military to corporate America.

I understand my participation is strictly voluntary and may refuse to answer any question without penalty. I am also informed that my participation will last 45 – 60 minutes.

I understand that my responses to the questions will be audio/videotaped, and that these tapes will be transcribed/stored and kept for (60 days) in a locked file cabinet. All efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality; therefore, to ensure your confidentiality you will be identified by a pseudonym. Afterwards, these tapes will be destroyed.

I understand questions or concerns about this study are to be directed to Chanty R. Clay, 314.574.8151 at [cbradleybrown4@charter.net](mailto:cbradleybrown4@charter.net) or his/her advisor Dr. Keith Waugh Associate Professor and WED Graduate Coordinator, College of Education and Human Services, Workforce Education and Development at 618-453-4868, [ckwaugh@siu.edu](mailto:ckwaugh@siu.edu).

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be tape recorded. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers.

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ to have my responses recorded on audio/video tape.”

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ that Chanty Clay may quote me in his/her paper”

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Participant signature and date

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618 453 4533. Email:siuhsc@siu.edu.

## APPENDIX C

**Email to Participants**

Hello Everyone – my name is Chanty R. Clay and I am USAF veteran and a PhD candidate at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale. I'm reaching out to see if any of you are interested in participating in a future study that focuses on the transition experience of women veterans and the transfer of skills from the military to corporate America. I am particularly interested in your experience with the military Transition Assistance Program (TAP)!

If you are interested, I will take care of all of the scheduling, logistics, and the interviews can even be conducted via Skype! As far a timeframe, I plan to conduct interviews within the next 30 days and would greatly appreciate your support!

Please note that this study is **completely voluntary** and your responses will be **kept confidential!** Lastly, this study is also not associated with your role or experience at Wells Fargo!

I'm excited about the future for women veterans and I hope you would consider being a part of this wonderful 'change process'.

Lastly, if you have any questions or need any clarification, please don't hesitate to contact me at 314.406.8575 or 314.574.8151.

Thanks, Chanty

**VITA**

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University

Chanty R. Clay

cbradleybrown4@charter.net

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Bachelor of Science, Workforce Education and Development, May 1998

Lindenwood University

Master of Science, Human Resource Management, December 2003

Dissertation Title:

The Transferability of Soft Skills of Women Veterans to Corporate America

Major Professor: Dr. Keith Waugh